



## Sacred Encounters in Salmon Nation

By Rev. John Rosenberg

In the Pacific Northwest, encounters with the sacred are as likely to occur in the natural world as in church. For many, those encounters involve salmon.

None of this is news to the indigenous people of the region for whom salmon are at the heart of their spiritual and economic lives. But salmon are also deep in the souls of nearly everyone else who encounters them as well.

In a place where every school child can recite the life cycle of the salmon, the link between salmon and spirit is not surprising. From an early age, children learn the story of the salmon's birth in the river gravel of their native watersheds and how the tiny fry begin their long journey to the ocean. The children are familiar with the countless obstacles, natural and human-made, that salmon face on their perilous odyssey and how, years later, a chosen few survivors return to the place where they were born to spawn, die and begin the cycle again.

Salmon inhabit the public art and architecture of our region. They are embedded in our sidewalks and light up our decks and Christmas trees. They are so ubiquitous that, as Tim Egan observed,

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## 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 (WA IPL) 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

No two Northwest species are more iconic than salmon and orcas. In fact, author Timothy Egan famously described the Northwest as "wherever the salmon can get to." Orcas, also known as killer whales, feature prominently in Coast Salish tribal legends and culture all along the Pacific Northwest coast.

No two species are more intertwined in this region, either – Chinook salmon are the major food source for Southern Resident Killer Whales. Found mostly off British Columbia, Washington, and Oregon, these orcas eat Chinook year-round, especially in the spring and summer when they occupy inland waters. As salmon runs have plummeted, so too have orcas, with only 75 individuals remaining and the population on the Endangered Species List.

In this issue of *Earth Letter*, we look at the intersection of salmon and orcas and the impact that humans have had – and can still have – on their continued survival. People of faith are actively engaged in efforts to restore these species to healthy numbers and to broker a dialogue between the people and interests who have a stake in the outcome: tribes, fishermen, farmers, conservationists, and civic leaders. The faith community is a vital partner in helping to facilitate these bridging conversations.

Egan said that "rivers without salmon have lost the life source of the area," and the same can be said about orcas in the Salish Sea. Working together we can restore the light in the river and beyond.

Blessings,



## GOINGS-ON at Earth Ministry

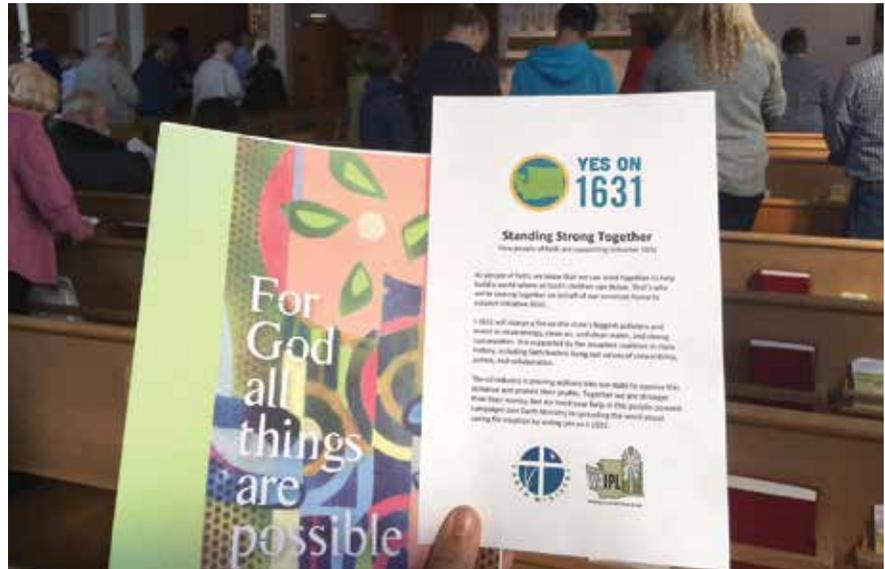
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### A Recap of Initiative 1631

After pouring our hearts and energy into I-1631, Washington's Clean Air and Clean Energy initiative, we were deeply disappointed that it did not pass in last November's election. Yet there is still joy to be found in how we worked together to put forward a vision for a clean energy future that honored our shared values. Many of you volunteered countless hours gathering signatures, educating your congregations, phone banking, and knocking on doors. We are so proud and grateful to have been, and still be, on this journey with all of you.

What we have not lost is the power of our connection with the broad team that drafted and supported I-1631. Speaking out as moral and religious leaders, our activists joined over 600 organizations and over 6500 volunteers coming together for clean air, clean energy, and the health of our communities in our state. In the Earth Ministry community, 200 people of faith gathered signatures and 125 religious communities showed their support – including 12 as pop-up offices and spaces for phone banks or canvasses. You truly put your faith in action, and together we will continue to channel the strength and determination we gathered through this campaign.

Attributed to Gandhi though he never said it, this quote does summarize his work and ours: "First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win." Though the Big Oil companies outspent us two to one, we are close to winning. We will continue to work together for climate action on behalf of God's creation, our descendants, and the common good.



### Fossil Fuels and Land Use

Earth Ministry/WAIPL is continuing our faithful advocacy to halt fossil fuel infrastructure across the Northwest. People of faith helped pass an ordinance in King County to prevent new fossil fuel infrastructure and successfully advocated for a similar interim regulation to be renewed for an additional six months in Tacoma. These land use strategies provide elected leaders with time to assess how best to steward their jurisdictions given the reality of a changing climate.

In an ongoing relationship of solidarity, Earth Ministry is organizing the faith community to stand with the Puyallup Tribe in opposition to the liquefied natural gas (LNG) plant being built next to their land and waters. In response to a request from the Tribe, we wrote, circulated, and delivered to the governor a clergy letter signed by 100 leaders who amplified the Puyallup and 14 other tribes' request for a stop-work order on the project. We also trained and mobilized people of faith to participate in the supplemental EIS comment period and to testify at a public hearing on the project's greenhouse gas emissions.

### 2019 Legislative Session

Each year, Earth Ministry/WAIPL builds the moral foundation for environmental justice in the state legislature by supporting bills that align with our values of caring for the most vulnerable and stewardship of God's creation. Here are some of our priorities for Washington's 2019 Legislative Session:

- **100% Clean Electricity** (HB 1211/SB 5116): Ensuring that Washington State's electricity is fully powered by 100% clean energy by 2045.
- **Clean Fuel Standard** (HB 1110/SB 5412): Reducing the carbon intensity of transportation fuels by 20% by 2035.
- **Oil Spill Prevention Act** (HB 1578/SB 5578): Implementing protections to prevent oil spills in the Salish Sea.
- **Orca Emergency Response** – Pollution Prevention for Our Future Act (HB 1194/SB 5135): Protecting vulnerable populations, like children and orcas, from five especially dangerous classes of chemicals.
- **Reusable Bag Act** (HB 1205/SB 5323): Eliminating thin carry-home plastic bags at all retail establishments.

We have been active in collaborative efforts to elevate these bills, including the 100% Clean kickoff event in Tacoma and Environmental Lobby Day at the state capitol. The world felt a bit topsy-turvy when we were able to make it to Spokane to lead the environmental workshop at the Eastern Washington

Legislative Conference but then were snowed out from gathering for Interfaith Advocacy Day in Olympia! However, this year's legislative session runs through late April so we are hosting several faith-based "mini lobby days" and will continue to empower faithful advocates to speak truth to power.

### Congregations and Colleagues

Throughout the flurry of last fall's campaigns and 2019's legislative session, Earth Ministry staff has been giving presentations all over the state! In Seattle we presented to Congregation Beth Shalom, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle Unity, Admiral UCC, University Temple UMC, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Holy Rosary Catholic Church, Ballard First Lutheran Church, and Fauntleroy UCC.

We also taught at St. Mark's Lutheran by the Narrows and Trinity Presbyterian in Tacoma, United Church in University Place, Newport Presbyterian and Nativity Lutheran in Renton, St. Joseph Catholic Church in Vancouver, Lutheran Church

*Earth Ministry supporters at the Washington State Capitol*



of the Good Shepherd in Olympia, Grace Episcopal on Bainbridge Island, Community Congregational UCC in Pullman, Shalom UCC in Richland, New Pilgrims in Anacortes, and the Greening Congregations Collaborative on Whidbey Island.

Organizationally, Earth Ministry/WAIPL was represented at events with the Muslim Association of Puget Sound, the Renton Ecumenical Association of Churches, and at the Unitarian Universalist Justice Summit. We also were honored to present at the Church Council of Greater Seattle's Weaving Our Strengths conference in Seattle and at the international Parliament of World Religions gathering in Toronto, Canada.

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The Earth Ministry community has been weathering the winter together. In late November, Earth Ministry facilitated an election debrief colleague gathering at which 25 faith leaders reflected on the good work faith communities did to support I-1631 and strategized around what comes next. Early in 2019, two Earth Ministry Colleague Connections have met in-person to get to know other local faith leaders and kick off regular collaborative networking.

## Earth Ministry's New Home

After 18 years of our office being housed at Trinity United Methodist Church in Seattle, Earth Ministry is moving to a new home. As of mid-April, we will be working out of St. John United Lutheran Church.

St. John United is a longtime partner of Earth Ministry and a Greening Congregation that shares our passion for climate justice and stewardship. We are grateful for their gracious welcome, as well as for the long-time hospitality of Trinity UMC. Many thanks also to everyone in our network who shared leads on office space when we were searching!

Here's our new address:  
Earth Ministry  
5515 Phinney Ave N  
Seattle, WA 98103



*Earth Ministry members and Colleagues at a recent gathering*



## A Sacred Trust By Rachel Shinabarger

“So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good” (Gen 1:21, ESV).

The Bible opens with the narrative of God forming the world and declaring it good. It shows the world as it was intended to be, and each part of creation has a role to play. The creatures of the sea, the land, and the sky, and last but not least: humanity.

As part of the creation narrative, God instructed humanity to steward the great gift of the Earth. Caring for creation is not simply a responsibility, it was part of the *first* biblical directive, often referred to as the “creation mandate” from Genesis 1:28b.

As David Rhodes, Professor of New Testament at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, states, “Being stewards of creation is foundational to what it means to be human. Caring for creation is not an add-on, not a sideline, not related just to part of our calling. It represents our proper human relationship to Earth. This portrayal puts human beings squarely in a caretaker position in regard to environmental stewardship.” Religious stewardship is seen as a sacred trust.

The Genesis story paints a picture of the world as a harmonious, balanced ecosystem where humans, animals, and plants can all thrive. Unfortunately, when one part of an ecosystem falters, the rest suffers with it.

This interconnectedness can be seen through the current suffering of Northwest salmon and orcas. Salmon runs are dwindling due to human-caused habitat destruction and hydroelectric dams that block their migration route. Orcas are starving without adequate supply of their main food source: the disappearing salmon.

And people are noticing and sharing the heartache of our kin in the web of creation. It was not just the mother orca Tahlequah who mourned her dead calf; we all mourned with her.

As someone who recently moved to the Pacific Northwest, I’m still learning about the depth of relationship between people here and the salmon and orcas. But I can confidently say I’ve noticed how iconic these species are. Both are present across culture and conversation, in legend and lore. It’s easy to appreciate these marine creatures. Salmon have long provided sustenance for indigenous peoples and local communities, and many Northwest residents have grown up witnessing the persistent migration of salmon. With their powerful sense of empathy, along with high levels of intelligence, orcas easily inspire a sense of awe as beautiful giants of the sea.

Every Sunday I cross Puget Sound by ferry on my way to Eagle Harbor United Church of Christ, and I am briefly away from human-dominated spaces. For a few moments I’m surrounded by the stillness of the sea – wondering what creatures teem beneath and hoping for a rare glimpse of an orca surfacing. When I return to the city I bring with me a sense of my existence alongside the rest of creation. Our own well-being is intertwined with our local marine residents. Salmon and orcas deserve better stewardship so we can all thrive together, as God intended it to be.

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*Rachel Shinabarger is Earth Ministry’s Outreach Coordinator.*



# Shared Tables By Leda Zakarison

Shared tables create the space for conversation and mutual understanding that might not exist away from the table. Our sacred stories teach us this lesson, too – again and again, Jesus gathers his disciples to share simple meals of bread and fish. Faith can be what brings us to the table, and the relationships and connections we forge there have a lasting impact. This has certainly been my experience through the Loaves and Fishes events hosted by Earth Ministry.

In Eastern Washington, conversations about the Lower Snake River dams can be contentious. Driving through the Palouse, it’s not unusual to see “save our dams” bumper stickers. The four dams create a lock system that allows barges to ship grain to market. At the same time, the dams prevent many young salmon from reaching the ocean and have played a central role in reducing salmon populations by more than 90%. Many experts agree the only way to save this iconic species is to change how the dams are managed.

Growing up in the Palouse region of Eastern Washington, I learned this story from the farmers’ perspective – farmers need a way to get grain to market, and the dams create good energy for our state. After moving to Seattle and working at Earth Ministry, I started to uncover a different story. I learned that most farmers in Eastern Washington no longer use barges as their primary method of moving grain, and the four Lower Snake River dams only produce 4% of the region’s electricity – which, as found in a 2018 study by the NW Energy Coalition, can be reliably replaced with clean and renewable energy at a highly affordable cost.

And so I returned home to Pullman, nervous to tell my farming family about my changing thoughts on the dams. But when I broached the subject I found that they, too, were in support of dam removal. As I talked with people in the area, many more were willing to engage in this conversation than I had assumed.

When Earth Ministry began discussing the possibility of hosting dialogues on Snake River salmon recovery, sharing a meal seemed like a good place to start. Together, Earth Ministry and Save Our Wild Salmon partnered with the Upper Columbia United Tribes and Nimiipuu (Nez Perce) to host a series of Loaves and Fishes gatherings. We’ve hosted discussions in churches in Spokane, Walla Walla, and Moscow with faith leaders, farmers, commercial fishers, tribal members, and environmental experts – the parties who have a major stake in the conversation about dam removal. Local folks interested in learning more joined these community leaders for a simple meal.

As we shared bread baked from local wheat and salmon caught by commercial fishers whose names we knew, we found that everyone at the table shared a deep love of the Palouse and the Columbia River Basin, an appreciation for the beauty and bounty of the region, and a desire to protect and preserve this gift.

We may not solve the complex problem of salmon recovery in one night, but we are laying the foundation for bridges to be built. Coming together over a meal allows us to explore the places where we agree – and where we disagree – in order to move toward a solution that will protect our salmon and the livelihood of all Washingtonians.

*Leda Zakarison is a fourth-generation daughter of the Palouse and a former member of the Earth Ministry staff.*



**DISCUSSING THE FUTURE OF WHEAT AND WILD SALMON IN EASTERN WASHINGTON**

Join the Walla Walla faith community at 1st UCC to hear from local farmers, commercial fishermen, Northwest tribal members, and faith leaders about the challenges facing our region’s wild salmon, Native people, and food producers. Light refreshments to be served.

**12 April - 73 S Palouse St, Walla Walla, WA**  
**Doors open at 6:30pm || program at 7pm**  
 Please RSVP to [leda@earthministry.org](mailto:leda@earthministry.org)

## A Mother's Grief Changed Everything By Jessie Dye

The mother whale Tahlequah changed everything.

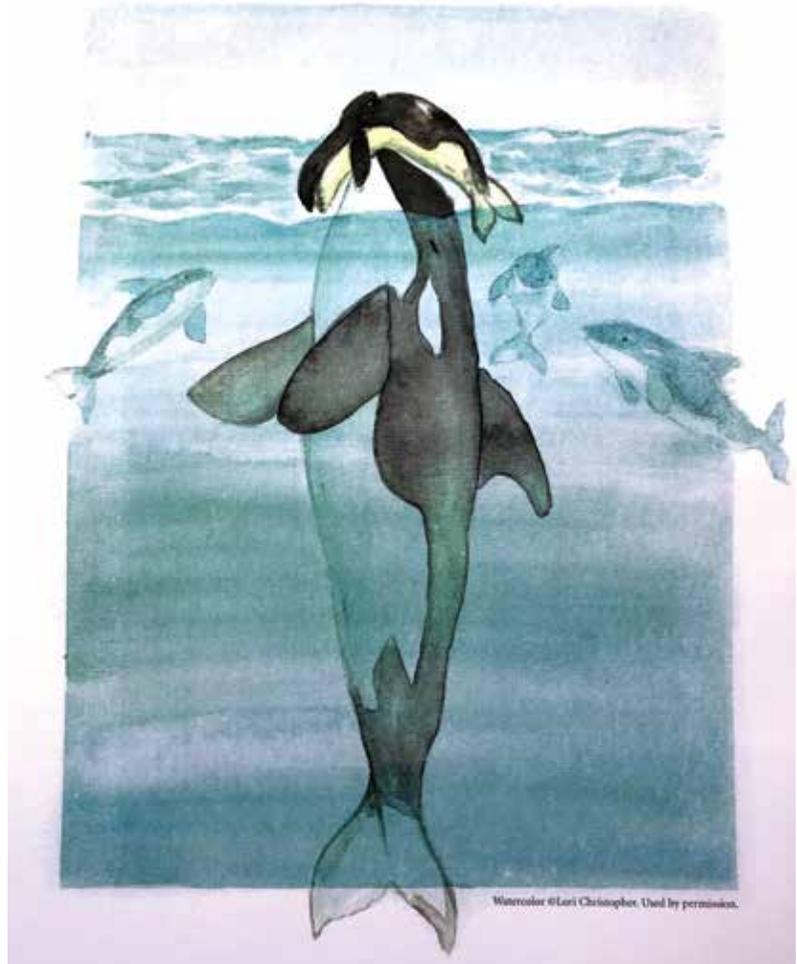
On July 24, 2018, Tahlequah, a 20-year-old undernourished orca, gave birth to a female calf – the first in the endangered pod in three years. Her baby died half an hour later, most likely from the effects of maternal starvation. Tahlequah could not restrain her grief. As the whole world watched, she balanced her deceased infant on her head, nudging the little whale's body back to the surface when it sank and carrying her infant for seventeen days in an act of profound grief.

The J-Pod of Southern Resident Killer Whales in Puget Sound is endangered and starving. Their only food source is Chinook salmon, which is also threatened. The pod faces three great pressures: lack of prey, noise, and pollution – of which chronic hunger is the most severe. The orcas need more salmon to survive.

What mother Tahlequah gave us through her grief is a window into how it feels to face extinction. As she swam the waters of the Salish Sea carrying the body of her calf, whale scientists and journalists reported on the losses of J-Pod, which has declined from almost 100 whales twenty years ago to only 75 now. Birth rates continue to fall and many of the few calves born to the pod fail to make it to their own reproductive maturity.

If elected leaders do not soon address food sources, noise, and pollution for these whales, human children born in the 21st century will not thrill to see wild orcas in the waters of Puget Sound. The Southern Residents will be no more.

Native communities and people of faith in Washington State understand that enabling extinction of species is not good stewardship of God's creation. Models of dominion and hierarchy, in which some social classes, races, and species are superior to others – and can therefore



take from those of a perceived lower order – are not consistent with either indigenous or Christian teaching.

In the Salish peoples' view of the world, like the ecological one, all beings have a unique place in the web of life and are related to one another. One species cannot be lost without a loss to all. No one creature has more intrinsic value than another. Indeed, the Christian concept of stewardship is the religious expression of the ecological word "sustainability." Pope Francis is unequivocal: "Clearly the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures." (*Laudato Si'*, 68).

In rural southeast Washington, far from Tahlequah's waters, along the banks of the Snake River in Washington and Idaho, the Nimiipuu (Nez Perce) people have fished for millennia. In recent decades, dams on the Lower Snake River have drastically reduced the number of salmon the tribe was guaranteed the right to fish for under the Treaty of 1855.

Fifteen years ago, the transport of Exxon Mobile megaloads of mining equipment threatened to destroy forests and streams through the Nimiipuu reservation. A small and deeply committed group of tribal leaders stood up to the companies moving the huge machines to excavate the tar sands of Alberta. Surprised and heartened by their success, these Native leaders formed Nimiipuu Protecting the Environment.

The group quickly became active in protecting the treaty rights of 1855, restoring salmon runs, and transmitting Nimiipuu culture to the next generation – including a love of fish and fishing. Today, this organization is a leader in calling for the removal of the four Lower Snake River dams, which have decimated traditional salmon runs and impacted both the Nimiipuu and Puget Sound orcas.

“Creator gave us the salmon, the elk, moose and deer for our subsistence and these animals offer their lives for us. This is why we have ceremonies honoring the creatures that we eat,” explained Julian Matthews, a co-founder of Nimiipuu Protecting the Environment. To Nimiipuu, living beings in the Columbia River Basin are part of the web of life, and it is no surprise that the tribe’s spiritual and organizational leadership is key to the survival of the orcas. Nimiipuu’s advocacy for salmon recovery is essential for all who cherish the whales, especially tribes for whom orcas are considered close relatives.

In fact, the death of Tahlequah’s calf was caused in part by the dams on the Lower Snake River that Nimiipuu Protecting the Environment wishes to remove. The Puget Sound Southern Resident orcas migrate in late winter to the mouth of the



Columbia River, where they gorge on runs of spring Chinook salmon coming down from the Columbia’s tributary, the Snake River. These runs have been blocked by the four Lower Snake River dams, and the water behind the dams has warmed in recent years. Many Snake River salmon runs are threatened and may not survive, thus depriving the wintering orcas of the food they need to make it until their summer feeding in Puget Sound.

In the Northwest corner of Washington as well as across the Canadian border in the Salish Sea, Southern Resident orcas swim, frolic, and fish most of the year. Lummi Nation leaders have fought to protect endangered orcas, connecting to these marine mammals as their relatives and members of their community. Lummis call them *“qwe’lhol mechen”* which translates to “our relations who live under water.”

In the spring of last year, Jewell James of the House of Tears Carvers created a totem pole from a cedar log and drove it across the country to Miami. He and other Lummi Tribal members had hopes of bringing captive orca Tokitae home from Sea World to the waters of Penn Cove, from which she was captured almost 50 years ago. In a tragedy that is hard to imagine today, Tokitae and almost a third of the orcas in Puget Sound were captured and sent to theme parks all over the world during the 1960s and 70s. Humans who witnessed these captures describe the cries of the kidnapped and remaining whales as full of grief and despair. Many of the kidnapped whales did not survive. Today, the resident pods are still depleted as a result of this violence.

After the death of Tahlequah’s calf, another young orca faced starvation. Lummi Nation Chairman Jay Julius, himself a salmon fisherman, along with several other Lummi skippers, searched the waters of Puget Sound hoping to locate this female and provide her with live salmon from their nets. Alas, she too died of infection and starvation despite

the best efforts of the tribe to find and feed her. Lummi Nation is committed to protection of the remaining orcas in the Salish Sea and returning Tokitae to her home. The Lummi have lived together with the orcas for thousands of years and honor the deep connection between them as kin.

If the web of life is threatened by the loss of Lower Snake River salmon and the Southern Resident Killer Whales that feed on them, so too is the human life that depends on the sea for nourishment and survival. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis could have been talking about Tahlequah when he said, "Our goal is not to amass information...but rather to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening in the world into our own personal suffering and thus discover what each of us can do about it" (19), and "All of us are linked by unseen bonds that together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate, and humble respect" (89).

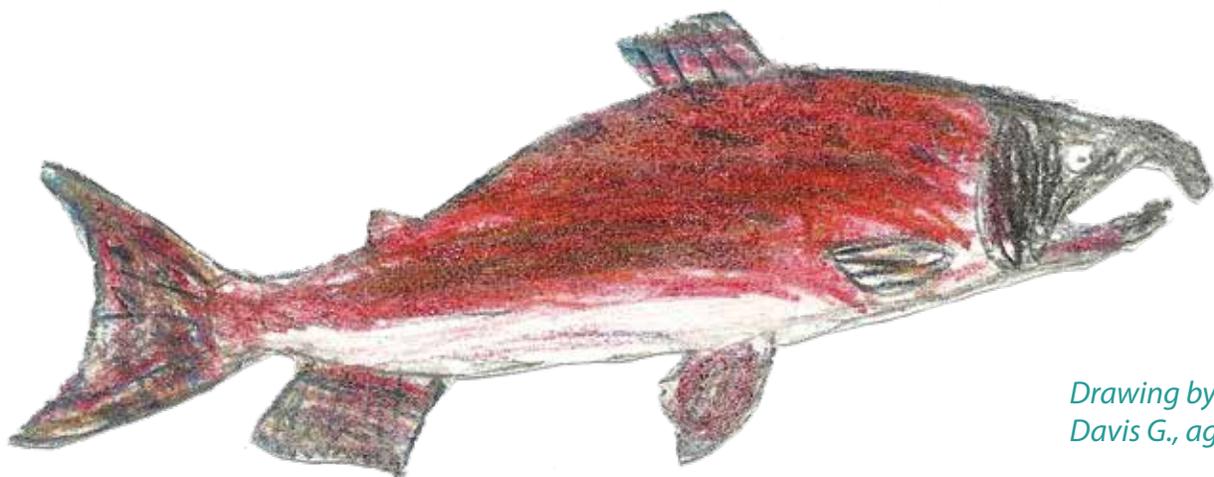
This year, Earth Ministry is working with the Environmental Priorities Coalition of Washington State in protection of these endangered species, including a suite of bills addressing shipping noise that disturbs the orcas' foraging for food, banning toxics that fill their blubber with poison, and setting limits on shoreline building that destroys salmon spawning beds.

With Nimiipuu Protecting the Environment and Save Our Wild Salmon, faith leaders are organizing meetings with budget makers in Washington State, asking them to appropriate funds for mediation among defenders of species, tribes, fishermen, and farmers. Such a stakeholder process can identify a path forward in the Columbia River Basin and meet the interests of each group. There are opportunities for all parties to be respected, made whole, and move into a future where nature and humans thrive in cooperation and abundance.

This will not happen without the commitment of faith leaders, treaty rights proponents, agricultural interests, and those who fish for a living and for sport. While the sides are very entrenched for and against the Lower Snake River dams, there is room for a mediated outcome that can produce an outstanding path forward for all. It will take the commitment of the governor, legislators, and leaders of all the communities involved. Earth Ministry strongly supports a thorough and meaningful stakeholder process.

At a memorial service last August for the calf of Tahlequah, co-sponsored by the Endangered Species Coalition, Earth Ministry, and Nimiipuu Protecting the Environment, many tribal members, people of faith, and those who love the orcas of the Salish Sea joined in ceremony and prayer. Though no human words lifted to God can bring back Tahlequah's lost calf, many have heard her voice in grief and have sworn to take redemptive action on behalf of her calf and her pod.

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*Jessie Dye is Earth Ministry's Senior Campaign Strategist.*



*Drawing by  
Davis G., age 8.*

# Lummi's Sacred Obligation Is to Feed Orcas, Our Relations Under the Waves

By Rayell Morris

The cultivated, kinship relationship of my people, the Lummi, with resident killer whales goes back since time immemorial. They are not wild animals, they are family.

My heart is heavy knowing that members of my community are starving, and that I am kept from feeding them. According to our Lummi traditional teachings, the Southern Resident Killer Whales are connected to my people through bonds of kinship. What happens to them happens to us. Our term for them is *qwe 'lhol mechen*, which means, "our relations under the waves."

When members of our family are hungry, we feed them. But feeding killer whales is not so simple; it requires government permission and cooperation. The Lummi Nation is calling for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and other partners to help us keep our *qwe 'lhol mechen* alive.

Recently, Lummi exercised our cultural rights and held a spiritual feeding for Princess Angeline (J-17), who is so emaciated that her body is peanut-shaped. As a mother and a grandmother, I feel especially connected to Princess Angeline, who is also a mother and a grandmother, a matriarch whose family depends on her. If she dies, others will likely follow.

It was a beautiful day in January. I was part of a small crew that went out on a boat with our hereditary chief and other tribal spiritual leaders. We had one live chinook to feed Princess Angeline, and a dead one to offer the *qwe 'lhol mechen* ancestors. We found a cove out in the islands that felt right. We did our ceremony, and our ancestors came to witness. We called to the *qwe 'lhol mechen*, then released the fish to the water.

Although we had been told that resident orcas were far away, they found us. Our *qwe 'lhol mechen* know that we have heard their call for help, that we're here for them, and we're going to feed them.

It's not only Angeline who is starving. K-25 was recently thought to be close to death. Last summer, Angeline's daughter Tahlequah carried her dead baby 1,000 miles over 17 days in a public display of mourning. The premature deaths, the low number of pregnancies, the high number of miscarriages and stillbirths are too often directly caused by lack of food.

Our *qwe 'lhol mechen* live in a Salish Sea degraded by human-caused pollution and climate change. We know that supplemental feeding for our *qwe 'lhol mechen* won't solve all the problems they face, but it will keep their spirits strong and better able to survive.

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*Raynell Morris is a senior policy adviser in the Sovereignty and Treaty Protection Office of the Lummi Indian Business Council in Bellingham.*



# Finding a Common Future for Orcas and Salmon, Fishermen and Farmers

By Sam Mace

Last summer, a grieving mother orca made international news as she carried her dead calf on her nose for 17 days through the Salish Sea. Members of her family were by her side, sometimes shouldering her burden to give her a rest. This heartbreaking journey of Tahlequah and her baby was a plea for help and a message to humans: Will you make room for us orcas to continue living in our home waters of Puget Sound?

These intelligent, charismatic whales are starving because we have not taken care of the rivers and habitat that sustain their primary food: Chinook salmon. Without enough food to eat, orcas have no hope of weathering all the other obstacles we put in their way, including pollutants, boat noise, and oil spills.

To ensure orcas have enough food to survive, raise babies, and frolic in the Salish waters, we need to make big changes in the Northwest. Are we willing to make room for these whales? Are we willing to care for the world in a manner that allows salmon to rebound and orcas to thrive again?

While it may seem daunting, we can do this. It will require rethinking the status quo – where and how we get our energy, transport goods, water crops, and care for our rivers. It will require a large table of diverse interests to succeed. It must bring

Northwest peoples together – commercial fishermen, farmers, faith leaders, tribes, Inland Northwest communities, Puget Sound residents – to create a future for our region that allows people, orcas, and salmon to thrive.

Scientists tell us that if the orcas are to survive, they must have access to many more salmon, as quickly as possible. By far the best potential source for getting them the food they need is from the Columbia and Snake River systems. In spring, Puget Sound orcas travel south to feed on the fat-rich Chinook heading

upriver. The largest swath of intact Chinook salmon habitat left in the Lower 48 states is found in the Snake River basin, which spans Idaho, Northeast Oregon, and Southeast Washington.

Unfortunately, salmon can no longer make it back to these pristine rivers in abundant numbers. We've built too many dams on the



Columbia and Snake Rivers that impede migration, create lethal water temperatures, and make young salmon vulnerable to predators. Fisheries scientists tell us that if we want to restore salmon to abundant levels, four dams on the Lower Snake River in eastern Washington need to be removed.

And there is the challenge. While the value of the barge transportation and hydroelectric power these four dams provide has steeply declined, some shippers still rely on the dams to barge goods to market, and the dams do generate some electricity. Efforts by Native tribes, commercial and sport fishermen, and conservationists to remove these dams have been met with strong resistance from farmers, shippers, and utilities. Calls for stakeholder discussions have been adamantly opposed by some industry lobbyists and business associations.

Meanwhile, only 75 orca whales live in Puget Sound and this year's Columbia and Snake salmon returns are projected to be the lowest in decades. We have a crisis.

How do we move forward, build common understanding, and break the impasse to solve the crisis? We must reach across the proverbial divide and engage in a dialogue between the people and interests who have a stake in the outcome: fishermen, farmers, tribes, and conservationists. The faith community can be a vital partner in helping facilitate these bridging conversations.

Save Our Wild Salmon is partnering with Earth Ministry to organize church-sponsored gatherings in eastern Washington and northern Idaho, bringing church and community members together for discussions led by Native Americans, faith leaders, commercial fishermen, and farmers on the moral imperative to restore salmon, honor treaty rights, and make sure the needs of people and communities are met. People with diverse interests and perspectives have attended these gatherings, shifting opinions and strengthening mutual respect among stakeholders.

Commercial fishermen also invited a few local wheat growers to a salmon dinner meet-and-greet. Fishers and farmers shared stories about their livelihoods, growing wheat, catching salmon, the struggles facing coastal communities with declining salmon, and the fears of losing barge transportation with dams removed. The evening ended with shared knowledge, more understanding, and a stronger commitment to support each other's interests and livelihoods moving forward.

The impasse over how best to restore salmon and what dam removal would mean for the region has reached a tipping point as both salmon and orcas struggle. Elected leaders can no longer leave the issue for another day or ignore it altogether. Last year, more than 700,000 people urged Washington State Governor Jay Inslee's Orca Task Force to support removal of the Lower Snake River dams. In response, Governor Inslee included \$750,000 in his budget to form a stakeholder group to look at removing these four dams.

This commitment is encouraging. For it to be effective, it must delve into the nuts and bolts of what a dam removal transition plan would look like. Elements include necessary transportation

investments to replace barging, pump upgrades for the few farmers who irrigate, hydropower replacement, and support to towns like Lewiston, Idaho and Clarkston, Washington to develop and take advantage of a new free-flowing urban waterfront.

As this planning hopefully moves forward, independent community conversations between regional stakeholders will be vital for addressing concerns and building trust. We need more wheat and wild salmon dinners in small towns and more gatherings hosted by churches to foster discussions focused on shared values and a common future. We can look to past success stories like the Elwha River to see how disparate interests can come together and collectively agree on how to restore a river and make the entire community better off in the long run. Let's keep talking.

Save Our Wild Salmon looks forward to working with Earth Ministry in fostering these important conversations to help move us toward a future that includes wild salmon, wheat, and whales; fishermen and farmers; Native treaties honored; and a free-flowing Lower Snake River.

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*Sam Mace is Inland Northwest Director of Save Our Wild Salmon, based in Spokane, Washington.*



*Continued from page 1*

an anthropologist new to the region might be surprised to find more fish icons than crucifixes. They are so much a part of our self-understanding that it is difficult to remember that they're going extinct. Their demise has created a spiritual identity crisis as well as an economic one in a place that Egan once defined as "anywhere salmon can still get to."

Salmon are a key part of an industry that generates \$4.5 billion annually for the Washington State economy and supports over 60,000 jobs. They are also at the center of continuing court battles and billions of dollars in recovery efforts. In the Columbia-Snake River system – where 16 million salmon once returned annually – fewer than 3 million now inhabit the entire watershed.

Most of the surviving runs are born and raised in the concrete runways of fish hatcheries. Their ancestors, by way of contrast, evolved in the gravel of free-flowing rivers that are rapidly vanishing in the face of population growth and economic development that have turned the Columbia into what historian Richard White calls an "organic machine." Of Washington State's 33 remaining genetically distinct populations of salmon and steelhead, 15 are listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. Hundreds of others – along with their unique life histories – are gone forever.

When our daughters were young, my wife and I made a point of taking them to places where they could see wild salmon. We did not offer much explanation beyond the basic biological facts of life and death of these anadromous sojourners. The mysterious sight of their battered but noble bodies as they moved upstream against the current seemed to make any further explanation unnecessary.

As our children grew older and viewed the salmon through their own experiences of life and death, they learned for themselves what it meant to move against the current. Soon enough, they made their own deep connections with the salmon and their places of birth.

Such family and community pilgrimages are

not unique to our family. Annual runs to local watersheds bring thousands of people each fall to observe the miracle of wild salmon spawning. Later in the year, volunteers gather to disperse dead salmon or pasteurized analogs made from excess carcasses from local fish hatcheries to rivers and streams that can no longer sustain wild runs, mimicking the role that wild salmon once played.

Because Pacific Salmon die after spawning, their dead bodies have been bringing life-giving sustenance from the nutrient-rich ocean to the comparatively barren inland watersheds of the Northwest for thousands of years. Over 137 species of plants and animals, including orcas, depend upon nutrients that living and dying salmon carry in their bodies.

If salmon are considered sacred, orcas are not far behind.

This past summer, as the West Coast choked on smoke from dozens of wildfires, the world watched transfixed as Tahlequah (J35 to scientists), a young female orca, pushed her dead calf through the waters of the Salish Sea for 17 days in a display of grief reminiscent of Michelangelo's *Pieta* – his famous sculpture in St.





to return, bringing life for the people and the watershed. For indigenous people, right action leads to healing and life. Greed and neglect lead to death. It's a simple equation that has proven infinitely difficult for the dominant culture to understand and live out.

That salmon and orcas are at the heart of native spirituality is well documented. But I've also been fascinated by the quickness with which others – when they are in direct contact with these animals – use what I call spiritual language to make sense of their experience. It is even more surprising because we live in what is widely acknowledged to be one of the most secular regions of the country, the so-called "None Zone" – where most people check the box "None" when asked about religious affiliation.

There is something deeply spiritual about experiencing salmon and orcas in the wild that invites people to employ the language of the soul to describe it, even

Peter's in Rome of Mary holding the crucified body of her dead son.

Salmon as life-bringers is more than simply a metaphor. Southern Resident orcas like Tahlequah, whom the Lummi tribe consider to be family members and who depend upon Chinook salmon as their main source of food, are dying of starvation as a result of dwindling numbers of salmon in Puget Sound.

Salmon have been "creating" the Pacific Northwest for centuries. When glaciers from the last great ice age receded, the decaying bodies of salmon provided the biological foundation for the proliferation of life in coastal rainforests that once ran from Monterey to Southeast Alaska. I often wonder if there will be any salmon left to help heal the ravages of climate change.

Returning dead salmon to replenish the rivers is, in some ways, reminiscent of First Salmon ceremonies practiced by indigenous people in our region from time immemorial. In most versions of this ceremony, the bones of the first returning salmon are reverently placed back into the river as an invitation for the salmon

if they've never darkened the door of a church or synagogue, mosque, or longhouse. They speak of hope and a connection to wildness; of how they "bring the world with them." They speak of healing and even resurrection. Their words have an unmistakable sacramental quality, infusing the material world with grace and meaning.

In addition to all the other gifts they bring, salmon and orcas help us take a longer view of our lives in relationship to creation and each other. They locate us firmly in creation rather than outside it. They invite us to consider how animals and people ultimately depend upon clean water and healthy watersheds in order to survive and thrive. They help us see that the world is larger than our individual concerns; larger even than our pain. They remove the artificial boundary between the sacred and the profane and show us, in Gerard Manley Hopkins' memorable phrase, that "the world is charged with the grandeur of God."

Paul Schell, former mayor of Seattle and son of a Lutheran pastor, put it well when he was asked what the listing of so many stocks of salmon under the Endangered Species Act might mean for the people of our region. He pointed to the marvelous irony that "as we work to save the salmon, it may turn out that the salmon saves us."

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*Rev. John Rosenberg is a retired Lutheran pastor from Olympia and is a former member of the Earth Ministry board.*

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