

## The Pan-Amazonian Pact calls us to commit to:

Challenging consumerism by adopting a simple and sober lifestyle by identifying with those who have nothing; reducing garbage and plastics, using public transport etc.

The frontpage of one of Australia's newspapers on March 13<sup>th</sup> had a huge heading responding the coronavirus stimulus package: It read "Stay Cam and Spend". This urge to spend is a constant call from economists and government representatives. It is a temptation for many people, some of whom are unable to afford what they are urged or tempted to buy.

In 1955, retail analyst Victor *Le Bow* claimed, "Our enormously productive economy demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and selling of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfaction, our ego satisfaction in consumption. We need things consumed, burned up, replaced and discarded at an ever- accelerating rate."

This call for people to consume more and more products led to the practice of planned obsolescence - the deliberate shortening of the life span of various products to guarantee continued consumer demand. This practice has been highlighted in the documentary, "Pyramids of Waste"  
["http://documentaryheaven.com/the-lightbulb-conspiracy/](http://documentaryheaven.com/the-lightbulb-conspiracy/)

Pope Francis reminds us of a reality we don't see as drastically in Australia and New Zealand, that the political, social and environmental consequences of a market driven economy are devastating for the poor, because wealth is distributed so unequally. Francis has said, "*Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape*".

The call from the Pact is for us to develop a simple and sober lifestyle because this would reduce greed while expressing concern for the needs of the poor and suffering, including the Earth. Francis has called for "a renewal of our families and our communities." Those communities include PFG's! Of course this renewal can be very threatening because most of us do not want to give up our comforts or have less (possessions)! It is common for people to ask "What has this got to do with me?"

The Amazonian Pact provides a challenge to the Passionist Family, including Passionist Companions and Passionist Family Groups. We can talk together in order to seek the best responses we can make to this challenge and to provide good example for the next generation. Often a generation is asked 'What kind of world should we leave for those coming after us?'

Every year, one hundred and fifty million mobile phones are discarded in the United States. In Australia there are estimated to be twenty three million phones abandoned in cupboards and drawers and not yet thrown out! These figures are a staggering example of the effects of consumption. Most significant of the effects is that we so easily use the expression 'throw out'. But where is out? There is no 'out' from our planet, so disused items become part of landfill and dump sites. For how long can this continue?

Is this the way to treat a mother, from whom all life on earth has emerged? We fill the earth with rubbish, pollute oceans, rivers, forests, land and atmosphere. It is well known how destructive waste has become to rivers and oceans and the species that inhabit them, but often our attitude is 'out of sight, out of mind'. We are being challenged to care for earth, our common home. Passionist Thomas Berry constantly reminded people that the universe is "*a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects*" and as we have noted, the fundamental backdrop for recognising the web of life and the interconnectedness of everything around us. Cosmologist Brian Swimme says, "We are related in terms of energy; we are related in terms of genetics. We are all a kind of kin. It is overwhelming". This is a reality that Indigenous people have always intuited and celebrated. They lived close to the earth on which they relied.

Scientists have learned in recent years that fields of energy connect us in ways we sometimes sense but do not understand. Our spiritual self knows that our actions impact on one another. This is why we pray for one another. Space, it seems is full of fields, including waves and rays that we cannot see. Gravity is a field, rather than a force. We know there are magnetic, electrical and radio fields that we do not 'see' until we note their effects, such as when we use a magnet, switch on a light or turn on a transmitter. We commonly speak of cyberspace. These fields create connections.

We are slowly coming to appreciate that humans are not the centre of the universe. Humans are latecomers! Ninety percent of all life on earth has been lived in the oceans. Trees and plants emerged four hundred and fifty million years ago. Birds appeared one hundred and sixty million years ago; flowers one hundred and fourteen million years ago and homo sapiens' humans just 300,000 years ago!

All life emerged from the galaxies so scientists like to suggest that everything is made from stardust! Slowly, different forms of life emerged. Humans did not get added to the Earth; we emerged from the earth, along with every life form that shares this planet with us. This impels us to recognise that we are connected with every form of life. Indigenous people had to learn not to over-exploit nature. We have to learn that too and it is becoming urgent that we wake-up to the consequences of not doing this. Earth can live without humans as it has done for eons. But humans cannot live without Earth.

Consumerism is leading us to exploit the natural world to maximize profits, regardless of the consequences for people, cultures, the biosphere, and future generations of all life forms. The standard of living cannot increase if there is no planet! One Earth can only provide at the rate it is being plundered. Some experts suggest we are extracting materials from Earth at a rate that suggests we have five planets. It is no wonder the children of the next generation – your children and grandchildren are worried!

Knowing exactly what we must do is not easy, but it begins with an awareness of the story of life and our place in it. We have to keep developing a spirituality of interconnectedness that recognises every form of life is sacred and each reveals something of the divine presence. We need reverence and respect for this planet through which God gave us life and sustains us. Only with this attitude can we begin to overcome the hysteria and small mindedness of climate change issues and more seriously play our small part. We have to believe that our small part will make a difference and we have to believe it is our moral responsibility to do what is right!

We don't have to feel guilty and we don't have to do dramatic things, but our awareness of the issues will help us recognize what we might be able to do – and importantly – why we would do it. Our aligning with the PACT might be partial – a step. When we speak of 'my family' or 'my Passionist Family Group', we are speaking about the family of life.

If we can quietly challenge some aspects of consumerism in our own families with the active support of our PFG's such as reducing garbage and plastics, using public transport; adopting 'a simple and sober' lifestyle, identifying with those who have nothing, taking part in environmental clean-up days etc, this would be a good fit with our PFG aims to live as the early Christians and to give good example to children? So can we, with the active support of our PFG:

**Adopt 'a simple and sober' lifestyle by identifying with those who have nothing? Could this help us to be less consumerist?**

**Can we reduce garbage and plastics, use public transport more, take part in environmental clean-up days etc?**

**Watch the 20 minute video 'The Story of Stuff'**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GorqroigqM>

**How does all this fit with our charism and in particular for PFG members with the aim of the Movement to live as the early Christians and to give good example to children?**

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