

President Clinton, Vice President Gore, members of the Cabinet, fellow participants in this Forest Conference.

My ministry as Archbishop of Seattle brings me to nearly 200 parishes and Catholic communities from the Canadian border to the Columbia River, from the crest of the Cascade mountains to the shores of the Pacific.

I often drive down Highway 101 from our parish of St. Anne's in the Olympic peninsula town of Forks to Our Lady of Good Help, our parish in the Grays Harbor town of Hoquiam. Enroute, I pass through the magnificent, moss-covered old growth forests of the Olympic National Park, pristine forests virtually untouched by human hands.

I also pass through private and public lands that have been logged and logged again. Some of these lands have been replanted and a uniform group of Douglas firs awaits some future harvest. Other lands are clear-cut and fallow, all but devoid of the abundant forest life with which God has graced creation.

At the end of my drive, I arrive in Hoquiam, a proud independent town that carries on, despite the recent closure of the mill that was its biggest employer. Here I meet a burly, strapping fellow in the prime of life. A native of the area, he has worked most of his forty-some years in the woods, felling trees. he has been without work for months stretching into years. He has lost his home and his ties to family and friends are tenuous.

"Archbishop," he asks me, "do you know what it's like to work for twenty years, and then end up sleeping in your pickup at the side of the road?"

I tell him, "I don't," But I do know that this man's tragedy has been repeated thousands of times by workers who have lost their livelihoods in our forests.

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These are not only personal experiences. They are community tragedies. The man who lives in his pick-up truck has lost the wherewithal and the self-worth that builds community. He doesn't vote. He doesn't belong to the Rotary Club or Kiwanis. He doesn't show up for coffee at the diner.

The loss of that man and those like him is evident in the empty storefronts in downtown Hoquiam and other timber communities. The loss is evident in the lines at the food bank and the welfare office. And the loss is evident in the homes where unemployed workers - anxious, depressed, sunk in despair - lash out at their loved ones or find solace in alcohol or drugs.

Moreover, the loss of the unemployed timber worker has repercussions which can destroy the very existence of small rural communities, as well as contributing to the increased feminization of poverty as women are exploited in low-paying jobs. A culture, a way of life, prized and revered in our timber communities, is dying.

I speak today as a representative of a Judeo-Christian tradition that values all of God's creation: the forests, the workers who labor in the forests, and the communities whose livelihood has been dependent on the forests.

In the creation account, the Bible tells us that "God looked at everything that was made and found it very good." And, it is.

Mr. President, I commend you for convening this conference. I believe that only through dialogue and full participation of all concerned parties can we achieve a balanced solution that serves the common good.

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It is not the role of the church to propose specific political or economic remedies to solve this dilemma. Our role is to raise the moral values involved in preserving forests, employing forest workers, and saving forest-dependent communities.

In Grays Harbor and elsewhere, the Catholic, Lutheran and other Churches are helping to mediate local discussions between timber and environmental interests. This past weekend, we appealed to all our people in Western Washington for contributions of food, clothing and finances to assist those in need. Our hope is that not only will we provide immediate assistance, but that common ground be discovered so that the common good will be achieved.

Mr. President, this Conference can begin a national dialogue that will resolve the crisis in our forests, in peoples' lives, and in our timber communities. The dialogue has to be more than rhetoric.

The timber crisis is a moral issue. I, the members of my church and the members of many other churches, stand ready to assist your efforts toward resolution and reconciliation.

Thank you for listening to me today. May the blessings of a good and gracious God be with you and grant you wisdom.

Most Reverend Thomas J. Murphy
Archbishop of Seattle
April 2, 1993