EARTH letter Fall 2014

In Defense of a Sacred Region

By Jessie Dye

Native American spirituality and religious practices vary a great deal across this continent, but one thing Native peoples have in common is a love and respect for home. Their place on the earth is sacred to them. Many of us share this core value, and stand in opposition to the climate-destroying practices of the fossil fuel industry out of love for our region.

Post-European contact, Christian conversion was often used as a tool to destroy Native American culture and religion. Pacific Northwest denominational leaders acknowledged this in two "Letters of Apology" to the tribes of the region in both 1987 and 1997.

Now with an unprecedented threat looming, a new alliance between tribes, environmentalists, and people of faith is arising in the Northwest. These leaders are standing in support of tribal treaty fishing rights and sacred lands, and in opposition to the mining, transport, and export of fossil fuels that poison our air and water. As Pope Francis has said, destroying abundant life for profit is a sin.

One venue of the conflict between the sacred earth and the dominion of greed is at Cherry Point on the far Northwest coast of Washington State, home to the Lummi Nation and proposed site of the largest coal terminal on the West Coast.

This project plans to ship Power River Basin coal from Wyoming on uncovered trains across 1,500 miles of track to be dumped in the heart of Lummi territory. There, the coal would be loaded on huge freighters and shipped to China. There is already one oil refinery in the vicinity, and companies drilling the Bakken shale in the Dakotas are seeking permits to dramatically increase oil processing at the site.

No one knows when the Lummi people first established a home at *Xwe'chi'eXen,* their name for Cherry Point and ground zero for fossil fuel proliferation. At least 175 generations of Lummi ancestors lived in this village complex, and before the arrival of European conquerors it had been home to upwards

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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

Those of us of European descent carry an uncomfortable history as oppressors of indigenous people around the world. Faced with our past and present wrongs, we are tempted to disengage, embarrassed and unsure how to move forward.

But as Kevin O'Brien writes in *Listening to the Voice of God in all God's People*, our theology insists we listen to the voices of the oppressed. Our faith calls us back into right relationship with all of our brothers and sisters — a call as important now as it was in Jesus' day.

Examples of indigenous empowerment are all around us. In this issue of *Earth Letter*, Native American writer and activist Winona LaDuke offers a compelling account of the renewable energy advocacy of Henry Red Cloud and the Lakota people. Earth Ministry staff members Jessie Dye and Jessica Zimmerle offer accounts of the Lummi Tribe's resistance to the coal export terminal proposed on their sacred land, and speak to the shared values that invite people of faith to join the Lummi in solidarity. Finally, in *Quinoa: to buy or not to buy*, Tanya Kerssen reminds us that indigenous struggles are a global issue and not always straightforward.

No matter your ethnic or cultural context, I invite you into this conversation. Together, we can seek "a resonant hope for all of us who care about preserving God's creation," and let us begin by listening.

Blessings,

GOINGS-ON at Earth Ministry

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!

Ethics & the Columbia River Treaty: Righting Historic Wrongs

Ratified by the U.S. and Canada in 1964, the Columbia River Treaty mandated the development and operation of dams in the upper Columbia basin solely for hydropower production and flood control.

U.S. Native American tribes and Canadian First Nations were not consulted in the treaty negotiations, leading to devastating impacts on indigenous communities, their sacred archeological sites, and cultural traditions. Ecosystem health was also not considered in the treaty, and dam operations have drastically impacted stream flows and fish habitat.

Now, 50 years later, a movement is growing to expand the purposes of the treaty to include tribal representation and a focus on fish and wildlife. Religious, tribal, and community leaders came together for a conference in Spokane in early summer to address these historic wrongs. One result was the *Declaration on Ethics & Modernizing the Columbia River Treaty,* which articulates a vision for a shared international habitat that is an integrated human-ecological system, in which our stewardship responsibilities and our moral and legal obligations to Native people are actively upheld.

The declaration was signed by over 100 key leaders, including Bishops Skylstad (Catholic), Wells (Lutheran) and Waggoner (Episcopal), as well as Earth Ministry Executive Director LeeAnne Beres and board members Rev. Tom Soeldner and Evita Krislock.

See *http://bit.ly/treaty_declaration.*

Rachael Paschal Osborn, Bishop William Skylstad, Pat Ford, Bishop Martin Wells, and Pauline Terbasket speaking at the Columbia River Treaty conference

Pastor Erik Wilson Weiberg saying no to more oil

Saying No to Increased Oil Transport

The Northwest is facing an onslaught of fossil fuel traffic, from coal trains rolling through our cities to increasing numbers of oil tankers on our waters. On July 24, the Army Corps of Engineers held a public hearing regarding oil transportation at the BP Cherry Point refinery north pier, near Bellingham, WA.

The BP refinery's pier was built without conducting the legally required Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Now that one is being done, it is important to ensure that BP is complying with laws which explicitly prohibit any increase in the volume of crude oil that can go to facilities on or near Puget Sound.

Earth Ministry and our partners turned out citizens to testify at the hearing, and Pastor Erik Wilson Weiberg of Ballard First Lutheran was a featured speaker at a pre-hearing rally.

Support Clean Air for all God's Children

In June, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released a rule that will set the first-ever national carbon emission limits for existing power plants. Thanks to these new standards, by 2030 there will be 30% less carbon pollution from the power sector and 25% less smog and soot.

When these pollution reductions are implemented, Americans will see an estimated 150,000 fewer asthma attacks and 3,700 fewer cases of bronchitis in children; 180,000 fewer missed days of school and 310,000 fewer lost work days; and, up to 3,300 fewer heart attacks.

People of faith across the country understand that we must reduce our carbon emissions to ensure climate justice for all of God's people and creation. Earth Ministry/WAIPL is collecting comments in support of the EPA carbon rule as an important step in our calling to be good stewards of our land, air, water, and communities.

Earth Ministry members at Hands Across the Sands

Standing for Sacred Ground: Stories from the Totem Pole Journey

At Earth Ministry/WAIPL's semiannual Colleague and Congregational Gathering, photographer Paul Anderson shared his experience as a participant on the 2013 Lummi Totem Pole Journey.

Tribal members carved and took a totem pole on a journey of blessing along the rail line from the coal fields of Montana to Cherry Point. Earth Ministry church leaders enjoyed a breathtaking visual journey as Paul chronicled his travels with the Lummi Tribe along the Northwest coal train route.

As part of the gathering, participants put their faith into action and took a stand against dirty fossil fuels at *Hands Across the Sands,* an international day of action. Our members joined with other climate activists at Golden Gardens Park, where coal trains already roll by daily, to say no to dirty fossil fuels and yes to clean energy.

Hanford Reach National Monument, near Richland, WA

National Monuments Nurture Our Inner Well-Being

On July 5, new Earth Ministry board member Rev. Tom Soeldner had an opinion piece published in the Spokesman-Review newspaper on the need to protect America's national monuments. A retired Lutheran pastor in Spokane, Tom is an avid outdoorsman and knows that natural areas are important places for spiritual renewal and outdoor recreation.

Both opportunities abound in our country's national monuments. Tom took the occasion of Independence Day to reflect on America's most iconic places and to consider how best to ensure that future generations can enjoy them too. Read his OpEd at *http://bit.ly/natmonument*.

***Earth Letter* Fall 2014 Photo Credits**

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Listening to the Voice of God in all God's People

By Kevin O'Brien

Earth Ministry's work with the Lummi Nation is consistent with the movement in contemporary Christianity called liberation theology. This movement can be broadly understood with two theological claims: 1) In order to hear God's voice, we must listen to those who have been excluded by existing power structures, and 2) Heeding these voices, Christians should consider changes to the economic and political systems that create such exclusion.

Liberation theology gives voice to those who have historically been dismissed as voiceless: people of non-European descent, women, the poor. The reasoning is biblical: Jesus was born poor in a world run by the rich, Jewish in a world run by the Romans, a craftsman in a world run by legal authorities. Perhaps God's voice still speaks most clearly in the voices of the poor, the disenfranchised, the oppressed.

This lesson of empowerment for those who feel disenfranchised and silenced is a challenge for people like me — a middle-class white male — reminding us that we do not have all the answers. This may be hard to hear, but it is vitally important. In a recent interview, Pope Francis encouraged all Christians to be open to those unlike themselves. He emphasized: "You must leave room for the Lord, not for our certainties; we must be humble."

When I look humbly at the state of the world, I realize that people like me, people with privilege, have made a lot of bad decisions that endanger the world's ecosystems. To fix that, we're going to need to learn to look beyond our privilege and genuinely listen to others.

We who are middle class or wealthy need to learn from those who are impoverished, struggling, and operating outside our markets. We who are white in a world structured by the descendants of Europe need to learn from people of color who have been forced to live out the flaws in our culture. We whose ancestors immigrated to this continent in the last five hundred years need to learn from cultures that have lived here for many millennia.

To learn from others is to see that the world could be otherwise. Truly listening offers hope that we need not accept poverty, oppression, racism, sexism, or any other form of oppression. Instead, liberation theology interprets the reign of God ordained by Jesus as one that builds a new future. Consider Paul's Letter to the Romans, 8.19-21:

> *For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God . . . in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.*

Liberation means a new world, a resonant hope for all of us who care about preserving God's creation.

Facing climate change and other challenges, Christians need to hope for a different world, for changes to the political structures and economic systems that led us into our current troubles. The tragedy of environmental degradation is real, but Christians who hope for God's liberation can seek freedom from bondage to coal and fossil fuels if we begin to listen to the voice of God in all God's people.

Kevin O'Brien is the Treasurer of Earth Ministry's Board of Directors.

Stommish: Unity, spirituality, and a run against fossil fuels

By Jessica Zimmerle

Earlier this summer, tribal and community members came together for a grand celebration at the Lummi Nation's 68th Annual Stommish Water Festival.

This year, the festival hosted a series of public events about the serious threat that increased fossil fuel transportation poses to tribes throughout the region. At the Sacred Summit, I was moved repeatedly by the wisdom of the elders and experts who came from the Plains, Midwest, and Canada to share their beliefs about our sacred obligation to the environment and to promote a message of unity in the face of oppression.

Chief Phil Lane Jr. of the Ihanktonwan Dakota and Chickasaw Nations set the scene: "We are all in this together; we're only here for a short time . . . like shadows vanishing before the setting sun."

He explained that in detrimental projects like coal export, tar sands, and the Keystone XL Pipeline, the silver lining is that fossil fuel companies have inadvertently awakened a spiritual giant. People are coming to the realization that we are all indigenous to Mother Earth; we are created to care for our one and only planet. It is this grounded faith that gives us the strength to carry on.

The incredible activist and Native American rights champion, Winona LaDuke, encouraged us to operate out of hope rather than fear. She declared that although taking on the fossil fuel industry may feel daunting, "the Creator is much bigger than all of them, and that's why we do the right thing." It's no small task, but it is what we are called to do. And in order to do so, we must embrace the reality that "sometimes we have to go outside what is comfortable."

The Sacred Relay followed the theme of the summit in being both unifying and spiritual. Folks gathered on the beach at Cherry Point where runners and paddlers were blessed and given a pair of carved prayer staffs, carried by land as well as by water, to be re-joined at the Stommish grounds.

Without planning, training, or knowing if I could even make it to the finish line, I took Winona's advice and I ran. I ran eight miles in solidarity with the Lummi.

This last minute decision was far beyond my comfort zone – and it ended up being the best run of my life. As we ran, the staff was traded off and filled with prayers, the woods were alive with the sounds of creation, and supporters fueled us with encouragement. It was incredibly empowering and I was honored to participate.

Kurt Russo, friend of the Lummi and Earth Ministry, boldly suggested that "evil is mighty, but it can't stand up to our stories." Building the call for unity, Chief Reuben George of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation asked that we honor of "all our relations, with one heart, one mind, and one prayer."

Our stories - including your stories, perseverance, and actions – are a crucial part of Earth Ministry's Power Past Coal campaign. Let us continue on the journey together, spreading the epic tale of our collective movement toward a more sustainable future.

Jessica Zimmerle is Earth Ministry's Outreach Coordinator.

Quinoa: To buy or not to buy...is this the right question? By Tanya Kerssen

We've been hearing a lot about quinoa lately. While U.S. consumers prize it as a delicious "super-food," there is growing anxiety about the impact of the quinoa boom in the Andes, and particularly Bolivia, the world's top producing country.

The media has focused primarily on the fact that global demand is driving up the price of quinoa, placing it beyond the reach of poor Bolivians — even of quinoa farmers themselves — leaving them to consume nutritionally vacuous, but cheap, refined wheat products such as bread and pasta. By this logic, some suggest, northern consumers should boycott the "golden grain" to depress its price and make it accessible once again.

Others point out that the impoverished farmers of Bolivia's highlands are at long last getting a fair price for their crop — one of the few crops adapted to their arid, high-altitude environment. In this view, global markets are finally "working" for peasants, and a consumer boycott would only hurt the hemisphere's poorest farmers.

In short, the debate has largely been reduced to the invisible hand of the marketplace, in which the only options for shaping our global food system are driven by (affluent) consumers either buying more or buying less. It's the same logic that makes us feel like we've done our civic duty by buying a pound of fair trade coffee.

This isn't to dismiss the many benefits of fair trade or other forms of ethical consumption, but the so-called quinoa quandary demonstrates the limits of consumption-driven politics. Whichever way you press the lever (buy more/buy less) there are bound to be negative consequences, particularly for poor farmers in the Global South. To address the problem we have to analyze the system itself, and the very structures that constrain consumer and producer choices.

The rising demand for quinoa is indeed contributing to higher prices, which have tripled in the last six years. But even more troubling than the price impact on Bolivian quinoa consumption is the impact on land use. Quinoa production is expanding at a break-neck pace in one of the most vulnerable ecosystems on the planet: the fragile soils and native pastures of the Bolivian high plateau (Altiplano).

These lands were once carefully managed with fallow (rest) periods of eight years or more. Now many areas are in near-constant production, threatening to destroy the soil's fertility. The llama herds that have provided manure to fertilize subsistence quinoa plots for millennia have dwindled to make way for large quinoa monocultures. Government programs are doling out tractors, and this mechanization is allowing for the cultivation of larger and larger fields.

In a public ceremony in early February 2013, President Evo Morales presented 65 John Deere tractors to communities in the highland department of Oruro to promote the expansion of quinoa. The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) announcement that 2013 would be named the International Year of Quinoa goes hand in glove with this big push for mechanization.

Meanwhile, sand storms are increasingly common in the southern Altiplano, an indicator of the progressive desertification of the region. Desertification — characterized by saline soils, loss of nutrients, erosion

and decreasing yields — is triggered by the increased mechanization of farming practices, as well as a disruption of the delicate balance between pastoralism and agriculture. Whereas quinoa was once grown primarily on small hillside terraces, it is now moving into large areas formerly dedicated to llama grazing. In so doing, it is wiping out the high biodiversity of native pastures, shrublands (tholares) and wetlands (bofedales)— a diversity necessary for this system's sustainability and resilience to climate change.

So while no one would argue that Bolivian farmers shouldn't get a good price for their crop, these trends cannot be ignored — or left up to global market forces. Perhaps most tragic of all is that this boom (and booms are always followed by a bust) is leading the poorest, most vulnerable farmers to degrade their own environment — i.e. the material basis for their very survival and cultural identity — in the name of short-term food security.

Peasants everywhere tend to have an intimate and reciprocal relationship with the natural world — known in the Andes as Pachamama. When this relationship begins to break down, it's usually because peasants have few or no options. What's missing from most northern media accounts of quinoa is a discussion of what the range of possible options might look like — that is, beyond the two unsavory extremes of dismal poverty on the one hand, and environmental destruction (invariably leading back to dismal poverty) on the other.

One of the rarely discussed alternative paths is agrarian reform. Bolivia, like most Latin American countries, has a highly unequal distribution of land, with thousands of farmers eking out a living on tiny highland plots, while wealthy elites (including many foreign investors) control enormous lowland plantations, primarily dedicated to export-oriented soy and sugarcane.

Over the last few decades, this inequality has generated waves of rural migrants from highland regions to the lowlands, including tropical coca-growing areas, and to the swelling outskirts of cities like La Paz and Santa Cruz. It's also fed a growing landless movement, now organized as the Bolivian MST (landless worker movement), modeled on the Brazilian example. This movement is actively pushing the Bolivian government to make good on its agrarian reform promises as a solution to rural poverty and degradation.

Another option — and these are not mutually exclusive — would be to rebuild local food markets that have been decimated by decades of nefarious U.S. aid and trade policies. Might we envision a future in which cheap, highly subsidized U.S. wheat products don't pour into Bolivia, directly undercutting producers of Andean foods in their own markets?

This would require, of course, the political will and capacity to regulate imports – admittedly, import dependence and dietary changes are difficult things to undo. It would also require support for small farmers not only in producing commodities for export but, more importantly, for producing a wide variety of plants and animals for domestic consumption, in a way that is suitable to local ecologies. This is something Andean farmers are spectacularly good at—having produced food for thousands of years in one of the most diverse and challenging environments on earth.

Bolivia has a number of laws in place (such as the recently passed Law for Mother Earth, Integrated Development and "Living Well") demonstrating that political will exists on the part of President Evo Morales to promote food sovereignty and peasant production for local markets. But as University of California, Berkeley agroecologist Miguel Altieri notes:

> *Discourse must now translate into action. A starting point would be to capitalize on the sustainable peasant production strategies that have stood the test of time — mobilizing indigenous knowledge and ancestral practices (use of animal manure, rotations and fallows, terrace construction, etc.) and spreading these experiences through horizontal, farmer to farmer exchanges.*

So while there is no easy solution to the quinoa quandary — much less a solution driven by northern consumers — the issue has generated an important debate about our global food system. At its core, it's a debate about which strategies are most effective for creating a just and sustainable food system. And consumption-driven strategies, while part of the toolbox for effecting change, are not the only tools.

Only by facing the reality that we can't consume our way to a more just and sustainable world — and examining the full range of political options and strategies — can we start coming up with real solutions.

Tanya Kerssen is Research Coordinator at Food First/Institute for Food and Development Policy and the author of the book Grabbing Power: The New Struggles for Land, Food and Democracy in Northern Honduras *(Food First Books 2013). Article reprinted with permission from* Common Dreams.

Solar Warriors vs. the Black Snake of Tar Sands

By Winona LaDuke

There are two very different ways of recognizing [care for the earth] in the Northern Plains and Washington, D.C., perhaps illustrating what Native people call the choice between two paths: one well scorched and worn, the other green.

In April 2014, Henry Red Cloud, a descendent of Chief Red Cloud and President of Lakota Solar Enterprises, was recognized as a Champion of Change by President Obama for his leadership in renewable energy.

Red Cloud's work has included installation of over 1,000 solar thermal heating units on houses in tribal communities across the Northern Plains. Those units can reduce heating bills by almost one quarter and cost less than $2,000 to install. The solar thermal panels harken a future with less reliance on propane and fossil fuels, something which proved deadly this winter as the price skyrocketed, and many homes spent at least that amount to heat.

Henry Red Cloud is one of many Lakota people who had been in D.C., and a large number of other Oglala tribal members will descend on Washington for the Cowboys Indians Alliance encampment against the Keystone XL pipeline. Henry Red Cloud sees solar energy as a way to "honor the old ways in the new times," and address some of the fuel poverty that is rampant in northern plains and north woods First Nations in an era of petroleum replacing natural fuels. Annually, tribes are forced to pay hundreds of millions of dollars of propane bills to keep houses warm. . . .

"Last year, more than five million was spent on propane and electricity to keep our members warm," Red Cloud explained. "We can take that money and turn it around, start some businesses."

Solar thermal heat not only keeps people warm, reducing the hemorrhage of fuel bills, but circulates money into a local economy. The solar panels are made on the reservation, and the Red Cloud Renewable Energy center near Oglala on the reservation employs nine full-time workers and several part-time workers in the busy season. That is money helping a community and rebuilding infrastructure in that community.

According to Henry Red Cloud and many others, this is what we need to do. After all, about 14% of reservation households are without electricity, 10 times the national rate. Energy distribution systems on rural reservations are extremely vulnerable to extended power outages during winter storms, threatening the lives of reservation residents.

Reservation communities are at a statistically greater risk from extreme weather-related mortality nationwide, especially from cold, heat, and drought associated with a rapidly changing climate. Reservations need more than 200,000 new houses, and there is no money for them; Pine Ridge, Henry's home, may be one of the most impacted areas. . . .

The simple elegance of local power, solar energy, and working to benefit communities, not corporations, is a good lesson.

Winona LaDuke, Executive Director of Honor the Earth, is an author, activist, former U.S. vice presidential candidate, and mother. She is an Anishinaabekwe (Ojibwe) enrolled member of the Mississippi Band Anishinaabeg who lives and works on the White Earth Reservations.
This article is published under the creative commons license.

Henry Red Cloud with an installed solar panel in New Town, ND on the Fort Berthold Reservation

Continued from page 1

of 30,000 people. Estimates are that the Lummi have been in this site for 3,500 years, although it is likely that it was many thousands of years before that when the people began harvesting salmon from the area's plentiful shores.

The ancient Lummi were an innovative group, inventing fish traps to catch migrating sockeye salmon. They likely developed and certainly perfected reefnet fishing, using cedar canoes and nets to observe and haul in the catch. Later, they devised purse seining, and the people did not go hungry.

In the 21st century, these by-now traditional fishing methods may seem obvious, but in the context of human history they are as brilliant technological advances as the invention of software or the internal combustion engine.

It is well known that indigenous people did not do well after the Europeans arrived. Smallpox Bay in the San Juan Islands got its name for a reason. Over 90% of indigenous people died as white settlers spread out across the continent.

Christian religious denominations were not friends to the First Nations, and collaborated with the government to ban indigenous religious practices. Sacred rituals like the sweat lodge and traditions like the potlatch were forbidden. Children were taken from their homes by the thousands and sent to religious boarding schools, where they were Christianized and abused. Traditional objects of faith were confiscated and cemeteries desecrated.

Numerous treaties between Native tribes and the U.S. government finalized the theft of Indian lands. On January 22, 1855, Governor of the Washington Territory Isaac Stevens signed a treaty with the chiefs of the Northwest region, taking their land and moving them onto reservations. The location of the treaty signing at Point Elliott is today marked by a small sign in the Nisqually Wildlife Refuge.

The story of the treaty itself is heartbreaking, and the process truly fraudulent, as the signers could not read or speak the language through which they were relinquishing their homelands forever. However, one clause in that treaty has made all the difference to the life and culture of Native people today:

> **"ARTICLE 5:** *The right of taking fish at usual and accustomed grounds and stations is further secured to said Indians in common with all citizens of the Territory. . . ."*

More than one hundred years later, the famous Boldt Decision of 1974 held that this clause meant that Native nations have a right to co-manage and share equally in the harvest of the sea and rivers. The

salmon were not lost to the people as the buffalo had been. Indian fishing was sustained, and new life came to the Coast Salish.

Now the Lummi Nation faces a new threat at their ancient village site of *Xwe'chi'eXen*. Because this place is one of the few deep-water ports in North America, it is coveted by coal companies and oil refineries in order to export fossil fuels around the world. Unfortunately, building these huge export terminals would destroy the salmon, crab, and herring beds of the near-shore habitat.

Without salmon, there is no Lummi culture. These projects would violate the treaty fishing rights so hard-fought by all the tribes of the region, and desecrate at least 3,500 years of ancestral graves and village sites.

Now, out of a shared love of a beautiful place, environmental groups and faith communities have joined Native leaders in protection of *Xwe'chi'eXen*.

Local environmentalists oppose the Cherry Point fossil fuel projects because of the environmental and health damage caused by 50 uncovered coal trains a day crossing the Northwest. The increase in numbers of oil trains headed to the Cherry Point refinery is a terrible safety risk in itself, given their likelihood to derail and explode into fireballs of death. Both coal and oil trains will transverse the Columbia River Gorge, threatening the salmon fishing of the Yakima Tribe as well as the tourist businesses of the scenic river. Oil spills from huge Cape-sized, ocean-going tankers are also a concern.

Every Christian denomination has a statement on climate change, and building new fossil fuel infrastructure to ship up to 150 million tons of coal a year to be burned in China is an enormous threat to Earth's one and only atmosphere and abundant oceans. There are moral and spiritual reasons for faith communities to oppose fossil fuel processing at Cherry Point.

These three very different constituencies have joined together to protect the Salish Sea of the Pacific Northwest. Tribal leaders are adamant that their fishing rights be protected from treaty violations and that their sacred sites be respected and left intact. Environmental leaders are concerned for the safety of communities along the rail lines, for human health risks from coal dust, and about the catastrophic impacts of burning fossil fuels on climate change. Faith leaders articulate a moral appeal for the protection of life on earth, a stable atmosphere, and abundant seas.

All have testified at public hearings about the need for a broad scope of environmental review of these fossil fuel projects. At the request of the Lummi, Earth Ministry circulated a letter of support for Northwest tribes (see p. 14), which was signed by regional bishops and denominational leaders in defense of Native treaty rights and sacred lands.

Lummi master carver Jewel Praying Wolf James has created a totem pole dedicated to *"Our Shared Responsibilities, the Land, the Waters, the Peoples."* James will take this totem pole across Montana, Idaho, Washington, and British Columbia, finally stopping at the reservations abutting the tar sands of Alberta. He will be joined on this journey by local tribal leaders, environmental activists, and faith leaders as he asks for blessing and protection of the people, the land, and the waters threatened by fossil fuel projects.

It turns out that a shared love of place is indeed a shared spirituality.

A Public Declaration to the Tribal Councils and Traditional Spiritual Leaders of the Native Peoples of the Northwest

August 2014

In 1987 and again in 1997, bishops and denominational executives of churches in the Northwest offered letters of apology to the indigenous peoples of our region. These letters acknowledged the historical disrespect of traditional Native American spiritual practices and traditions. In those letters, the leaders of our denominations promised "to honor and defend the rights of Native Peoples … [including] access and protection of sacred sites … [and to] end political and economic injustice against tribal communities."

In this decade a new threat has arisen against Native Peoples: the mining, transport, burning, and disposal of fossil fuels. Proposed coal export terminals would damage native fisheries protected by long-standing treaties and poison our shared air and water. Coal trains servicing these terminals would cut across lands sacred to indigenous peoples, and impact the health of those communities. In this generation we also acknowledge that the mining and burning of fossil fuels creates the terrible threats of climate disruption, ocean acidification, and pollution to the harm of all God's children, especially the poorest.

Tribal leaders have asked us to keep our past promises, and to stand with them in defense of their sacred lands and fishing rights. And so we call upon the Northwest Congressional delegation and other elected officials, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Department of the Interior, and all people of goodwill to uphold the treaty rights of Native communities of the Northwest. We ask that all environmental and cultural harm to Native lands and peoples be considered in making public policy decisions about the mining, transport, and export of coal and other fossil fuels.

As religious leaders we call for the protection of the life we have been given and the Earth we all call home. Our greatest commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:30-31). Putting this ethic into action, we stand in solidarity with our Native neighbors to safeguard the traditional lands, waters, and sacred sites of their peoples from destruction.

Rev. Michael Denton
Conference Minister, Pacific Northwest Conference
United Church of Christ

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Bishop, The Episcopal Diocese of Spokane

The Rev. Martin Wells
Bishop, Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

MEMBER PROFILE

St. Leo Catholic Church, Tacoma, WA

St. Leo Catholic Church in Tacoma, WA, actively lives out the values of social and environmental justice that they hold at the center of their faith. The parish reaches out to the local community through a ministry that revolves around the interconnectedness of all of creation, both in the human and natural world.

Rick Samyn, the pastoral assistant who runs St. Leo's Social Justice Commission, encourages the congregation to enact the Catholic social teachings of peace and justice in all aspects of parish life. This commitment grew from a congregational decision made years ago to express their faith by "taking the Gospel messages of care for the most vulnerable," so as to "[bring] the Reign of God into action."

St. Leo's justice-oriented group collaborates to make positive change through local partnerships, such as their Food Connection program that supports emergency food programs throughout Pierce County. Rick is also very proud of the L'Honey Bee Program, which helps parishioners and locals reconnect with all of the wonderful complexities of creation.

St. Leo's mission for justice is also brought to life through outreach to the local Native American community. The congregation acknowledges the bittersweet history between Jesuits and Native people and desires to learn from the past in order to move forward in reconciliation. To do so, St. Leo's hosts the Kateri Circle, a group of Native American Catholics who gather to celebrate the seven sacraments at the church. As Rick says, the Circle "helps the entire congregational family go deeper in our spiritual journey and feel closer to each other as sisters and brothers."

As one of Earth Ministry's newest Greening Congregations, this church has made creation care the base from which they build all other expressions of their ministry, including their connection to the Native community.

Last fall, St. Leo's hosted a beautiful blessing of the Lummi Nation's Totem Pole. The parish feels a strong call to support the Lummi and helps give voice to the Lummi's cause to protect their sacred land and waters. The ceremony was incredibly moving and included a local Native children's choir, impassioned speakers sharing their stories, and a water blessing using cedar boughs. The blessing was followed by a generous lunch and the opportunity to spend time with community members.

On St. Leo's respect for Native American tradition and sustainable practices, Rick explained,

> *"We are all connected. This is the reality of life and the way of the Creator. The social and spiritual divisions that we contrive are an illusion - the Creator has given us all life and the ability to live in harmony with each other. This harmony includes all of us: humans, other creatures, and even the elements. If my brother or sister is suffering, I am suffering. If creation is diminished by human greed, self-centeredness, and dismemberment, then I too suffer and am diminished. If the rights of Native people are not honored, then we all are dishonored. Faith unites us all and love holds us together."*

St. Leo's continues to ground its ministry in social and environmental justice, positively impacting the local community as a welcoming Greening Congregation.

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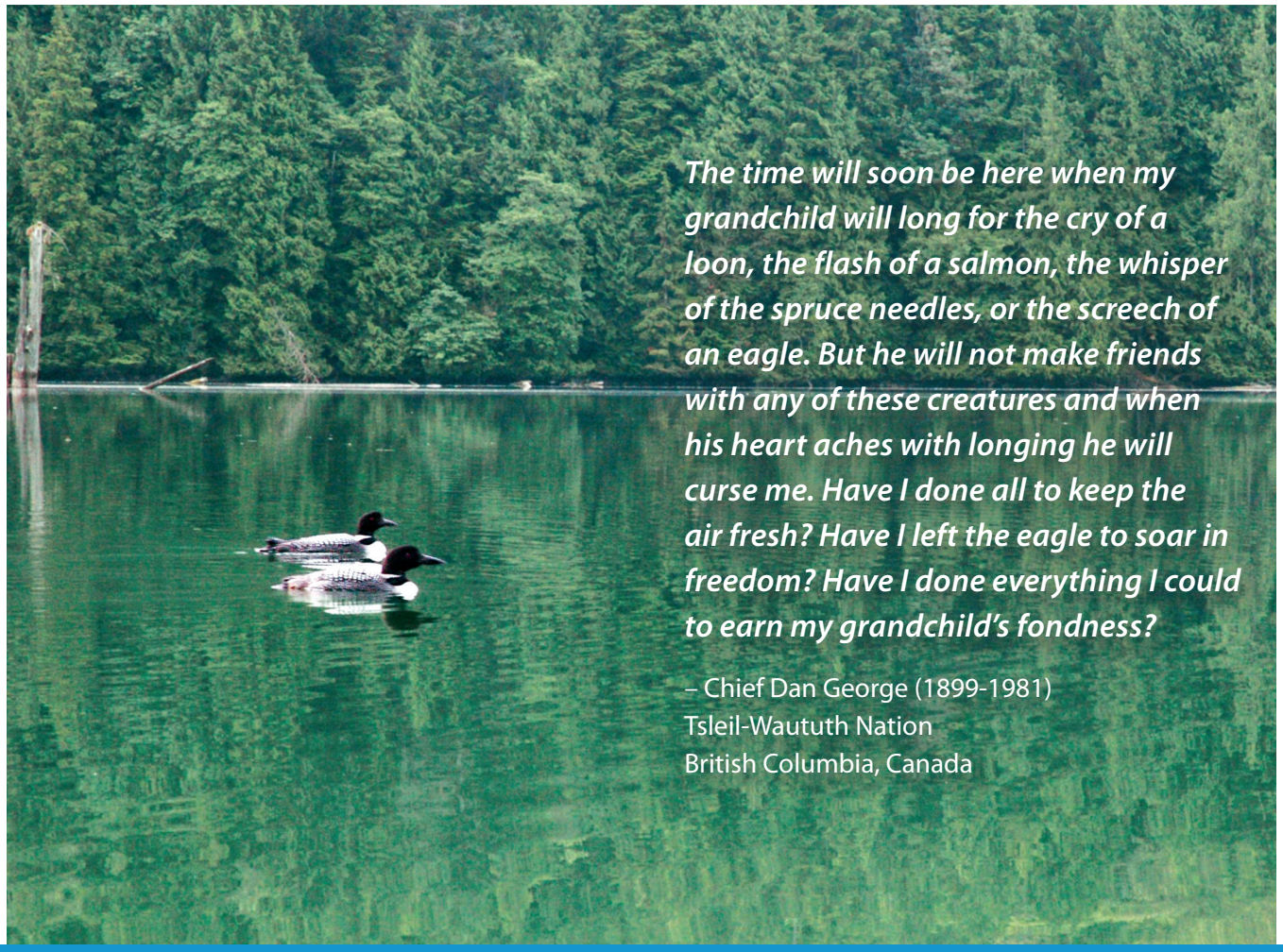
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