



Eco-Palm Project makes environmental, social justice part of Palm Sunday celebrations

February 06, 2008

[Episcopal News Service] Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem, accented by the jubilant waving of palm fronds, is re-enacted each Palm Sunday in Christian congregations worldwide as the observance of Holy Week begins.

More than 300 million palm fronds are harvested each year for U.S. consumption alone, most of them for Palm Sunday. Unfortunately, for the communities where these palms are harvested, palm fronds do not always represent the same jubilation.

The Episcopal Church is joining Lutheran World Relief, Catholic Relief Services' (CRS) Fair Trade Program and the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s Enough for Everyone Program to promote the use of sustainably harvested eco-palms for Palm Sunday 2008. By purchasing eco-palms for Palm Sunday celebrations, Episcopal congregations can play an important role in protecting forests, local jobs, and sustainable livelihoods in the harvesting communities.

The Eco-Palm Project is an effort of the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation and the University of Minnesota [Center for Integrated Natural Resources and Agricultural Management](#) to develop a certification program for palms that will ensure the fronds are being harvested in an environmentally sustainable way, and the palm harvesters are earning a livable income from their labor.

Martha Gardner, consultant for Environmental Ministries at the Episcopal Church Center, is excited about the project.

"Ever since I heard about 'sustainable palms,' I was excited to bring our denomination on board. Using eco-palms on Palm Sunday is a way to remind Episcopalians that we are committed to the idea of environmental sustainability as one of the Millennium Development Goals," she said. "I know that many Episcopalians have made a commitment to sustainability by their purchase of Bishops Blend coffee through Episcopal Relief and Development; eco-palms are another way to show our commitment."

Harvesting palm products is an important source of supplemental income for many indigenous families and communities in Guatemala and Mexico. However, over-harvesting palms can threaten the livelihood of these communities as well as the forests where the palm plants thrive.

To combat the problem of over-harvesting palms in Guatemala and Mexico, community cooperatives have formed to harvest eco-palms -- palms harvested in an ecologically and socially sustainable way. The harvesters are paid on the quality of the fronds they harvest rather than the quantity, which helps to limit the amount of fronds taken from the forest. These communities have adopted harvesting practices that minimize impact on the natural forest where the palm grows.

Rather than sending the harvested palms off to a distant warehouse for sorting and packaging, the community members complete those tasks and sell their palms directly rather than relying on middlemen, ensuring that more of the money paid for the palms goes to those who worked the hardest to provide them.

More information about the program, including an order form, is available [here](#) or [here](#). The order form can be accessed directly by clicking [here](#). Orders for delivery by Palm Sunday must be placed by February 20.

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