
ECO-JUSTICE

Volume 10

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Nature is full of genius, full of the divinity, so that not a snowflake escapes its fashioning hand. – Henry David Thoreau

Good News for the Earth!

By Bishop Stephen Charleston

Episcopalian School of Divinity

If you are active in environmental ministry, then you are used to bad news. For one thing, you are probably spending a great deal of energy trying to alert people to how serious the environmental crisis really is. That means telling them the bad news: bad news about global warming, acid rain, deforestation, species extinction, and a host of other alarming statistics. It is the kind of information people need to hear, but to say that it is a discouraging word is an understatement.

Bad news, however, is not just in the message we deliver. It is also in the message we receive. We hear that our cause is just, but that we will have to take a number and wait because there are too many other needs already in line. We hear that there is no money to fund our efforts and no additional people to work with us. Ironically, we are like a salesperson that has a product that everyone likes, but no one wants to buy.

The cumulative result of all of this bad news is easy to predict. Most of us feel isolated; many of us feel depressed; all of us feel

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Light and Darkness

By Liz Vitale

The theme of light and darkness pervades the winter season, and indeed, is present throughout the Jewish year. As I write, the memory of the full moon in the sky last night is with me. As we approach Chanukah, the moon will wane, until on the first night of Chanukah, it will be barely visible. Chanukah is early this year, because of the way the lunar calendar works. As you read this, the days will be getting shorter, enveloping us with longer nights and shorter day for a while.

The story of Chanukah, which tells of the miracle of the tiny drops of oil burning for eight days, is familiar to many. The powerful lesson from that story is that something pure, no matter how small is able to give light well beyond its natural potential. Another lesson, perhaps is that miracles may happen, but we must not depend on them. We must work with G-d and with the forces of nature, just as the Maccabees did not depend on a miracle to occur. They sent a messenger to obtain a supply of oil in order to keep the eternal flame in the temple burning. What can we learn from this? The resources of the earth are bountiful, and they seem as if they will last forever. Indeed, we would like them to. However, we must also be aware of the limitations of the supply of resources, and not be blind to these limitations.

Every Jewish holiday begins and ends at sundown, at the transition between light and darkness. Each holiday is marked by the lighting of candles, as if to keep the darkness from taking over. The candles are traditionally lit by women. Does anyone know where this tradition comes from? It is the only Jewish ritual that is traditionally assigned only to women.

The *yahrzeit* (anniversary of the death of a loved one) is

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tired. We start to believe in the bad news, both the grim vision we predict if action is not taken and in the hopelessness of our situation. The Don Quixote syndrome sets in and we start to doubt the value of our own mission. Burn out becomes an occupational hazard that claims many talented people in environmental ministry. Some of us may wonder if we will be next.

Well, before you lose heart let me share something completely outrageous and wonderful with you. Something you may not have heard in a while. Something called good news. Let me joyfully take this opportunity to shower you with the kind of abundant life that restores the soul, revives the spirit and renews the body.

In a nutshell, be of good cheer because as difficult as the task may seem, in the end, *we are going to win*. It's that simple.

How do I know? How can I be so sure? Because I believe in a God of goodness who blessed creation at the beginning of time. Because I believe in a God of justice who would never allow that creation to be despoiled. Because I believe in a God of mercy who will not abandon those who are faithful steward but will sustain them even in their darkest hour. This God is not a weak and impotent being helplessly watching our struggles from far away, but a mighty God who is a very present help in time of need. There is no multinational corporation more powerful. There is no government with more authority. This is the good God of the Earth who stands beside us in our cause and who will give us the victory.

I also feel confident because I believe in you. You see, I know who you are. I have seen you in the thousands of men and women around the world who labor on to save our island home against incredible obstacles. I have seen you in the countless community organizations and parish committees that continue to grow stronger even without the benefit of big budgets. I have seen you take on governments, corporations and churches and insist that they be responsible, even when they try to look the other way. Therefore, I have come to know you for who you are: a person of enormous faith, great talent, and deep vision.

Consequently, this good news becomes a blessing of thanks for all that you are doing. Thank you. Thank you for all the lonely hours you put in. Thank you for struggling on even when your hope grew faint. Thank you on behalf of all of us who work beside you. Thank you on behalf of those who still don't understand but are trying to. Thank you on behalf

of those who can't speak to you personally, but whose lives you are protecting and changing. Thank you on behalf of the creatures of this Earth. Thank you on behalf of the God whom you serve so well. Thank you and be blessed for who you are and what you do. Be blessed for who you are and what you do. Be blessed and strengthened and renewed through the power of God's love for you.

Finally, let me invite you to abide in this good news. When you are feeling tired or discouraged, I want you to take this small article out and read it again. And again. Read it every time you start to feel overwhelmed by the bad news. Let it bring into your soul the vision of what this earth will one day be: a garden rejoicing in the fullness of life. Clear air and clean water. Beautiful forests and rolling seas teeming with life. Humanity at peace and children at play. Good news made real for all creation. Good news brought to reality because of your faith, your hope and your hard work. Good news pouring like sunlight into the world, and most of all, into your heart. ♦

Every Being in the Universe

By Lao Tzu

Every Being in the Universe
is an expression of God
all life springs into existence,
unconscious,
perfect,
free,
taking on shapes,
letting circumstances
bring it to completion.

God gives birth to all things,
nourishes them
maintains them
cares for them,
comforts them,
protects them,
takes them back to herself
creation without possessing
acting without expecting
guiding without interfering.

This is why the love of God
is in the very nature of things,
in every being in the universe. ♦

HOW GREEN IS YOUR BEAN?

By Terri Eickel

Ugh. It is 6:00 o'clock in the AM, outside it is dark and cold, and you are stumbling towards the kitchen. You don't just want a cup of coffee; you *need* a cup of coffee. As the coffee begins to brew and that familiar aroma fills the air, you relax in anticipation of that first morning cup. But before you lift that steaming cup to your lips, stop to consider – how green is your bean? In other words, are you drinking eco-friendly coffee?

What is eco-friendly coffee, you ask? Well, friend, let me tell you. Eco-friendly coffee is shade grown, fair trade, organic coffee; it is coffee that is environmentally sustainable and economically viable. The impact of switching to eco-friendly coffee cannot be understated. In fact, the Rainforest Alliance says that “Buying shade-grown coffee is the easiest and perhaps most important action that a North American conservationist can do protect wildlife habitat in the tropics.” For the past twenty years, the coffee industry has switched from shade-grown coffee crops, which promote and sustain a diverse eco-system, to sun coffee crops, which turn the area into an ecological and biological desert.

Shade-grown coffee crops, unlike many other crops, exist well in rainforest habitat. Sun coffee crops, which are favored for their high yields, require heavy doses of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, which ultimately find their way into the water supply and your coffee cup. And the deforestation used to create room for these crops displaces a vast number of species that rely on the rainforest for habitat. As many as 250 species of birds migrate from North America to the rainforests and the shade-grown coffee crops – unless the current land-use situation changes, the future of these birds is in serious doubt. And they are not alone. The rainforest is home to many other species displaced by the sun coffee crops: howler monkeys, leafcutter ants, pumas, white tailed deer, and wild goats are a few of the animals that thrive there.

Purchasing shade-grown coffee, either at home or at your place of worship, is a concrete way that we can demonstrate our gratitude to God for the amazing gift He has given us; this little planet we all call home. So prayerfully consider making the switch to eco-friendly coffee. Though somewhat more expensive, it is positive affirmation of Faith and a testament of Love. And the howler monkeys will thank you! ♦

marked by lighting a special candle, which is meant to burn for twenty-four hours. When I have lit a *yahrzeit* candle, it has often burned much longer than that. When this happens, I often feel a sense of celebration of the person being commemorated, as if their spirit is present, keeping the flame alive. On lighting the Sabbath candles, it is customary for the woman to move her hands in a circular motion over the lit candles, prior to chanting the blessing. Years ago we began the tradition of using this gesture as a cue to think of loved ones far away or deceased, and to “send the light” to them.

The little drop of oil in the Maccabee times burned for eight days, leading to our custom of lighting candles for eight days. What if each of those candles, symbolizing only one day, were to burn for eight days? And then each of those for eight, and so forth? The *Shamash*, or helper candle, is the first one to be lit, and from this springs many flames, a total of eight others on the final night of Chanukah. If each of our efforts toward harmony and peace is like a single flame, let's use the power in each of our flames to ignite hope, peace, and goodness in all our actions and interactions. Let's not be limited by the apparent smallness of our own little efforts, but think of the exponential potential of each flame, each drop of oil, each spark of light. ♦

Ask the animals, and they will teach you. As the birds of the air and they will tell you. Ask the plants of the earth, and they will inform you. Ask the fish of the sea and they will declare to you. Who among you does not know that the hand of God has done this? In God's hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every living thing - Job 12: 7-10 ♦

O God, May I Speak...

By Chiara Lubich

O God, may I ever speak
as though it were the last word that I can speak.

May I ever act
as though it were the last action that I can perform.

May I ever suffer
as though it were the last pain that I can offer.

May I every pray
as though it were for me on earth
the last chance to speak to you.

Amen. ♦

**No other nation on Earth so swiftly wasted its birthright;
no other, in time, made such an effort to save what was
left. -Wallace Stegner ♦**

CALENDAR

JANUARY

HARTFORD ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE NETWORK

Thursday, January 2, 5:30 PM
Hispanic Health Council
175 Main Street, Hartford
(860) 548-1133

EARTH PRAYERS

Monday, January 13, 7:30 PM
First Baptist Church of West Hartford
90 North Main Street, West Hartford
(860) 493-0696

YOU HAVE THE POWER

Monday, January 27, 7:00 PM
First Baptist Church of West Hartford
90 North Main Street, West Hartford
(860) 521-9460

FEBRUARY

YOU HAVE THE POWER

TBA
Unitarian Society of Hartford
50 Bloomfield Avenue
(860) 493-0696

HARTFORD ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE NETWORK

Thursday, February 6, 5:30 PM
Hispanic Health Council
175 Main Street, Hartford
(860) 548-1133

EARTH PRAYERS

Monday, February 10, 7:30 PM
First Baptist Church of West Hartford
90 North Main Street, West Hartford
(860) 521-9460

MARCH

EAGLE WATCH BOAT TRIP

March 8, Time TBA
Adults \$25, Children \$10
This is a wonderful opportunity to see eagles from the comfort of a heated boat cruise. Tickets are limited.
(860) 493-0696 or info@irejn.org

An Islamic Perspective

By Kemal Argon

I am glad that I was invited as a Muslim to share in the Concluding Liturgy after the Forum on Religion and the Environment at First Baptist Church and I have been asked to share some written thoughts for an environmental newsletter. My hope is that I can share some words of encouragement for people from various religious backgrounds who face an uphill effort to do something for a very beleaguered environment.

The best words that can be shared come from Scripture and I would like to recommend these two passages for your consideration.

Chapter One of the Holy Qu'ran

In the Name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful:

Praise be to God, The Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds, Most Gracious, Most Merciful, Ruler of the Day of Judgement. Thee do we worship and Thine aid we seek. Show us the straight way, the way of those on whom Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace, not of those whose portion is Wrath nor of those who stray.

Chapter Two, Verse 164

*Behold! In the creation of the heavens and the earth;
In the alternation of the Night and Day;
In the sailing of the ships through the Ocean
For the profit of mankind;
In the rain which God sends down from the skies,
And the life which it gives to an earth that is dead;
In the beasts of all kinds that he scatters through the earth
In the change of the winds,
And the clouds which they trail like their slaves between the sky and the earth
Here indeed are Signs for a people that are wise.*

My experience with multi-religious peacemaking has caused me to come to a conclusion that it is easiest to bring about meeting and dialog amongst people of multiple religious backgrounds if we can focus on real issues of common concern. Environmental issues are just such an area of real concern that is common for many in multiple locations within the US and abroad. We can be sure that environmental issues are sure to be with us for a long time and will offer a tremendous potential for bringing people from different religious backgrounds to focus on matters that adversely affect people here and elsewhere.

If Christians, Jews and others are interested in working with Muslims on environmental concerns, I would express my personal belief that common cooperation on environmental concerns has broad potential that can be developed by Christians, Jews, Muslims, and others. Muslims are usually proud of the intellectual tradition within Islam. Muslim intellectuals as well as most everyone else outside of America know that Muslims like others are very much affected by a degraded environment. If Christians, Jews and other people of faith do a bit of work to discover the aspect of Islamic intellectualism that regards the environment, Muslim intellectuals should recognize their own Islamic values on stewardship of the environment and may also be impressed with others' efforts at understanding. Those who take the time to learn about Muslim viewpoints on the environment may be pleasantly surprised not only at the philosophy itself, but also at possibly finding Muslims coming forward to admit sharing a common interest in doing something about the environment. If you want help for a new environmentalism, in theory, there is plenty available for those willing to do a bit of footwork in this area. ♦

If you want to see birds, you must have birds in your heart.

- John Burroughs ♦

ECO-ACTION

The average American will drink 56,000 cups of coffee in their lifetime. Unfortunately, the coffee industry has become responsible for widespread deforestation because of its current business practices. (see article – page 3) In light of this, the Interreligious Eco-Justice Network urges you to switch to shade grown, fair trade, organic coffee in your home and place of worship. The Interfaith Coffee Program is one place to start. Check out www.equalexchange.com. As low as \$5.70/lb, it is cheaper than Starbucks and better for the environment, too! So when you pour cup #34,697, make sure it is eco-friendly! ♦

Interreligious Eco-Justice Network
P.O. Box 270147
West Hartford, CT 06127
(860) 493-0696
info@irejn.org

The Canary Committee

By Kim Defeo

Toxics Action Center

Joellen Lawson had planned to teach another twenty years. This became impossible as she was forced to accept a disability retirement last year due to illness caused by her working at a sick school. The McKinley Elementary School in Fairfield was found to be so severely contaminated with toxic mold that it had to be torn down.

Sixty-eight percent of Connecticut schools have reported some type of environmental problem in the last year, including toxic mold, asbestos and pesticide exposures that put children and school personnel at risk. And amazingly, Connecticut has no indoor air quality standards.

Joellen has formed the Canary Committee with the aim of educating people about the hazards of sick schools and to pass effective legislation to ensure that the indoor air quality of our schools is safe. The Canary Committee is made up of parents, teachers, environmental advocates and medical professionals and held a public forum to kickoff their campaign on October 25th at the Danbury Hospital.

“We are determined to ensure that children and school personnel are no longer treated as canaries in a coal mine,” said Joellen. “Too much rhetoric has stressed school accountability without adequate emphasis on the accountability of legislators, superintendents, boards of education, public health and maintenance departments to protect school occupants from these health hazards.”

For more information, please call (860) 233-7623. ♦

YOU HAVE THE POWER!

IREJN is hosting free “You Have the Power” panel presentations designed to educate religious communities about the benefits of renewable energy. Each forum features a moderator from IREJN and representatives from Green Mountain Energy, the Connecticut Clean Energy Fund, a local environmental group and a local place of worship that has recently switched to renewable energy. Attendants will learn about the hazards of air pollution from fossil fuel plants, the cost and feasibility of renewable energy, and methods for actually making the switch. For more information, please contact (860) 493-0696. ♦