

Gina Fiorile is a junior at the University of Vermont studying environmental studies and public communications. She is a native of Saranac Lake, N.Y., but she lives in Burlington throughout the school year. Gina expects to graduate from the Rubenstein School of Natural Resources at the university with a bachelor's degree in May 2018.

Why did you agree to serve on this committee?

I am proud of my Catholic faith, and my identity is first and foremost as a daughter of Christ living in the world today. I recognize that creation is one of the greatest gifts mankind has ever received; I am going to do everything in my power to protect that gift and to help my brothers and sisters in Christ understand that it is our duty as Catholics to protect creation.

What specific concerns do you have about the wellbeing of the earth, "our common home?"

I am most passionate about the issue of climate change. As a Catholic, I am a defender of life in every form. Climate change is a serious threat to life in every form. It will exacerbate life-threatening issues of water insecurity and food insecurity, and it will increase natural disasters. It will place burdens on developing nations and poverty-stricken individuals who will be impacted by climate change the most although they are contributing to the issue the least.

What message do you want to convey about care of the earth?

Our life is dependent on creation. We need a healthy planet to survive. Supporting care of the earth is supporting life itself; I want to help every Catholic realize this. It is so easy to become wrapped up in a culture that attempts to divide us. Climate change and other environmental issues are not political issues; they are human issues. We are one Church. It is our duty as Catholics to step up and protect life and creation.

How can Vermont Catholics participate in the care of the earth?

Start a conversation with your Catholic peers about creation and start a conversation with your non-Catholic peers about the importance of faith in the environmental movement. Break down any stereotypes that Catholics are uninformed about issues surrounding the environment. Rather, speak the truth of how much our beliefs are intertwined with the moral call to protect life and maintain a healthy, livable environment. Start this dialogue young; speak to the youth who are inheriting this earth and let them know that you care about their future and that you care about having a livable planet for the unborn.

What do you say to people who do not understand/believe the seriousness of the situation of the earth?

As is the case in any misunderstanding, Catholics are called to lead with mercy. This issue is not about who is right and who is wrong on the political spectrum, it's about building compassion toward the gift of creation and all individuals our mistreatment of creation negatively impacts.

What motivates you in your work to protect our earth?

Climate change is the greatest issue of our time. According to NASA, climate-warming trends over the past century are extremely likely due to human activities. I know that as Catholics, we are called to help our fellow brothers and sisters and to restore justice. My conscience doesn't allow me to sit on

the sidelines and watch this issue play out by itself. We all are a part of a spiritual battle; a battle that challenges us to step outside of our comfort zone and to protect a culture of life, to protect the gift of creation and to maintain justice for our brothers and sisters in Christ.