For many young adults today, traversing the rough terrain of our early twenties is no cake walk. We are thrown into the post-grad “real world” of ambiguous career paths, shifting identities, and overwhelming responsibilities. As a person of faith, I often wonder what to carry forward with me, and what to let go.

Sometimes the weight of reality comes crushing down, and I get overwhelmed by stark injustices that I cannot escape – like the terrifying fact that every time I sit on a cushion I am exposed to toxic flame retardants linked to cancer, learning disabilities, and reproductive harm.

For the first 22 years of my life, I lived under the assumption that the products in my home were safe. Spending a sick day curled up on my couch with my dog always seemed like the ultimate safe haven. As I slurped up the healing soup made by my mother, we had no idea that I was actually sitting in a toxic stew.

When I learned about toxic flame retardants, the myth of consumer protection was shattered and I was furious. I flipped over all of the cushions in my home. Sure enough, there was the tag indicating that our furniture meets legal flammability requirements, meaning that chemicals added to the bare foam enable it to withstand an open flame for
ABOUT US

Earth Ministry engages the religious community in environmental stewardship. We work in partnership with individuals and congregations to respond to this great moral challenge through education, modeling sustainable lifestyle choices, and organizing for social change through environmental advocacy.

Founded in 1992, Earth Ministry has a history of leading the way in caring for the environment from a faith perspective. Our Greening Congregations Program was the first in the country to help houses of worship implement sustainable practices, and our faithful advocacy program is on the cutting edge of empowering clergy and lay leaders to speak out on public policy issues.

Earth Ministry supports a growing network of congregations and has a national membership. While Earth Ministry is rooted in the Christian tradition, we actively engage all religious communities on climate and energy issues through Washington Interfaith Power & Light. Our programs and resources are available to all. www.earthministry.org www.waipl.org

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Spring is in the air! The flowers are blooming and the sun has begun to shine warmly on our faces – but in today’s world, we know there is more to the air we breathe than these beautiful gifts of spring.

In this issue of Earth Letter, we take on the often-invisible world of toxic chemicals, which affects everything from the quality of our air and water to the chair on which you are sitting as you read this. Earth Ministry/WAIPL Outreach Coordinator Jessica Zimmerle leads off by telling her story as a young adult responding to the growing number of toxins in the products and furniture we use daily. Sister Clare Josef-Maier encourages a faith-based approach to caring for our bodily health and integrity, and Dr. Brian Naasz reflects on his own perspectives of stewardship as a scientist and educator.

On page 8, Program & Outreach Director Jessie Dye urges people of faith to a new level of advocacy – this time, with retail stores and major commercial producers. In “Mindful Living,” Creation Justice Ministries offers a comprehensive perspective of the challenges and points of hope in a world full of toxics. Finally, we examine the common threads within faithful responses to toxic chemicals from a variety of religious traditions.

Earth Ministry/WAIPL is pleased to offer food for thought for our readers and to provide leadership in reclaiming the health of our invisible world, so that it may be as beautiful as the visible new life of springtime.

Blessings,
Earth Ministry relies on donations from individuals like you to make this important work possible. Join or renew your membership in Earth Ministry, sign up for monthly giving, or make a special gift at www.earthministry.org or by calling (206) 632-2426. Thank you for your support!

Salmon Ground is Holy Ground

Earth Ministry/WAIPL is actively engaging the religious community in the reauthorization of the Columbia River Treaty, an agreement between the United States and Canada that governs the operation of large dams in the Upper Columbia watershed. We are advocating for the inclusion of Native voices and consideration of ecosystem functions in the updated treaty.

One key leader on this important issue is Lutheran Bishop Martin Wells, who published an OpEd on the Columbia River Treaty in High Country News. His piece, "Salmon Ground is Holy Ground," outlines the moral, ethical, and ecological issues at stake in modernizing the Treaty, as well as key principles that must be addressed in its renegotiation.

Read more at http://www.hcn.org/articles/salmon-ground-is-holy-ground.

Fun and Friendship at Earth Ministry

Not only does Earth Ministry/WAIPL work hard, but we play hard too! We have enjoyed getting to spend time with you, our members, at various social gatherings in the past months.

Our most recent colleague gathering was a Member Mixer, a chance for individuals to meet like-minded peers and for Earth Ministry member congregations to network around current projects. Representatives of our Greening Congregations had lively small group conversations around the program’s five Green Fields (worship, education, building & grounds, community outreach, and advocacy) and how they have shaped each congregation’s passion for creation care.

In late January, Earth Ministry hosted a happy hour as a casual opportunity for members to meet one another and spend time with the staff and board.

Around 50 of our friends gathered at Peddler Brewing Company for an evening of great conversation, laughs, and sustainable local brews.

We can’t emphasize enough how much all of us at Earth Ministry/WAIPL value our relationship with each and every one of you. We are glad to be on this journey with you and are grateful for your continued support of our work!
The Journey Continues: Lummi totem pole journey revisited

On January 29, Earth Ministry/WAIPL joined the Lummi Nation and Sierra Club for an event reflecting on the 2014 Totem Pole Journey. The gathering premiered a film documentary by Fred Lane, featured photographs of the journey by James Leder, and showcased the stunning 14 by 21 foot mural that was painted by attendees at stops along the journey.

Lummi leaders addressed their recent request that the federal government deny a permit for the Cherry Point coal export terminal as it would be a violation of tribal treaty rights. The proposed coal terminal would break the social compact between the government of the United States and its people to secure the general welfare of its residents. It also threatens the tribe’s way of life by impacting current fishing grounds as well as disturbing sacred lands and waters.

Participants enjoyed a special evening celebrating the beauty and power of the Totem Pole Journey through art, pictures, and word — reminding us that we are connected to a vast network of tribes, people of faith, ranchers, artists, and neighbors, all of whom are united in support of the Lummi Nation at Xwe’chi’exen.

Legislative Workshops & Interfaith Advocacy Day

To help people of faith make their voices heard during the 2015 Washington State legislative session, Earth Ministry/WAIPL staff and board presented at legislative workshops in Seattle and Spokane, and at Interfaith Advocacy Day in Olympia.

Outreach Coordinator Jessica Zimmerle moderated a question-and-answer session on oil transport and the Governor’s climate change package at the Seattle workshop, and led a breakout group on how citizens can take action. In Spokane, Program & Outreach Director Jessie Dye joined staff from Sierra Club and the Lands Council to present on oil transportation safety, and Earth Ministry Board member Rev. Tom Soeldner led a session on the Columbia River Treaty. Over 225 people attended the two workshops on opposite sides of the state.

At Interfaith Advocacy Day, Jessie led two workshops on our environmental priorities — getting toxics out of home furnishings, combating climate change, and improving oil train safety — and supported nearly 250 faithful activists as they met with their elected officials. Check Earth Ministry’s website regularly for updates on each of our legislative priorities: www.earthministry.org/advocacy/legislative-priorities.
Combating Climate Change

Earth Ministry/WAIPL is leading the Washington State faith community in addressing climate change. Executive Director LeeAnne Beres serves on the steering committee of the newly-formed Alliance for Jobs and Clean Energy, a coalition of individuals, organizations, and businesses dedicated to reducing global warming pollution and strengthening our economy. The Alliance is working to combat climate change by adopting and enforcing strong standards that meet our values and principles, while promoting just and broadly-shared prosperity. We currently support two policy proposals: the Carbon Pollution Accountability Act (HB 1314) and a Clean Fuels Standard.

The Carbon Pollution Accountability Act will create a new market-based program that limits carbon pollution and requires major emitters to pay for their emissions. Pollution limits will grow stronger over time and the bill will generate $1 billion annually to reinvest in promoting further emissions reductions, expanding transit options and maintaining transportation infrastructure, supporting public education, and investing in low income families’ transition to the clean energy economy.

A Clean Fuels Standard will require fuel distributors to gradually reduce the pollution content of their fuels, make more alternatives to petroleum — such as electric cars, biofuels, and renewable natural gas — available to consumers, reduce air pollution, lower carbon emissions, and keep more of our transportation dollars in the local economy.

On January 27, over 25 Earth Ministry/WAIPL members attended the Alliance for Jobs and Clean Energy launch and the first hearing on the Carbon Pollution Accountability Act at the state legislature, ensuring that the faith voice was well represented.

Third Time’s the Charm for Banning Toxic Flame Retardants

Earth Ministry/WAIPL continues to partner with firefighters, nurses, parents, and many others as we speak out against unnecessary toxic chemicals in our homes and bodies. We’d like to believe “third time’s the charm” as we once again seek to pass the Toxic-Free Kids and Families Act (HB 1174). This bill will ban toxic flame retardants in home furniture and children’s products — creating safer homes for the most vulnerable among us, our children. The Governor’s Toxic Reduction Act is also one of our priorities this legislative session. HB 1472 is a bold toxics package that offers a comprehensive approach to regulating harmful chemicals in consumer products. This approach is critical for the wellbeing of the environment as well as our health.

Earth Ministry has been persistent in our battle against toxic flame retardants throughout the legislative session, starting with a highly successful pre-session faith & health literature drop with the Washington Nurses Association at the state capitol. In the last month, we have hosted three more church-based screenings of the award-winning documentary, Toxic Hot Seat, and have taught a wide range of adult education classes to raise awareness about this issue.

Earth Ministry has also turned out religious leaders to testify at two legislative committee hearings, representing the many thousands of people of faith who have raised concern over toxicity in our homes and who support this bipartisan legislation.

Continued on page 15

Rick Samyn (St. Leo Parish, Tacoma), Rev. Marilyn Cornwell (Church of the Ascension, Seattle) and Rev. Kathleen Patton (St. Stephen’s Episcopal, Longview) ready to testify at a House Environment Committee hearing
The Divine Sanctuary  By Sister Clare Josef-Maier

“Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.” 2 Corinthians 7:1

Many of us who grew up in a religious context have heard variations on the theme that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. In 2 Corinthians 6, Paul writes about this concept, continuing in the verse above to encourage us to live accordingly.

I learned as an adolescent that being God’s holy dwelling place meant that I should shun makeup, piercings, and tattoos, and that I should dress modestly and engage in pure conduct. It seems inevitable that considering my body as a holy temple soon became strongly associated with implications of judgment and control.

I was not able to come to a healthier understanding until I approached it again through the lens of reverence for the whole creation as the sanctuary of God. We do not judge or criticize the natural world, but seek to cherish, protect, and steward creation. We examine more carefully the impact we leave on the earth, moderating our consumption and waste, and seek to live more simply and modestly.

As we ourselves are part of God’s good creation, we face afresh that the natural world around us is not all that requires stewardship and care. My work with Earth Ministry has encouraged me to reclaim in a vital, urgent way what it means to be myself a divine sanctuary.

Through the lens of creation care, I realized that to be a divine sanctuary was less about purity codes and more about the emphatic affirmation of the value of my material being.

In a dominant culture wholly willing to dismiss, judge, or punish human bodies, the reminder that the Spirit of God seeks us out as a sanctuary and dwelling place gives us pause. Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians stand as an insistence on the body’s worth and wholeness that I and many I know are as-yet unwilling or unable to believe.

Paul reminds the community of faith to purify everything that contaminates body and spirit. What particularly does this mean? Well, whatever it meant in Paul’s day, we are faced with the fact that our concerns today are increasingly distinct as our human industry (and desire for profit) escalates. To live healthfully now requires that we know about the pollution that our lifestyles create and about the chemicals that enter our bodies. Imagine my dismay to learn my “personal care” products are often more harmful than promoting of care. I now make many of these products myself in my own home with few, and natural, ingredients.

To live into our bodies as divine sanctuaries is not about judgment or control, but about the grace and freedom God wants for us and for all creation. When I accept that the biological organism that I am is as holy to God as my spirit, I begin to be willing to educate myself and advocate for the health, wellness, and integrity of that organism in a world of toxic chemicals. And when you and I accept it together, we begin to transform our world — and ourselves.

Sister Clare Josef-Maier is the editor of Earth Letter.
The New World  By Brian Naasz

It is an interesting time to be a chemist.

I have worked in the chemical field since 1980 — as a student, research scientist, manager, and teacher. I knew I wanted to be a chemist after Mr. Miller, my science teacher at Maywood Junior High, reenacted a small-scale version of the Hindenburg disaster in our classroom. While there were no injuries, the outcome of a Bunsen burner igniting a hydrogen balloon in the classroom had mixed results depending on the perspective of the participant.

Mr. Miller probably decided to rethink the scale of his demonstration. A few janitors were likely aggravated at the extra work of cleaning up all the debris that floated down from the concussed ceiling tiles. Several students were terrified of the loud explosion and quick flash of fire. For me, it was like a door had been opened into an exciting, and potentially dangerous, new world.

Basic awareness of chemical hazards has changed a lot since my junior high experience. In large part, this has been due to our ability to detect smaller and smaller quantities of potential toxins and contaminants.

One example is our use of organic solvents. My father was an experienced handyman — he taught me that a great way to get grease off of your hands was to wash them in gasoline. As an undergraduate in the ‘70s we used benzene, a component of gasoline, very casually. The first large study that showed its toxic impact was published late in that decade. Today we know that benzene, even at low levels of exposure, is a carcinogen and poses a major health risk. It is one of many carcinogens of which the new generation of chemists must understand the risk.

Why is this important? Our knowledge of the chemical world and the way that chemicals impact us has changed dramatically in the past 40 years — even in the last 10 years. The technology available to find out what is present, and understand its impact on people, plants, and animals is progressing at an incredible rate.

For those of you that share my chronology, you have seen the impact and benefit of both the Clean Water Act and the Clean Air Act. Each recognizes the need to regulate and control the toxic material that we release into our air and water.

But these Acts miss a huge range of exposures: the materials and products we use every day. New chemicals are routinely invented, but many are not tested for toxicity. The regulations that control them are severely outdated. Would you believe that the chemicals in your personal care products are regulated by a 1938 law? Unfortunately, it’s true.

Earth Ministry has been a leader in helping to drive attention to this critically neglected area of chemical reform for the past several years, working to pass bills such as the Toxic-Free Kids and Families Act and the Toxics Reduction Act. It has been meaningful for me — as a scientist, educator, and a person of faith — to participate in this vital work to protect both the people of our planet, and our planet itself. It is to this advocacy for good stewardship of our health and our world that we all are called.

Brian Naasz is an Assistant Professor of Chemistry at Pacific Lutheran University and former Board Chair of Earth Ministry.
Who’s Minding the Store? By Jessie Dye

Everything we have comes from the earth. God has given us this beautiful planet, and every single thing we need for life is a gift of Mother Earth. All comes from the natural world: our food, our water, the air we breathe, the clothes on our back, and the shelter that covers us.

Much of it came to our family by way of Costco.

Like many Seattleites, we choose to support the home team and Costco was founded in Seattle. Over time, I have come to trust the brand for its emphasis on organic food, quality merchandise, and a commitment to reducing their carbon footprint in shipping. Costco’s employment practices are generally enlightened and based on the same Catholic social teaching that I studied from preschool through my Jesuit university education. It should be a straightforward decision by Costco, because of their ethical business model, to commit to eliminating toxic flame retardants in their furniture.

Mind the Store

Washington Toxics Coalition (a long-time partner of Earth Ministry) has pointed out that big retailers can be important leaders in consumer safety. When a large chain decides its products have to be safer, this decision often moves public policy in a good direction. And consumers, particularly people of faith, can have an important voice in influencing the policies of companies. Retailers are very interested in their customers’ opinion of their brand.

Mind the Store, a program of the national organization Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families, tells us that “retailers have the power to make substantial improvements in public health and safety, and with that power comes a moral obligation, a corporate social responsibility.” The advocacy of faith leaders provides a valuable voice for safer products.

Because of ongoing public pressure, the largest U.S. furniture manufacturer, Ashley Furniture, announced that they are phasing out toxic flame retardants by next year. The Chicago Tribune recently published articles about other major retailers including Crate and Barrel, Room and Board, and Williams-Sonoma (owner of Pottery Barn and West Elm) largely eliminating toxic flame retardants from their furniture. In addition, the Futon Shop, Scandinavian Designs, and Walmart are asking their vendors to stop adding flame retardants to their furniture labels.

Washington-based retailers like Costco can be key drivers of supply chains, and can convince the companies that manufacture their furniture to do so without flame retardants.

Our Bodies are Temples of the Holy Spirit

Why should people of faith be concerned about the chemical make-up of consumer products anyway? Rarely in Earth Letter do we mention commercial brands, retail stores, or advocacy involving market strategies. How is this a religious issue?

When I was a Catholic schoolgirl, the nuns taught us that the Holy Spirit manifests though our hands and hearts, and that we must make healthy personal
choices to support the work of Spirit in the world. We learned that is sinful to poison or degrade our bodies. Though it sometimes seemed like an old-fashioned concept, the belief that "our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit" was a pivotal message in the Catholic grade school theology of my youth.

Looking back, this seems both wise and prescient. Since the year I was born, over 80,000 new chemicals have been introduced into commerce, and almost none of them have been tested for safety. The vast experiment that the chemical industry is conducting on the bodies of our children is sinful. The big toxics companies buying influence in our state legislature and Congress are poisoning both our families and our democracies. So I am clear that Earth Ministry’s work advocating for safe chemical policy is on behalf of the Holy Spirit.

Retail Therapy
Businesses that operate in our communities welcome customer feedback. Even big retailers are more interested in consumer well-being than are the few flame-retardant industries whose only business model is to sell poison.

Seattle Gymnastics Academy is a cheerful, small-scale local example. Gym mats, like fold-out beds and yoga pads, contain foam that typically includes a large amount of toxic flame retardants. When John Sweeney, chairman and Seattle Gymnastics Academy owner, learned from parents about the risk to kids from toxic dust coming from gym mats, the academy became the first gym in the country to authorize a chemical study of the dust in its buildings.

John discovered that there were indeed flame retardants in the dust, and noted that it contained the especially toxic chemicals TDCPP and TCEP, which present a significant risk of cancer, birth defects, and other reproductive harm. The gym replaced all uncovered mats with non-toxic ones. Not only that, Seattle Gymnastics Academy took its first-ever public stand on a policy issue and supports removing these chemicals completely from all mats to keep its consumers safe.

It’s not possible for even the most sophisticated parents to buy their way out of this toxic mess without retailers being on board. A woman with a baby testified at a recent legislative hearing on toxics. Besides being a mom, Lorelei Walker is a Ph.D. candidate in epigenetics from the University of Washington and spoke about the severe risks to infants and children from toxic flame retardants.

When Lorelei became pregnant, she spent hours online trying to find baby products that don’t contain poisons — and she couldn’t do it. Companies either do not disclose what is in their baby merchandise or the level of certain toxic chemicals, and in many cases there just are no safe products. Our maternal epigeneticist gave up.

Realistically, only our elected officials and influential retailers have enough power to change the direction of manufacturing. Individuals do not. Many of our representatives are doing the right thing and answer to “we the people” on this issue. But we often find gridlock, which we know favors those who profit from poisons.

A recent bright spot, however, was an overwhelming bipartisan vote of 95–3 in our House of Representatives to ban certain toxic flame retardants and grant authority to the state’s toxics agency to prevent equally bad or worse chemicals from being used in the future.

Many retailers, like Costco, seem to want to be responsible corporate citizens. Please join Earth Ministry, national faith leaders, and consumer protection activists to ask them to mind the store by adopting a policy that phases out flame retardants.

Jessie Dye is Earth Ministry’s Program & Outreach Director.
Mindful Living: Human health, pollution, and toxics

As people of faith, we often turn to the Bible for advice on how we should live and improve our lives. Turning to scripture, we often think of self-improvement and self-care in spiritual terms and seek ways to purify our souls, make our hearts more loving, and better conform our minds to Christ.

For issues that concern our physical bodies, however, most of us are conditioned to look elsewhere for answers. And yet, despite this, the Bible does teach us how we must think about and care for our bodies. Scripture teaches us that we are all created in the image of God and that our bodies are to be temples of the Holy Spirit.

We honor God when we take steps to foster an environment that promotes healthy living for creation and for each other. When we disregard the importance of a world that is clean and safe, however, our bodily temples suffer, and we fall short in honoring our Creator.

The pervasiveness of pollution across the land, water, and air, and the presence of harmful chemicals in the manufacturing process of nearly every man-made item make the health dangers of chemicals and pollution a sobering problem. Household cleaning products contain potential poisons. The food on our tables can contain harmful pesticides. Even our water, used for drinking, bathing, cleaning, and cooking, may be contaminated with dangerous chemicals.

Pollution of the air and water, and the presence of harmful chemicals in everyday household items contribute to an unprecedented incidence of illness. Environmental degradation has been linked to diseases that range from asthma and cancer to developmental disorders in children. In fact, children and the elderly are the most vulnerable to these widespread contaminants.

This unnecessary burden of a polluted Earth is an insult to the perfection of God’s creation and a desecration to our bodily temples.

Toxic pollution is also a justice issue. Toxic pollutants and chemicals disproportionately threaten the health of low-income communities and communities of color. According to the report Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty: 1987–2007, issued by the United Church of Christ, “people of color make up the majority of those living in host neighborhoods within 3 kilometers (1.8 miles) of the nation’s hazardous waste facilities.”

Yet, despite these alarming realities, there is hope for change. With mindful living, active citizenship, responsive governmental action, and business leadership, we can all live out God’s vision for our lives with wholeness and abundance.

We Know Not What We Do

Too often, humanity forgets its God-given responsibility to care for all of creation. Instead, we abuse our privileged positions as stewards and treat the world as a means to serve our own selfish purposes. When we use up God’s abundance for the immediate benefit of ourselves alone, we have forgotten our responsibility as stewards.

The architect of this world masterfully designed a system in which all elements are related for the common good and for the sustainability of life itself. When we overstep the bounds of our role within this system, we run the risk of turning creation into a wasteland.
Toxic Legacies
Synthetic chemicals are pervasive in our modern lives — in our homes, schools, and churches. These seemingly invisible, yet toxic, chemicals can be found in everyday items such as baby mattresses, personal care products, furniture, toys, and canned food. In addition to diet, exercise, and genetic factors, synthetic chemicals and heavy metals in consumer products, building materials, cleaners, and plastics contribute to unprecedented incidences of illness and disease ranging from asthma to cancer.

Over the last one hundred years, we have produced millions of tons of chemicals for the manufacture of new products. Some of these chemicals have made our lives faster and more convenient. While many of these chemicals were rigorously tested to ensure that they could perform their intended tasks, their long-term impact on our bodies and on the rest of creation has been largely ignored. More than 84,000 synthetic chemicals are currently registered for use. Only fifteen percent have any human health data and only 200 chemicals have been fully tested for safety.

Nearly 700 new chemicals are introduced each year. These largely untested, unregulated chemicals end up in our food, water, air, and consumer products, and have serious implications for our health and wellness.

Effects of Toxic Chemicals
The average person in the United States has hundreds of chemicals stored in her blood, fat tissue, organs, and bones. Toxic chemicals contribute to growing rates of cancer, asthma, birth defects, and autism.

According to the EPA, in 2010, nearly 3.9 billion pounds of 650 different chemicals were released in the air, soil, and water; nearly 30 percent of these chemicals are linked to cancer and birth defects. The CDC found through the biomonitoring data they collected of individual blood samples that 75 percent of people in the United States have triclosan, a chemical used in anti-bacterial products, in their blood. Triclosan is an endocrine disrupting chemical linked to infertility, learning disabilities, and antibiotic resistance.

Similarly, some perfluorinated compounds (PFCs), chemicals used to make materials stain and stick resistant, are associated with cancer, male infertility, immune suppression, and ADHD. The CDC found PFCs in almost all the biomonitoring participants. The levels of PFCs are particularly high among higher income people. Various types of pesticides, which are chemicals sprayed onto our food to kill insects and weeds, have immediate effects on the nervous and hormonal systems and may impair cognitive and reproductive development in children.

In the rush to introduce new chemicals, we unfortunately learn about their harmful effects long after the damage is already done.

Environmental Triggers and Disease
Research by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences and the 2010 non-partisan Presidential Cancer Panel’s report on environmental links to cancer found that although genetics is an important predictor of health challenges, triggers in the environment often propel a person towards disease.

So, while someone may have a predisposition to a particular illness, the disease may never develop if not first prompted by exposure to a chemical or other environmental factor. In fact, the Presidential Cancer Panel found that the environmental links to cancer are grossly underestimated.
Children, the elderly, and people with weakened immune systems are particularly vulnerable to environmental contaminants.

**Stagnancy**
The intended design of creation is one in which interdependence of all living things is celebrated and encouraged. The lessons of interdependence, both joyful and challenging, are what make life abundant. We jeopardize our God-given opportunity for abundant living through our reliance on synthetic chemicals. We cannot make God’s earth a wasteland of things manufactured, used, and discarded — and still expect people or the rest of God’s creation to prosper.

Exposure to air pollution, water contamination, heavy metals, endocrine disrupters, and carcinogens profane God’s cycle-of-life design into a truncated lifeline. By seeking safer and more sustainable alternatives, all of us as part of God’s creation can live a full and abundant life.

**Purity as Holiness**
Any effort given toward purifying the body — the earth’s, our own, and others’ — shows respect for the divine artist whose masterpiece is our context for living. It is also the pursuit of holiness. God’s creation, of which we are only one part, is sacred.

We should treat it with great care to ensure that the breath of life can flow rhythmically through the collective body so that the work of God can continue and flourish in each of us. The way we live, work, and play in the world should foster creation’s interdependence, where each member of creation contributes to the health of the whole. In this way, creation is continually animated by the spirit of God.

Only when the spirit of God, which initially gave rise to the diverse aspects of creation, can live in us and flow through us will the whole of creation be renewed. A pure body both leads to and stems from a pure heart.

**The Fruits We Bear**
Every day we make choices about our daily living — from which transportation we use to what household cleaning products we choose, to our selection of lawn care products.

We tend to think of these as individual decisions concerning only us, but we are called to consider how we are affecting all of creation. What impact will our actions today have on those who come after us? How will they influence those around us? What bearing will they have on our own lives? Are they helping to purify the body and spirit of creation?

If we are able to discipline ourselves to regularly ask these questions and respond to them with the intention that comes from loving God first (Luke 10:27), then our work as stewards will ensure that all of creation can experience the spirit of God flowing with each breath.

This excerpt from Mindful Living: Human Health, Pollution, and Toxics is reprinted with permission from Creation Justice Ministries. For the full article, list of citation references, and other excellent resources, we encourage you to visit www.creationjustice.org.
12 seconds. I don’t know about you, but we aren’t sitting on bare foam in my living room. We’re sitting on cushions covered by flammable material, which scientists have proven negates any fire retardant benefit.

Like most young adults, I enjoy lounging around, so I breathe in these toxins daily – just imagine how much worse it is for babies and young children who spend more time with their faces right on seat cushions. Firefighters themselves are concerned about Tris and other toxic flame retardants since they are exposed to combusted forms of these chemicals during a fire. So my family and yours don’t receive any real benefits, but are left with a toxic legacy in our homes and bodies.

Given everything I already worry about as I try to make my way in the world, it’s all too much to question the products I come into contact with every day. When I do yoga, my practice should not be clouded by anxiety about whether my yoga mat might leave me infertile. When I tuck my beautiful godson into his car seat, I would like to think I am keeping him safe, not increasing his chances of developing autism. And when I witness my peers battling cancer, I cannot help but fear the invisible source of the disease that is destroying their future.

After discovering the issue of toxics in our homes, the knowledge became a heavy burden. I couldn’t even enjoy a movie at the theatre without ranting about potential negative impacts of the chairs we were sitting on. I was that person at the party, full of terrifying facts that no one wanted to hear.

So instead, I dug deep into my faith to find a more centering calm, and looked for ways to put my faith into action. Through Earth Ministry, I became passionately involved in advocacy efforts, supporting Washington State’s Toxic-Free Kids & Families Act to ban flame retardants from home furniture and children’s products.

In this work, I have found ways that I can leverage my own story to help create systemic change regarding the policies that impact my personal health. I’ve learned to tell these bits of my story to other people of faith, to my family, and even to legislators in hearing testimony, in the hope that it will inspire others to speak up and to make a difference.

As a young woman, I am faced with certain expectations. One of the most common is that I will have children. The thought of doing so fills me with fear, not because I do not wish to be a mother, but because I cannot imagine bringing a child into this world full of toxic contaminants. How can I protect my child when their car seat and crib contain these toxic chemicals? It’s to the point that when I receive a new baby announcement, like my new cousin’s, my reaction is not joy for the parents but rather concern for the child.

As a woman of faith, I believe we have a moral obligation to love one another as ourselves. A basic expression of this love is reasonable safety standards. Furthermore, a fundamental tenant of all faith traditions is protection of the most vulnerable among us, and children certainly qualify. So it only makes sense that we create a system to remove unnecessary toxics in our furniture and children’s products.

As Outreach Coordinator for Earth Ministry, I hear people of faith across the state express their concern about this issue. People are shocked when they realize that they are not protected consumers as they are led to believe.

Continued on next page
As a constituent, I ask legislators to stop putting our children’s future at risk. I challenge elected officials to think about how their votes affect the wellbeing of the people they represent, and the health of our communities. I pray that they hold that responsibility in their hearts and make the right choice for the common good.

As an optimist, I am confident we can improve our chemical safety standards. I have hope that we will move forward together, across party lines, to ban the toxic flame retardants that affect us all. I have hope that by the time I purchase my next couch I will be able to select one without toxic chemicals. And I have hope that the next generation won’t even have to learn about Tris and these other toxic flame retardants.

This is a glimpse of the future that my 24-year-old heart yearns for — one where we will be able to focus on our friends, families, and careers without having to fear the couches we are sitting on.

Jessica Zimmerle is Earth Ministry’s Outreach Coordinator.

Christianity echoes Jewish teachings about creation’s goodness, and the New Testament teaches that Christ’s salvation encompasses not only humankind but “all things” or “the entire world” (Colossians 1:15–20; John 3:16). Jesus teaches that those who receive gifts from the Creator are required to use these responsibly (Matthew 25:14–30, Luke 19:12–28), and that Christians are called to seek justice for society’s most vulnerable (Matthew 25:31–40).

Islam teaches that the natural world is a “sign” (“aya”) that points to the existence of Allah and that all of creation glorifies Allah (Qur’an 27:88, 24:41). Human beings are divinely ordained to maintain creation’s balance and harmony (Qur’an 55:1–13). Allah forbids self-harm — an implicit caution in regards to use of toxic substances (Qur’an 2:195, 4:29). Justice for the vulnerable is central to Islam — whether through care for those who suffer or through the prevention of suffering.

Hinduism affirms veneration of nature in its Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, Sutras, and other sacred texts. Mahatma Gandhi taught that simple living is the foundation of sustainable economies, and that “dharma” — often translated “duty” — can be interpreted to support respect for Earth. Gandhi emphasized the Hindu teaching of “ahimsa,” or nonviolence towards the web of life.

Buddhist teachings such as “dependent co-arising” (“paticca samupadda”) affirm that all life is interconnected, and by extension recognize that toxic chemicals damage this web of life. Buddhism also affirms “ahimsa,” or non-violence, recognizing that we must reduce avoidable suffering, criticizing the self-indulgence and greed that characterizes the reckless use of toxics. Buddhism affirms our duty to show compassion to society’s most vulnerable members.
Young Adults Taking Action
Who said millennials were apathetic? Our young adult on staff, Jessica Zimmerle, has been busy conducting outreach to 18–30 year olds, encouraging her generation to raise their voices for environmental justice.

On February 12, members of various faith-based volunteer service corps gathered for a discussion around “Faith & Environment: Where Stewardship Meets Sustainability.” This conversation connected Earth Ministry’s work to the values lived out in a year of service, and how crucial it is for young people to speak up as advocates for justice. The group learned about Earth Ministry’s legislative priorities, worked on crafting their narrative as faith leaders, and put their faith into action through phone calls to the Washington State Legislative Hotline.

Jessica also attended a Young Professionals Climate Action Happy Hour with 40 other young adults who are craving climate justice. Through support from the Alliance for Jobs and Clean Energy, each young person left better connected to the movement and with specific action steps.

Connecting with national efforts for social justice, Jessica represented Earth Ministry/WAIPL at a retreat through the Forum for Theological Exploration that brought together young adults passionate about creating change through the church. This gathering was another empowering reminder that many young people of faith are committing to lives of justice.

Interfaith Partnerships
On February 21, Earth Ministry/WAIPL was proud to speak at a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Pacifica Institute’s new facility in Bellevue. A predominately Muslim organization, the Pacifica Institute promotes cross-cultural awareness and dialogue between various religious traditions in order to engage participants in social justice projects. Earth Ministry/WAIPL’s Jessie Dye joined U.S. Rep. Adam Smith and Claudia Balducci, Mayor of Bellevue, in welcoming the Pacifica Institute to our region.

Also in February, we participated in an Interfaith Harmony Week event at the Seattle University School of Theology and Ministry. This year’s event featured a panel of speakers from diverse faiths addressing the challenging topic “If our faiths teach love, why do we hate?”. Four speakers from the Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and Buddhist traditions and a facilitated discussion helped participants own up to our religions’ dark sides in an honest and open exchange of ideas.
People are like stained-glass windows.

They sparkle and shine when the sun is out,

But when the darkness sets in,
Their true beauty is revealed only if there is a light from within.

—Elizabeth Kübler-Ross