

# Green Resolutions

More than wishful thinking | **MARIANNE PETERS**

I love making New Year's resolutions. Perhaps I'm a cockeyed optimist, but every January I hope that, with the Holy Spirit's help, I can keep "living up to what I've already attained" (Philippians 3:16). I vow to lose those perennial ten pounds every year (that's either optimism or insanity). I also vow to live more sustainably, meaning that I will keep looking for ways to conserve the earth's available natural resources, leaving plenty left over for future generations.

What motivates me to set green goals every year? I'm susceptible to eco-guilt, but that only motivates me to crawl under a rock. I believe that God created this magnificent planet we call home as well as all its magnificent inhabitants, from singing whales to songbirds who chart their migrations by the stars. With that in mind, I struggle to live creatively and responsibly. I wish I was more consistent, but I keep trying to adopt new habits and abandon old ones. In my neck of the woods, sustainable living has to be a conscious choice. There's little encouragement from local infrastructure or public opinion to be green. I cut myself some slack, though. It took awhile to establish my current habits. It will take a correspondingly long time to change my old habits into new, greener ones.

I also believe that Christ's ambassadors must love the world's people, especially those in need. Not surprisingly, those in need are often the ones most affected by environmental problems such as shrinking arable land, exposure to chemicals such as pesticides, air, and water pollution, and extreme weather patterns.

So, as I set my annual goals, I ask myself how I have lessened my household's impact on the planet in the past twelve months. I look through

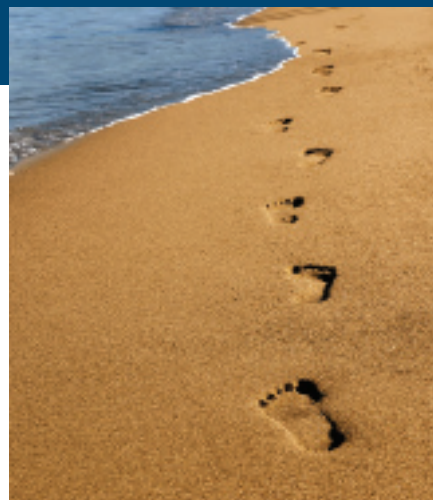
my utility bills. I pay attention to how much I'm reusing, recycling, and composting around the house. And for a more comprehensive picture, I measure my ecological footprint.

The Global Footprint Network's website, [www.footprintnetwork.org](http://www.footprintnetwork.org), offers an enlightening quiz that helps explain an individual's total environmental impact. The quiz estimated how much I use available resources, and it also offered suggestions for specific ways I could lessen my impact, based on the information I provided. Here's the bad news, though: according to the quiz, if everyone on the planet lived like me, we would need the resources of four earths to sustain our lifestyles!

Now, an ecological footprint is only an estimate. (The methodology used to attain this estimation is interesting, quite involved, and available through the website, so I won't repeat it here.) And it also takes into account societal as well as personal impacts—no one would ever get a "perfect score" since we all rely on public services and the infrastructure of the country where we live. I was still discouraged. Several of my friends commented, "I thought you

## The Ecological Footprint

The "ecological footprint" concept was invented in 1992 by Mathis Wackernagel, a doctoral student studying community and regional planning at the University of British Columbia, and his professor, William Rees. Unlike the "carbon footprint" concept, which measures only the amount of carbon emitted by individuals or groups, an ecological footprint takes into account carbon emissions *plus* other ways human activities impact the earth's resources, including land and water. Wackernagel is now president of the Global Footprint Network. ■



were doing better than that!" (Thanks, guys.) Why was my score so high? Using my data, the quiz pinpointed how my household could lighten up. For instance, we rely a lot on supermarket food, which travels many miles and uses tons of packaging. We have found local, seasonal sources of food, though, which reduces fossil fuel consumption and plastic waste. Our generously sized house gulps energy, though we have mostly switched to Energy Star appliances, sealed cracks, and reduced water and electricity use. Our paid-off cars are not necessarily fuel-efficient. We've adopted a more sustainable lifestyle, but the quiz showed me that if we really want to lessen our impact, we've got to do more than change a few light bulbs.

The quiz also reinforced to me that while individual effort matters, the more of us who make a change, the better the prospects for all of us. We should not wait for our neighbors to take the first step. We should bring them along on this green journey. One light bulb (a CFL, of course!) can light up a whole room. Many light bulbs can light the way for everyone. What are your green resolutions for 2010? ■

## For Further Reading

Need more ideas for your green resolutions? Read Lori Bongiorno's book *Green, Greener, Greenest: A Practical Guide to Making Eco-Smart Choices a Part of Your Life*. It's an indispensable resource for living green.

**Marianne Peters** is a freelance writer living in Plymouth, Indiana.