
ECO-JUSTICE

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Interreligious Eco-Justice Network

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The true meaning of life is to plant trees, under whose shade you do not expect to sit. – Nelson Henderson

Living the New Story

By Alan AtKisson

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URL: <http://www.context.org/ICLIB/IC24/MacGillis.htm>

The New Story is the story of creation as told through both our telescopes and microscopes, as well as our advancing understanding of how evolution has brought us along this far. It is also, then, the story of our place in the universe, and it brings with it nothing short of a radical transformation in human self-understanding. Theologian Thomas Berry has emerged as a key teller of this tale, and Sister Miriam Theresa MacGillis is one of his foremost interpreters. Through her workshops and lectures, she helps people to understand and embody this new understanding of what it means to be human.

Alan: *What is the heart of the "New Story?"*

Miriam: We are now in a position, based on our scientific explorations, to understand the origin and process out of which the universe has emerged, and with it the solar system, planet Earth, all of life, and the human as well. For the first time all

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Who is Sister Miriam Therese MacGillis?

Sister Miriam Therese MacGillis, keynote speaker for this year's *Sacred Trust: Forum on Religion and the Environment*, is a member of the Dominican Sisters of Caldwell, New Jersey, and lives and works at Genesis Farm, which she co-founded in 1980. Since then, she has helped develop the farm as an ecological learning center and a large community-supported garden.

Sister MacGillis is an articulate advocate of a new cosmology, a vision of humans in dynamic and life-sustaining relationship with earth, with community and with the divine. She is an impassioned proponent of "Creation Cosmology," a theology that presents a loving, living picture of the universe - which is appealing across denominational lines. She proposes a "deep ecology," inviting us to see ourselves as a living part of a living cosmos, alive with love and connection. Her message is timely and timeless, spirited and inclusive.

IREJN kicks off Youth Initiative

By Terri Eickel and Mindy Shilansky

Interreligious Eco-Justice Network

Nathan looked worried. During a role-playing game on the global distribution of resources, Nathan had finished empty-handed. The exercise involved dividing food among participants based on their status, which is determined by the random dispersal of colored tickets. A blue ticket indicates that the owner must take one of every food item on the table, whether they want it or not. A student with a green ticket may take whatever they want, a student with an orange ticket must take whatever they need, and a student with a yellow ticket will take whatever they can. In proportion to the world's population, there are far more yellow tickets than any other color

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SACRED TRUST FORUM

The Interreligious Eco-Justice Network and the Hartford Seminary will be co-sponsoring this year's "A Sacred Trust: Forum on Religion and the Environment" on Tuesday, September 30th from 4:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at St. Patrick's & St. Anthony's Church, 285 Church St., Hartford. A presentation on "Creation Cosmology" by keynote speaker Sister Miriam Therese MacGillis will be followed by a kosher, vegetarian meal provided by Avon Old Farms Inn. After dinner, participants will be able to choose break-out interest groups: Preaching, Homes and Building, Congregational Life, Food Systems, Community Gardens, Energy Sources, Urban Planning, Transportation, Youth Education, and Lifestyles. Tickets are \$25 and advance registration is required. For more information, call (860)493-0696 or download a registration form: www.irejn/sacredtrustforum.html

peoples of the Earth can understand this origin story and it places everyone – their history, their significance, and their roles – in a whole new light.

The most significant part of this scientific story is that the universe has emerged not only in its *physical* dimension, but also in its inner, psychic, *spiritual* dimension. It is an *integrated* evolutionary process.

Alan: *We're now in the process of telling ourselves this New Story, and teaching it to our children. How can we begin to live it? How can it become manifested in our lives?*

Miriam: I think at every level of our humanness, in the whole inner psychic structure out of which we define our sense of person and individuality. We're beginning to realize now that the *self* is an expression of this deeper Earth self, and the even deeper Universe self – that there are no separations. The *whole* is my whole self. Psychically, the sense of unity – true unity – with the inner dimension of the universe then becomes an incredibly beautiful and enticing mystery to enter into... They are empirically founded, because we know that in our very genes we are connected to the whole.

Physically, it's the same idea. When we begin to identify with the whole physical being of the planet, then we can see the necessity of enhancing and conserving the integrity of the whole natural world – because it's functioning of this part of the planet that makes it possible for humans even to exist. Without air, water, soil, vegetation, there's no human life. I mean, the Earth literally is our body.

Alan: *Doesn't living the New Story amount to a thoroughgoing revolution in religious life?*

Miriam: More of a transformation, because in a revolution one party just changes places with another party. A transformation brings everybody forward.

Alan: *How does a transformation relate to history? What part of the past comes with us?*

Miriam: I think we carry the *entire* past... The past has made it possible to have these kinds of insights.

The major shift we're making now is in our concept of time and space. In the old cosmologies, time was cyclical, and the universe fixed and static. But in this new context, the universe is a constantly emerging process. Time itself is *development*. Therefore, everything in the past has been essential to open up the possibilities for what is yet to develop – like the tree in the acorn. The acorn has to go

through all the states of its process to bring forth a tree, and the tree is very different from the acorn. But you can't have one without the other.

Alan: *What elements of continuity are there with older understandings of the Christian tradition, for example?*

Miriam: Well, in the Judaic tradition there is the Exodus event. That was a historic event, and it meant what it meant. It was a true experience for those people of their ongoing salvation and vision in history. Christians, however, look back on that event and say that it was a pre-figurement of the great Exodus that the Christ took in passing through life, death, and resurrection – that you can't even have the Christ without the first Exodus. The Exodus holds the possibility of the paschal mystery of Christ – but they're *connected*.

There's a sense now in which the form of the paschal mystery of Christ was also a pre-figurement of the passage that the human species must go through – the process of life, death and resurrection, which is essential to becoming willing to die to our fears, our ignorance, our prejudices, our sense of exclusiveness, our sense of having the whole truth. And there's no deliverance, no possibility for transformation unless we see that this is an ongoing process, an everyday occurrence.

Alan: *There's no passing the cup.*

Miriam: Right. I want to use the Biblical words *dying to self*, dying to very old concepts or illusions about ourselves, in order to recover the deep divine nature implicit in the Christ event, which was implicit in the Exodus event. It's all one piece. We are connected to the divine. We carry this incredible mystery. That's the light that is carried through the whole process.

Alan: *What other things can people do in their own lives to strengthen that sense of the sacredness of the Earth and begin to embody that understanding?*

Miriam: Our spirituality has to be extremely practical. We have to start right where we live – in our home, in our backyard, in our neighborhood, in our region. If *those* things are sick, or if what we're doing in our household is contributing to the sickness, then our spirituality is not efficacious.

If we can go about reminding ourselves around the table, before going to bed, in prayers together, or in moments of gift-giving, then we can go into these deeper aspects of life.

Diverse Workshops at Forum

By Terri Eickel

Interreligious Eco-Justice Network

This year's Sacred Trust Forum offers a variety of learning experiences for Connecticut's religious community. Sister Miriam Theresa MacGillis (see article, page 1) will be the keynote speaker, discussing a new cosmology, one that promotes a right and life-sustaining relationship between humans, the earth, its inhabitants, and the divine. Following her presentation, participants will breakout into ten workshops, each focusing on a different interest area. The workshops and their leaders are:

PREACHING – by The Reverends Tom Carr, First Baptist Church of West Hartford and Norm MacLeod, Christ Church, Guilford, CT.

BUILDINGS – Doug Disbrow, an architect with Fletcher-Thompson Inc., Bridgeport, and member of the Connecticut Green Building Council.

CONGREGATIONAL LIFE – Lynn Fulkerson, co-chair of the Interreligious Eco-Justice Network and chair of the Committee on the Environment for the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut.

FOOD SYSTEMS - Michael Kielty, a farmer and farm educator who runs Maple Spring Farms in Morris, CT.

COMMUNITY GARDENING - Donna Gordon, community gardening coordinator for the Knox Parks Foundation, Hartford, CT.

ENERGY SYSTEMS - Brooke Suter, Connecticut director, Clean Water Action.

URBAN JUSTICE – Sharon Lewis, program director, Hartford Environmental Justice Network.

TRANSPORTATION - Sandra Fry, principal transportation planner, Capitol Region Council of Governments. She coordinates the Bike to Work program for the capitol region.

YOUTH EDUCATION - Mindy Shilansky, chair of the Interreligious Eco-Justice Network Youth Initiative program and David Blumenkrantz, founding director of the Center for the Advancement of Youth, Family and Community Services, Glastonbury, CT.

LIFE STYLES - Kathryn Jesch, coordinator of the Unitarian Universalist national program on environmental living, the Green Sanctuary Program.

Tickets are \$25 and the registration fee includes a kosher, vegetarian meal. Advance registration required – see you there! For more information, call 860-509 – 9519. ♦

Nathan stood there, clutching his yellow ticket. He had moved slower than the other kids and thus found himself without any food at all. The group paused and looked at each other. Then, remarkably, two students offered to share their food. What made the gesture remarkable was not the act itself, but the status of the people making it. The students offering to share did not have blue, green, or even orange tickets. They had yellow tickets. The students with the least gave the most, and the three of them divided the small amount they had fairly and equitably.

An innate sense of fairness. A deep faith. A unique perspective. Seemingly boundless energy. These are only some of the qualities youth bring to issues about which they care. Increasingly, today's youth are being energized by the environment and are mobilizing to protect and preserve it. In Connecticut and across the world, young people have come together in recent years to voice their concern regarding environmental degradation, the plight of the poor, and the lack of corporate responsibility. Protests have rocked cities in every country, as youth promote a pro-peace, pro-environment philosophy. Optimistic, passionate, and focused, they do not compromise their values or their ideals.

Understanding the enormous potential of young people, IREJN is beginning a Youth Initiative. Led by Mindy Shilansky, the Youth Initiative will organize and promote youth events that will educate and involve high school students in preserving God's creation. Outdoor events, such as hiking and canoe trips, will be organized in conjunction with the Connecticut Audubon Society. In addition, youth will have an opportunity to participate in workshops on Peace Day on Monday, October 13th, as well as learn about and participate in the legislative process. Two exploratory meetings were held in the spring and summer, with regular meetings to begin this fall.

Today, unfortunately, too much of the world is holding the wrong color ticket. By encouraging and educating the energy of today's youth, IREJN hopes to give them the tools to combat environmental pollution and destruction and right our relationship with the Earth and all of its inhabitants. Perhaps, someday, we will all – plants, animals, and people – be holding the same color ticket, one that may not guarantee us everything we want, but will provide us with everything we need.

For more information about the Youth Initiative or to find out how to educate youth in your religious community about the environment, please call (860) 493-0696 or check out www.irejn.org. ♦

CALENDAR

SEPTEMBER

YOU HAVE THE POWER

Monday, September 8, 6:30PM coffee, 7:00 p.m. panel
First United Methodist Church of Wallingford
175 Main Street, Hartford
(203) 269-9100
Free and open to the public
Featuring Rep. Mary Mushinsky and Rev. Tom Carr

EARTH PRAYERS

Monday, September 8, 7:00 p.m.
First Baptist Church of West Hartford
90 North Main Street, West Hartford
(860) 521-9460

SACRED TRUST: FORUM ON THE RELIGION AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Tuesday, September 30 4:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
St. Patrick's & St. Anthony's Church
285 Church Street
Hartford, CT
(860) 493-0696

OCTOBER

EARTH PRAYERS

Monday, October 13, 7:30 p.m.
First Baptist Church of West Hartford
90 North Main Street, West Hartford
(860) 521-9460

THE EARTH CHARTER AND OUR COMMON FUTURE

Saturday, October 11, 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
St. Joseph's College, Hoffman Auditorium
(860) 231-5694
Keynote Speaker: Dr. James G. Speth, Dean of Yale's
School of Forestry and Environmental Studies.

PEACE DAY

Monday, October 13, 9:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.
The Hartford Learning Corridor
(860) 232-2966
Tools for Peace and Justice for Youth and Adults: 24
Workshops, 3 Music and Art Presentations – Fabulous &
Fun!

NOVEMBER

EARTH PRAYERS

Monday, November 10, 7:30 p.m.
First Baptist Church of West Hartford
90 North Main Street, West Hartford
(860) 521-9460

We have to just turn the television off and do these things in our homes.

We also have to open up the kitchen cabinets, look at the labels and see what we're putting into our bodies and pouring down our drains. I think it's as close as what kind of clothes we're wearing. It's as close as looking at the recycling policy in our neighborhood.

And we have to be active voices at the policy making level. We have to get to know our township officials, find out who's on the planning board, understand development and zoning policies.

Alan: *And this is all an integral part of our spirituality?*

Miriam: Oh, absolutely! We've been tremendously passive about taking part in those decisions, basically because we're running around crazy, working just to survive – or to get what we *think* we need to survive.

Alan: *Many people are simply afraid when even a little bit of real meaning is brought into their lives... How can we make it easier to deal with the depth of feeling called up when we begin to look at these issues?*

Miriam: I think love is the only way we can empower each other. We do hold onto what make us secure – the way we've defined ourselves... Letting go to some of that is very painful and very frightening, especially when we've existed so long in this culture with these images of our value being dependent on our material wealth or our accomplishments... We've been culturally programmed to believe that we are not of worth in just our true *self*.

We're talking about the deeper things that are stirring, that we're being called to. And I don't think anything can help in that process except love.

Alan: *Are you hopeful that we can accomplish the kind of changes you describe?*

Miriam: It's critical to commit ourselves to being hopeful – though not necessarily optimistic or rosy... These things take time – but one thing builds on another, and a little act becomes a platform for something else to happen.

So hope is then an act of the will. It's a conscious choice to do what sometimes doesn't seem to make any sense.

QUICK TIP:

Call the IREJN office for fabulous videos,
lesson plans and books for all ages
860-493-0696

UPDATE!

Clean Bus Campaign

The Hartford Environmental Justice Network (HEJN) is sponsoring the Clean Bus Campaign to help reduce diesel emissions in Hartford. HEJN is not only advocating for state-of-the-art clean fuel buses to be introduced into Hartford fleet, the group is requesting that the older buses be retrofitted with pollution control technologies. To further protect the health of the people of Hartford, HEJN is promoting restrictions for diesel truck traffic through residential areas of Hartford. In addition, HEJN is working to educate and advocate the enforcement of emission control for diesel school buses.

This campaign led to the enactment of a three minute school bus idling law, which began October 1st, 2002. It also helped force the city of Hartford to declare an Asthma emergency. The declaration of an Asthma emergency means that city officials must take air pollution concerns seriously and develop strategies, programs and legislation to reduce asthma in Hartford.

More recently, the Hartford School system agreed to adopt HEJN's goals of requiring low sulfur diesel fuel and particulate traps for school buses as soon as possible. They are also committed to acquiring Natural Gas powered school buses in the future.

To find out how you can help, visit www.environmental-justice.org or call (860) 548-1133.

Burst into song, you mountains, you forests, and all your trees. – Isaiah 44:23b

INTERRELIGIOUS ECO-JUSTICE NETWORK

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

**Rabbi Andrea Cohen-Kiener, Director
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Meet IREJN's Youth Director!

By Terri Eickel

Interreligious Eco-Justice Network

WANTED: energetic, innovative person to run IREJN's Youth Initiative. Must have experience in environmental issues and youth education. Must be a person of faith.

MINDY SHILANSKY: music teacher - all ages, environmental activist, member of First Baptist Church. Enough energy for ten people.

IREJN's new youth initiative leader is one with diverse experience, a commitment to education, a love of children, and a deep faith. Mindy Shilansky's passion for education has been evident since high school, when she taught dance to young children as well as choreographed the high school musicals, beginning a long tradition of teaching kids of all ages. While getting her Bachelor of Music at the University of New Hampshire, Shilansky became so inspired by the university summer music program for high school youth (SYMS) that she founded a junior high version. With Shilansky at the helm, the junior high program did so well in its first year that UNH offered to run it the following year and it remains an integral part of the school's summer music program.

After graduating, Shilansky taught music in rural New Hampshire for three years before she moved to Connecticut with her husband. With a Masters in Music Education degree from the Hartt School, she is currently employed by the Granby School System, she teaches both elementary and high school music.

Her enthusiasm for teaching and her lifelong love of the environment made her a natural choice to lead IREJN's new Youth Initiative. "Kids have great passion and are unlikely to compromise their values. They don't rationalize the way adults do," Shilansky said. "However, kids often get overwhelmed with the details and can burn out quickly without effective guidance. That is where the Youth Initiative comes in." For more info, call 860-493-0696 or check out www.irejn.org. ♦

ECO-ACTION

Youth are energetic and enthusiastic about the environment. IREJN has lesson plans available to encourage and educate young people to care for the earth. This fall, consider incorporating one into your curriculum.

If we don't have what you need, let us know and we'll help you find it! Check out www.irein.org for more info.