
St. Monica Green Team

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Celebrating 51 Years of Earth Day

By Meredith McCarthy

From a spark that created a movement, Earth Day continues to inspire! The St. Monica Green Team celebrated Earth Day on April 17th by inviting parishioners to clean their local neighborhood or beach. It has never been more important to care for our common home.

A history lesson

In 1963, Wisconsin Senator Gaylord Nelson, desperately concerned about the state of the environment, persuaded President Kennedy to turn the political lights on this issue by going on a national conservation tour. They flew to Washington to discuss the proposal with Attorney General Robert Kennedy, who backed the idea. The President began a five-day, eleven-state conservation tour in September 1963. It didn't immediately switch a flood light on the issues of the degraded environment, but a candle was lit that eventually sparked what we now refer to as Earth Day.

Senator Nelson was convinced that "if we could tap into the environmental concerns of the general public and infuse the student anti-war energy into the environmental cause, we could generate a demonstration that would force this issue onto the political agenda."

The Vietnam protests and teach-ins continued to inspire Senator Nelson and when the fires again erupted on the Cuyahoga River in June of 1969 he announced shortly after that in the spring of 1970 there would be a nationwide grassroots demonstration on behalf of the environment. Everyone was invited. The response was overwhelming. Support poured in from all across the country. The American people finally had a way to express concern about what was happening to their land, rivers, lakes, and air.

On April 22, 1970, 20 million people across America celebrated the first Earth Day. Now 35 years later, Earth Day is being celebrated around the globe. Through the combined efforts of grassroots organizations, and citizens like you, what started as a day of national environmental recognition and education has evolved into a world-wide campaign to protect our global environment. Earth Day worked then because of the spontaneous response at the grassroots level.