
ECO-JUSTICE

Volume 12

Interreligious Eco-Justice Network

Summer 2003

Nature is a volume of which God is the author. - Harvey

The Bah'ai Statement

By the Bah'ai International Community

In September of 1986 the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) launched their Network on Conversation and Religion, bringing religious leaders representing Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, and Muslims together with environmental leaders in Assisi, Italy.

Each of the five religions represented there issued a declaration on nature. As of October 1987, the Baha'is became the sixth major religion to join this new alliance, and put forward this statement in support of the Network's objectives.

"NATURE IN ITS essence is the embodiment of My Name, the Maker, the Creator. Its manifestations are diversified by varying causes, and in this diversity there are signs for men of discernment. Nature is God's Will and is its expression in and through the contingent world. It is a dispensation of Providence ordained by the Ordainer, the All-Wise." Baha'i Writings

With those words, Baha'u'llah, Prophet-Founder of the Baha'i Faith outlines the essential relationship between man and the

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Smart Power = Green Power

By Terri Eickel

InterReligious Eco-Justice Network

In January 2003, SmartPower Connecticut and its partners, Environment Northeast, Clean Water Fund, and the InterReligious Eco-Justice Network launched a campaign to promote renewable energy use, called 20 x 2010. The goal of the program is to increase renewable energy consumption in Connecticut to 20 percent by the year 2010.

Connecticut's active interest in protecting and preserving the environment made it a perfect candidate for the SmartPower coalition and the 20 x 2010 campaign. Besides increasing renewable energy consumption, SmartPower Connecticut and its collaborators hope to encourage green marketers to enter the state, fix market rules that discourage new energy suppliers from coming to Connecticut, and promote changes to the Connecticut Renewable Portfolio Standard, which is the standard for the amount of renewable energy offered by the state's energy suppliers.

Currently, power generation in the Northeast is a combination of nuclear, coal, natural gas, oil and renewables, with seventy six percent of energy from fossil fuel and nuclear plants and only two percent from clean renewables. By increasing Connecticut's consumption of renewable energy to twenty percent of overall energy use, SmartPower and its affiliates hope to reduce air pollution, fight global warming, and stabilize energy costs by increasing Connecticut's energy independence.

Funded by SmartPower CT, the 20 x 2010 campaign seeks to address the significant damage that humans are doing to the environment. The science regarding global warming and acid rain is accepted by all major scientific organizations and the data linking fossil fuel plants to environmental and health damage is conclusive. Carbon dioxide, the major byproduct of fossil fuel power plants, is the leading cause of global warming. Likewise, nitrogen oxide and sulfur dioxide cause

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COMING SOON!

IREJN Youth Initiative

This April, the Interreligious Eco-Justice Network officially launched its Youth Initiative, aimed at activating the young people in Connecticut's religious communities. Mindy Shilansky, a long-time member of IREJN, will lead the group – the next meeting is planned for the fall. The youth will not only participate in outdoor activities, such as hikes and river clean-ups, but they will also have an opportunity to learn how to effectively organize and advocate for the environment. Lesson plans are currently available for both Christian and Jewish educational contexts.

For more info contact the office at info@irejn.org or (860) 493-0396.

www.irejn.org/youthevents. ♦

environment: that the grandeur and diversity of the natural world are purposeful reflections of the majesty and bounty of God. For Baha'is, there follows an implicit understanding that nature is to be respected and protected, as a divine trust for which we are answerable.

Such a theme, of course, is not unique to the Baha'i Faith. All the world's major religions make this fundamental connection between the Creator and His creation. How could it be otherwise? All the major independent religions are based on revelations from one God -- a God who has successively sent His messengers to earth so that humankind might become educated about His ways and will. Such is the essence of Baha'i belief.

As the most recent of God's revelations, however, the Baha'i teachings have a special relevance to present-day circumstances when the whole of nature is threatened by man-made perils ranging from wholesale destruction of the world's rain forests to the final nightmare of nuclear annihilation.

A century ago, Baha'u'llah proclaimed that humanity has entered a new age. Promised by all the religious Messengers of the past, this new epoch will ultimately bring peace and enlightenment for humanity. To reach that point, however, humankind must first recognize its fundamental unity -- as well as the unity of God and of religion. Until there is a general recognition of this wholeness and interdependence, humanity's problems will only worsen.

"The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established," Baha'u'llah wrote. "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens."

The major issues facing the environmental movement today hinge on this point. The problems of ocean pollution, the extinction of species, acid rain and deforestation -- not to mention the ultimate scourge of nuclear war -- respect no boundaries. All require a transnational approach.

While all religious traditions point to the kind of cooperation and harmony that will indeed be necessary to curb these threats, the religious writings of the Baha'i Faith also contain an explicit prescription for the kind of new world political order that offers the only long-term solution to such problems.

"That which the Lord hath ordained as the sovereign remedy and mightiest instrument for the healing of the world is the union of all its people in one universal Cause...." Baha'u'llah

wrote.

Built around the idea of a world commonwealth of nations, with an international parliament and executive to carry out its will, such a new political order must also, according to the Baha'i teachings, be based on principles of economic justice, equality between the races, equal rights for men and women and universal education.

All these points bear squarely on any attempt to protect the world's environment. The issue of economic justice is an example. In many regions of the world, the assault on rain forests and endangered species comes as the poor, legitimately seeking a fair share of the world's wealth, fell trees to create fields. They are unaware that, over the long term and as members of a world community which they know little about, they may be irretrievably damaging rather than improving their children's chances for a better life. Any attempt to protect nature, must, therefore, also address the fundamental inequities between the world's rich and poor.

Likewise, the uplifting of women to full equality with men can help the environmental cause by bringing a new spirit of feminine values into decision making about natural resources. The scriptures of the Baha'i Faith note that: "...man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the balance is already shifting; force is losing its dominance, and mental alertness, intuition and spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be an age less masculine and permeated with feminine ideals...."

Education, especially an education which emphasizes Baha'i principles of human interdependence, is another prerequisite to the building of a global conservation consciousness. The Faith's theology of unity and interdependence relates specifically to environmental issues. Again, to quote Baha'i sacred writings:

"By nature is meant those inherent properties and necessary relation derived from the realities of things. And these realities of things, though in the utmost diversity, are yet intimately connected one with the other...Likened the world of existence to the temple of man. All the organs of the human body assist one another, therefore life continues...Likewise among the parts of existence there is a wonderful connection and interchange of forces which is the cause of life of the world and the continuation of these countless phenomena.

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NEW HAVEN MAN WORKS TO DEVELOP AWARENESS

By Terri Eickel

InterReligious Eco-Justice Network

Working to combat New Haven's environmental problem is Fairhaven resident, Lee Cruz. Through two innovative programs, Cruz is working to raise environmental consciousness in New Haven County. "Toxic Tours," which is a guided environmental tour of New Haven's neighborhoods, is sponsored by the New Haven Environmental Justice Network. By foot or by bus, the tour reveals environmental dangers in area neighborhoods and encourages residents to become advocates for the environment. Cruz was inspired to start the program after a Yale study released a few years ago found that one third of the contaminated sites in New Haven County were in Cruz's hometown of Fairhaven. Since then, Cruz has been taking high school students, college students, and adults on the Toxic Tours. To find out more information on the Toxic Tours, contact Crystal Manning at (203) 785-8854.

Cruz also organizes the "Where the River Meets the Road" cleanup, sponsored by the Mill River Watershed Organization. The program, geared for youth, aims to reduce litter on the banks of the Mill River and demonstrate that cleaning the environment makes it more enjoyable for everyone. Cruz takes a youth group and their adult supervisors to a place where the road literally meets the Mill River, such as a dead-end, or where the road crosses the river, such as a bridge. These locations tend to accumulate litter due to social activity and weather conditions. After an hour of clearing the area of trash, the youth are treated to a free pizza dinner and a canoe trip on the river. The canoe trip is a critical component of the program because it gives the youth an opportunity to experience nature in a new way. Cruz said, "We had sixty-five kids participate last year, but only two had ever been in a canoe on the river before." The event also gives the youth a chance to see adults they know and respect taking care of the world around them. "They see that picking up garbage is in no way a punishment, but a responsibility that anyone can take," Cruz said, adding, "It would be great to get up group from upstream on the Mill River, so that they can see the effect their litter has on people downstream." For more information on "Where the River Meets the Road," contact Lee Cruz at (203) 865-5755. ♦

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both ozone and acid rain, which devastate both public health and the environment. Connecticut's contribution is significant. In one month, the average Connecticut household uses almost one thousand kilowatt hours, generating 1,227 pounds of carbon dioxide, 12.5 pounds of nitrogen oxide, and 6 pounds of sulfur dioxide. A large university campus uses approximately 2000 kilowatt hours every hour of every day. Increasing the use of renewable energy in Connecticut would significantly reduce the pounds of pollution released into the atmosphere.

Promoting renewable energy became more challenging with the departure of the Connecticut Energy Co-Op and Green Mountain Energy, Connecticut's renewable energy suppliers. SmartPower Connecticut and its affiliates were not discouraged, however, and began to urge consumers to purchase "green tags" a less direct, but still very effective method for purchasing renewable energy. Green tags are the primary source of renewable energy purchasing in the country, especially for states that do not have renewable energy suppliers.

To understand how green tags work, it is important to understand the system of energy generation. Energy is being produced constantly and fed to an energy "grid," where is instantly directed to consumers. Because energy is used the second it is generated, it cannot be saved or stored, which is why Connecticut experience "brownouts" on heavy use days. Demand simply overwhelms supply. Also, once the energy is on the grid, it all combines together, fossil fuel and renewable alike. This means that unless a consumer purchases directly from a renewable energy supplier or self-generates their own energy, they have no idea of knowing what, exactly, is powering their dishwasher. However, purchasing green tags is an effective way to put more renewable energy on the grid.

The process works like this: The consumer purchases energy from their regular supplier and a "green tag" from a renewable supplier. The price of the green tag is usually five to ten percent of the monthly energy bill, depending on how much renewable energy is desired. The green tag is presented to the regular supplier, who must then generate renewable energy and put it on the grid. This process is obviously not as straightforward as purchasing renewables directly, however, if 20% of consumers purchase green tags, then 20% of Connecticut's energy will come from renewable sources. Connecticut consumers will also send a message that there is a viable market for renewable energy. For more info, check out "Green Market Suppliers Fact Sheet" on www.irejn.org. ♦

CALENDAR

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JULY

A REFLECTION DAY FOR EARTH MINISTRIES

Tuesday, July 29th, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

The Mercy Center

Madison, CT

(860) 493-0696

Join Earth Ministries as we continue to expand our vision and set goals for the future. The fee is \$25, but could be offset for those who need it.

SEPTEMBER

YOU HAVE THE POWER!

Monday, September 8, 7:00 p.m.

First United Methodist Church

941 Old Rock Hill Road, Wallingford

(860) 493-0696 for information

www.irejn.org/powerpanels.html

Join IREJN as we explore the renewable energy possibilities in Connecticut!

EARTH PRAYERS

Monday, September 8, 7:30 p.m.

First Baptist Church of West Hartford

90 North Main Street, West Hartford

(860) 493-0696

Inspiration, teaching, prayer and music are parts of Earth Prayers. We seek guidance and strength to commit to a caring ecological life-style.

Co-Sponsored by the Center for Serenity, Inc.

www.centerforserenity.org

A SACRED TRUST: A FORUM ON RELIGION AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Tuesday, September 30, 4:00 PM – 9:00 PM

St. Patrick's and St. Anthony's Church

285 Church Street, West Hartford

(860) 493-0696

Sister Miriam Therese MacGillis, our keynote speaker, is an articulate advocate of a new cosmology, a vision of humans in dynamic and life-sustaining relationship with the earth, with community, and with the divine. Her message is timely and timeless, spirited and inclusive.

The very fact that such principles should come with the authority of religion and not merely from human sources, is yet another piece of the overall solution to our environmental troubles. The impulse behind the Assisi declarations on nature is testimony to this idea.

There is perhaps no more powerful impetus for social change than religion. Baha'u'llah said: "Religion is the greatest of all means for establishment of order in the world and for the peaceful contentment of all that dwell therein." in attempting to build a new ecological ethic, the teachings of all religious traditions can play a role in helping to inspire their followers.

Baha'u'llah, for example, clearly addressed the need to protect animals. "Look not upon the creatures of God except with the eye of kindness and of mercy, for Our loving providence hath pervaded all created things, and Our grace encompassed the earth and the heavens."

He Himself expressed a keen love and appreciation for nature, furthering the connection between the environment and the spiritual world in Baha'i theology. "The country is the world of the soul, the city is the world of the bodies," Baha'u'llah said.

This dichotomy between spirituality and materialism is a key to understanding the plight of humankind today. In the Baha'i view, the major threats to our world environment, such as the threat of nuclear annihilation, are manifestations of a world-encompassing sickness of the human spirit, a sickness that is marked by an overemphasis on material things and a self-centeredness that inhibits our ability to work together as a global community. The Baha'i Faith seeks above all else to revitalize the human spirit and break down the barriers that limit fruitful and harmonious cooperation among men and women, whatever their national, racial or religious background.

For Baha'i's goal of existence is to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. Such a civilization can only be built on an earth that can sustain itself. The Baha'i commitment to the environment is fundamental to our Faith. ♦

QUICK TIP:

To make congregations aware of energy use and costs, print the monthly bill in the bulletin!

CALL TO ACTION!

SIGN THE PLEDGE!

You Have the Power to Create Clean Air, Healthy Communities, and Energy Independence!

I, _____,

Pledge to create clean air, healthy communities, and energy independence by purchasing at least 20% of my energy from clean, renewable energy when it becomes available in my community. By completing this form, I join "Connecticut's 20 x 2010 Campaign" and support the work to achieve that goal in my community and state.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

I'd like to know more about how I can help this effort!

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Phone: (home) _____

Phone: (work) _____

E-mail: _____

Please mail this pledge to the InterReligious Eco-Justice Network, PO Box 270147, West Hartford, CT 06127.

INTERRELIGIOUS ECO-JUSTICE NETWORK

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Familiar Face, New Message

By Terri Eickel *InterReligious Eco-Justice Network*

With a growing congregation, Rev. Carr seemed to settle into the life of a traditional Baptist preacher, leading the church and ministering to those in need at the First Baptist Church of West Hartford. But the quieter life as a conventional minister did not await him. By the end of the century, Rev. Carr had established himself as a prominent environmental activist and one of Connecticut's leading theologians on environmentalism.

In 1998, concerned about growing environmental pollution and degradation, he co-founded Connecticut's first interfaith environmental group. First called Eco-Justice and now known as the InterReligious Eco-Justice Network, the group quickly expanded beyond First Baptist Church of West Hartford. As Rev. Carr led the group into battles against the state's dirty power plants, he found himself the center of some controversy – no one expected to hear the voice of faith in an environmental debate. But more and more, with the leadership of people like Tom Carr, different faith communities are joining together to save the planet, possibly the only thing all of us truly share.

It was in the mid 80's that Rev. Carr first began to consider the theological and spiritual implications of the Earth and our treatment of it. Living in Dayton, OH, he was appalled by the story of the Islip garbage barge, the garbage barge that floated up and down the East Coast with nowhere to dump its load. Rev. Carr began to wonder what his faith had to say about the stewardship of nature. He found that our treatment of the Earth was really a reflection of our relationship with God. "Ultimately when we move God away from the center of life and put ourselves in His rightful place, it fails...And why does it fail? Because putting the human at the center of life is idolatry. It is making something other than the one true God the central guiding force and the purpose of life...Put God in the center of life, work towards God's purposes of justice, peace, compassion, and the integrity of creation and there will be wholeness and health."

It is a radical message, one that includes the Earth in Christ's reconciliation of all things back to God. It encompasses all creatures on our planet in God's love. At IREJN, we are grateful for Rev. Carr's guidance, enthusiasm, and spirit. ♦

ECO-ACTION

Global warming and acid rain threaten not only the vast ecosystems on this planet, they endanger life as we know it. Today, please prayerfully consider switching to renewable energy. Although slightly more expensive, the savings are worth infinitely more than the cost. ♦

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