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# ECO-JUSTICE

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Volume 14

Interreligious Eco-Justice Network

Winter 2003

*Let man heal the hurt places and revere what is still miraculously pristine – David R. Brower*

## To Whom Does the Earth Belong?

By Al-Hafiz B.A. Masri

*Reprinted with permission from **Earth and all the Stars**, edited by Anne Rowthorn*

There are so many stars and planets in the heavens that it is impossible to count them. Yet, in all those heavenly bodies we have not been able to find anything that has life, except on our planet Earth. Even here there are so many different species of living creatures and animals that it is impossible to count them. Yet, out of the millions of kinds of living beings, we are the only species who have the brains to understand the difference between right and wrong in the moral sense and who can use the power of our minds to choose between the two.

It is only because of this freedom of choice that we are considered to be higher in rank than the other animals. Animals, too, possess minds and can distinguish between good and bad. However, their brains are not developed enough to distinguish between virtue and sin. Our freedom of choice, based on knowledge and intelligence, puts on us the added responsibility of caring for the rest of God's creation and for those very resources of nature which help all kinds of life on earth to stay alive.

The laws of nature were laid down and are enforced by the Supreme Controller we call God (Allah in Arabic). The universe is God's scheme; God knows what is needed to run it and weighs and measures everything accordingly. The Koran tells us:

Have they never cast a glance at the firmament above?  
How we have set it up and decked it out! And how there are no rifts in it. And the earth – we have spread it out like a carpet; we have cast on it firm mountains and caused it to grow, in pairs, all kinds of palatable vegetation. All this merits deep reflection. (Koran 50:6-8)

It is God who created the heavens and earth, according to a plan and with a purpose. Whatever

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## You Don't Have to Be Irish to Be GREEN!

By Terri Eickel

*Interreligious Eco-Justice Network*

In 2003, the United Church of Christ, the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut, and the Interreligious Eco-Justice Network chose to "green" their annual conferences, offsetting their energy usage by purchasing green energy certificates. Because Connecticut ratepayers can not choose to purchase green energy directly yet, (stay tuned for the great developments this spring); so the organizers used a third party to purchase green energy, guaranteeing that renewable energy would be supplied to Connecticut's overall energy grid. Lynn Fulkerson, chairperson of the Episcopal Committee on the Environment, explains, "We were offset by EAD Environmental. EAD has been creating products for the faith community. They recommend that people offset all sorts of celebrations. They are very interested in working with faith communities, so they were a natural choice for us."

IREJN 'greened' our Sacred Trust forum "We got two certificates to green our conference, one from Community Energy, a wind energy provider for the Atlantic and New England region, the other from EAD Environmental. Community Energy has recently made a commitment to sell their product in New England. Their staff person, Jeff Keeler, was extremely helpful and answered all of our questions.

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### Good News

The Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut and 8 other businesses and congregations are finalizing purchase commitments to green energy at a December 16<sup>th</sup> press conference. Congratulations and thanks to these pioneers.

God wills to *Be*, it evolves into *Being* – God’s words turn into reality. (Koran 6:73)

According to the Koran, the universe, including the earth, was created in six eons, meaning the six ages of the universe, or six stages:

Have not the incredulous people considered that the heavens and the earth were originally one closed-up mass, and we rent them asunder? Do not they know that it is out of water that we have made everything living? (Koran 21:30)

The ecological problems we are facing today arise from the fact that we have started using very scarce resources wastefully and in such a way that we are not giving nature a chance to reproduce the things we are taking from it. We are also consuming non-renewable resources at a very fast rate. The law of nature is based on its own rhythm. We must learn to operate in accordance with that rhythm.

When we study the lives of the early Muslims, we find that they considered all the elements of nature as the common property of all the creatures. Our right to use the natural resources is only in the sense of *usufruct*, which means being given the right to use another person’s property on the understanding that we will not damage, destroy, or waste what is in our trust. According to Islamic law, the elements of nature such as land, water, air, fire, forests, and sunlight were considered to be the common property of all, not only of all human beings, but of all creatures. The Islamic rules on this issue are very specific and clear, based on the Koran:

Ask them: “To whom does the earth and all that it contains belong, if you know.” (Koran 23:84)

To God belongs all that the heavens and earth contain. (Koran 22:64)

God is the Supreme Controller of the universe and it is God who has created it, including our planet Earth for a purpose which God knows best. God has created each and every living being. When our souls are presented to God, we will be judged as to how we have conducted ourselves during our lives on Earth. One of the things of which we shall be judged will be the active kindness we have shown to all that God created, as we are told by the Holy Prophet Mohammed in these words:

All creation is like a family of God and He loves most those who are most beneficent to His family.

The answer to all our problems on earth lies in humanity’s

total submission to the will of God and in trying to carry out God’s will, which is expressed in the laws of nature. That is what the Koran tells us in these words:

Set your face on true religion – the nature of God on which He has instituted the innate nature of mankind. No change is permissible in God’s creation. This is the eternal religion. (Koran 30:30)

Let us try to grasp the true spirit of the eternal word of the Creator before it is too late. “Call to me, and I shall answer.” (Koran 40:60) ♦

## Hee hee...

**God is sitting in heaven when a scientist prays to Him, "God, we don't need you anymore. Science has finally figured out a way to create life out of nothing -- in other words, we can now do what you did in the beginning."**

**"Oh, is that so? Tell Me," replies God.**

**"Well," says the scientist, "we can take dirt and form it into the likeness of you and breathe life into it, thus creating man."**

**Well, that's very interesting ... show Me." replied God. So the scientist bends down to the earth and starts to mold the soil into the shape of a man.**

**"No, no, no.." interrupts God, "Get your own dirt." ☺**

## Join IREJN!

IREJN needs you! In the past year, under the leadership of our Executive Director, Rabbi Andrea Cohen-Kiener, IREJN has collected hundreds of green energy pledges, held numerous “You Have the Power” energy panels, sponsored our third annual “Sacred Trust” forum, began a Youth Initiative, and developed a Christian Education curriculum on religion and the environment. If you want to be an integral part of the important work that IREJN is doing in Connecticut, sign up for membership today. Membership costs \$35 and benefits include:

- Quarterly newsletter: Eco-Justice
- Discounts on all IREJN events
- Free access to our media library and resource center
- Discounted purchase price on IREJN educational materials
- Preaching/teaching for your faith community by IREJN leaders and experts
- Action Alert Updates (at your request)

Help us to continue our work – join IREJN today!

See [www.irejn.org](http://www.irejn.org) for more details. ♦

## Free Bay: Alternative Shopping

By Mindy Shilansky

*Interreligious Eco-Justice Network*

Do you have something on a shelf or in a closet that you don't use but don't want to toss out? As our lives change, we probably all end up with valuables that we'd love to see in a new home.

One community, Congregation Pnai Or of Central Connecticut (Jewish Renewal), created a vehicle for sharing such goods called Free Bay. Based on the great internet yard sale known as E-Bay, Free Bay has slightly different methods and goals.

"I'm a big advocate of "social wealth," says Pnai Or's spiritual leader, Rabbi Andrea Cohen-Kiener. "My daughter needed to read a certain novel, so I posted the title on our congregation distribution list, and that evening TWO copies were on my front porch. Voilá! Free Bay was born!"

Since then, Pnai Or's members have used Free Bay to give and seek small appliances, loaner cars and weekend hospitality for visiting relatives as well as the more traditional children's clothing and videos.

"We do have rules," explains Andrea. "We didn't want money to be part of these exchanges. We didn't want people getting all bitter and sad if no one wanted their aunt's old tea set. And we did not want members to feel overwhelmed by the volume of e-mails."

The rules are simple. People can list their offerings or requests just once, all transactions must be money-free and people must indicate in the "Subject Line" of the e-mail what the e-mail is about. Members commonly write: "Free Bay: Wanted" or "Free Bay: Offering" with just a brief description of the item. That way, folks can simply delete it, guilt-free, if the item is of no interest to them.

"The volume of e-mails has not been overwhelming," according to Andrea. "We get a spate of them from time to time. That's it." It could definitely grow, however. With the economy sliding, Free Bay could be expanded to include work opportunities or for-fee services offered by members.

"Free Bay meets community building goals that we have for ourselves, as well as real material needs," states Rabbi Cohen-Kiener. "I think this could be a win-win idea for many communities." ♦

EAD's representative was also very easy to work with and the whole process to very little time or energy.

Gordon Bates, the Associate Conference Minister for Justice/Witness Ministries of the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ, had a similar positive experience. After attending an energy use forum at Asylum Hill Congregational Church, he learned about green energy certificates and EAD Environmental. Since environmental concerns have always been high on his list, he proposed to the Conference Justice Ministry team that they "green" the UCC three-day Conference Annual Meeting. Bates said, "The process was very easy and EAD did all of the leg work. We hope to interest 258 churches in the option and to encourage individual homeowners to do the same."

Fulkerson added, "Greening was not very expensive because we gave them a marketing opportunity in exchange for the green energy certificates. Even without this exchange, however, greening would have a negligible cost for our event." ♦

## Affluenza: A First World Plague

By Wilf Lamb

"Please, sir, I want some more." These words, immortalized by "Oliver," echo through the western world, revealing our frenzied desire for possessions. These words also characterize the theme of the film, "Affluenza," produced by National Public Radio and sponsored by the Pew Charitable Trusts.

In the fifty-six minute video, hosted by Scott Simon, we are asked to take stock of our lives and ask, "Am I healthy? Or do I suffer from "affluenza," a condition of overload, debt, anxiety, and waste resulting from the dogged pursuit of more?"

"Affluenza" infects industrialized nations, resulting in a dizzying depletion of resources and a staggering increase in societal ills. Rather than measuring our economic progress and health by the GDP (gross domestic product), Ted Halstead, founder of "Redefining Progress," suggests switching to a GPI (genuine progress indicator). The GPI measures the values of twenty-four societal activities including volunteerism, housework, decrease in family breakups, and decrease in crime. Halstead believes that these are true standards from which to measure the health of human communities. Contact IREJN for a copy. ♦

## CALENDAR

### DECEMBER 2003

#### EARTH PRAYERS

Monday, December 8, 7:00 p.m.  
First Baptist Church of West Hartford  
90 North Main Street, West Hartford  
(860) 521-9460  
A Celebration of Light: Our Hanukkah, Christmas and  
Solstice Earth Prayers Celebration. Come join us!

#### GREEN ENERGY PRESS CONFERENCE

Tuesday, December 16  
Show your support for renewable energy by joining us for  
this celebration of green energy purchases by the Episcopal  
Diocese of Connecticut and 8 other businesses and  
congregations. Details at [www.irejn.org/specialevents.html](http://www.irejn.org/specialevents.html)

### JANUARY 2004

#### TRINITY ON THE GREEN, NEW HAVEN

Sunday, January 11, 10:15 a.m.  
Grace Pritchard-Burson will be teaching at the Adult  
Education Forum  
(203) 624-3101 or [www.trinitynewhaven.org](http://www.trinitynewhaven.org)

#### EARTH PRAYERS

Monday, January 12, 7:30 p.m.  
First Baptist Church of West Hartford  
90 North Main Street, West Hartford  
(860) 521-9460  
A New Year's Festival of Song! Music, music, music! This  
is an evening to sing, listen, tap your feet, maybe even dance!

#### ENERGY ROUNDTABLE

Tuesday, January 13, 12:30 p.m.  
Learn more about renewable energy options in CT.  
For details: [www.irejn.org/specialevents.html](http://www.irejn.org/specialevents.html)

#### EMANUEL SYNAGOGUE, ORANGE

Friday, January 16, 8:30 PM  
Rabbi Andrea Cohen-Kiener will be preaching.  
Phone: 203-397-3000 or [uahc.org/congs/ct/ct006](http://uahc.org/congs/ct/ct006)

#### CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER, NEW HAVEN

Sunday, January 18, 11:30 a.m.  
Rabbi Andrea Cohen-Kiener will be addressing the adult  
forum.  
Phone: 203-787-5711 or [www.uccredeemer.org](http://www.uccredeemer.org)

#### FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, CONGREGATIONAL, MIDDLETOWN

Sunday, January 18, 11:30 a.m.  
Lynn Fulkerson will be addressing the adult forum.  
Phone: 860-346-6657 or [www.firstchurchucc.org](http://www.firstchurchucc.org)

## IREJN Sponsors First Legislative Breakfast

By Terri Eickel

*Interreligious Eco-Justice Network*

IREJN's first official foray into political life was the legislative breakfast held on Monday, October 20<sup>th</sup> at the Capitol, CT. Holding the meeting in the off session gave members a chance to meet their representatives in a non-adversarial setting, however, turnout among the legislators was poor because many of them work when the legislature is not meeting. Representative Lew Wallace (D-Danbury) did join IREJN and SmartPower to listen to our environmental concerns, hear the keynote speaker, Reverend Dr. Barbara Headley, and give advice on effective lobbying.

Representative Wallace stressed the importance of building relationships with legislators; he especially focused on those in leadership roles, such as Sen. Kevin Sullivan, Rep. Moira Lyons, Mr. Looney, Mr. Amann, Mr. Ward, and Mr. DeLuca, as well as committee chair people. These legislators are extremely influential in determining which bills reach the floor for a vote.

Jonathan Edwards, from SmartPower, spoke about the importance of knowing both sides of the issue when speaking with legislators. Addressing their concerns at the outset paves the way for reasoned debate and improves the possibility of a win-win scenario. For example, during the Sooty Six debate, many legislators were concerned that bringing the grandfathered power plants up to modern emission standards would threaten the reliability of Connecticut's power supply. By familiarizing themselves with this side of the issue, environmentalists were able to separate fact from fiction and ease legislator's fears.

Faith based groups are the fastest growing segment of the environmental community. By building relationships with our legislators and creating coalitions with other environmental groups, we can ensure that our efforts are meaningful and effective. ♦

### QUICK TIP:

Go on an Owl Prowl! Check out the  
Connecticut Audubon Society for that and other  
fun activities. [www.ctaudubon.org](http://www.ctaudubon.org)

## **CALL TO ACTION!**

### **Your Values: Don't Leave Home Without Them!**

As the holiday season approaches, many of us are planning to hit the stores in search of that perfect gift. Before you whip out the plastic though consider the impact of your purchase and your patronage. If you have concerns, discuss them in a non-confrontational manner with the store manager.

Every time she shops at her neighborhood supermarket, Rabbi Cohen-Kiener requests that the store sell recycled paper goods. "I always mention to the clerk that I am disappointed that they no longer sell Marcal products, which are made from post-consumer recycled material," says Cohen-Kiener.

Terri Eickel says that each time she goes into a Pottery Barn, she talks to the manager about the production of their rugs. Eickel stated, "I know that ninety-five percent of the imported, hand-tufted rugs in the world are made by child labor. The best way to guarantee that your rug was made in a fair trade environment is to look for Rugmark certification, because Rugmark is a third party organization that investigates rug factories. When I talk to the manager, I explain very nicely that Pottery Barn's lack of Rugmark certification is the reason that I can't buy one of their rugs."

Both Eickel and Rabbi Cohen-Kiener stress the importance of consistent, but polite, pressure on companies to engage in responsible business practices. "We don't need to be nasty to get our point across," says Eickel, "however, we do need to be vocal about our concerns if we want companies to change the way they do business." If you want to research a specific company, check out [www.sweatshopwatch.org](http://www.sweatshopwatch.org) for more information. ♦

### **INTERRELIGIOUS ECO-JUSTICE NETWORK**

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**Dr. Heidi Hadsell**

**The Right Rev. Andrew Smith**

## **Spotlight On: Lynn Fulkerson**

**By Terri Eickel**

She is a petite woman, soft-spoken and kind. But don't let her gentle demeanor fool you. Lynn Fulkerson is no shrinking violet, she is not afraid to say what she thinks. As the Chairperson for the Connecticut Episcopal Committee on the Environment and the Co-chairperson for IREJN, Lynn has repeatedly demonstrated a fiery commitment to caring for God's creation.

It is a fire that was lit while Fulkerson was attending Hartford Seminary ten years ago. The last class she took at the seminary was on religion and the environment and taught by Anne Rowthorn. Fulkerson said it changed her life, redefining her ministry. The same year she met Peter Holroyd, a priest with the Episcopal Diocese, who was among the first clergy in Connecticut to speak of environmental stewardship. "Peter was a deeply spiritual man and really wanted to raise awareness of the connection between faith and caring for creation," Fulkerson said. Together they formed the Connecticut Episcopal Committee for the Environment. After his untimely death in 1994, Fulkerson faced the task of further developing the mission and work of the Committee. However, she remained committed to it, because of her deep spiritual conviction. She stated, "I really felt called to it. And Peter was such a great mentor – I wanted to continue the ministry, in part to honor his memory." In ten years the group has grown to eight members and is focused on raising awareness within churches, among the clergy and congregants while providing educational and liturgical resources.

Fulkerson connected with other faith leaders in 1999, during the Sooty Six power plant campaign. Excited by the chance to build a network of faith communities, Fulkerson became very active with the group, working to promote eco-friendly public policy and actions. "Building a network through IREJN has given us the critical mass that we need to affect positive change," she reflected. "I am grateful that I have the opportunity to give time to this ministry." ♦

### **ECO-ACTION**

Green your holiday event! (see article, page 1) With so many parties and celebrations coming up, it is a great opportunity to show your support for renewable energy. Consider it a holiday gift to the planet! Call IREJN at (860) 493-0696 for more info. [www.irejn.org](http://www.irejn.org) ♦