



Planting the Seeds of Civic Engagement

By Rev. Dr. Marilyn Cornwell

Sun warms the backs and heads bent down over the rectangular garden box behind our church in Seattle. Large hands guide smaller ones as each hole is dug, each plant is carefully placed and snuggled into the fragrant, dark earth. Tiny zucchini, snap peas, and rosemary starts will yield their abundance for our local food bank. Fresh, organic food will be made available to those who might not otherwise get it. The youth of our small congregation are learning about civic engagement, about putting faith into action.

Putting faith into action by engaging in civic life means working to make a difference in the life of our community outside the church walls. As an Earth Ministry Greening Congregation, our church does this by nurturing and developing a combination of values, knowledge, and skills that we use to identify and address issues of public concern for the land and creatures where we live.

About a hundred feet north, on the other side of the church, the sun warms the back of a local woman bending over to clear winter's debris of leaves in the traffic triangle near our neighborhood's major intersection. Bushes pruned and garbage removed, she sits back on her heels to enjoy the yellow daffodils she has tended for years. Her civic engagement brings natural beauty into a world that longs for it.

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Join Earth Ministry/WAIPL and add your voice to the growing movement of people of faith caring for creation! Membership includes a subscription to *Earth Letter*.

Individual Membership Levels:

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Join at www.earthministry.org or www.waipl.org, by phone at (206) 632-2426, or by sending in the enclosed envelope. Please contact us for congregational membership information.

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.

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In the words of author and professor Thomas Ehrlich, "Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes."

Civic engagement can take many forms, from individual volunteerism to organizational involvement to electoral participation. It means being involved in the life of your community – whether that is working in a church soup kitchen, serving on a neighborhood council, writing a letter to an elected official, or voting. It means working together with friends, family, and your neighbors to create change that embodies our shared values.

Most important, civic engagement is not just a way to make the world better, although it certainly does! It's also a meaningful way to connect with others that is incredibly life-giving. Loving engagement in our communities is personally rewarding, and forges strong social fabric that gives us the grounding to reflect compassion and resistance in the world around us (for more on the theme of compassion and resistance, see the last issue of *Earth Letter*, Spring 2017).

Earth Ministry/WAIPL is honored to support you – a community of creation stewards who are incredibly passionate and creative in your civic engagement. Together we are building a brighter future for all God's children.

We hope you find these stories of faithful civic engagement food for the journey.

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!

Colleagues and Congregations

Earth Ministry's recent outreach included presentations at Seattle Pacific University; St. Augustine's-in-the-Woods Episcopal Church in Langley; St. James Cathedral in Seattle; Newport Presbyterian Church in Bellevue; St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Oak Harbor; St. Patrick's Catholic Parish in Seattle; St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Port Townsend; and Emmaus Campus Ministry at the University of Montana in Missoula.

In conjunction with the launch of our updated Greening Congregations Toolkit, we are thrilled to welcome our two newest Greening Congregations: First United Methodist Church and Luther Memorial Lutheran Church, both in Seattle. We are also busy rolling out our new Earth Ministry Colleague Connections program, starting in the Puget Sound region and spreading out across the state. On April 8, nearly 40 faith leaders gathered at our Spring Colleague Gathering to learn about this exciting new program and begin making local connections. See pages 8–9 to learn more!

Washington State Legislative Session Wrap Up

Washington's legislative session was a long one this year, but faith leaders stayed strong and built deep support for bills that uphold our shared values of environmental stewardship. At press time the legislature was moving into special session, so it was too early to tell which bills may still pass – regardless, we laid the critical groundwork needed for our priorities to succeed in the future.

Over 200 people, including many friends of Earth Ministry/WAIP, went to Olympia on March 14 to attend a hearing on the Clean Energy Transition Act. Rev. Kathleen Patton from St. Stephen's



A new advocate makes her first call to her legislators at one of our trainings!

Episcopal in Longview shared brilliant testimony with the committee and was cheered on by a crowd so large that it spilled into two overflow rooms.

Two days later, Earth Ministry/WAIP's Jessie Dye and Emily Martin returned for Catholic Lobby Day and delivered faith community factsheets to every legislator in support of the bill's equitable price on carbon. Executive Director LeeAnne Beres also joined with a diverse group of interfaith leaders to meet with Governor Jay Inslee, in which she shared religious support for the Clean Energy Transition Act.

Congregations have been especially enthusiastic about getting more involved. Two parishes worked with Earth Ministry to organize their own lobby day in Olympia. A group traveled from Whidbey Island to speak in person with their swing district legislators about the importance of the Oil Transportation Safety Act. Members of St. Patrick's Catholic Church also took a trip to the capitol with Emily Martin, and delivered 37 letters from their parishioners to 12 legislators.

Interfaith Earth Day

Earth Ministry/WAIPL partnered with Seattle University to host our fourth annual Interfaith Earth Day. Participants enjoyed an interactive fair that included mindfulness meditation, an open mic cafe featuring interfaith Earth Justice conversations, and an action center promoting local engagement.

Earth Ministry/WAIPL coordinated the Action Center in which local groups offered opportunities for attendees to take action for the health of our communities and the planet. Jessica Zimmerle recruited 13 organizations faithfully engaging on environmental issues. The spectrum of representation in the Action Center included Catholics responding to *Laudato Si'*; Muslims from Pacifica sharing their traditions and commitment to interfaith dialogue, the EPA's ENERGY STAR Congregation program, and an interfaith group advocating for climate.

Earth Ministry is all about action, so during this event our staff, board members, and volunteers talked with people about chemical safety standards and invited them to sign a postcard we later delivered to the Department of Ecology. Jessie Dye spoke at the open mic to charm students into calling the legislative hotline in support of our environmental bills. Overall, it was a lovely day of community building and resource sharing that left all feeling renewed and ready to treat every day like Earth Day!



Taking action on Interfaith Earth Day.

Standing with Native Tribes

Pull Together

Much like Northwest tribes fighting fossil fuel projects in the United States, the Tseil-Waututh and Coldwater First Nations in British Columbia are fighting to stop the Kinder Morgan oil pipeline. This pipeline would carry toxic oil from the Canadian Tar Sands – the world's largest industrial site – which is the size of France – to the traditional lands of the Tseil-Waututh. Native constitutional rights – some of the strongest in the world – have the power to stop it, and the two First Nations have filed multiple lawsuits since the project's approval in late 2016.

Earth Ministry/WAIPL was proud to be a co-sponsor of Seattle's "Pull Together: The People vs. Kinder Morgan" event in late April, raising funds for the First Nations' legal defense against the pipeline. Earth Ministry Board member Rev. Marilyn Cornwell offered a closing benediction in support of the inherent rights of indigenous communities.

Interfaith Network for Indigenous Communities (INIC)

This year marks the 30th anniversary of a Letter of Apology that was delivered to Pacific Northwest Tribes by denominational executives (bishops and equivalent) in 1987. This letter apologizes for the Church's repression of Native religion and offers solidarity and support moving forward.

The Letter of Apology was well-received and began a long process of reconciliation between Native Peoples and religious communities. It was this letter that the Lummi Nation brought to Earth Ministry/WAIPL in 2011 when they asked religious leaders to help protect their sacred land and waters from coal export. Our support for Native treaty rights has since extended to partnering with the Quinault Nation against crude oil, upholding the Standing Rock Sioux water protectors, and beyond.

Earth Ministry/WAIPL is also a key member of the Interfaith Network for Indigenous Communities (INIC). Representing a broad array of denominations and faith-based organizations, INIC is focusing on broadening relationships and deepening the commitments of the 1987 Letter of Apology.

Members of INIC acknowledge that faith leaders have not done enough to dismantle our privilege and support Indigenous Communities. It is time to renew and honor those commitments. Together, this group is taking a step toward a new vision of solidarity between First Peoples and faith communities as we seek to work together to confront urgent issues of our time.

Religious Rapid Response Team

Tribal sovereignty is a key source of power of Indigenous Nations in the United States, but the current political climate has made Tribal leaders from around the country deeply fearful of potential threats to their sovereignty.

Given our success in integrating religious, environmental, and tribal constituents, Lummi Nation once again reached out to Earth Ministry/WA IPL for assistance. In response, Earth Ministry is developing a Religious Rapid Response Team of regional faith leaders who have pledged to send advocacy alerts to their denominational or organizational lists for broad distribution and to identify key faith leaders to speak in the event of a sudden threat to treaty rights.

In the past three months, alerts have been sent by members of this team on the reversal of the proposed Environmental Impact Statement at Standing Rock, the Native March on Washington on March 10, and the threat to Bears Ears National Monument.

From Washington State to Washington, DC

LeeAnne Beres and Emily Martin recently traveled to Washington, DC to present at the national Interfaith Power & Light (IPL) conference, lobby for climate protections on Capitol Hill, and participate in the People's Climate March.

Joining over 70 other religious leaders from 34 states at the IPL conference, LeeAnne led a popular lobby training session to help prepare state leaders for visits to Capitol Hill and also spoke on a panel highlighting Earth Ministry/Washington Interfaith Power & Light's role in the Northwest's successful Power Past Coal campaign. On lobby day, we met with staff of the Washington State Congressional delegation regarding the EPA's Clean Power Plan, the bipartisan Climate Solutions Caucus, and preserving critical funding for environmental programs that protect our air and water.

On April 29, we joined with members, friends, and people of diverse faiths from around the country to speak out for our neighbors and the climate, forming a powerful and visible faith contingent at the People's Climate March in Washington DC.

In our west coast Washington, Earth Ministry/WA IPL members also turned out in various locations for the March for Science and People's Climate March. In addition to public demonstrations, we organized religious constituents to meet in-district with the environmental staff of U.S. Representative Pramila Jayapal and participated in a faith roundtable discussion with Representative Adam Smith.



The Muslim contingent leading the faith community at the People's Climate March in Washington, DC.

*Earth Letter Summer 2017
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GROUNDED IN FAITH

Creating the Beloved Community By Diane Bell

For many, this is a turbulent time. The country is divided. People are angry and scared. The future seems uncertain. Many feel unsure of what to do, yet feel the need to do something.

At times like this, it is more important than ever to bring our spiritual teachings and practices to the forefront of our lives. Grounded in faith and guided by God, we find the courage to channel our frustrations and fears into actions that will create positive change.

People of faith have always come together in community to worship, to pray, to meditate, to chant, to perform the spiritual practices we feel called to do based on our faith traditions. There is great power in coming together. As scripture tells us, where two or more are gathered, God is there also (Mathew 18:20). When we come together as a community in service to one another, to the earth, and to the betterment of our world, we are also in service to God.

Much of Earth Ministry's mission is focused on environmental advocacy. In this work, we call upon our government to solve problems, correct injustices, protect our safety, and promote justice for everyone in our country.

While this work is vitally important, we must not look only to the government. We must also look to God, and ask: "What is mine to do?" for we must each do our part. We must each be spiritual leaders in our own way, connected as one human race, conserving and preserving our one beautiful home that is one of our greatest gifts from God.

Realizing this vision can take many forms, as diverse as we who undertake them. Whether we are growing organic vegetables for the local food bank, putting solar panels on our church roof, installing community rain gardens, talking to our neighbors about climate change, or advocating for protection of our public lands, we are all involved in civic engagement that reflects the kind of world we want for ourselves and our children.

In our efforts, we must remember that building

community, taking action in community, and serving our community through these actions is every bit as important, if not more so, than the action itself or its result. As people of faith, our strength lies in our unity.

As we come together, each of us willing and prepared to do the work needed, to create a world that works for everyone and a just and sustainable future for all, we will be creating the Beloved Community that Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke of when he said: "The end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the Beloved Community. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opponents into friends.... It is this love which will bring about miracles in the hearts of [all]."

This is how God works: through our hearts, through our minds, and through our hands. All we have to do is be willing.

Diane Bell is Earth Ministry's Operations & Development Manager and author of Empowerment Through Love: A Collection of Spiritual Poetry.



Beyond Stereotypes By Jessie Dye

Right after last year's election, Earth Ministry held several large community gatherings to discuss how to move forward together effectively in a deeply polarized time. Diving into darkness and resurfacing was important for me too, personally.

My deepest feeling was guilt for feeling superior, for judging people who believe differently from me (politically, not religiously) as fools who were played to vote against their own interest. It's embarrassing for me to admit this now, because it is obviously prejudice by another name. I am living the stereotype that others hold of people like me: snobbish, isolated in a bubble, unconcerned with those falling behind in less-educated, less tech-oriented regions than my own.

How to address this part of me? Admitting it to myself was excruciating, but facing my own dark side is one way of finding my power. How, then, do I reach across the partisan and cultural divide to find compassion and common ground? Could the Samaritan drive a gas-guzzling monster truck with a full gun rack? Might she show up as a highly made-up, helmet-haired matron in a gated community? I see my stereotypes of the other side raising their ugly heads again.

So I quit social media for Lent. The outrage cycle on Facebook portrays the absolute worst of the far-right and enforces my rage, fear, and contempt of actual humans who believe differently than me. No doubt, the Twitter feed of supporters of this administration show the actions of my allies as ridiculous, lazy, easily offended, and yes, stupid. Stepping away from the phone helped cool my inflamed psyche and restored me to some balance, not to mention faith in humanity.

My theory of change is that people of diverse religious backgrounds learn to live together and appreciate each other by



working for a common cause. People of very different political views can find the same shared appreciation through common undertaking. Certainly, we don't learn to love each other by reading the worst about "the other side" on a daily basis with enhanced hysteria by our own friends. What civic engagement opportunities are open for us to reach across the parochial gap?

One place to look is in my own Catholic Church. Many pro-life Catholics and Evangelicals do support strong environmental protection and welcoming immigration policies, but feel unwanted in the progressive community. Crossing that barrier is challenging, though there are certainly many engagement opportunities for both pro-choice and pro-life volunteers.

In my reading, I've been fascinated to learn that people in red states are far more likely to volunteer for good causes and give blood far more often. Working together toward shared common goals isn't for the purpose of conversion – that's an important point. The goal is to build a Beloved Community, to get to know the other, and let go of our stereotypes. If a side-effect is that we can ask questions that we have always wanted to know, about theology or political views, it becomes all the more interesting.

Now summer is here and our Earth Ministry members, friends, and Greening Congregations are developing a new energy for resistance to corruption, greed, and destruction of Earth's ecosystem – and our prognosis doesn't feel nearly as hopeless as it did six months ago. Our community, personal, and moral obligations remain the same – reach out to those we can help, raise our voices powerfully for justice, and show compassion to those we oppose. Compassion and resistance remain our path forward.

Jessie Dye is Earth Ministry/WAIP's Program & Outreach Director.

Earth Ministry's Greening Congregations & Colleague Connections

By Jessica Zimmerle

Members of Earth Ministry/WAIPL know that we become grounded when we tend to relationships in a beautifully diverse tapestry of religious community. Loving engagement with our neighbors helps us weave a strong social fabric. It is through these partnerships that we uncover how our shared values create pathways to hope.

Now more than ever is the time to come together around the values we hold dear: care for God's creation, safety for our communities, and equity for the most vulnerable among us. Earth Ministry is strategically engaged in campaigns that align with these values shared by our members, and it is our joy to provide resources for you to get involved in these efforts too. We are excited to launch two new programs in response to feedback from you, our members, who have been asking to deepen relationships and build skills for civic engagement.

NEW Greening Congregations Toolkit

Did you know that Earth Ministry's Greening Congregations program was the first of its kind in the nation? There were no programs in the late 1990s that supported congregations wanting to actively care for creation. Earth Ministry filled this void by developing a detailed, step-by-step approach for churches to follow in "greening" all aspects of community life, from worship and education to building and grounds and beyond the church doors into the neighborhood.

Earth Ministry's Greening Congregations Handbook has been a staple in the libraries of many individuals and congregations for nearly 20 years. You might recognize it as a hefty spiral-bound volume that contains a wealth of resources to cultivate stewardship in spiritual communities. This resource has served us all well, but as it goes for all good publications, it's time for an update.

We've been hard at work transforming our original handbook into a compact digital masterpiece that will be your new go-to for inspiration. The result is a beautiful and condensed publication that combines the heart of faithful creation care with concrete actions your church can implement to be good stewards of the Earth.

Our new Greening Congregations Toolkit is designed to be relevant to individuals and communities all along the spectrum of engagement with faith-based environmentalism. No matter your entry point, this Toolkit will help you do the good work of caring for God's creation.



Earth Ministry
Greening Congregations Toolkit

Earth Ministry
www.earthministry.org

Earth Ministry's Greening Congregations Toolkit has it all, including how to:

- Successfully complete the certification process to become one of Earth Ministry's Greening Congregations
- Revitalize the sustainability efforts of current Earth Ministry members and Greening Congregations
- Bring to life ideas that incorporate environmental awareness into the programming and operations of your church
- Lighten your footprint as an individual or family member of Earth Ministry

A bonus that really makes it irresistible is that it is free! As part of our "launch special," the Greening Congregations Toolkit is free upon request to any current individual or congregational member of Earth Ministry. Email emoffice@earthministry.org to check your membership status and request your copy today.

Colleague Connections

There is rich history in the arc of how Earth Ministry has related to our members over the past 25 years of our existence. The organization began with an emphasis on faith formation, focusing on educational outreach that helped people of faith understand our call to care for creation. This time of relationship building was followed by a booming Greening Congregations program and a widening network of clergy and lay leaders responding to the call to stewardship.

As communities and individuals normalized this stewardship in their parish and personal lives, Earth Ministry invited our members to take the next step into the realm of faithful advocacy. People of faith just like you have directly contributed to outstanding victories, including phasing out Washington's last coal-fired power plant, passing the Toxic-Free Kids and Families Act, and halting proposed oil and coal export facilities up and down the Northwest coast.

For 25 years, Earth Ministry has fostered a statewide network of religious leaders and congregations working on environmental issues. The relationships we've built over time have played a key role in our many shared successes. Now that we are advocating in a new era, it is time to deepen regional partnerships which will provide the spiritual fuel required to be a beacon of compassion while resisting that which does not align with our values.

In the last six months we have seen a boom of interest in activism combined with some hesitation from members regarding how to be civically engaged on environmental justice. That's why Earth Ministry is launching our new Colleague Connections program to offer you additional resources, local support, and regular contact.

So what is a Colleague Connection? Essentially it is a structure to identify and bring together faith leaders from Earth Ministry congregations within a set geographic region. "Colleagues" are what Earth Ministry staff refers to as our "rock stars," the point persons within a faith community whose passion is faith and environment – which may be you! It is not uncommon for these activists to feel alone in their deep-seated call to stewardship. That's why you have Earth Ministry to help support you within a local network. We'll connect you with other Colleagues in your area and share ideas for action.

A benefit of this program is its flexibility. Earth Ministry provides guidance, but the members of each Connection decide how to relate to one another. It could be as simple as a regular gathering to discuss sustainability efforts of each congregation in the neighborhood, or it could expand to organizing shared educational events or combining efforts on an advocacy action.

Most important, Colleague Connections are life-giving. This program is not meant to become just another meeting on your full calendar. It is meant to provide support for the good work you are already doing and to remind you that you are not alone on the journey.

Interested? We are launching this program in the Seattle area and then rolling it out across the state. Be on the lookout for an Earth Ministry gathering to organize a Colleague Connection near you!

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Jessica Zimmerle is Earth Ministry/WAIPL's Senior Outreach Coordinator and the lead on our Greening Congregations and Colleague Connections programs.

Faithful Divestment By Rev. Dr. Jim Antal

As people of faith, we live our lives open to wonder, miracle, surprise, awe.

In August 2012, Bill McKibben issued a call for institutions and individuals to divest from fossil fuel companies. McKibben was well aware that in the late 1970s and 1980s, divestment from companies doing business with South Africa was a critical strategy in overthrowing that country's Apartheid practices. He also knew that many historians reject that claim.

Nevertheless, because climate change represents the greatest moral challenge humanity has ever faced, if there was any hope of building a sustainable world, the climate movement needed to embrace the widest array of non-violent strategies.

The chief objective of the divestment movement was simple. Create a movement of institutions and individuals willing to be very public about the fact that what we do with our assets matters. Owning stocks is not just about making money. By owning a stock, we are endorsing the actions of the company. Two hundred companies were identified as the ones chiefly responsible for extracting, transporting, refining, and selling fossil fuels.

Divesting from these companies was a way to draw public attention to the "supply side" of the climate change crisis. This amounted to a new front in the fight to combat climate change.

The goal was to increase public awareness of two realities. From a practical perspective, 80% of the known fossil fuel reserves (worth about \$20 trillion) would need to be left in the ground. From a moral perspective, the divestment movement would revoke the moral license the fossil fuel companies needed to continue their "business as usual" practices of making money for their investors by wrecking the earth.

McKibben's article was a wakeup call. Mixing morality and money is always controversial. But four months later, the Board of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ voted to bring a resolution to the national UCC Synod urging the church – its entities and individuals – to divest from fossil fuel companies. In June 2013, the UCC became the first national



body and the first religious body to vote to divest from fossil fuel companies.

Momentum was building in other sectors. Across America and throughout the world, cities, philanthropic foundations, col-

leges and universities, pension funds, churches, and countless individuals were instructing their financial managers to scrub their portfolios of companies whose profits came from fossil fuel.

As people of faith, we live our lives open to wonder, miracle, surprise, awe.

I experienced all of these emotions and more when, in December 2016, I read in the *New York Times* that investment funds worth over five trillion dollars had dropped their fossil fuel stocks.

Our covenant charges us with the responsibility of maintaining the continuity of God's creation for all future generations. Seven generations of humans have used about half of what nature took 150,000,000 years to create. By doing so, we have raised earth's temperature by 1.3° Celsius, and if we do nothing, in a few decades the world will focus on only the desperation of hundreds of millions of refugees and the chaos of war fought over diminished food supplies and drought.

\$5,000,000,000,000 of invested funds that no longer include fossil fuel stocks is a good start. Every person reading this can add to that momentum. Take action! Screw up the courage to tell others. If you have financial assets, talk with your family and financial advisor and divest. If you are a member of a church, join with others and create a campaign to divest. Get publicity.

As the just-released statement from the national leadership of the United Church of Christ reminds us, "The Earth Is the Lord's!" Preserving God's creation is our generation's number one moral challenge – and God has given us everything we need to succeed.

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Rev. Dr. Jim Antal has served as the Conference Minister and President of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ since 2006. He has engaged the spiritual discipline of civil disobedience numerous times and speaks on climate issues all over the country.

Let the Sun Shine In By Sara Cate

Wesley United Methodist Church is involved in our community of Yakima, Washington in a variety of ways. As disciples of Jesus we believe that we are called to share the good news in our actions as well as our time of worship and study. That call extends to caring for creation and connecting with our neighbors – the UMC Book of Resolutions states it clearly: “As God’s people we are called to stewardship of the earth and all that dwells therein.”

Wesley UMC has been an Earth Ministry Greening Congregation since 2008, and our Green Team’s efforts began with church-wide initiatives to raise awareness of our carbon footprint. We started with Earth Ministry-inspired efforts, such as hosting car-free Sundays, and touting the benefits of being a locavore, and then gravitated to energy issues.

With a big poorly-insulated building coupled with a declining congregation, we decided that it made sense to find ways to decrease our energy usage. We arranged for a free energy audit from Pacific Power, which became our roadmap for the purchase of a more energy efficient heating system, insulating windows, and replacing lighting. These improvements cut our energy bills by nearly half.

Yakima has abundant sunshine, and with a good south-facing roof, the church seemed perfect for a solar installation. In 2012, we tested the waters for this investment but it was a much harder sell than we expected. Despite detailed presentations to the church council and trustees, and a survey showing that greater than 90% of the congregation was supportive of solar, the upfront costs and the payback period made many of our fiscally conservative trustees nervous. They voted against the plan.

Disappointed but not defeated, our Green Team went to work to raise the funds among supportive members of the congregation, where we found much greater success.

In 2013, our efforts resulted in the installation of an eight-panel solar system. We looked to outside sources for additional money to expand the project and wrote a 30-page grant application to Pacific Power’s Blue Sky Community Fund program, but it was not funded. We then embarked on more fundraising within

the congregation and this time, along with \$8,000 donated by church members, Wesley UMC voted to contribute \$10,000 from the church budget to the project. In May 2015, 14 additional solar panels were commissioned.

Having exhausted individual and church resources, we again applied for the Pacific Power Blue Sky grant with a letter of support from Earth Ministry. The second time was the charm, and we received a \$48,000 grant! This allowed us to add 34 more solar panels to the church roof in spring 2016, which we dedicated on Earth Day during a big community “solarbration.” Wesley UMC’s now 56-panel array is a visible testimony to the city of Yakima and to the larger faith community of our commitment to a more sustainable future.

The real story behind this project is of a small group of committed people supporting each other in spite of setbacks, and remaining dedicated to bringing their dream to fruition. We found that initial skepticism changed to growing enthusiasm once members of the church saw the benefits of the initial eight-panel array. Wesley’s project has since led many members of the church to invest in solar arrays for their homes, which truly shows the power of faith in action in our community.

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Sara Cate, MD, MPH, is a practicing family physician working in Central Washington with underserved populations for almost 30 years.



Wesley UMC celebrates installation of the first 8 solar panels in 2013.

Dwelling in the Heart of Community By Deirdre Gabbay

Sukkot is the Jewish harvest festival that takes place in the autumn. Christians may know it as the Feast of Tabernacles. At Sukkot, we Jews build small, fragile, structures outdoors called *sukkahs*, and we “dwell” in them for a week.

We make them beautiful, and then we eat our meals in them unless it’s raining, and we invite our friends to join us. Some people even sleep in them. But they can’t be water tight. They need to be open to the sky; only natural branches can form the roof. You have to be able to see the stars at night through the roof, but during the day it must cast more shade than sunshine.

Sukkot calls our attention to our vulnerability and our interdependence, with God, with the earth, and with our friends and community.

Last year at Sukkot I began a practice of inviting my friends to sit in my sukkah with me, for tea and conversation in the late mornings, after my husband and children had left for work or school. Sometimes the people I invited over weren’t my friends, actually. They were people I had met briefly, been intrigued by, and wanted to get to know better. They were friends I wished I had! This quickly became one of the most energizing and joyful practices of my life.

After the results of last fall’s election, I was confronted

with that sinking feeling that I still get when I think about the likely future of so many hard-fought protections and safety nets for vulnerable people and for our beautiful planet. But I knew right away what I needed to do – I needed to connect with my friends. So I started a practice I call Tea + Activism, modeled on my beloved Sukkot practice.

Tea + Activism is so easy. Here’s what I did: I came up with a few dates, one on a weekend and one on a weekday, and invited the folks on my environmental mailing list over to my house. I made tea. I served a few snacks. Then we shared with each other our feelings about the world, and our dreams and visions of the world we wanted to see be born. We listened to one another.

The beauty of having Sukkot as my guide is that I do not feel even the slightest desire to take control. This was not a meeting with an agenda. It was an encounter between human beings and the Divine. We created a space that was open to the experience of vulnerability and interdependence, and to the Divine presence. And truly, I believe we are not alone. I cannot tell you where these encounters will go; that is not up to me to decide.

But if the world is to become the one we envision, it will be because of people meeting like this, sharing a vision of the future, and bringing it into being with our own hands.

B’Shalom.

Deirdre Gabbay is a member of Congregation Beth Shalom in Seattle. Her blog is www.shmitainseattle.com.



Repairing the World by Minding the Store By Anya Callahan

The Jewish tradition of *tikkun olam* is an ethical concept that calls on people to repair the world. As a socially conscious Jewish woman, I am fortunate to work for Toxic-Free Future, an organization that embodies the essence of *tikkun olam* and actively fights for a more just and nurturing world.

Currently, Toxic-Free Future and Earth Ministry are working as part of the national “Mind the Store” campaign to convince the nation’s top retailers to stop selling products containing chemicals known to be harmful to our health and the environment, and to ensure substitutes are safe. While some major retailers have taken steps to address a few harmful chemicals, such as toxic flame retardants and BPA, some retailers have not put their significant purchasing power to work to change the manufacturing policies of their suppliers.

Toxics hide in everyday household products, including flame retardants in furniture, phthalates in personal care products, and cadmium in jewelry. These harmful chemicals are allowed in products because state and federal laws are not strong enough to ban toxics from products and the market. The lack of regulation means consumers may unknowingly expose their families to products containing harmful chemicals.

While we need stronger laws, retailers like Costco already have the power to reduce and eliminate toxic chemicals in products to protect consumers, workers, and communities where these products are made. Large retailers have a fundamental moral responsibility to ensure the safety of the products they sell, and to give consumers confidence in the products they buy.

In addition to pushing for stronger laws, we’re asking retailers to adopt public safer chemical policies. We’re also asking for consumers to hold companies and policymakers accountable and demand safer products in stores.

In a recent report evaluating some of the largest retailers on their efforts to reduce the use of harmful chemicals in products sold in their stores, Washington state-based company Costco received the lowest letter grade – an “F.”

Since the Mind the Store retailer report card was published, Costco recently updated its website describing the development and implementation of a Costco Restricted Chemical List (RSL) and Smart Screening Program for toxic chemicals.

This is a step in the right direction, but not enough to meet the increasing consumer demand for transparency and safer products. We are hopeful Costco will take the next step by announcing a robust safer chemicals policy and setting public



quantifiable goals with clear timelines for reducing and eliminating chemicals of high concern, beginning with its private label products.

In recent months, over 38,000 people across the country signed petitions urging the company to develop a public safer chemicals policy, and these signatures were delivered to the CEO at the company’s annual shareholder meeting in January.

Costco cares about its members, so we are encouraging Costco members to practice *tikkun olam* and tell Costco to adopt a public safer chemicals policy with clear benchmarks and timeframes. Please visit www.earthministry.org/mind-the-store-costco and follow instructions on how to send a comment to Costco.

Together, we have the power to make positive changes in our world, one action at a time.

Anya Callahan is Senior Campaigner at Toxic-Free Future, which conducts research and advocates at the state and national levels to win strong health protections for people and the environment.

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Why do I go out to engage the life of my community, beyond the comfort of my home and my house of worship? Why do I give the gift of time that could be spent in completing work-related tasks, or enjoying family and friends, or relishing the outdoors? The choice to engage answers the question underneath the others: "Why am I here?" Theologian Sallie McFague notes in *Blessed Are The Consumers: Climate Change and the Practice of Restraint* that there are two very different answers to this question:

[T]he first says that we are here to fulfill our own desires, as insatiable and outrageous as they might be (as long as we stay within the law), while the second says that we are here to respond to a "call," to something beyond ourselves that is both our deepest desire and our most profound duty.

Responding to a call to engagement beyond myself is a values choice. Based on my faith and values, I engage in civic life to be the change I want to see in the world. I break down the walls that separate me from others and begin to build relationships across our differences. Through participation, my longing for relationship – rooted deeply in my human nature – meets my profound duty to tend and nurture relationships with others: other people, other creatures, and Earth itself.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote in his Christmas sermon in 1967, "[A]s nations and individuals, we are interdependent... all caught up in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied to a single garment of human destiny."

The single garment of destiny of humankind is woven with threads from Earth's very being. We are dust, water, protein, and DNA. Our beating hearts, thinking brains, and creative bodies are knit together from Earth's substance and sustenance. We do not, and cannot, live and thrive separate from other creatures and lifeforms.

This truth is echoed in most of humanity's sacred scriptures and, I would say, revealed in what Kevin Beiler calls the "wood wide web." All created life is interdependent. Engaging in the life of the larger community affirms the truth that I cannot survive unless I acknowledge my profound dependence on Earth's well-being. Only when the whole community sustainably thrives now and in the future, will I – and all other lifeforms – thrive as well.

Down at Smith Cove, just below Seattle's Magnolia Bluff, our church youth clamber over the rocks above the beach, climb up to the top of the water drainage pipe and lean over to see what is flowing from our neighborhood into Elliott Bay. Their spiritual guide asks, "What do you see?" One child pipes up, "The water is dirty and smells bad." Another asks, "What's in it?" They ponder whether how they live results in the dirty water. They wonder what effect the dirty, smelly water will have on the creatures in the bay whose lives depend on it.

How then shall we live? As McFague asks, is Earth our hotel or our home? How



we answer this question determines our engagement in caring for creation. Will we live in denial of our interdependence? Or, will we strengthen relationships that sustain the intersectionality of the common good?

That we live in a fractured and divisive time in our national life is an understatement. It seems as if the very fabric of the social tapestry of our communities is actively unravelling. Is this the mirrored reflection of what we are doing to Earth? Re-weaving and strengthening a sustainable common well-being requires leadership to rebuild a strong sense of community. Each of us can show leadership at the local level that helps to create and sustain the long-term vision of sustainability for Earth and her creatures. If not us, who? If not now, when?



Engaged leadership takes many forms, both individual and communal. Are you called to teach and learn about threats to clean air, clean water, and sufficient food for all? Will you gather with neighbors to plant, nurture, and harvest a community garden? Will your club or church group host Earth care-focused documentary film nights, or convene a street's storm drain cleanup after a rain? In this edition of *Earth Letter* you will find stories of civic engagement that strengthen the fabric of relationships of the world wide web of creation.

*God has not given us a spirit of fear,
But of power and of love and of a sound mind.*

2 Timothy 1:7

The spirit of power, love, and a sound mind inspires the compassion that is at the heart of our engagement. Compassion for those oppressed by the destruction of Earth's ecosystems, and those who are wittingly and unwittingly complicit in that destruction, including you and me.

The spirit that inspires compassion also inspires strength in the fabric of relationships that sustains our destiny; the strength of resilience in the face of challenges; the strength for increasing shared meaning and creative solutions among us; the strength for compassionate and effective resistance.

We resist the unraveling of the fabric of our common destiny when we build relationships in our local communities, in our

nation, around the globe, and with Earth itself. We resist further destruction of our common destiny when we stand in solidarity with Earth and Earth's creatures. We resist the malaise of cultural denial when each of us does our part to amend our lives and to engage in civic action that speaks the truth of what we see. Our inspired compassion and resistance is the very fabric of dynamic resilience that changes the trajectory of our destiny with Earth.

In engaged communities, the tender shoots that are the lives of our children, youth, adults, and elders are nurtured. Watered and fertilized with story, communion, and collective encouragement, our relationships thrive. The energetic light of connecting across our differences produces a harvest of engaged action for the well-being of all of God's creation. Let us commit ourselves to be laborers for this harvest.

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