



## Communicating Climate Change to People of Faith

By Dr. Katharine Hayhoe

How we talk about things is almost more important than what we talk about. I want to share with you some of my own thoughts on this topic.

The reason I care about a changing climate is because it is the greatest humanitarian challenge we face today. We could be pouring all of our money, prayers, efforts, and hope into this bucket to try to fix poverty and hunger, injustice, disease. But there's a hole in the bucket, and the hole is climate change. And that hole is getting bigger and bigger. We have to fix the hole if we're going to fix the other issues that we already care so passionately about.

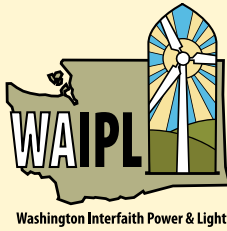
How do we talk about climate change with people of faith? What can we do about this thing, given how it is one of the most politically polarizing issues?

I'm going to give you a template. It is based on thousands of conversations I've had as well as a great deal of social science research.

*Continued on page 14*

### Inside this issue

- 3 Goings-On
- 6 The Danger of Binaries
- 7 Connectivity and Community
- 8 Chicago Church Pursues Environmental Justice "By Any Greens Necessary"
- 10 Empathetic Interfaith Relationships in Response to Hate
- 12 The Importance of Kindness: Teaching Empathy Through Interaction with Nature



### Earth Ministry/WAIPL Staff

LeeAnne Beres, Executive Director  
Jessie Dye, Senior Campaign Strategist  
Jessica Zimmerle, Program & Outreach Director  
Leda Zakarison, Outreach Coordinator  
Ryan Olson, Operations Manager  
Hunter Paulson-Smith, Operations Coordinator  
Alicia Healey, Bookkeeper

### Earth Ministry Co-founders

Rev. Jim & Ruth Mulligan  
Rev. Carla Pryne

### Earth Letter Staff

Rev. Meighan Pritchard, Editor  
LeeAnne Beres, Assistant Editor  
Jean Miller, Graphic Design

### Board of Directors

Rev. Dr. Marilyn Cornwell  
Sara Davis  
Anna Dyer  
Reuben Gelblum  
Evita Krislock  
Dr. Brian Naasz  
Chris Olson  
Jacob Schmidt  
Sr. Jessica Taylor, SP  
Rev. Terry Teigen

### Membership

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:

\$35 Individual  
\$60 Family  
\$100 Advocate  
\$250 Steward  
\$500 Sustainer  
\$1000+ Sacred Circle

Join at [www.earthministry.org](http://www.earthministry.org) or [www.waipl.org](http://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 transforms faith into action for the well-being of communities and the environment. We organize people of faith to advocate for strong environmental policies and provide strategic guidance to religious communities working toward environmental justice.

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's Washington Interfaith Power & Light (WAIPL) project organizes an interfaith religious response to climate change, and is part of a national Interfaith Power & Light network that is 40 states strong and growing. Our programs and resources are available to all. [www.earthministry.org](http://www.earthministry.org) [www.waipl.org](http://www.waipl.org)

## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Empathy is the ability to share another person's feelings and emotions as if they were our own. It has also been described as the ability to put ourselves in another person's place.

Most everyone has some degree of natural empathy, yet it is also a skill that we can cultivate and strengthen with practice. By listening more attentively, observing more closely, and imagining ourselves in the situation of others more frequently, we gain valuable understanding that can help us show deeper love, kindness, and compassion to all living creatures.

In this issue of *Earth Letter*, we explore different manifestations of empathy. We will learn from Dr. Katharine Hayhoe how to talk about climate change with people of faith, including those who find it to be a polarizing issue; break down binaries with Earth Ministry Operations Coordinator Hunter Paulson-Smith; hear how empathetic interfaith relationships helped create a support network after a synagogue and mosque were targets of hate crimes; and get a taste of environmental justice and right relationships at Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago.

Empathy is the key that can unlock the door to kindness and compassion. It requires us to understand how someone else is feeling and respond in a thoughtful, caring manner. The Earth Ministry team invites you to walk with us as we focus on fostering empathy to build a better world together.



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](http://www.earthministry.org) or by calling (206) 632-2426. Thank you for your support!

### Colleagues and Congregations

We are happy to welcome First United Methodist Church in Seattle as our newest Greening Congregation with a banner presentation in late March. In addition, Earth Ministry/WAIPL recently made presentations at Bothell United Methodist Church, the Greening Congregations Collaborative of Whidbey Island, Christ our Hope Catholic Church, Prospect Congregational United Church of Christ (UCC), Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church, Magnolia UCC, Seattle Pacific University, and Fautleroy UCC.

Our Spring Colleague Gathering was an in-depth training for faith leaders to gather signatures for Initiative 1631 in their spiritual communities – see below for more information on Earth Ministry/WAIPL's involvement in that exciting campaign. As we near the one-year mark of our new Colleague Connection program, it continues to grow – 85 individuals have joined and more in-person meetings are being coordinated by Colleagues. If you're interested in getting involved in the supportive network of a Colleague Connection in your region, email [jessica@earthministry.org](mailto:jessica@earthministry.org).



*Two youth from First UMC with their church's new Greening Congregation banner*

### Loaves and Fishes

Tribes who have lived in the Columbia Basin for millennia have watched salmon runs decline and tribal lifeways become disrupted. At the request of the Upper Columbia United Tribes and Nimiipuu (Nez Perce) Protecting the Environment and in partnership with Save Our Salmon, Earth Ministry co-hosted three "Loaves and Fishes" events in Eastern Washington and Idaho this spring.

These well-attended events in Spokane, Moscow, and Walla Walla brought together tribal members, faith leaders, wheat farmers, and commercial fishermen to share a vision for the future of the region that benefits everyone. Those gathered discussed the importance of including Native tribes in renegotiating the Columbia River Treaty and how we can work together to save wild salmon, honor tribal treaties, and protect local farmers by removing dams on the Lower Snake River.

People of faith have an important voice in issues of justice and stewardship and can reach across cultural, regional, and political differences with grace. Our goal is to create forums where all opinions are welcome and honored in crafting durable solutions for the Inland Northwest.

### The "Other Washington"

Earth Ministry/WAIPL staff have been busy representing you in our nation's capital!

As part of the UCC Justice Leadership Program, Leda Zakarison and Hunter Paulson-Smith traveled to Washington, DC in April to participate in Ecumenical Advocacy Days along with 800 other faithful activists from around the country. The theme was "A World Uprooted: Responding to migrants, refugees and displaced people," which included the impacts that climate change is having on food and water security and how that affects immigration. Our staff put faith into action by visiting the offices of Washington State's elected officials and asking for compassion and justice for displaced people in the US and around the world.

Executive Director LeeAnne Beres was also in DC in May, joining 60 other religious leaders from 31 states at the national Interfaith Power & Light conference. As she has for the last five years, LeeAnne led a lobby training session to help prepare state leaders for visits to Capitol Hill. On lobby day, she met with members of the Washington State Congressional delegation in support of the EPA's Clean Cars Standard and other national climate and energy legislation.



### Celebrating Earth Month

We loved celebrating creation with you during Earth Month! We kicked off April with an interfaith trail cleanup with our partners at the Muslim Association of Puget Sound Nature, Outdoors, and Wilderness group (MAPS-NOW). Outreach Coordinator Leda Zakarison and Earth Ministry/WAIPL members spent the day restoring trails in Grand Ridge Park in Issaquah.

Later in the month, Plymouth United Church of Christ in Seattle hosted a contra dancing fundraiser, with all proceeds benefiting Earth Ministry/WAIPL. Board president Anna Dyer spoke at the event and had a great time meeting our supporters and – of course – dancing the night away!

We also enjoyed connecting with members at a happy hour at Lucky Envelope Brewing in Seattle. Thanks to all of our friends who came out to raise a glass to Earth Ministry!

We rounded out the month with a creation care-themed hike. Program & Outreach Director Jessica Zimmerle and friends of Earth Ministry/WAIPL spent a morning hiking at Twin Falls State Park and discussing our relationship with creation. It was a great way to slow down and reflect after a busy month celebrating our common home.



*Interfaith volunteers at the MAPS-NOW habitat restoration event*

### Initiative 1631: Clean Air and Clean Energy

Earth Ministry/WAIPL has worked for years with a broad coalition of partners in the Alliance for Jobs and Clean Energy to craft an equitable climate policy for our state, and now Washingtonians have the opportunity to get it on the ballot. Initiative 1631 will invest in clean energy, protect our communities' health, and create thousands of local jobs, all while cutting pollution.

The Yes on I-1631 campaign officially kicked off on May 10 with a press conference at El Centro de la Raza in Seattle. At the rally, we heard from everyday heroes including Fawn Sharpe, President of the Quinault Indian Nation, as well as a family physician, solar contractor, farm workers' union organizer, retired shop steward, and wildfire fighter. Earth Ministry board member Rev. Dr. Marilyn Cornwell also spoke about why people of faith support I-1631 because it aligns with our shared religious values of justice, responsibility, and stewardship.

Congregations across the state are putting their faith into action by collecting signatures for I-1631 to help it qualify for



*Rev. Dr. Marilyn Cornwell speaking at the Yes on 1631 press conference*

the November ballot. Over 100 houses of worship across the state are using Earth Ministry's faith leader signature gathering guide and factsheets to collect signatures in their congregations, and people of faith have already collected nearly 10,000 signatures (and counting!) People of faith will continue to have an important role to play to help get this initiative over the finish line. Email [leda@earthministry.org](mailto:leda@earthministry.org) to get involved. Together, we are creating a clean and healthy future for Washington!

### Clergy Standing with the Puyallup Tribe

"Natural gas," which in reality is "fracked gas," is the next big fossil fuel industry threat to Northwest Native tribes, with an immediate danger in the form of a liquefied natural gas (LNG) plant being built in Tacoma. This 8 million-gallon plant would store and distribute highly volatile

fuel on an existing Superfund site, locking our region into another polluting fossil fuel for at least 40 years.

The most significant moral concern regarding this project is the environmental injustice of it being located directly adjacent to the land of the Puyallup Tribe, which has been outspoken against the LNG plant from the start. Both the Tribal Council and Native activists known as Water Warriors have raised significant concerns about tribal sovereignty and consultation, safety dangers for their community, Puget Sound water quality, and the health of nearby wetlands and the entire Tidelands ecosystem.

In partnership with the Puyallup, Earth Ministry/WAIPL is circulating a sign-on letter for Northwest clergy supporting the Tribe's request that a stop-work order be issued to Puget Sound Energy. A Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) has been ordered for the project and construction should be halted until the environmental review is complete and all required permits are obtained. Please encourage your pastor, rabbi, or imam to sign through [www.earthministry.org](http://www.earthministry.org).

*The Tacoma LNG facility under construction*





# The Danger of Binaries By Hunter Paulson-Smith

In the United States, we are socialized to see ourselves as separate, both from each other and from Earth. The boxes that confine us give comfort and tell us where the boundaries of identity are. What if we opened our eyes a little wider? What if we saw the spectrum that falls between the binaries? What if we saw ourselves and the Earth not as separate entities, but as intricately connected?

As a society we are obsessed with binaries. It takes patience and insight to see the gray in life, the space between black and white. Slowly, we are starting to learn how to hold multiple perspectives at the same time.

More than ever before, young people are boldly claiming their identities as transgender and non-binary. Being non-binary is an umbrella term that means an individual does not conform to being male or female. When thinking about the complexities of gender, the most important thing to understand is that a person's assigned sex and gender identity are distinct and don't necessarily align. A person's gender is not chained to the body they were born with and its corresponding assumptions.

Just as the world is ever changing and complex, so are our genders and identities. If we pause before making an assumption about someone based on their appearance, we leave more space for humanity to enter the fold. Creating this space

is an important way we live out our call as people of faith to love our neighbors.

A big part of my identity-forming journey was looking past my body as a cage and confining box. Although I was born with what is typically thought of as a "male" body, I've realized my identity is too big and complex to fit into the box I was originally assigned.

Working at Earth Ministry has helped me understand how "either-or" thinking affects how we think about the world around us. Although they may seem unrelated at first glance, a nuanced understanding of gender and binaries in general can be a helpful lens to see environmental stewardship in a new way. Much like we perceive binaries and the boundaries of our bodies as separations from each other, sometimes we humans consider ourselves separate and above the rest of creation. This idea contributes to our desire for and justification of dominance of Earth, rather than stewardship. It's a deep-rooted problem that creates apathy and dissuades urgency about climate change and other environmental issues.

Thinking that we're separate from Earth gives us the illusion that our fates are separate as well.

If we open our minds to the spectrum of humanity rather than checking one column or another, we may see how we are interconnected. And, through this new lens, we might see the interconnectivity in all of creation as well.

My hope is that we can start looking beyond the walls that separate us and start seeing the humanity in each other and the value in all of creation.



# Connectivity and Community By Hunter Paulson-Smith

Who are you not seeing? Are there people blending into the backdrop of your day-to-day life? Where does dualistic thinking put up barriers to authentic relationship?

In these times of division, we are conditioned to not see people who are different from us, or to see them as less than or inherently separate. Much of this mentality is driven by corporations who know that keeping communities disjointed and unfocused on our shared home is profitable to those in power.

The solution is not to say that everyone is the same, washing over the beauty of diversity or the challenges of inequitable access to power and resources. Yet we do need to start finding more common ground. Seeing people as “other” has a tendency to make us more apathetic and complicit in the oppression of those who are different from us. Breaking through some of these barriers to connect with one another makes it more possible to change the status quo of individualism.

If we look at historical paradigm shifts, we see the power of connection and community. In the abolition and civil rights eras, and in current movements such as Black Lives Matter, Me Too, and many more, we see that progress is possible when people stand together. People of faith have an important role to play in building these bridges.

Leaning into this value of collaboration, Earth Ministry works hard to bring people together and spark new dialogue.

In Eastern Washington, we’re hosting a series of Loaves and Fishes events that connect Native leaders, farmers, fishermen, and religious leaders around our shared hopes for salmon recovery. Earth Ministry recognizes that now is the time for open dialogue and conversations about salmon and dams, barges and irrigation, and treaty rights and the health of our rivers.

In the last year, over 80 Earth Ministry members have joined a Colleague Connection, fostering deeper regional partnerships across faith traditions and congregations. Through community building efforts like these, Earth Ministry is working to celebrate diversity and lift up individuals as a part of the collective whole.

Our current advocacy focus on Initiative 1631 also holds collaboration at its core. Over the last three years, we have worked with a broad coalition including social justice, communities of color, health, labor, and business organizations calling for an equitable price on carbon that reduces pollution, creates green jobs, and invests in local communities. This initiative, which we are now working to get on the ballot, holds that the people most impacted by climate change must have a meaningful voice in shaping the state’s climate policy. Bringing together a broad range of stakeholders is how we succeed in truly creating a just transition to clean energy.



*Hunter Paulson-Smith collecting signatures for I-1631*

Earth Ministry has invested in our work with Loaves and Fishes, Colleague Connections, and I-1631 because we truly believe that they are steps toward a more equitable and neighborly Northwest.

Traditional binary thinking, whether it be about gender, the environment, economics, or even faith traditions, keeps us stagnant as a society. The constructs of these boundary lines convince us that this is the way things are, always have been, and always will be. Once we start seeing the connectivity between all people and between us and Earth, while upholding values of diversity and equity we become free, and we gain immense power to overcome the injustices that drive us apart.

Now is the time for a paradigm shift. Please join us in working toward connectivity and community.

.....  
*Hunter Paulson-Smith is Earth Ministry/  
 WA IPL’s Operations Coordinator.*

# Chicago Church Pursues Environmental Justice

## “By Any Greens Necessary” By Celeste Kennel-Shank

A mile and a half from Trinity United Church of Christ, along 95th Street in Chicago, is the recently dedicated site of the church’s Imani Village.

In the heart of the South Side, close by an expressway and the El tracks, Imani Village is a 27-acre project that will include a five-acre farm providing training for green jobs for people who have been released from prison. Plans also call for residential housing for seniors, athletics space for youth, and a primary care clinic focusing on preventative care offered through a partnership with a local hospital system.

Trinity UCC’s emphasis on environmental concerns is not secondary in its ministry—it flows from a green theology that shapes everything the congregation does.

A billboard on 95th Street promoting the farmers market Trinity sponsors carries the phrase “By any greens necessary,” echoing civil rights advocate Malcolm X’s words about the global black struggle for freedom.

“When we speak of environmental justice in the global economy, we’re talking about communities of color who will be adversely affected by climate change,” said senior pastor Otis Moss III. Additionally, “Africa, South America, and Asia have been utilized as a garden by European colonialism for over a century. Ecojustice is a way for everyone on the planet to recognize our common connection to the earth and our common connection to each other.”

Moss describes the approach as theological biomimicry—looking to the earth as an example of how to build relationships that are not oppressive.

“When we recognize the interdependence and interconnection in nature, we begin to build human systems that are independent and interconnected, based on justice and

love,” he said. “Nature recognizes that everyone has a purpose in the larger sacred economy. Capitalism doesn’t have that lens.”

This vision fuels their efforts not only to care for the earth, but to employ the marginalized and develop a just economic base for the community.

“It takes longer this way,” Moss said of the ministry, since it involves educating the congregation on why the cheapest building options aren’t always the best ones, as well as finding hyperlocal, black contractors who are able to connect with the vision.

The approach builds on Trinity’s legacy as a congregation that is “unashamedly black and unapologetically Christian.” Its longtime pastor Jeremiah Wright Jr., now pastor emeritus, was known for his prophetic preaching. Barack and Michelle Obama and their daughters attended Trinity when they lived in Chicago.

Trinity’s emphasis on green ministry began in earnest six years ago when it decided to renovate its building. Renovations are underway to make it certified in Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design by the U.S. Green Building Council.



*Monica Brown Moss, Paula Anglin, and Otis Moss III in Trinity United Church of Christ’s George Washington Carver organic garden*





Trinity United Church of Christ  
Farmers Market

Work is currently being completed on a green roof for the two-decades-old building—one that collects and cleans rainwater, among other benefits. Rosalyn Priester, a Trinity deacon and longtime member, was part of the multiyear \$5 million fundraising campaign for the project. The congregation did a listening tour to share the idea with the community and for a year someone at each service spoke about why they gave.

“What is so marvelous about what’s happening at Trinity is that it’s not something that’s abstract, it’s real in our everyday lives,” she said. “It’s not something on the agenda to preach about a couple of times a year.”

Environmental sustainability was not initially familiar to everyone in the congregation, but church leaders have been consistent in describing it and embodying it over the years, she said. Projects such as changing the sanctuary lighting or using green building techniques for a new patio make that manifest.

“I see us still growing as a church and caring for the spiritual and the physical needs of our members, being concerned with them in a holistic manner,” she said. “That is an indication of the love for the people and the community.”

The congregation’s variety of green ministries strive to educate people and help them apply the knowledge, said Monica Brown Moss, Trinity’s village wellness coordinator.

“My whole focus is helping people prepare and enjoy real food as families,” she said. “I want people to discover the healing power of real food,” as opposed to “processed, packaged, preservative-filled” options.

She learned a green sensibility and use-what-you-have mentality from her parents and grandparents. “The whole idea of eating from the land, growing and cultivating, that was second nature to me,” she said.

When she moved to Chicago, she saw right away that people didn’t have ready access to healthy foods: “Fresh produce is cost-prohibitive for people and extremely limited in certain areas of the city. But we’re making progress.”

The farmers market is one way the church works for food justice. At the market, she and others give demonstrations on cooking healthy food and exercise. In this way Trinity’s green ministries serve both church members and people who live in

the community. Last year the farmers market reached 2,500 people. This summer it was on track to reach 4,000.

The congregation has also turned land across from before the sanctuary that Monica Brown Moss described as “just a vacant, junky lot” into the George Washington Carver organic garden and Barbara Allen butterfly garden, named after a late minister of the church who loved butterflies. A mural in the garden honors George Washington Carver, who was born into slavery and became a botanist and innovator, and cites Amos 9:14 with the phrase “they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.”

Food from the garden contributes to the Kitchen, another ministry of the church, which offers breakfast and dinner every Sunday, including a healthy option that is increasingly popular. The Kitchen is working on having more of the food supplied by the farmers market. Once the farm at Imani Village is up and running, it will contribute as well.

In all of these projects and more, Trinity aims to build intergenerational connections and influence the next generations’ habits of healthy, sustainable living, Monica Brown Moss said. “We are trying to get our children to see that this is for their children.”

---

*Celeste Kennel-Shank is news editor of the Christian Century and also serves with a garden ministry and in health-care chaplaincy.*

Copyright © 2017 by the *Christian Century*. “Chicago Church Pursues Environmental Justice ‘By Any Greens Necessary’” by Celeste Kennel-Shank is reprinted by permission from the September 2017 issue of the *Christian Century*.

# Empathetic Interfaith Relationships in Response to Hate

Rabbi Seth Goldstein states plainly what we are all feeling in our hearts these days: “We are living in challenging times, in which it seems hate is given new sanction and attacks against individuals and groups are treated as normative.”

Given the unfortunate rise of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia across the United States, how do we counter this hate with love of our neighbors? How do we then go above and beyond to exhibit empathy to targeted communities and individuals, and take action for their safety and well-being? Earth Ministry/WAIPL turned to two of our partners in Olympia, Washington to share their thoughts – Rabbi Seth Goldstein of Temple Beth Hatfiloh and Mustafa Mohamedali of the Islamic Center of Olympia (Masjid Al-Nur).

Temple Beth Hatfiloh and the Islamic Center of Olympia have both faced upsetting hate crimes that have spurred an outpouring of support from the broader community. In March of this year, both houses of worship were disrespected by an individual standing outside with inflammatory signs urging repentance and belief in Jesus. In response to this and other threats, residents of Olympia brought flowers and their own signs of support. In addition, a record number of people attended the Islamic Center’s next First Friday Open House, a monthly opportunity to learn about Islam and get to know members of the local Muslim community.

Goldstein and Mohamedali both highlight the importance of authentic relationships as the foundation of empathy. The better we know one another, the easier it is to imagine ourselves in each other’s shoes. Together we can then take the next step to stand up for justice. May their words inspire you to do so.

## **Rabbi Seth Goldstein**

*I and my congregation of Temple Beth Hatfiloh in Olympia have become more alert and attentive, as we know that anti-Semitism is on the rise. We know this personally since my congregation has been the target of violence: a few years ago a swastika appeared on a statue next to our building. We do not know the motivation; the graffiti was not accompanied by any overt threats. Yet to have painted on our building this symbol of hate, with its particular echoes of the Holocaust, was unnerving to say the least.*

*As a Jewish community, we have always had to address issues of security for our congregation, both of our physical home and of our people who convene there for worship, study, and fellowship. The swastika heightened this need for us, and we have taken certain new safety measures, such as cameras, the routine locking of doors, and better procedures for monitoring who enters the building and when.*

*Through it all, what seems to be the best security measure is strong relationships, both within the congregation and among our interfaith friends and neighbors. As soon*



*Mustafa Mohamedali (left) Rabbi Seth Goldstein (second from left) and other religious leaders standing up for justice in Olympia, WA*



as news got out that a swastika was painted on the building, we had an outpouring of support. Not long after, we held a large unity rally on the bridge that connects the east and west sides of Olympia. This would not have been possible if the Jewish community was not actively engaged in the greater Olympia community. It was our relationships—knowing we were not alone and that there were others to stand up for us—that provided us the greatest sense of safety.

It is people caring about each other and looking out for one another that is going to provide a true sense of security. Unfortunately, we know things are always going to happen. But if we develop strong relationships based on trust and mutual support, if we get to know our neighbors, and especially if we reach out to those who are unlike us, then if something does happen, there will be those to lend a hand and raise a fist. We will not be alone in the face of hatred.

---

*Rabbi Seth Goldstein serves at Temple Beth Hatfiloh in Olympia and is the President of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association.*



---

### **Mustafa Mohamedali**

In the 7th century, nearly a century after the death of the prophet Muhammad, a Muslim [lady] scholar, Rabiá Al-Basri, celebrated for her love and empathy, is reported to have said something very poignant that resonates to this day: "My soul is so deeply filled with the love of my Lord, I have no room for hate." Empathy starts from within and spreads to our loved ones, family, friends, neighbors, community, and then the world. There is no us versus them. There is only us.

I believe Rabiá's inspiration was not accidental. The Qur'an (41:34) implores us, "Nor can goodness and Evil be equal. Repel (Evil) with that which is better: then will he between whom and thee was hatred become as it were thy intimate friend!" The prophet himself is reported (Tirmidhi) to have said, "Those who are merciful will be shown mercy by the Most Merciful. Be merciful to those on the earth and the One in the heavens will have mercy upon you."

We must study our individual scripture and emphasize the core universal values of justice, equality, peace, respect, love, and compassion for all. It is up to each individual, spiritual leader, and community to speak vocally against hatred within our communities toward those who seek to divide us. We must rally together and start a revolution of empathy. We must counter hate with love, fear with hope, and injustice with justice. Humanity is like one body. When one limb is injured, the whole body suffers. As Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

I end with another verse from the Qur'an (49:13) that I believe embodies the essence of humanity and our God-given diversity: "O Mankind. We created you from a single pair of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may learn from each other (not so that you may despise and fight each other), for verily the closest to me amongst you is the one most righteous."

---

*Mustafa Mohamedali is the Social Secretary of the Islamic Center of Olympia and a licensed civil engineer and project management professional.*

# The Importance of Kindness: Teaching Empathy Through Interaction with Nature

By Melissa Harding

Everyone wants to be liked. There is an inherent human need to feel like an accepted member of a group. That is why many of us join clubs and professional organizations. We all feel our best when we think we are liked for who we are; it makes us happy.

However, if the number of books on happiness research are any indication, we are all striving to be happier. This can be especially difficult for children, who are learning to navigate the social landscape as they go. Fortunately, there is new research from the Krasnow Institute for Advanced Study at George Mason University that suggests the best way for children to feel liked and accepted by their peers, to feel happy, is through practicing kindness.

A sense of empathy, or the ability to put oneself into the shoes of another, is the basis for kindness; if a person is empathetic, he is able to read a situation and put the needs of

others above his own. Prompting people to engage in pro-social behaviors, such as helping others, increases feelings of well-being; conversely, people who are happy are much more likely to help others.

In an experiment conducted in 19 classrooms in Vancouver, 9- to 11-year-olds were instructed to perform three acts of kindness per week over the course of four weeks. A control group of students was asked to visit three places in the same time frame. Students in both groups showed improved feelings of well-being, but students who performed acts of kindness experienced greater peer acceptance than students from the control group. In essence, those students who were kinder and more empathetic to others were more popular and well-liked.

With the high incidence of bullying in schools, as well as spikes in depression and anxiety in students, this is an idea worth considering. Peer acceptance is an important goal, as it increases a sense of well-being.

Empathy is not only an essential social skill but an academic one; research shows that successful learners are not only knowledgeable but also empathetic. Successful students excel not only in the classroom but in the community. The ability to be empathetic is found naturally in all of us but requires nurturing to be properly developed. One way to teach these skills is through engagement with nature.





Children often have a natural affinity with the natural world, especially animals. Animals are a constant source of wonder for children, baby animals in particular; children naturally feel emotionally invested in animals. This fact is well known in the medical community; there are a growing number of pet and equine therapy programs for children who are the victims of abuse or who have mental illness.

Owning a pet, volunteering at an animal shelter, or caring for a class pet are all ways that children can bond directly with animals. The bond that forms between child and animal has been shown to increase social competence and sense of wellbeing. As a child cares for and nurtures an animal, he or she develops a sense of empathy, which in turn promotes pro-social behaviors toward other people.

Another way to create a sense of empathy is through creating a sense of place. Whether it is a backyard or a local park, allowing children the time and freedom to explore, play in and care for a green space will create an affinity with the area.

Research shows that those children with a sense of place are also more likely to turn their love of one place into a love for all of nature; this creates a sense of empathy with the natural world. Even caring for plants, for instance in the form of gardening, is beneficial. Spending time outside with trusted adults and watching them demonstrate their own care for nature helps to form a child's sense of stewardship for the plants and animals within it.

Among those plants and animals are people, which are surely also part of nature. As children learn to treat the world around them with respect and care, so they will also treat each other. Caring for each other is an important part of any community. The more able children are to act with kindness, the more successful and happy they will become.



This article originally appeared on the blog of Phipps Conservatory, where Melissa Harding was the Phipps Science Education Specialist: [www.phipps.conservatory.org/blog](http://www.phipps.conservatory.org/blog).

*Earth Letter* Summer 2018 Photo Credits

Cover: Living Water International  
Page 4: MAPS-NOW; Yes on 1631  
Page 6: Peter Bonges  
Page 8: Celeste Kennel-Shank/  
Christian Century  
Page 9: Trinity UCC  
Page 10–11: Islamic Center of Olympia  
Page 12: Tony Brown  
Page 13: California State Fair  
Page 14: FishInWater  
Page 15: US Department of Agriculture  
Page 16: TheZyphix  
All others: Earth Ministry

*Continued from page 1*

1. **Bonding and Connecting**

What do we have in common, that we both already care about and is affected by climate change?

2. **Explaining**

Why is this happening? Why might we [both] care?

3. **Inspiring**

How can we work together to tackle this problem in a way that is compatible with our values?

Let me give you examples of each of these three things so you see what I'm talking about.

**Bonding and Connecting**

Start a conversation from a place of a shared value or concern or love or care, no matter how trivial it is, as long as it's important to us. It could be fishing. I used to fish a lot. Or hunting or birding or hiking or skiing. Could it be the fact that we're both parents?

In the United States, over 75% of the people belong to a faith tradition. And every single major faith tradition has at its core the concepts of stewardship or responsibility over the planet and caring for those who are more vulnerable or less fortunate than us. That is one of the big things that we have in common.

The bottom line is, we all want a safe place to live, clean air to breathe, clean water to drink, enough food to eat, a healthy economy where we and our kids and our families can get a job. Just about every single person on the planet has the values they need to care about climate change already. We just have to figure out what those are through asking questions, conversing, getting to know them. And then we can connect the dots to climate.



Let me share from my heart with you why, as a mother, I am very concerned about a changing climate. Let me share with you as a Christian, as a former missionary kid, why I'm concerned about how climate change will affect the poorest among us. Let me share with you from the perspective of national security why I'm concerned about what the military has to say about this. Let me share with you from an economic perspective, as a fiscal conservative, about how we have some serious issues to confront.

We start from the place of shared values and then connect them to a changing climate.

**Explaining**

If we need to, after we've connected the dots, then we can do some explaining. Yes, it really is real; it's us; scientists do agree. It matters because it affects us by exacerbating the risks we already face today.

What do those risks look like? They look like stronger hurricanes along the Gulf and the Atlantic Coasts. They look like wildfires burning greater and greater areas as beetles eat our forests in the West. It looks like what used to be permanently frozen ground thawing and crumbling under people's homes, up in the Arctic. Or it looks like increased risk of heavy precipitation and flooding in the South.

We can explain these things. We can explain how we've always been prone to billion-dollar weather and climate disasters and how many of these we've had since 1980. We care about a changing climate because it takes these risks and it exacerbates them, amplifies them.

We found out that 15-40 percent of the rainfall associated with Hurricane Harvey would not have happened if we had this same hurricane 50-100 years ago when the world wasn't as warm. Because in a warmer world, more water evaporates, so there's more water vapor for a big storm like Harvey to sweep up and dump on us. Climate change didn't cause Harvey, but it exacerbated or amplified it, increasing the





*Natural Resources and Conservation Service District Conservationist J.M. Villarreal (left) and Arrowhead Farms owner Akram Mohammad show off pecans grown using a micro irrigation drip watering system in Texas*

amount of rainfall associated with Harvey and also increasing the area it flooded.

### **Inspiring**

We cannot end without talking about how we can work together to fix this problem. And the number one thing to remember when we're talking about solutions is it's not about being afraid. Paul writes to Timothy, "God has not given us the spirit of fear" (2 Tim 1:7). So if you feel a spirit of fear, that's not from God. What God has given us is power to get things done, love to care for others, and a sound mind to make good decisions.

We're also told that there isn't a specific thing that everybody needs to do. The metaphor that is used in the Bible is that of a body. Each of us has a different role. Each of us has a different ministry. Everyone gets in on it. Everyone benefits.

One of the first things that we can do may surprise you. It's talking about it. When asked, "Do you hear somebody else even talking about this issue?" 75 percent of people in the U.S. said rarely or never. Nobody ever talks about this issue. Why?

Because it's contentious, it's politicized, they're afraid they're going to start an argument, and it's depressing.

So let me give you some talking points that are not depressing.

We can talk about how people are taking sensible steps to prepare for a changing climate. In West Texas, farmers are putting in drip irrigation to be more conservative with their water and save money. In the Netherlands, people are building floating villages. So if sea level rises three, five, even eight feet, so what? You buy a few more feet of anchor chain and you're done.

In Texas, Fort Hood, the biggest military base in the U.S., decided to go with wind and solar over natural gas last year in order to save taxpayers over \$165 million. By the end of 2017, Texas had generated 18% of its energy from wind. Every year we're growing in the amount of wind energy that we generate. In Georgetown, a small town north of Austin,

they've decided to go green because three students from the local college in the business program ran the calculations and made a pitch to City Council about how they could save money.

We can talk about how solar energy is being used to end energy poverty in sub-Saharan Africa, where hundreds of millions of people are living without any energy. We can talk about how we can use God's gifts to us—wind, sun, tides that will never run out—to help end energy poverty and invest in people's lives.

We can talk about what we're doing ourselves as well. One of the first things we can do is step on the carbon scales, measure our footprint. Because how would you know how much weight to lose if you don't weigh yourself? How do you know how much carbon to lose if you don't weigh your carbon footprint?

So how do we talk about climate change? We can do so by bonding over our shared values, explaining why climate change matters, and finding ways that we can work together to act. Because the bottom line really is this: The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. (Galatians 5:6)

.....  
*Dr. Katharine Hayhoe is a professor in the Department of Political Science and director of the Climate Science Center at Texas Tech University. This article is a partial transcription of the webinar "Communicating Climate Change to People of Faith," February 20, 2018, sponsored by the Catholic Climate Covenant: [CatholicClimateCovenant.org](http://CatholicClimateCovenant.org).*

EARTH MINISTRY/WAIPL  
6512 23RD AVE NW, STE 317  
SEATTLE, WA 98117-5728

Address Services Requested

NON PROFIT ORG  
US POSTAGE  
PAID  
SEATTLE WA  
PERMIT NO 1886

*A compassionate community will not be achieved only through prayer; I pray myself, but I accept its limitations. We need to take action to develop compassion, to create inner peace within ourselves and to share that inner peace with our family and friends. Peace and warm-heartedness can then spread through the community just as ripples radiate out across the water when you drop a pebble into a pond.*

– The Dalai Lama



[www.earthministry.org](http://www.earthministry.org)

[www.waipl.org](http://www.waipl.org)