

## Why St. Anne uses those “different” Palms for Palm Sunday

# ECO PALM SUNDAY

*celebrate justice*

*They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!"*

John 12:12-13

In celebration of Palm Sunday, St. Anne partners with Catholic Relief Services' Fair Trade Program to use Eco-Palms, a branch truly worthy of praising Christ. Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches across the United States combine environmental and social justice with their Palm Sunday celebrations by purchasing eco-palms. In our first year, St. Anne was one of 1,436 American churches who participated in this ecumenical, fair trade and environmental program. **Then, the number of Eco-Palms purchased increased from 360,000 in 2007 to 600,000 2008 with our help!**

### INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES AT RISK

More than 300 million palm fronds are harvested each year for U.S. consumption alone—most of them for Palm Sunday. Yet for the communities who harvest these plants year after year, palm fronds rarely represent jubilation. Although U.S. palm purchases may reach as high as \$4.5 million each year, the palm harvesters themselves earn very little. Indigenous families and communities, who rely heavily on palm harvesting for income, represent the poorer segments of the rural populations in the palm-producing areas of Mexico and Guatemala.

### ENVIRONMENT AT RISK

Typically, palm harvesting is done by community members hired by local contractors, who then sell palms to large floral export firms. Payment is based on volume, so harvesters are motivated to gather a large quantity of palms without regard for quality. As a result, up to half the palms harvested are usually discarded due to poor quality. Many palm producing areas are important biosphere reserves, and the harsh harvesting techniques are rapidly depleting the forest's rich biodiversity.



Eco-Palm fronds from Guatemala and Mexico are harvested in ways that financially reward workers for the quality of the palms they gathered rather than the quantity. Conventional harvesting techniques waste up to 50% of the palms harvested and add to the destruction of habitats, but Eco-Palm techniques use nearly 95% of all palms harvested. Eco-palm cooperatives have also taken the initiative to incorporate harvesting practices that

minimize impact on the wildlife where palms grow. In this way, Eco-palms protect the unique and important biodiversity of the region and improve the local communities' standard of living through fair trade practices.

### HARVEST FOR JUSTICE

Catholic Relief Services Fair Trade Program ([www.crsfairtrade.org](http://www.crsfairtrade.org)) has partnered with Lutheran World Relief and in cooperation with Presbyterian Church USA, the United Methodist Committee on Relief, and the University of Minnesota to help build support in the U.S. for eco-palms by introducing parishes to this social and environmental justice project as we strive to act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8). Eco-palms are harvested in a more sustainable way—harvesters are paid on the quality of their palms rather than the quantity. These communities are also committed to using harvesting practices that minimize the impact on the natural forest so to care for God’s creation.

Eco-palm harvesters and community members sort and package the palms themselves and sell their palms directly rather than relying on middlemen according to the principles of Fair Trade. In this way, eco-palms improve local communities’ standard of living and ensure that the money paid for the palms benefit those who labor.



### **Benefits of Eco-Palms**

By using those “different” palms on Palm Sunday, not only does St. Anne get palms more authentic to the ones used in Jerusalem, but we help harvesters and farmers in developing countries build a better life for their families and communities. The Carmelita cooperative in Guatemala uses our purchase of Fair Trade, Environmentally friendly Eco-Palms to help provide health care, build a community school, and improve the communities’ standard of living.

*To view pictures and stories of Fair Trade, Eco-Palm harvesters, visit <http://www.lwr.org/palms/slideshow.asp>*