



Each year on April 22, we observe the birthday of the modern environmental movement, which began in 1970. Earth Day celebrates its 52nd anniversary this year.

“In the decades leading up to the first Earth Day, Americans were consuming vast amounts of leaded gas through massive and inefficient automobiles. Industry belched out smoke and sludge with little fear of the consequences from either the law or bad press. Air pollution was commonly accepted as the smell of prosperity...America remained largely oblivious to environmental concerns and how a polluted environment threatens human health.”

I remember the publication of Rachel Carson’s book, *Silent Spring*, in 1962, “which raised public awareness and concern for living organisms, the environment and the inextricable links between pollution and public health.”

Senator Gaylord Nelson from Wisconsin had already been concerned about environmental deterioration in the USA, when, in January 1969, a massive oil spill in Santa Barbara, California ravaged the area. Wanting to harness the energy of the student anti-war protests and direct them into consciousness about air and water pollution, the Senator came up with the idea of a teach-in on college campuses. April 22 was chosen as it occurred on a weekday between Spring Break and Final Exams, to maximize the greatest student participation.

Denis Hayes who did the initial organizing realized that all Americans could participate in this movement. As ever more organizations, faith groups and others joined in the various events across the country, the name was changed to *Earth Day*. National media coverage resulted in “20 million Americans... taking to the streets, parks, and auditoriums to demonstrate against the impacts of 150 years of industrial development which had left a legacy of serious human health impacts... By the end of 1970, the first Earth Day led to the creation of the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the passage of other first of their kind environmental laws... “

In 1990 “Earth Day went global, mobilizing 200 million people in 141 countries...30 years on, Earth Day 2000 sent world leaders a loud and clear message: Citizens around the world wanted quick and decisive action on global warming and clean energy.”

But more challenges faced the environmental community in 2010, as climate change deniers and well-funded oil lobbyists, etc. continued their opposition. But Earth Day continued and EARTHDAY.ORG prevailed, making Earth Day a main proponent for global action for the environment.

Today, as the climate crisis grows and the fight for a clean environment is even more urgent, it is imperative we do our part to work for our planet and its people.

Sr. Pat Cataldi, CPS

(Adapted from www.earthday.org)

