
ECO-JUSTICE

Volume 11

InterReligious Eco-Justice Network

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As my eyes search the prairie, I feel the summer in the spring – Chippewea song

Healing the Coyotes

By Rev. Owen D. Owens

American Baptist Churches of America

Navajo philosophy and experience open practical ways we can re-enter the green natural world and warm, caring human community. Through their ceremonies they help troubled people experience the healing power of the ongoing ceremony of nature. When those who have caught the vision of a nation moving toward ecological wholeness and social justice look through Navajo lenses we discover how to draw strength from both the harsh and healing realities of the natural order and human society, be released from what is dragging us down, and get in balance with the living world of God, nature, and human beings.

Each person views life differently, drawing on one's own experiences. Plants, animals, land and other human beings mean different things to different people. We see life through our own lenses. Anthropologists call these lenses "culture." Language, philosophy, family system, economics, and religion shape the way we see, and indeed often determine what we see.

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Ask the Animals

By Terri Eickel

InterReligious Eco-Justice Network

As the use of genetically engineered food increases and diseases like mad cow disease and e-coli strike all over the world, Americans are beginning to take a harder look at where their food comes from. The findings are troubling. In the last fifty years, large factory farms have replaced the small family farms idealized in Norman Rockwell paintings. This is especially true regarding livestock farms. A recent study found that of 640,000 livestock farms in the United States, 450,000 are factory farms. Not surprisingly, three percent of the nation's hog farms produce fifty percent of the nation's farms. The same holds true for beef production, with two percent of cattle feed operations accounting for forty percent of the cattle sold in this country. These lopsided statistics hold broad and disturbing consequences for the state of animal welfare and environmental protection.

Factory farms, where thousands of animals live with inadequate space, air, water, and food, is the result of increased pressure to produce more food for less money. This leads corporations to take many shortcuts, many unethical, some illegal, but all at the expense of animal comfort, public health, and the environment. Michael Pollan, in his New York Times expose, *An Animal's Life*, describes the disgusting living conditions suffered by both poultry. The stress that results from constant overcrowding causes the animals to behave in a very self-destructive manner. Egg laying chickens, kept in tiny cages far too small for them, rub their bodies against the wire mesh until their bodies are featherless and bleeding. To prevent illness and infection, the chickens are fed a diet of antibiotics, which eventually end up on your breakfast plate. At the end of their life, the chickens are "force molted," a process in which they are denied food, water,

COMING SOON! 20% by 2010

SmartPower Connecticut and its collaborating partners, Environment Northeast, Clean Water Fund and the InterReligious Eco-Justice Network have launched a campaign to have 20% of the state's energy supply come from clean, non-polluting renewable sources by 2010. Through its You Have the Power programs, IREJN plans to promote renewable energy choices as a commitment to faithful living. Rabbi Andrea Cohen-Kiener, Executive Director of IREJN (see article-page5), said, "We will increase support for a robust green power market right here in Connecticut." For more info, check out www.irejn.org. ♦

As the theologian, Benjamin Reist, wrote in *Theology in Red, White, and Black*, to understand North American history we engage in multi-racial dialogue. As we listen to each other we begin to see the nature of the evil that threatens to ruin and destroy nature and humanity. As we listen to each other the Spirit of God suggest changes we can make to re-enter the way to life.

Since 1984 Rev. John Cook, Navajo spiritual leader and Presbyterian minister, and I have been working together. At Cook's suggestion we used the Coyoteway Blessingway ceremony, last performed to be recorded in 1974, to prepare a guidebook for eco-just spiritual healing. Writing this guidebook proved to be far more difficult than either of us imagined. Cook, fluent in archaic and traditional Navajo language, had to teach me to understand elemental realities he had known since he was a child. I had to learn to look through the lenses of a culture than was different than mine at natural realities that surrounded me-but of which I was dimly aware.

We visited in each other's homes, discussed, wrote, and pulled draft after draft apart to start over. The structure and process of the Coyoteway Blessingway Ceremony, however, proved to be very strong. After ten years of work in 2002 we were able to shape a guidebook for spiritual healing out of a very deep book length manuscript. In April and October we spoke to university, church, and eco-justice gathering, receiving a great deal of interest and encouragement.

In brief, the daily movement of the Coyoteway Blessingway Ceremony recorded in 1974 provides the outline for our guidebook. We follow the Singer, Man with Palomino Horse, and the One Sung Over, Luke Cook, through four days and night of unraveling processes using rhythm, song, medicine, and washing. Along with dead Coyote the one sung over is coming back to life. Fire ceremonies use red berries to treat and purify the blood. Water is given to replenish, moisten, and put life in the body. The skin of the patient is washed clean, moving him back into the way of long life happiness. Bundles filled with good medicine are unwound to release the clutters Cook created for himself.

As we follow the flow of this ancient ceremony from spiritual to mental healing we discover that what we have ignored, denied, and only dimly allowed to come into our conscious minds surfaces in safe, beneficial ways. Thus we learn to:

- Look through Navajo healing lenses (Session One)

- Be in and on time – naturally, through the four directions – East, South, West, and North (Session Two).
- Unravel the attitudes and decisions that make us ill. (Session Three.)
- Humbly ask the Creator to reconnect with stern, purposeful living (Session Four).
- Bring in prayer to the One who made them the beautiful colors and shapes of the living world (Session Five).
- Sweat out the poisons that make us sick. (Session Six).
- Use the rhythms of natural movement to run with purpose (Session Seven).
- Be made strong. (Session Eight).
- Thrive in the midst of hardships (Conclusion).
- See Jesus Christ through coyote eyes – a vision at first arrogant and exploitative, then humble and healing. (Bible studies in each session.)

Many Native American Indians and other readers are Christians. We bring Coyoteway and Christ together to help us see Jesus as he is revealed in the New Testament. By following the flow of the ceremony Christ's ministry of freeing and healing takes on vital, sometimes surprising meaning. Conversely much "Coyoteing around" becomes revealed for what it is – greedy desires and actions that lead to ruin and murder, the very motivations that led the religious and political leaders of his day to kill Jesus.

Cook's Navajo heritage and language open dialogue, which takes us step by step toward healing justice in racial and ecological relationships. By respecting the Navajo, therefore, we discover they are salve, cement, and a hearing aid that brings people together. By listening to them we learn to walk the earth as though we were walking on an eggshell, because the earth is alive. ♦

If you live on this land, and you have ancestors sleeping in this land, I believe that makes you a native to this land. It has nothing to do with the color of your skin. I was not raised to look at people racially. What I was taught is that we're flowers in the Great Spirit's garden. We share a common root, and the root is Mother Earth.
- Oh Shinnah

WALLINGFORD METHODIST GREENS IT UP!

By Terri Eickel

InterReligious Eco-Justice Network

In the midst of so many attempts to erode environmental protections (see article, page 5), it is refreshing to watch a faith community like Wallingford Methodist Church demonstrate their commitment to God's creation. In the past few months, Wallingford Methodist Church has examined their faith community for different ways they might live and worship in a more eco-friendly fashion. Not a stone was left unturned as they sought to educate and activate their congregation on environmental issues. Here are some of the issues they addressed:

- ◆ Genetically Engineered Food – By bringing in a representative from ConnPIRG and distributing brochures on the subject, Wallingford Methodist effectively educated their congregation on the dangers of GE food. Next, interested people filled out postcards urging supermarkets not to purchase genetically engineered or modified foods. These postcards were delivered to the local supermarkets in the hopes of garnering the support of the managers. In addition, Wallingford Methodist sent a petition to the FDA requesting that such food be labeled for consumer protection. Finally, church members contacted the Director of Food Service for the Wallingford school system asking her not to use these foods.
- ◆ Dioxin – The most toxic chemical known to science, dioxin is entirely man-made. Unlike other hazardous pollutants, such as mercury, dioxin is not found anywhere in nature. To address this concern, Wallingford Methodist handed out educational brochures as well as resource lists on practical things people can do to reduce dioxin pollution. Because one of the largest causes of dioxin is the use of chlorine bleach for paper products, congregants were provided with samples of many non-chlorine bleach products as well as information on where these items can be purchased.
- ◆ Eco-friendly coffee – Because sun-grown coffee crops are devastating the world's rainforests, Wallingford Methodist has switched to shade-grown, organic coffee.

These are only a few of the actions Wallingford Methodist Church has taken to green their church – let's lift them up and celebrate their good works! ◆

and light, resulting in one last bout of egg-laying before they die.

Pigs suffer similar indignities. Michael Scully, in his book, *Dominion*, describes harrowing circumstances. Weaned from their mother far too early, pigs on factory farms have an unfulfilled desire to suckle, which leads them to bite the tail of the pig in front of them. This constant torment and the stress of confinement make the intelligent pig severely depressed. In a state of "learned helplessness," the demoralized pig will not defend itself and the wounds they sustain from the bites can lead to infection. To prevent this, the farmers engage in "tail docking," a process where all but a tiny portion of the tail is snipped off using pliers and no anesthetic. The tiny stump is then so sensitive and the tail biting so excruciating that the depressed pig will defend itself, avoiding infection and maintaining its value as a "production unit."

Overcrowding is a common theme in factory farms, as are disease and hormone and antibiotic-enriched feed. In attempt to understand the beef industry, writer Michael Pollan purchased a calf with the intent of following its course through life. In his New York Times article, *Power Steer*, he described his findings. According to Pollan, cows are crowded together in feed lots, knee deep in their own waste. In order to reach sale weight faster, the cows are fed corn, a diet that reduces the growing time from 3 to 5 years to 18 months. However, the digestive system of a cow is designed specifically for the digestion of grass, not corn. The stomach of a cow produces acid that digests the grass efficiently. However, when this acid comes in contact with corn, it creates a gas that can, over time, build up and explode the cow. Periodically, farmers must put a hose down the throat of an over-inflated cow to release the pressure.

The inappropriateness of this diet weakens the immune system and leaves the cow very susceptible to illness and disease. To counteract this, farmers feed them heavy doses of antibiotics. And because the life span of a cow is significantly shorter due to the corn diet, they are also fed many growth hormones so that they will reach their goal weight before they are, essentially, poisoned to death.

The shift from small family-run farms to industrialized factory farms has had devastating consequences for animals, humans, and the environment. Even though we are given "dominion" over the earth, this should not be interpreted as a license to do whatever we want. All of our actions should be tempered with a reverence for God's creatures and for His creation. We should consider stewardship as a clear witness of our faith and make our decisions accordingly. The planet is depending on us.

CALENDAR

APRIL

EARTH PRAYERS

Monday, April 14, 7:30 PM
First Baptist Church of West Hartford
90 North Main Street, West Hartford
(860) 493-0696

A Celebration of Earth Day at Earth Prayers. Please bring a favorite short poem, song, prayer, or reading that speaks to your heart to share in the celebration.

MAY

CARING FOR SACRED SPACES

Monday, May 5, 1:30 – 4:00 PM
Trinity Episcopal Church
120 Sigourney Street, Hartford, CT
(860) 493-0696

Andrew Rudin, Director of Interfaith Coalition on Energy and an expert at reducing energy costs in a place of worship, will go step by step through conservation, efficiency, “green” (renewable, non-polluting) energy sources and good educated consumer practices.

EARTH PRAYERS

Monday, May 12, 7:30 PM
First Baptist Church of West Hartford
90 North Main Street, West Hartford
(860) 493-0696

Liz Vitale will offer “Nature as Our Teacher.” She will share some of the exciting work going on that uses the wisdom of nature to create sustainable systems to solve environmental problems.

JUNE

EARTH PRAYERS

Monday, June 9, 7:30 PM
First Baptist Church of West Hartford
90 North Main Street, West Hartford
(860) 493-0696

Andrea Cohen-Kiener, Executive Director of IREJN, will offer “Stepping Lightly: Inspiration and Practical Steps for Environmental Living. Join us for music, visioning, and practical suggestions.

Some people choose vegetarianism in response to the current situation. Some choose to purchase “free-range” meat that guarantees that no hormones or antibiotics were given to the animal. Still others become involved politically, fighting for legislation that protects all of the earth’s creatures. This is a personal decision and only you can decide what action is appropriate for you. However, one thing is clear – the existing system needs to change. Through our purchases and our actions, we can “speak for those who cannot speak for themselves.” ♦

In losing stewardship we lose fellowship; we become outcasts from the great neighborhood of creation.

-Wendell Berry

If I Were Alone

By Meister Eckhart

Reprinted from Earth Prayers from Around the World, edited by Elizabeth Roberts

If I were alone in a desert

and feeling afraid,

I would want a child to be with me.

For then my fear would disappear

and I would be made strong.

This is what life in itself can do

Because it is so noble, so full of pleasure

and so powerful.

But if I could not have child with me,

I would like to have at least a living animal

at my side to comfort me.

Therefore,

let those who bring about wonderful things

in their big, dark books

take an animal

to help them.

The life within the animal

will give them strength in turn.

For equality

gives strength, in all things

and at all times.

QUICK TIP:

**Make that garden organic!
For information, visit the website for the
Northeast Organic Farmers Association.
www.nofa.org**

CALL TO ACTION!

ENVIRONMENT FUND TO BE COMPLETELY DEPLETED!

Governor Rowland is proposing to completely transfer the Conservation and the Renewable Energy Fund to general funds for the next two years – a set back for renewable energy and conservation of 200 million dollars! These funds provide resources for conservation and efficiency measures, as well as renewable energy investment and development.

What You Can Do:

Please call the leadership and your legislators!

Message: “In the 2-year budget do not take ANY money from the Conservation and Renewable Energy Funds. Spending this money for anything other than its intended use (conservation, renewable energy, efficiency) is deceitful!

Governor Rowland:

860-566-4840 governor.rowland@po.state.ct.us

Senator Sullivan: (President Pro Tempore)

800-842-1420 kevin.b.sullivan@po.state.ct.us

Representative Lyons: (Speaker of the House)

800-842-1908 moira.lyons@po.state.ct.us

Senator Looney:

800-842-1420 looney@senatedems.state.ct.us

Representative Amann:

800-842-1902 jim.amann@po.state.ct.us

Senator Harp: (Chair of the Appropriations Committee)

800-842-1420 harp@senatedems.state.ct.us

Rep. Dyson: (Chair of the Appropriations Committee)

800-842-1902 william.dyson@po.state.ct.us

As a supporter of renewable energy, we need your help. Please take the time to call and defend the Conservation and Renewable Energy Funds! ♦

INTERRELIGIOUS ECO-JUSTICE NETWORK

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Lowell Fewster

IREJN Welcomes New Director

By Terri Eickel

InterReligious Eco-Justice Network

IREJN is pleased to announce that the group has hired an Executive Director to continue the network’s mission “to inspire and empower faith communities to live as faithful stewards of life.” The new director, Rabbi Andrea Cohen-Kiener, of West Hartford, believes that the environment provides common ground for diverse faith communities. “Everything from limited financial resources to community health has a root in the way we consume resources. It is a delight for me to work with people and groups who understand that these issues affect us all. The vision and passion of my colleagues has been the greatest part of my new position,” stated Rabbi Cohen-Kiener.

Announced by Rev. Tom Carr and Lynn Fulkerson, founders and co-chairs of IREJN, the appointment will allow IREJN to continue the many worthwhile programs already in place, as well as spearhead the group’s renewable energy initiative, also known as You Have the Power. IREJN and You Have the Power were recently recognized by SmartPower Connecticut, a state wide collaboration which supports clean air and energy independence through the use of renewable energy resources. “Having Andrea on board as director will allow us to expand the network’s activities at a vital time,” according to Carr. “Climate change and air quality issues are pressing concerns and our energy sources are not nearly as clean as we would like. We believe that churches and other faith organizations can have a real impact on our state’s energy future.”

Rabbi Cohen-Kiener is passionate about her new position. “I have always felt that it honors God for faith communities to find common ground. Environmental activism is about using our talent and vision and resources to serve the common good. The faith, purpose and connection I get from this work is, to me, a new definition of wealth!” ♦

ECO-ACTION

Of all the animals in factory farms, egg-laying hens have one of the worst existences. (see article – page 1) This month, consider switching to organic, free-range eggs that do not use hormone or antibiotic-enriched feed. In this way, we can ensure that the life of the chicken and the gift of an egg are respected and protected. A dozen eggs sell for about \$3.00, more expensive than regular eggs, but the expense is absolutely worth it. Then your biggest dilemma will be “Scrambled or fried?” ♦

