

SPRING 2009

Earth Letter

EARTH MINISTRY • CARING FOR ALL CREATION

Getting Green Done

by Auden Schendler

Climate Revelations for a Change

One day, a man named Walter Bennett walked into my Aspen, Colorado, office holding a laptop. He was in his mid to late fifties, with a graying crew cut, wearing khakis and a button-up shirt. He looked like, and described himself as, a west-Texas redneck. His younger (second) wife accompanied him, saying little. As we chatted, Walter mentioned that his daughter had just given birth to a baby boy—a grandson. Walter reminded me of the aging, Cheney-esque board members I'd been hoping would die off so we could actually start doing something on climate change. But that was exactly what he wanted to talk about. He set down his laptop and hooked it up to a projector.

"Do you mind if I show you this presentation I've prepared for my senior management?"

"No problem," I said, thinking, *Get me out of here. This is going to hurt.*

I'm a climate guy. I work for a ski resort, Aspen Skiing Company, where my title is "sustainability director." In theory, I work to address all aspects of the resort's environmental impact, from weed control to cage-free eggs, from

taking calls about new technologies to handling attacks about what a bunch of hypocrites we are. It's fun. I enjoy it. But, to be brutally honest, I don't care that much about those subjects. Twenty years ago, I took my first course in climate science. The news I read today is essentially the same. And I believe two things: First, to quote ABC newsman Bill Blakemore, "climate isn't the story of our time; it's the only story." Second, it seems obvious that a ski resort should both care deeply about climate change and also be in the vanguard of solving it.

Because my job is high profile, people often ask to meet with me about climate, sustainable business, and the environment. That's what Walter Bennett was doing. Walter works for Stihl (pronounced "steel"), the German chainsaw manufacturer. We have a partnership with them. They support free-skiing competitions, and we use Stihl saws on our mountains to cut trails. I didn't expect much from the meeting. After all, we're talking about a chainsaw manufacturer here. But after Walter got his projector set up, he clicked a button and proceeded to blow my mind.

He had prepared an hour-long multimedia event on

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Earth Ministry's mission is: **To inspire and mobilize the Christian community to play a leadership role in building a just and sustainable future.**

IN THIS ISSUE

This issue of *Earth Letter* has a focus on environmental responsibility. Marie Iannotti addresses this in her question and answer article. The more we understand responsible food production, the more we lessen our burden upon the Earth. Chris Olson reviews the book *Organic Prayer: A Spiritual Gardening Companion* by Nancy Roth. She pictures "a continual striving toward balance between ourselves and creation through partnership with the Creator." Beth Anderson tells us of Washington Toxics Coalition's program of Pesticide Free Zones—not using potentially harmful chemicals on your yard or garden.

On a totally different note Auden Schendler tells his engaging story of meaningfully addressing climate change—at, of all places, a world famous ski resort. He's become an expert on addressing this central issue of our time. Those of us who care about God's Earth need to take heed.

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GOINGS-ON AT EARTH MINISTRY

ENVIRONMENTAL PRIORITIES LEGISLATIVE WORKSHOP

The legislative session got off to a great start on January 10 with a record turnout of three hundred people attending the 2009 Legislative Workshop at Seattle Pacific University. Throughout the day, attendees learned about four bills supported by the Environmental Priorities Coalition: three climate change bills (Cap and Invest, Efficiency First, and Transit Oriented Communities) and Invest in Clean Water, which addresses storm water pollution. Earth Ministry held an afternoon training session on lobbying basics led by Executive Director LeeAnne Beres and Program and Outreach Director Jessie Dye. To learn more about the four 2009 environmental priorities and how you can support them, please visit www.environmentalpriorities.org.



Earth Ministry staff teach participants how to lobby lawmakers on environmental issues

BY THE WATERS AT FAUNTLEROY UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

On January 11, worshipers at Fauntleroy UCC in West Seattle celebrated *By the Waters* Sunday using Earth Ministry's newest *Caring for All Creation* curricular resource. The worship service focused on celebrating God's renewing gift of water and featured a water-themed liturgy. Congregants contributed water brought from a favorite lake, stream or ocean for a "Blessing of the Waters" which culminated in the welcoming of two children into the community of Christ through baptism. After the worship service, Fauntleroy's Green Committee hosted a tap/bottled water taste test and educated churchgoers on the environmental and social justice problems inherent in using bottled water. Participants had the opportunity to fill out personal action pledges to reduce bottled water consumption and take steps to save water at home, work, and church. (*By the Waters* is available for purchase through the Earth Ministry website at www.earthministry.org or by calling the office at (206) 632-2426.)



Congregants bring water from many sources for a "Blessing of the Waters"

EARTH MINISTRY MEMBERS IN THE NEWS

Two Earth Ministry members recently appeared in Washington newspapers touting their support for the Cap and Invest bill, strong climate legislation that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions in our state. Climate scientist Gary Lagerloef had a letter to the editor published in the *Kitsap Sun* on January 29. He called on Washington lawmakers to advance our state's environmental leadership by passing the legislation to limit carbon dioxide emissions, which in turn will help forge a comprehensive national policy to reduce global warming. Sr. Mimi Maloney, member of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, was featured in a February 4 article in the *Tri-City Herald* addressing the Cap and Invest bill: "One woman supporting the bill even argued that capping emissions is a moral responsibility. 'For me as a person of faith, the care and creation and the protection of Earth and the life support systems on Earth from the devastating effects of global warming is not just an environmental and economic issue,' said Sr. Mimi Maloney. 'Everyone is part of the living system, part of the web of creation.'"

FAITH IN ACTION: EARTH MINISTRY ADVOCACY IN THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE

FEBRUARY 3: ADVOCACY IN OLYMPIA

The Earth Ministry community already has been active and visible in advocating for God's creation this session! In Olympia, Program and Outreach Director Jessie Dye joined with other members of the Religious Coalition for the Common Good to present a state-wide social and environmental justice agenda to elected officials. Jessie spoke of our moral responsibility to reverse the effects of climate change in meetings with Senate Majority Leader Lisa Brown, Speaker of the House Frank Chopp, Senator Kelli Linville, and Governor Christine Gregoire. Earth Ministry members also testified at three legislative committee hearings in support of the Environmental Priorities' climate change bills. Climate scientist Gary Lagerloef of Grace Episcopal Church addressed the Senate Environment, Water and Energy Committee; Father Joseph Kramis spoke on behalf of Transit Oriented Communities legislation in the House Local Government Committee; and Sister Mimi Maloney testified in support of the Cap and Invest bill in the House Ecology & Parks Committee.

Closer to home, five Earth Ministry friends from Emmanuel Episcopal on Mercer Island had an in-district meeting

with their state senator to advocate for the Environmental Priorities, and leaders from six churches on the east side of Lake Washington had a similar meeting with elected officials from the 45th Legislative District. Activists from Earth Ministry congregations also collected signatures on over 100 Repower Washington postcards at the Bainbridge Island Environmental Film Series and at St. James Cathedral in Seattle. The message to legislators is that by repowering our state with clean energy, we can stimulate our economy while cleaning up pollution that threatens Earth's climate. All of these activities mean that the voice of the faith community—your voice—is being heard loud and clear in the state capitol.



Sister Mimi Maloney (center) preparing to testify in support of the Cap and Invest climate bill

FEBRUARY 19: ENVIRONMENTAL LOBBY DAY

It's a long ride to the state capitol for Washington State's Environmental Lobby Day. No one would consider it a faux-spa day, or a luxurious event. It is hard work, learning the policy points of the Environmental Priorities, schlepping back and forth across the Capitol campus, and speaking with elected officials who may or may not agree with this environmental agenda.

Yet a record-setting number of citizen activists gathered in Olympia on February 19 did just this, in order to support four important environmental bills that will safeguard Washington's climate and water resources for future generations. Earth Ministry members; from churches as far away as Yakima, Port Townsend, and Bellingham; rose very early to lend their voices for environmental protection. Numerous groups came from Seattle, including a van full of St. James Cathedral colleagues and Seattle University students. Pacific Lutheran University students practiced the skills of democracy learned

in their Christian ethics classes. People of faith came one hundred strong and joined other environmental activists to make a total of more than five hundred people pushing hard for climate and water protection.

Earth Ministry has been a partner in the Environmental Priorities for three years, and many of our members have attended a lobby day. We say, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” Every voice matters, including yours: two of our four priority bills passed out of committee within twenty-four hours of Lobby Day.

FAITH ADVOCACY DAY IS MARCH 17

We would love for you to come along. It is not too late to make your voice heard! See the calendar (page 15) for details and registration information. If you can't attend you can call the Washington State Legislative Hotline at 1-800-562-6000 and leave a message for your elected officials in favor of these bills:



36th District representatives meet with Senator Kohl-Welles



- ✦ HB 1747/SB 5854 Efficiency First
- ✦ HB 1490/SB 5687 Transit-Oriented Communities
- ✦ HB 1819/SB 5735 Cap and Invest
- ✦ HB 1614/SB 5518 Invest in Clean Water

This is an important journey—not just to Olympia for one day, but a lifetime journey of faith calling us to protect God’s Creation. We at Earth Ministry, our members and supporters, are on this road for the long-term. Please join us for Faith Advocacy Day or make a call today to support these bills!

Participants at Environmental Lobby Day

EARTH MINISTRY ECO-TOUR OF THE HOLY LAND

In late January, Earth Ministry co-founder Carla Pryne and Executive Director LeeAnne Beres led nineteen Earth Ministry members and friends on an eco-tour to Israel, Palestine and Jordan. The twelve-day pilgrimage included a tour of biblical, cultural and historical sites; learning about the ongoing Israeli/Palestinian crisis; and gaining an understanding of current environmental issues in the Holy Land (with an emphasis on water). The group met with natural resource experts, Palestinian Christians working to protect their communities, a prominent Jewish eco-theologian, representatives of local environmental organizations, and many others who shared their passion for peace and sustainability in this sacred land. Long-time Earth Ministry member Doug Thorpe provided a reflective component to the tour with much-appreciated prayers and poems.



Earth Ministry eco-tour participants at Qumran, site of the Dead Sea Scrolls discovery

What is Organic Gardening?

by Marie Iannotti

Question: *What does it mean to have an organic garden? Does organic gardening mean that you have to put up with insects eating your plants or unattractive flower beds?*

Answer: The short answer is that organic gardening means not using synthetic products, including pesticides and fertilizers. Ideally, organic gardening replenishes the resources as it makes use of them. Like feeding depleted soil with composted plants, or planting legumes to add nitrogen to an area that had been planted with a heavy feeder. The bigger picture involves working in cooperation with nature, viewing your garden as a small part of all the natural system.

Here are some basics to get you started with organic gardening:

What is Meant by Organic Matter?

Organic matter is decaying plant and animal waste. It includes everything from compost, grass clippings, dried leaves and kitchen scraps to manures and fish heads.

Organic matter is used as a soil amendment or conditioner. It can be worked into the soil of a new garden or used as a top dressing or mulch in an existing garden.

What's so Important About the Soil?

One of the basic tenets of organic gardening is to “Feed the soil and the soil will feed the plants.” It’s really common sense. Plants get water, air and nutrients from the soil. Clay soil is higher in nutrients than sand and holds water better. Sometimes it holds water too well and the plants can’t get enough air. Sandy soil is well drained, but can use some amending to make it great garden soil. This is where organic matter comes into play. Adding organic matter improves any soil’s texture as well as attracting soil organisms that create nutrients in the soil.

How Do You Control Pests and Diseases Without Chemicals?

Organic gardening doesn’t mean you have to share your apples with the worms, but you will probably have less than pristine looking plants and produce. Since you are trying to



Photo by Ron Williams



Photo by Ron Williams

garden in cooperation with nature, sometimes you have to accept the occasional pest in the garden. Your first line of defense should be vigilance. Inspect your plants regularly for signs of a problem and take action quickly. Keep in mind that not every insect is a foe and that action doesn't necessarily mean the use of pesticides.

- ✦ There are many organic pesticides available, but first make certain that there is a problem and that you know what it is. You can live with a little damage. Some insects, like the 4-lined plant bug, do their damage and then move on for the season.
- ✦ Consider if you are having a pest problem because your plants are stressed and don't have the resources to defend themselves.
- ✦ Interplanting and diversity will protect you from losing an entire crop to an infestation. Large swaths of a single plant are pretty, but are also a landing strip for interested insects.
- ✦ Many insects and larger animals are considered beneficial, preying on the insect pests. Reaching for the spray can every time you see a pest means that you will be killing off the beneficial insects too. Lady bugs and parasitic wasps enjoy an aphid banquet. Birds will munch on grubs. Frogs, lizards and even snakes all contribute to the balance in your garden and prevent a pest population from becoming a problem.
- ✦ Barriers prevent problems. Floating row covers prevent moths from landing and laying eggs. Yellow sticky traps can easily catch dozens of flying pests. Foil collars around the base of plants will thwart cut worms and many borers.
- ✦ There will probably come a time when you will need to apply a pesticide or lose your plants. Organic or natural pesticides can be very effective and are usually less toxic to wildlife, pets, and humans than synthetic pesticides. Many organic controls can target specific problems, such as

using *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt), a type of bacteria that kills caterpillars, but not much else. Just be sure that you know what the problem is before you treat it and that you always follow the label instructions.

What Else is Involved in Gardening Cooperatively With Nature?

There are many elements that can contribute to a healthy garden climate.

- ✦ Select plants that are suited to your site conditions. Plants that are happy with their growing conditions will be healthier than plants that are stressed. Stressed plants are very attractive to pests. Don't choose plants that require full sun if you live in a shady woodland. Similarly, don't select plants that like a moist environment if you have sandy soil and lots of sunshine.
- ✦ Mulching your garden beds serves multiple purposes. Mulch suppresses weeds, conserves water, moderates soil temperature, feeds the soil, prevents erosion, and is attractive to boot.
- ✦ As mentioned above, create diversity in your garden. A mix of plants will attract more beneficial insects and prevent a problem from spreading throughout your garden.
- ✦ Most importantly, get to know your plants so that you will notice if a problem is manifesting. Nature is cyclical and learning the seasonal changes your plant will go through can help you anticipate problems. Organic gardening is a constantly evolving dance that allows you to be a full participant in your garden. †

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Photo courtesy of Seattle P-Patch

GETTING GREEN DONE - CLIMATE REVELATIONS FOR A CHANGE

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climate change, complete with country music overlays, video clips, and charts and graphs, that rivaled any presentation I'd seen from experts in the field, nonprofit heads, and climate PhDs. It got the science exactly right, the challenges, and some of the solutions. Walter's goal was to convince Stihl that it should begin to take action on climate change, in concert with its efforts to develop cleaner burning chainsaws and other power tools.

When Walter was done, I sat in silence. Finally, I asked, "Walter, if you don't mind my asking...what was it that moved a self-professed west-Texas redneck to care about climate change at all, let alone try to change an entire corporation's perspective on the issue? You don't really fit the mold of someone who would do this."

Walter said: "Holding my grandchild—holding that little baby in my hands..." His voice trailed off. I thought he was going to cry.

Walter's experience, I believe, is being lived throughout the country, throughout the world, because climate change is a threat the likes of which our society has never seen. Unlike some earlier predictions of doom from environmentalists (the population bomb, for example), this one has uniform scientific agreement. Climate change is happening, and it will get worse. The best science—represented by Rajendra Pachauri of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and James Hansen at NASA—tells us we have to act in the next few years to cut carbon dioxide emissions 80 percent by midcentury, or the planet will be unrecognizable by end of century.

And yet, somehow, we don't seem to be able to engage this monster adequately. While Aspen Skiing Company has developed a worldwide reputation as a green company, our energy use keeps increasing, despite herculean efforts to reduce it. Not only are other businesses struggling in the same way, but also most of the nations that signed the Kyoto Treaty are missing their targets. Why? Because our society is entirely based on cheap energy. We can't just retool it overnight. Solving climate change is going to be a bitch.

Given the extreme challenges we face in implementing solutions—whether trying to make mass transit work, fixing the problem of existing buildings, building enough renewable energy to power our operations, or driving federal action on climate policy—it's worth asking the question: what will motivate us to actually pull this off? How will we become, and then remain, inspired for the long slog ahead? Because this battle will take not just political will and corporate action; it will require unyielding commitment and dedication on the part of humanity. *We need to literally remake society.*

We can intellectualize the need for action all we want, but in my experience, in the end our motivation usually comes down to a cliché: our kids and, for want of a better word, our dignity. The journalist Bill Moyers has said, "What

we need to match the science of human health is what the ancient Israelites called 'hocma'—the science of the heart... the capacity to see...to feel...and then to act...as if the future depended on you. Believe me, it does."

Moyers, who is an ordained Baptist minister, taps into something positively religious about the possibilities in a grand movement to protect the Earth. Climate change offers us something immensely valuable and difficult to find in the modern world: the opportunity to participate in a movement that, in its vastness of scope, can fulfill the universal human need for a sense of meaning in our lives. A climate solution—a world running efficiently on abundant clean energy—by necessity goes a long way toward solving many, if not most, other problems too: poverty, hunger, disease, food and water supply, equity, solid waste, and on and on.

Climate change doesn't have to scare us. It can inspire us; it is a singular opportunity to remake society in the image of our greatest dreams.

What are those dreams? The concept of an ideal society has been a core element in human thought for all of recorded history. In 1516, Thomas More wrote about a kingdom called Utopia off the coast of the recently discovered Americas; in doing so, he brought the concept of an ideal society out of the realm of religious faith and the afterlife and into the world of the living. For centuries, that utopian ideal had been called by different names but had always existed in some other world: the Garden of Eden, Paradise, the Land of Cockaigne. More's idea that such a place might exist here on Earth was radical, but it came from the same yearning for meaning and betterment that has always driven human beings to new heights. One of the great and hopeful concepts of human history, it carried itself into the present: from the settling and then founding of America and all its promise; to the vision behind Kennedy's City on a Hill and Johnson's Great Society; to Martin Luther King, who said that he might not get there with us, but he had seen the Promised Land.

The absence of that vision is despair.

Barry Lopez has written, "One of the oldest dreams of mankind is to find a dignity that might include all living things. And one of the greatest of human longings must be to bring such dignity to one's own dreams, for each to find his or her own life exemplary in some way." This longing is a fundamental aspect of human experience. In my work, I see it on a daily basis, in people like Walter Bennett, in the hundreds

“Climate change... we have to... It can in... it is a s... opportu... remake... in the in... our gr... dream

of college graduates looking for work in the field of sustainability, in people all over the world.

Recently, I received the following e-mail from Bob Janes, an Alaskan tour guide I had met in 2007:

Greetings from Juneau, Auden,

...My interests are being drawn more and more towards the global warming issue (whose aren't?). I am able to involve myself both personally and in a business capacity now and into the future, but am definitely in the dark on a specific course.... Do you believe one can actually find a way to earn a bit of a living in this emerging (crisis?), and at the same time go home at night and let the kids know that something good is being accomplished? My business sense tells me there are many grand opportunities, but the field seems to be a tempting invitation to intrusive species and interests. What is reality? What will stand the test of time?

When you get a chance, Auden, could you drop me a line with some thoughts and possible information links....

Bob

In a note dashed off after work or between tours in the mayhem of a busy day, Bob was asking some of the most basic, consistent, and profound questions humanity has struggled with. And when I tried to pinpoint exactly what Bob was talking about, I ended up with words that didn't square with the biology background I have, or the empirical perspective the field of sustainability and climate has historically followed. The words I found to describe

Bob's goals came from the religious community—words like grace, dignity, redemption, and compassion. And it occurred to me that the environmental, political, and business worlds, in their discussion of climate change and its solutions, have been missing something fundamental.

There have been scores of books published on climate change and sustainable business over the last two decades. Most come from the secular academic or left-leaning environmental community, or they come from the free market-crazed economists at right-wing think tanks. It's either pure science or pure economics. Few of these books address the broader, seemingly glaring point that no such holistically encompassing opportunity as climate change, nothing with so great a promise to achieve universal human goals on so large a scale, has been offered up since the establishment of large, organized religions between two and four thousand years ago. The vision of a sustainable society, with its implications

for equity, social justice, happiness, meaning, tolerance, and hope, embodies the aspirations of most religious traditions: a way of living at peace with each other, the world, and our consciences; a graceful existence; a framework for a noble life. Most religions originally evolved to meet a basic human need for community, understanding, and mission. Religion, in its original intent, and the sustainability movement seem to be sourced from the same ancient human wellspring.

Is it any wonder, then, that so many have come at sustainability, and in particular the climate struggle, with an almost religious fervor? And that many prominent leaders of this movement—leaders like Al Gore, Sally Bingham, Bill Moyers, and Richard Cizik—are either ordained or educated in theology? Indeed, many critics of environmentalism and the current climate “crusade” point out the avid, zealous enthusiasm behind the movement, as if to say, “What a bunch of wackos.”

But religion has been one of the most important forces shaping society throughout history. If there are some very clear parallels between the goals of most religious traditions and the goals of a sustainable society, how is it possible to talk about huge philosophical issues that cut to the core of human desire—like climate change, which threatens the very nature and existence of life on Earth—without talking about...God?

My inquiry into religion and climate change began through conversations with my friend Mark Thomas, who was at the time studying for a degree in theology at Berkeley. Mark once said, “To think God is some old guy sitting in a chair, you'd have to be insane.” As a member of no religious practice and a lifelong atheist who always felt religion was absurd, the idea was liberating to me. I was guilty of viewing religion in the most simplistic terms.

When I talk about religion, I'm talking about its core founding principles, not what seems to be the bulk of popular modern religious practice in the U.S. As Bill McKibben has pointed out, in America, the evangelical agenda prominent in politics—with its unwavering focus on gay clergy, same-sex union, and abortion—has very little to do with the original teachings of any religious faith, let alone Christianity, despite the fact that roughly 85 percent of U.S. citizens call themselves Christian. He notes that three-quarters of Americans think the line “God helps those who help themselves” comes from the Bible. But Ben Franklin said it, and the notion actually runs counter to the founding ideas of most religions, which focus explicitly on tolerance and helping the poor.

At the same time, the American religious community—even the most unmoored element—is on board with climate action. Leaders typically cite a biblical mandate regarding stewardship, describe Earth as “God's creation,” and note the commandment of Jesus to “love thy neighbor as thyself.” I believe this represents the beginnings of a seismic shift back toward core principles in religion, not contemporary distractions—a shift toward the original, more humble aspects of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and away from making tax cuts permanent. In a way, this makes sense. As we move out of an unprecedented age of abundance and back into a world of

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Gardening Safely: Creating a Pesticide Free Zone

by Beth Anderson

As the growing season approaches, the time is right to plan for encounters with unwelcome guests in your garden! Organic soil, seeds, and plantings are only part of the puzzle when it comes to nurturing healthy lawns and gardens.

Weeds, insects, scavengers, and disease all affect your garden's harvest or the condition of your lawn. How you choose to deal with those pests has a huge impact on the overall healthfulness of your landscape. Your approach to pest control also has serious implications for the environment—especially for the people, plants, and animals that come in contact with common garden chemicals. In addition to the local risk these chemicals pose to pets and children, many pesticides and herbicides have far-reaching and harmful effects on birds and beneficial insects as well as on fish and their food sources.

According to the Washington Toxics Coalition, about 140 million pounds of the active ingredients in pesticides are used in and around homes in the U.S. each year. Although the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulates pesticides, the full products (both inert and active ingredients) are required to be tested only for short-term toxic effects resulting from a single exposure. The active ingredients are tested for some long-term effects in humans, including cancer, birth defects, and impacts on the nervous system. There is currently no required testing for effects on the hormone system, and many pesticides contain chemicals that are known or suspected endocrine disruptors. The bottom line is that many pesticides allowed by the EPA are not guaranteed to be safe for humans, let alone other species.

One way to solidify your commitment to safe gardening practices is to designate your yard and garden a "Pesticide Free Zone." In the state of Washington, each household and/or business is eligible to receive one free Pesticide Free Zone sign to place on their own property. To sign up, go to the "Healthy Homes and Gardens" tab on the

Washington Toxics Coalition website (www.watoxics.org) or call (206) 632-1545.*

The signs are distributed on the honor system to individuals and organizations who pledge to:

1. put the sign up on the property;
2. choose the least-toxic methods to maintain the property and try to avoid using synthetic pesticides such as insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides;
3. talk about pesticide-free yard care with at least three other people;
4. respond to a brief follow-up questionnaire about six months after receiving the sign.

In addition to the sign itself, participants in the Pesticide Free Zone campaign receive fact sheets entitled *What's Wrong with Using Pesticides?* and *Talking to Your Neighbors About Pesticides*. This information is designed to help gardeners take the next step in advocating for safe gardening practices within their own communities.

Churches and other places of worship are invited and encouraged to participate in the Pesticide Free Zone program. Developing toxic-free grounds-keeping practices could be part of a larger plan to become an Earth Ministry Greening Congregation!

Gardening safely may initially take a bit of extra preparation, but the benefits for human health and the health of the environment as a whole far outweigh any inconveniences. In fact, many effective and less-hazardous pest control alternatives are readily available. If you need help getting started, contact your city or county government for information on natural yard care workshops in your area.

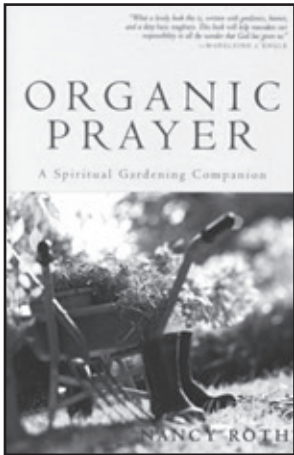
Whether you take the Pesticide Free Zone pledge as a congregation or as an individual, this is an important step in cultivating faithful stewardship of God's Earth. †



*Note: If you live outside of Washington or need additional Pesticide Free Zone signs, signs can be purchased from The National Coalition for Pesticide-Free Lawns at <http://www.beyondpesticides.org/pesticidefreelawns/pfzsign/index.htm>.

Reflections on *Organic Prayer*

by Chris Olson



These days almost everyone could tell you at least a little bit about organic gardening. But if asked to explain the term “organic prayer,” I venture most people would end up staring back at you with a furrowed brow and questioning eyes. In her book *Organic Prayer: A Spiritual Gardening Companion*, author Nancy Roth expertly weaves the idea of organic gardening into a metaphor for our prayer lives. An Episcopal priest and

avid gardener, Roth uses sincere and reflective story-telling drawn from her own life experiences to guide the reader on a spiritual journey. She finds life-giving connections between her understanding of faith and prayer and her knowledge of the bountiful soil in her organic vegetable garden. In her introduction to the book she writes:

An organic garden represents a middle ground between returning the land to wilderness and bulldozing it for condominiums. Ideally, it is a fruitful partnership between ourselves and nature. Similarly, organic prayer represents neither an impossible Eden nor an arrogant Babel, but a continual striving toward balance between ourselves and creation through partnership with the Creator.

By looking at prayer as an extension (into the world around us) of our deepest self, instead of a cookie-cutter daily routine, we can begin to examine our connection to the Creator and bear the spiritual fruit of healing and compassion for all creation.

Each chapter of *Organic Prayer* is written as a short, thoughtful meditation based on a story from Roth’s life and ends with a simple and engaging prayer exercise. As I read each story, I found myself pulled into memories of times I had felt a connection between myself, the natural world, and God. Over and over again, I was impressed with her ability to paint a vivid picture of the mystery of God in the world around us.

One story in particular spoke to my heart. Roth tells of a trip she and her family once took to Paris. They spent an afternoon at the Rodin Museum where she first saw his

sculpture *Hand of God*, a mass of marble shaped into a hand reaching out of the floor. In the palm of the hand is a lump of earth from which human limbs are beginning to form. For Roth, the image of the human shape in the clay was a profound expression of God working in the Garden of Eden:

In the story in Genesis 2, God is a sculptor, forming a human shape from the *adamah*, or earth. At first the clay figure is inanimate. Then into its nostrils God breathes *ruach*, life-giving breath. The breath courses through the earth-sculpture, bringing it to life as *adam*—literally an “earthling.” Us.

She goes on to say that once the earth and the life-giving breath have intermingled, they are inseparable. Our relationship with the Creator is direct and permanent, a mixture of the elements

of the Earth and the glorious breath of life. Through the web of creation, we are connected to all of God’s magnificent works. We should live our lives to reflect that joyful connection. Our prayer lives should nurture and nourish our souls, just as we nurture our gardens and find nourishment for our bodies in their harvest. And just as

keeping an organic garden demands attention year-round in order to flourish, we must make sure that we are meeting our prayer needs by cultivating healthy and sustainable prayer practices to last a life time.

Organic Prayer: A Spiritual Gardening Companion is a thoughtfully-written book full of insight and understanding. This book is perfect for individual meditation or for group discussion, and will help foster a deeper understanding of the connections between our lives of faith and the natural world. †



Organic Prayer is available from Earth Ministry and can be ordered in our online store at www.earthministry.org or by calling (206) 632-2426.

GETTING GREEN DONE - CLIMATE REVELATIONS FOR A CHANGE

Continued from page 9

scarcity, we are going to need these ideas of tolerance and human dignity that help people work together and coexist peacefully. We are going to need these ideas to solve climate change.

The sustainability movement, too, is arguably seeing a shift toward “core principles” in the sense that we’re less focused on the microscale and the individual (recycling, paper or plastic, self-righteous SUV-hating) and more focused on the collective (solving climate change as a social, economic, spiritual, and environmental effort).

To get a sense of what might be happening on the leading edge of religion—and how this evolution might relate to the climate struggle—I contacted two young progressive religious thinkers: my friend Mark Thomas, now Director of Mission Integration and Spiritual Care at Providence Hood River Hospital, and Rabbi David Ingber from New York’s Kehilat Romemu congregation. I asked them about Lopez’s “dignity that includes all living things.” In the process of listening to their responses, it became clear to me that Thomas and Ingber had a particular definition of “God” that informed their whole worldview. Further, it had nothing to do with my simplistic understanding of the idea of God. Let me explain.

Two distinct concepts of God have existed in parallel since the origin of religion. Theologian Marcus Borg explains them: Supernatural theism, he says, imagines God as a personlike being. Panentheism, however, “imagines God and the God-world relationship differently.... Rather than imagining God as a personlike being ‘out there,’ this concept imagines God as the encompassing Spirit in whom everything that is, is.”

Both Thomas and Ingber used this latter definition, what Father Thomas Keating, a leading thinker on the subject of contemplative prayer, calls the “isness” of the world, or “isness without boundaries.” In fact, after conversations with Buddhist leaders, Keating came to a description of God they could all agree on: “ultimate reality.” In this context you could also define God as what Lao Tzu called the Tao, or, simply, “the sacred.” Similarly, the Talmud says of God, “He is the place of the world; the world is not His place.”

When you talk about God as ultimate reality or the sacred, and if you see religion as a way of relating to the world in a dignified way—a broker for grace—then the religion discussion becomes much less charged. Nobody’s trying to get you to believe something ridiculous. Instead, we’re simply talking about a philosophy of living.

In response to my question about Barry Lopez’s “dignity,” Ingber and Thomas both described a faith that has the goal of bringing the natural world into harmony with people, bringing the divine to everyday experience. As Ingber writes, “Religion seeks (at its best) to illuminate our

eyes, that is to actualize our capacity to realize, apprehend, see (with the eye of Spirit) that there is nothing but G-d, everywhere, now and always.”

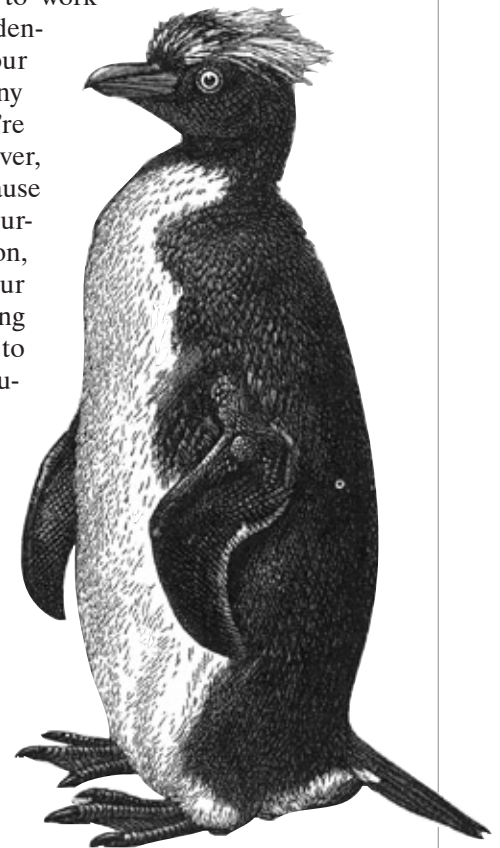
The idea of the divinization of the world—of our lives—is a powerful and unifying concept tying together religion and the climate challenge. It means that it doesn’t matter what direction we come from; most people, religious or secular or something in between, can agree on common goals. An atheist might be envisioning an ideal society running on renewable energy, and others might have the same vision but see that as the true meaning of “God’s will be done” on Earth. Heaven must look like a sustainable society.

And yet, for someone like me, the question is, how do you talk about religious ideas, or use words like “grace” and “redemption” and “compassion” in a business context, which is all about return on investment (ROI), net operating income (NOI), cash flow, and year-on-year growth?

Aspen Skiing Company is a good case study. In 1994, our mission, though unstated, was to make money by selling lift tickets. That’s not very inspiring. Our incoming CEO at the time, Pat O’Donnell, tapping into the idea that people’s lives are, ultimately, a search for meaning, suggested that people won’t happily come to work each day to make money for the bossman. Instead, we needed a set of guiding principles that would be based in values, not profits, though business success could certainly become one of those values. What resulted was a core mission for the company that sounds radical to the point of froofiness: “We provide opportunity for the renewal of the human spirit.” Come to work

to do that, and suddenly things change. Your mission as a company begins to evolve. We’re more successful than ever, but that’s in part because we’ve begun to see ourselves, and our mission, differently. Perhaps our role, in part, is providing safe, gratifying work to members of the community, creating fulfilling jobs about which people can be proud. Perhaps business can be *graceful*. If that transition is happening in one corporation, it can happen in others.

And the business community is indeed slowly moving in this direction. It started,



in part, with books like Paul Hawken's *The Ecology of Commerce* and his and Amory and Hunter Lovins's *Natural Capitalism*. Their argument was that capitalism is wonderful, but it has never been practiced. We've always discounted the value of the natural (and human) world and the costs of our impacts on it. Making the costs of air pollution, climate change, and fisheries destruction part of the business equation—and recognizing the true value of the natural resources we use as feed-stocks—would in fact be a divine act: it would mean the business community finally seeing not just the bottom line but the *entire world* as sacred. It would mean seeing the dignity of the world, the harm in damaging it, and the *vision* of a sustainable future.

It is there. It has always been there. Can we see it?

There is a movement within many religions called the contemplative tradition. Contemplation, or contemplative prayer, is a form of meditation, the goal of which is to cultivate an understanding of and relationship with the divine—the life force, the ultimate reality of the world. That ultimate reality might be a dignity that includes not just all living things, but all things. Father Thomas Keating has called the entire contemplative tradition simply “a long and loving look at what is.” He's now eighty-five, and living at the St. Benedict Monastery in Old Snowmass, Colorado, not far from Aspen Skiing Company's slopes.

I decided to meet with Keating, a leader in this field, because the practice of contemplation is in effect the same thing as the practice of trying to solve climate change; both

are an effort to pursue the divinization, the making sacred of the world and of ourselves.

That's couched in religious terms, but pagans like me

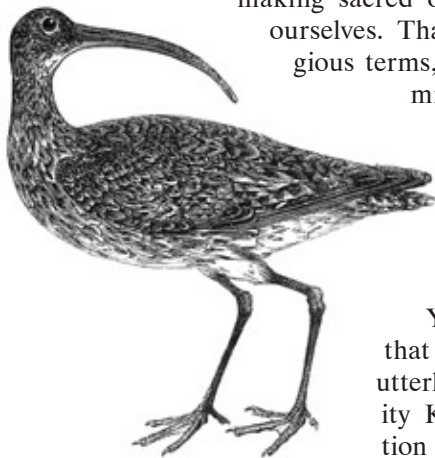
might simply call that state of grace

“global sustainability.” It's

the same idea, though mark-

edly less poetic.

You could argue that the world today is utterly missing the clarity Keating's contemplation is meant to provide,



and that's why we haven't moved more quickly on climate change.

You couldn't get farther from what Keating calls a “radical

participation” in the

reality of the world than, for example,

Star magazine and *Us Weekly*. Those magazines—just like a public obsession with sports or video games—simply take our attention off what matters. If the public at large needs a clearer view of the world, so do businesspeople and politicians, who both base decisions on short time frames—quarterly reports or election cycles that are meaningless without any kind of broader worldview for context.

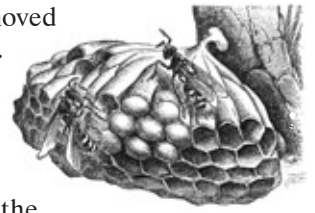
To someone who asks, “I want to establish a relationship with the divine. Can I come to your monastery?” Keating might reply, “You can have that relationship anywhere, and should.” My conversation with Keating reminded me of the many phone calls I get from eager, young, well-educated college graduates who desperately want to get into the “sustainability field.” My response is that given the scale of the problems, every job must become a sustainability job. So one approach is to look for ways to turn your own position into one that addresses climate change. If every job doesn't become a climate job, we're not going to solve the

problem. Even if you work for the worst of the worst—let's say it's ExxonMobil—we need people inside the beast. We need moles. And there isn't a job in the world that doesn't somehow influence the changing climate.

My forays into religious thinking revealed to me, above all, a desire within humanity to live in a dignified world. This is Walter Bennett's vision while holding his grandchild; it's what Bob Janes aspires to when he warms up his truck each morning in Juneau. Their urges, hopes, and desires are the deeply rooted, very powerful forces that have been part of human experience always.

This is a hopeful concept: maybe humans are hard-wired to durably engage, participate in, and relish the challenge of solving climate change, because it offers us a shot at just this dignity.

And maybe something even better: maybe we can't help but do it. †



“Making the costs of air pollution, climate change, and fisheries destruction part of the business equation...would in fact be a divine act: it would mean the business community finally seeing not just the bottom line but the entire world as sacred..”

EARTH MINISTRY MEMBER & CONGREGATIONAL PROFILES

MEMBER PROFILE: MALLORY MCDUFF



Mallory and daughters

Like many people whose vocation is in the environmental field and who have an active faith life, Mallory McDuff's interest in religion and the environment started in her childhood. Raised in an Episcopal family, Mallory's faith was grounded in conservation values that were evident through actions, not words. One of the ways Mallory's

family demonstrated faith-based concern for the environment was through annual Lenten practices. Long before recycling programs, they cancelled the family's garbage service for Lent. Another year, her father gave up driving. The synergy between conservation and faith were clear.

Today, Mallory teaches environmental education at Warren Wilson College in Asheville, North Carolina, and attends the Cathedral of All Souls. The marriage of her

passion for faith and the environment has culminated in her most recent research project, a book that examines how Christian churches are integrating the environment into traditional ministries. Her research shows that this integration is "transforming the church and making it more relevant."

Mallory came to Seattle last July to write a chapter of the book on Earth Ministry's successful environmental advocacy program. "When I got the contract to publish the book, I knew that I would profile Earth Ministry's work. It is such a good organization. With so few people on staff, the impact of the work is really phenomenal to me," said McDuff. She had known about Earth Ministry for awhile, but when she entered GreenFaith's Fellowship program and was paired up with Earth Ministry's Executive Director LeeAnne Beres, she said, "I was lucky to have LeeAnne as my study partner. Earth Ministry is the rock star of the religion and environment movement and I was excited to get to know LeeAnne."

Thank you, Mallory, for sharing your gifts and passions with the religious environmental movement and with the next generation of environmental educators!

CONGREGATIONAL PROFILE: WESLEY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, YAKIMA, WA

Issues of local food resonate strongly with the members of Wesley United Methodist Church, of Yakima, Washington, one of Earth Ministry's newest Greening Congregations. The church is situated in a fertile valley surrounded by nearly 100,000 acres of orchards, plus vegetable farms and vineyards. A recent Food and Faith Sunday (featuring Earth Ministry Program & Outreach Director Jessie Dye) not only addressed issues of earth care, but "was also a way to honor the farmers, vintners, and master gardeners in our congregation," said church member Sara Cate.

Church members have also held a "locavore" potluck, started an organic garden, written testimonials and tips for the church newsletter, and toured the nearby Nature Conservancy reserve at Tieton River Canyon. During a car-free Sunday, "everyone had a nametag with a number showing how much carbon they had saved that day," said Cate.

Although involvement with Earth Ministry is recent for this congregation, a core group at the church has been deeply involved in recycling for 30 years. "During 2007, we kept 625,000 pounds out of the landfill," said Keith Case,

a member of the church's recycling team. Team members donate about 125 hours a month to the project, which earned \$12,000 last year for youth programs. Yakima residents have few other recycling options. Yakima's municipal recycling program charges a fee and other non-profit recyclers have dropped out of the market because of problems with dumping of unrecyclable trash, such as car tires. Therefore neighbors help patrol the Wesley United recycling site. "The people who like the recycling center are very protective of it. That keeps it very clean," said Case.

Like almost everything in Yakima, even the recycling program is linked to agriculture. Paper collected by Wesley goes to local plants that mold it into paper trays used to protect fruit during shipping.

Thank you Wesley UMC for your enduring commitment to creation!



Recycling team busy on a snowy day.

CALENDAR, SPRING, 2009

For updated and more detailed information, please sign up for our weekly events-action email listserv on the Earth Ministry home page, www.earthministry.org.

Please submit calendar items and congregational goings-on to LeeAnne Beres at Earth Ministry, LeeAnne@earthministry.org.

Earth Ministry Events

Faith Advocacy Day

Tuesday, March 17, 8:30AM-3PM; United Churches, 110 11th Ave E, Olympia, WA

This event is sponsored by Earth Ministry, the Washington Association of Churches, the Lutheran Public Policy Office, the Religious Coalition for the Common Good, and several other religious organizations. It brings people of faith from all over Washington to Olympia for a day to advocate for a unified social justice agenda. Earth Ministry members and friends come together to speak as one voice with the larger faith community on behalf of creation care and protection of our climate. Your voice is particularly important to convince legislators to be bold in voting for climate protection. To get you up to speed Earth Ministry's Program and Outreach Director, Jessie Dye, will host a workshop on energy and water legislation. Cost is \$25 and includes lunch. Register at www.faithadvocacyday.webs.com or by calling (206) 625-9790.

Climate Change and Water: Local Perspectives on a Global Problem

Sustainable Path Foundation; Wednesday, March 25, 5:30-9:00PM; Downstairs at Town Hall, 1119 Eighth Avenue, Seattle, WA

Climate change is heating-up our planet. Here in Washington we are beginning to get a glimpse of what the future holds for us—sometimes too much water and at other times too little. How do we respond to the prospect of more floods, drought, wildfires, and other catastrophes? This seminar will look at our current situation and put forward community-wide solutions for how we respond to serious issues relating to growth, development, climate. Co-sponsored by Earth Ministry: \$10 for advanced reservations or \$15 at the door. For reservations visit www.sustainablepath.org or call (206) 443-8464.

Save the Date

Washington Interfaith Power & Light Earth Day Event

Wednesday, April 22, 2009

National Interfaith Power & Light director, Rev. Sally Bingham, is coming to Seattle to celebrate Earth Day with Washington Interfaith Power & Light. Check our website for more information, www.earthministry.org.

Other Events

The Spirituality of Gardening

Saturday, April 25, 9AM-3PM; Mustard Seed House, 510 NE 81st Street, Seattle, WA

In this workshop facilitated by Christine Sine, participants will discuss the wonderful ways that God is revealed through the rhythms of planting, growing and harvesting in the garden. Come prepared to get your hands dirty as we will spend some time in the garden (or in the greenhouse if the weather is inclement.) Each participant will receive a copy of "The Garden Year", a resource that Christine created to help her plan, cultivate and harvest throughout the year. Individual registration cost \$45, groups \$40 per person. For more information and to register please visit <http://spiritualityofgardening.eventbrite.com>.

Sallie McFague featured at Ann O'Hara Graff Lecture

Monday, April 27, 7PM-10PM; Seattle University, Pigott Auditorium

The Ann O'Hara Graff Memorial Lecture Series was inaugurated in 1996 in memory of Ann O'Hara Graff and her contributions to theology, the church and the academy. The lectureship calls upon theologians who—like

O'Hara Graff—creatively hold together scholarship and experience, bring the insights of the academy into dialogue with the church and work out of liberationist feminist perspectives. The guest speaker for the 2009 lecture is Sallie McFague, Distinguished Theologian in Residence at the Vancouver School of Theology, Vancouver, BC, Canada.






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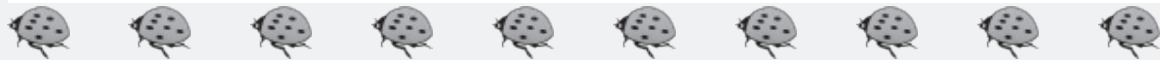
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Who Loves a Garden



Who loves a garden
Finds within his soul
Life's whole;
He hears the anthem of the soil
While ingrates toil;
And sees beyond his little sphere
The waving fronds of heaven, clear

—Lousie Seymour Jones



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