

Becoming Vegan Deepened My Consciousness

Father Fred Bugarin

I grew up in the Philippines and moved to Alaska in 1963 when I was 14 years old. I was ordained a priest in 1975 in Anchorage. I am currently serving at St. Anthony's Catholic Church in Anchorage, having completed 6 years in Kodiak and 9 years as a missionary in Southern Philippines.

I care deeply about issues of peace and justice, so what I've learned about the production of food from animal sources affected me profoundly. I take a holistic approach to spirituality which includes care of the earth and all life forms. How could I support practices that cause so much suffering, waste and indiscriminate destruction of both plant and animal species? But I'm getting ahead of myself . . . Let me start from the beginning.

Like many people living in America, I've gained weight over the years and have had the health problems that go with it: high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes, and arrhythmia.

My journey toward a plant-based diet actually began in September, 2011 when a doctor (not my primary doctor) asked me how much I had weighed in my 20's, (which was considerably less than I weighed in September!). He told me I should go back to that weight.

Wow! That didn't sound easy. How could I do that?

I thought of a couple in my church, June and Paul Cordasci, who have adopted a plant-based diet, lost weight and look great, so I asked the doctor, "What do you think about a plant-based diet?" He told me we can get enough protein from plants, and that actually, Americans eat far too much meat.

June and Paul had told me about the [Food for Life Nutrition and Cooking Classes](#), so I signed up right away for the classes that were just about to

start. I began eating the recommended diet of whole-plant foods immediately. Within three weeks, the change in my diet made my medications too strong for me. I found my-self feeling dizzy and paid a visit to my primary care doctor, who took me completely off four of my medications right away.

It's really amazing what a difference this change has made for me. Now I'm off my diabetes medications, my blood pressure has come down, and I've lost about 40 pounds so far! No more problems with constipation. I've become more limber and have much more energy than I had before. I enjoy uninterrupted sleep and wake up feeling refreshed.

When I first considered this change in diet, I was worried about being able to prepare the food. I'm not much of a cook. But what I thought might be a problem has actually become one of the joys of this

change. I find it delightful to prepare my food now. I'm not ready to cook for guests, but I'm having a great time experimenting and making foods for myself from the recommended New Four Food Groups I learned in class: fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains. The class really helped me with the cooking.

But to return to where I began, I soon realized that this dietary change affected much more than my personal health. Delisa made a comment in class that started me thinking about the animals, and then I read *The Food Revolution*, by John Robbins, and learned how our food production affects the earth and all the other beings on the earth. I grieved as I thought about some of the agricultural practices I had been involved in while working in mission in the Philippines.

With my holistic spiritual values and



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orientation to justice, it was a no-brainer for me to make the commitment to a vegan diet and lifestyle. It has broadened and deepened my **c o n s c i o u s n e s s** and understanding of how my life choices fit into my spirituality and ministry; in effect, a whole life-style with a broader and deepened awareness.

My parishioners have noticed my weight loss, improved health, and passion for my new way of life and some of them are becoming interested in it. In fact, we've now scheduled a Food for Life Class at

our church, which will start in March. I'm really excited about helping spread the word and supporting others in learning how to improve their health while also helping the earth and all life forms.

I had been concerned at one point that changing to a plant-based diet would be difficult socially, but it isn't. There has been no downside to changing my diet. In fact, it has made my life simpler and much more enjoyable.

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