"Many people will deny doing anything wrong because distractions constantly dull our consciousness of just how limited and finite our world really is." – Pope Francis, Laudato Si #56

The Carbon Footprint of Our Digital Consumption

Our online addiction is heating up the planet, as the electricity used to manufacture and power our devices, data centers and related infrastructure contributes a growing share of the world's carbon footprint.

The needed energy is mostly produced by fossil fuels – coal, natural gas (with its attendant issue of fracking and pipelines) and oil -- as well as problematic nuclear and hydro-electric energy.

These fossil fuel energy sources make significant contributions to global warming and resulting change in weather patterns commonly called climate change.

Some examples of the extent of digital energy needs:

- A 2013 report notes that wirelessly watching an hour of video a week on a tablet or smartphone uses as much electricity as 2 new domestic refrigerators.
- It is projected that data centers' carbon footprint will soon exceed that of the entire aviation industry.
- Bitcoin online currency heads toward annual carbon dioxide emissions equivalent to 1 million transatlantic flights.

A Guardian article offers an excellent overview of this issue.

Reflection

"There is no free lunch" applies to our extensive and growing dependence on the use of data for texting, sharing photos and streaming online videos. While this is very helpful for communication, education and entertainment, the required energy carries a high cost, granted this cost is often unknown and seldom considered.

- What does this mean to me as I use data on my phone or tablet? How do the benefits compare with the cost to our Earth home?
- Where is the line between *need* and *want* when it comes to use of electronics in this way?
- What about the tendency to use more data if I have an unlimited plan? Would buying a limited-data plan help me be more mindful of my data use?
- What is the *full cost* of using electronics?

Actions:

- Raise questions with others in my circles of influence about the tremendous energy demands of electronics' use – of all kinds.
- [Urge Internet companies](#) to power their data centers with renewable energy.
- Raise questions about the unsustainability of the power demands of Internet usage with policy makers.

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