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Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI) Newsletter

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January 1, 2014

Message of His Holiness Francis for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace

Fraternity, the Foundation and Pathway to Peace

Vatican

1. In this, my first Message for the World Day of Peace, I wish to offer to everyone, individuals and peoples, my best wishes for a life filled with joy and hope. In the heart of every man and woman is the desire for a full life, including that irrepressible longing for fraternity which draws us to fellowship with others and enables us to see them not as enemies or rivals, but as brothers and sisters to be accepted and embraced.

Fraternity is an essential human quality, for we are relational beings. A lively awareness of our relatedness helps us to look upon and to treat each person as a true sister or brother; without fraternity it is impossible to build a just society and a solid and lasting peace. We should remember that fraternity is generally first learned in the family, thanks above all to the responsible and complementary roles of each of its members, particularly the father and the mother. The family is the wellspring of all fraternity, and as such it is the foundation and the first pathway to peace, since, by its vocation, it is meant to spread its love to the world around it.

The ever-increasing number of interconnections and communications in today's world makes us powerfully aware of the unity and common destiny of the nations. In the dynamics of history, and in the diversity of ethnic groups, societies and cultures, we see the seeds of a vocation to form a community composed of brothers and sisters who accept and care for one another. But this vocation is still frequently denied and ignored in a world marked by a "globalization of indifference" which makes us slowly inured to the suffering of others and closed in on ourselves.

In many parts of the world, there seems to be no end to grave offences against fundamental human rights, especially the right to life and the right to religious freedom. The tragic phenomenon of human trafficking, in which the unscrupulous prey on the lives and the desperation of others, is but one unsettling example of this. Alongside overt armed conflicts are the less visible but no less cruel wars fought in the economic and financial sectors with means which are equally destructive of lives, families and businesses.

Globalization, as [Benedict XVI](#) pointed out, makes us neighbours, but does not make us brothers.^[1] The many situations of inequality, poverty and injustice, are signs not only of a profound lack of fraternity, but also of the absence of a culture of solidarity. New ideologies, characterized by rampant individualism, egocentrism and materialistic consumerism, weaken social bonds, fuelling that “throw away” mentality which leads to contempt for, and the abandonment of, the weakest and those considered “useless”. In this way human coexistence increasingly tends to resemble a mere *do ut des* which is both pragmatic and selfish.

At the same time, it appears clear that contemporary ethical systems remain incapable of producing authentic bonds of fraternity, since a fraternity devoid of reference to a common Father as its ultimate foundation is unable to endure.^[2] True brotherhood among people presupposes and demands a transcendent Fatherhood. Based on the recognition of this fatherhood, human fraternity is consolidated: each person becomes a “neighbour” who cares for others.

“Where is your brother?” (Gen 4:9)

2. To understand more fully this human vocation to fraternity, to recognize more clearly the obstacles standing in the way of its realization and to identify ways of overcoming them, it is of primary importance to let oneself be led by knowledge of God’s plan, which is presented in an eminent way in sacred Scripture.

According to the biblical account of creation, all people are descended from common parents, Adam and Eve, the couple created by God in his image and likeness (cf. *Gen 1:26*), to whom Cain and Abel were born. In the story of this first family, we see the origins of society and the evolution of relations between individuals and peoples.

Abel is a shepherd, Cain is a farmer. Their profound identity and their vocation is to *be brothers*, albeit in the diversity of their activity and culture, their way of relating to God and to creation. Cain’s murder of Abel bears tragic witness to his radical rejection of their vocation to be brothers. Their story (cf. *Gen 4:1-16*) brings out the difficult task to which all men and women are called, to live as one, each taking care of the other. Cain, incapable of accepting God’s preference for Abel who had offered him the best of his flock – “The Lord had regard for Abel and his offering; but for Cain and his offering he had no regard” (*Gen 4:4-5*) – killed Abel out of

jealousy. In this way, he refused to regard Abel as a brother, to relate to him rightly, to live in the presence of God by assuming his responsibility to care for and to protect others. By asking him “Where is your brother?”, God holds Cain accountable for what he has done. He answers: “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” (*Gen 4:9*). Then, the Book of Genesis tells us, “Cain went away from the presence of the Lord” (4:16).

We need to ask ourselves what were the real reasons which led Cain to disregard the bond of fraternity and, at the same time, the bond of reciprocity and fellowship which joined him to his brother Abel. God himself condemns and reproves Cain’s collusion with evil: “sin is crouching at your door” (*Gen 4:7*). But Cain refuses to turn against evil and decides instead to raise his “hand against his brother Abel” (*Gen 4:8*), thus scorning God’s plan. In this way, he thwarts his primordial calling to be a child of God and to live in fraternity.

The story of Cain and Abel teaches that we have an inherent calling to fraternity, but also the tragic capacity to betray that calling. This is witnessed by our daily acts of selfishness, which are at the root of so many wars and so much injustice: many men and women die at the hands of their brothers and sisters who are incapable of seeing themselves as such, that is, as beings made for reciprocity, for communion and self-giving.

“And you will all be brothers” (Mt 23:8)

3. The question naturally arises: Can the men and women of this world ever fully respond to the longing for fraternity placed within them by God the Father? Will they ever manage by their power alone to overcome indifference, egoism and hatred, and to accept the legitimate differences typical of brothers and sisters?

By paraphrasing his words, we can summarize the answer given by the Lord Jesus: “For you have only one Father, who is God, and you are all brothers and sisters” (cf. *Mt 23:8-9*). The basis of fraternity is found in God’s fatherhood. We are not speaking of a generic fatherhood, indistinct and historically ineffectual, but rather of the specific and extraordinarily concrete personal love of God for each man and woman (cf. *Mt 6:25-30*). It is a fatherhood, then, which effectively generates fraternity, because the love of God, once welcomed, becomes the most formidable means of transforming our lives and relationships with others, opening us to solidarity and to genuine sharing.

In a particular way, human fraternity is regenerated *in* and *by* Jesus Christ through his death and resurrection. The Cross is the definitive *foundational* locus of that fraternity which human beings are not capable of generating themselves. Jesus Christ, who assumed human nature in order to redeem it, loving the Father unto death on the Cross (cf. *Phil 2:8*), has through his resurrection made of us a *new humanity*, in full communion with the will of God, with his plan, which includes the full realization of our vocation to fraternity.

From the beginning, Jesus takes up the plan of the Father, acknowledging its primacy over all else. But Christ, with his abandonment to death for love of the Father, becomes the *definitive and new principle* of us all; we are called to regard ourselves in him as brothers and sisters, inasmuch as we are *children* of the same Father. He himself is the Covenant; in his person we are reconciled with God and with one another as brothers and sisters. Jesus' death on the Cross also brings an end to the *separation* between peoples, between the people of the Covenant and the people of the Gentiles, who were bereft of hope until that moment, since they were not party to the pacts of the Promise. As we read in the Letter to the Ephesians, Jesus Christ is the one who reconciles all people in himself. He *is* peace, for he made one people out of the two, breaking down the wall of separation which divided them, that is, the hostility between them. He created in himself one people, one new man, one new humanity (cf. 2:14-16).

All who accept the life of Christ and live in him acknowledge God as Father and give themselves completely to him, loving him above all things. The reconciled person sees in God the Father of all, and, as a consequence, is spurred on to live a life of fraternity open to all. In Christ, the other is welcomed and loved as a son or daughter of God, as a brother or sister, not as a stranger, much less as a rival or even an enemy. In God's family, where all are sons and daughters of the same Father, and, because they are grafted to Christ, *sons and daughters in the Son*, there are no "disposable lives". All men and women enjoy an equal and inviolable dignity. All are loved by God. All have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, who died on the Cross and rose for all. This is the reason why no one can remain indifferent before the lot of our brothers and sisters.

Fraternity, the foundation and pathway to peace

4. This being said, it is easy to realize that fraternity is the *foundation* and *pathway* of peace. The social encyclicals written by my predecessors can be very helpful in this regard. It would be sufficient to draw on the definitions of peace found in the encyclicals [*Populorum Progressio*](#) by [Pope Paul VI](#) and [*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*](#) by [John Paul II](#). From the first we learn that the integral development of peoples is the new name of peace.^[3] From the second, we conclude that peace is an *opus solidaritatis*.^[4]

[Paul VI](#) stated that not only individuals but nations too must encounter one another in a spirit of fraternity. As he says: "In this mutual understanding and friendship, in this sacred communion, we must also... work together to build the common future of the human race".^[5] In the first place, this duty falls to those who are most privileged. Their obligations are rooted in human and supernatural fraternity and are manifested in three ways: the *duty of solidarity*, which requires the richer nations to assist the less developed; the *duty of social justice*, which requires the realignment of relationships between stronger and weaker peoples in terms of greater fairness; and the *duty of universal charity*, which entails the promotion of a more humane world for all, a world in which each has something to give and to receive, without the progress of the one constituting an obstacle to the development of the other.^[6]

If, then, we consider peace as *opus solidaritatis*, we cannot fail to acknowledge that fraternity is its principal foundation. Peace, [John Paul II](#) affirmed, is an indivisible good. Either it is the good of all or it is the good of none. It can be truly attained and enjoyed, as the highest quality of life and a more human and sustainable development, only if all are guided by solidarity as “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good”.^[7] This means not being guided by a “desire for profit” or a “thirst for power”. What is needed is the willingness to “lose ourselves” for the sake of others rather than exploiting them, and to “serve them” instead of oppressing them for our own advantage. “The ‘other’ – whether a person, people or nation – [is to be seen] not just as some kind of instrument, with a work capacity and physical strength to be exploited at low cost and then discarded when no longer useful, but as our ‘neighbour’, a ‘helper’”.^[8]

Christian solidarity presumes that our neighbour is loved not only as “a human being with his or her own rights and a fundamental equality with everyone else, but as the living image of God the Father, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ and placed under the permanent action of the Holy Spirit”,^[9] as another brother or sister. As [John Paul II](#) noted: “At that point, awareness of the common fatherhood of God, of the brotherhood of all in Christ – ‘children in the Son’ – and of the presence and life-giving action of the Holy Spirit, will bring to our vision of the world a *new criterion* for interpreting it”,^[10] for changing it.

Fraternity, a prerequisite for fighting poverty

5. In his encyclical [Caritas in Veritate](#), my predecessor reminded the world how the lack of *fraternity* between peoples and men and women is a significant cause of *poverty*.^[11] In many societies, we are experiencing a profound *poverty of relationships* as a result of the lack of solid family and community relationships. We are concerned by the various types of hardship, marginalization, isolation and various forms of pathological dependencies which we see increasing. This kind of poverty can be overcome only through the rediscovery and valuing of *fraternal* relationships in the heart of families and communities, through the sharing of joys and sorrows, of the hardships and triumphs that are a part of human life.

Moreover, if on the one hand we are seeing a reduction in *absolute poverty*, on the other hand we cannot fail to recognize that there is a serious rise in *relative poverty*, that is, instances of inequality between people and groups who live together in particular regions or in a determined historical-cultural context. In this sense, effective policies are needed to promote the principle of *fraternity*, securing for people – who are equal in dignity and in fundamental rights – access to capital, services, educational resources, healthcare and technology so that every person has the opportunity to express and realize his or her life project and can develop fully as a person.

One also sees the need for policies which can lighten an excessive imbalance between incomes. We must not forget the Church’s teaching on the so-called *social mortgage*, which holds that

although it is lawful, as Saint Thomas Aquinas says, and indeed necessary “that people have ownership of goods”,[\[12\]](#) insofar as their use is concerned, “they possess them as not just their own, but common to others as well, in the sense that they can benefit others as well as themselves”.[\[13\]](#)

Finally, there is yet another form of promoting fraternity – and thus defeating poverty – which must be at the basis of all the others. It is the detachment of those who choose to live a sober and essential lifestyle, of those who, by sharing their own wealth, thus manage to experience fraternal communion with others. This is fundamental for following Jesus Christ and being truly Christian. It is not only the case of consecrated persons who profess the vow of poverty, but also of the many families and responsible citizens who firmly believe that it is their fraternal relationship with their neighbours which constitutes their most precious good.

The rediscovery of fraternity in the economy

6. The grave financial and economic crises of the present time – which find their origin in the progressive distancing of man from God and from his neighbour, in the greedy pursuit of material goods on the one hand, and in the impoverishment of interpersonal and community relations on the other – have pushed man to seek satisfaction, happiness and security in consumption and earnings out of all proportion to the principles of a sound economy. In 1979 [John Paul II](#) had called attention to “a real perceptible danger that, while man’s dominion over the world of things is making enormous advances, he should lose the essential threads of his dominion and in various ways let his humanity be subjected to the world and become himself something subject to manipulation in many ways – even if the manipulation is often not perceptible directly – through the whole of the organization of community life, through the production system and through pressure from the means of social communication.”[\[14\]](#)

The succession of economic crises should lead to a timely rethinking of our models of economic development and to a change in lifestyles. Today’s crisis, even with its serious implications for people’s lives, can also provide us with a fruitful opportunity to rediscover the virtues of prudence, temperance, justice and strength. These virtues can help us to overcome difficult moments and to recover the fraternal bonds which join us one to another, with deep confidence that human beings need and are capable of something greater than maximizing their individual interest. Above all, these virtues are necessary for building and preserving a society in accord with human dignity.

Fraternity extinguishes war

7. In the past year, many of our brothers and sisters have continued to endure the destructive experience of war, which constitutes a grave and deep wound inflicted on fraternity.

Many conflicts are taking place amid general indifference. To all those who live in lands where weapons impose terror and destruction, I assure you of my personal closeness and that of the whole Church, whose mission is to bring Christ's love to the defenceless victims of forgotten wars through her prayers for peace, her service to the wounded, the starving, refugees, the displaced and all those who live in fear. The Church also speaks out in order to make leaders hear the cry of pain of the suffering and to put an end to every form of hostility, abuse and the violation of fundamental human rights.[\[15\]](#)

For this reason, I appeal forcefully to all those who sow violence and death by force of arms: in the person you today see simply as an enemy to be beaten, discover rather your brother or sister, and hold back your hand! Give up the way of arms and go out to meet the other in dialogue, pardon and reconciliation, in order to rebuild justice, trust, and hope around you! "From this standpoint, it is clear that, for the world's peoples, armed conflicts are always a deliberate negation of international harmony, and create profound divisions and deep wounds which require many years to heal. Wars are a concrete refusal to pursue the great economic and social goals that the international community has set itself".[\[16\]](#)

Nevertheless, as long as so great a quantity of arms are in circulation as at present, new pretexts can always be found for initiating hostilities. For this reason, I make my own the appeal of my predecessors for the non-proliferation of arms and for disarmament of all parties, beginning with nuclear and chemical weapons disarmament.

We cannot however fail to observe that international agreements and national laws – while necessary and greatly to be desired – are not of themselves sufficient to protect humanity from the risk of armed conflict. A conversion of hearts is needed which would permit everyone to recognize in the other a brother or sister to care for, and to work together with, in building a fulfilling life for all. This is the spirit which inspires many initiatives of civil society, including religious organizations, to promote peace. I express my hope that the daily commitment of all will continue to bear fruit and that there will be an effective application in international law of the right to peace, as a fundamental human right and a necessary prerequisite for every other right.

Corruption and organized crime threaten fraternity

8. The horizon of fraternity also has to do with the need for fulfilment of every man and woman. People's legitimate ambitions, especially in the case of the young, should not be thwarted or offended, nor should people be robbed of their hope of realizing them. Nevertheless, ambition must not be confused with the abuse of power. On the contrary, people should compete with one another in mutual esteem (cf. *Rm* 12:10). In disagreements, which are also an unavoidable part of life, we should always remember that we are brothers and sisters, and therefore teach others and teach ourselves not to consider our neighbour as an enemy or as an adversary to be eliminated.

Fraternity generates social peace because it creates a balance between freedom and justice, between personal responsibility and solidarity, between the good of individuals and the common good. And so a political community must act in a transparent and responsible way to favour all this. Citizens must feel themselves represented by the public authorities in respect for their freedom. Yet frequently a wedge is driven between citizens and institutions by partisan interests which disfigure that relationship, fostering the creation of an enduring climate of conflict.

An authentic spirit of fraternity overcomes the individual selfishness which conflicts with people's ability to live in freedom and in harmony among themselves. Such selfishness develops socially – whether it is in the many forms of corruption, so widespread today, or in the formation of criminal organizations, from small groups to those organized on a global scale. These groups tear down legality and justice, striking at the very heart of the dignity of the person. These organizations gravely offend God, they hurt others and they harm creation, all the more so when they have religious overtones.

I also think of the heartbreaking drama of drug abuse, which reaps profits in contempt of the moral and civil laws. I think of the devastation of natural resources and ongoing pollution, and the tragedy of the exploitation of labour. I think too of illicit money trafficking and financial speculation, which often prove both predatory and harmful for entire economic and social systems, exposing millions of men and women to poverty. I think of prostitution, which every day reaps innocent victims, especially the young, robbing them of their future. I think of the abomination of human trafficking, crimes and abuses against minors, the horror of slavery still present in many parts of the world; the frequently overlooked tragedy of migrants, who are often victims of disgraceful and illegal manipulation. As John XXIII wrote: “There is nothing human about a society based on relationships of power. Far from encouraging, as it should, the attainment of people's growth and perfection, it proves oppressive and restrictive of their freedom”.^[17] Yet human beings can experience conversion; they must never despair of being able to change their lives. I wish this to be a message of hope and confidence for all, even for those who have committed brutal crimes, for God does not wish the death of the sinner, but that he converts and lives (cf. *Ez* 18:23).

In the broad context of human social relations, when we look to crime and punishment, we cannot help but think of the inhumane conditions in so many prisons, where those in custody are often reduced to a subhuman status in violation of their human dignity and stunted in their hope and desire for rehabilitation. The Church does much in these environments, mostly in silence. I exhort and I encourage everyone to do more, in the hope that the efforts being made in this area by so many courageous men and women will be increasingly supported, fairly and honestly, by the civil authorities as well.

Fraternity helps to preserve and cultivate nature

9. The human family has received from the Creator a common gift: nature. The Christian view of creation includes a positive judgement about the legitimacy of interventions on nature if these are meant to be beneficial and are performed responsibly, that is to say, by acknowledging the “grammar” inscribed in nature and by wisely using resources for the benefit of all, with respect for the beauty, finality and usefulness of every living being and its place in the ecosystem. Nature, in a word, is at our disposition and we are called to exercise a responsible stewardship over it. Yet so often we are driven by greed and by the arrogance of dominion, possession, manipulation and exploitation; we do not preserve nature; nor do we respect it or consider it a gracious gift which we must care for and set at the service of our brothers and sisters, including future generations.

In a particular way, the *agricultural sector* is the primary productive sector with the crucial vocation of cultivating and protecting natural resources in order to feed humanity. In this regard the continuing disgrace of hunger in the world moves me to share with you the question: *How are we using the earth’s resources?* Contemporary societies should reflect on the hierarchy of priorities to which production is directed. It is a truly pressing duty to use the earth’s resources in such a way that all may be free from hunger. Initiatives and possible solutions are many, and are not limited to an increase in production. It is well known that present production is sufficient, and yet millions of persons continue to suffer and die from hunger, and this is a real scandal. We need, then, to find ways by which all may benefit from the fruits of the earth, not only to avoid the widening gap between those who have more and those who must be content with the crumbs, but above all because it is a question of justice, equality and respect for every human being. In this regard I would like to remind everyone of that necessary *universal destination of all goods* which is one of the fundamental principles of the Church’s social teaching. Respect for this principle is the essential condition for facilitating an effective and fair access to those essential and primary goods which every person needs and to which he or she has a right.

Conclusion

10. Fraternity needs to be discovered, loved, experienced, proclaimed and witnessed to. But only love, bestowed as a gift from God, enables us to accept and fully experience fraternity.

The necessary realism proper to politics and economy cannot be reduced to mere technical know-how bereft of ideals and unconcerned with the transcendent dimension of man. When this openness to God is lacking, every human activity is impoverished and persons are reduced to objects that can be exploited. Only when politics and the economy are open to moving within the wide space ensured by the One who loves each man and each woman, will they achieve an ordering based on a genuine spirit of fraternal charity and become effective instruments of integral human development and peace.

We Christians believe that in the Church we are all members of a single body, all mutually necessary, because each has been given a grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ, for the common good (cf. *Eph* 4:7,25; *I Cor* 12:7). Christ has come to the world so as to bring us divine grace, that is, the possibility of sharing in his life. This entails weaving a fabric of fraternal relationships marked by reciprocity, forgiveness and complete self-giving, according to the breadth and the depth of the love of God offered to humanity in the One who, crucified and risen, draws all to himself: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (*Jn* 13:34-35). This is the good news that demands from each one a step forward, a perennial exercise of empathy, of listening to the suffering and the hopes of others, even those furthest away from me, and walking the demanding path of that love which knows how to give and spend itself freely for the good of all our brothers and sisters.

Christ embraces all of humanity and wishes no one to be lost. “For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (*Jn* 3:17). He does it without oppressing or constraining anyone to open to him the doors of heart and mind. “Let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves” – Jesus Christ says – “I am among you as one who serves” (*Lk* 22:26-27). Every activity therefore must be distinguished by an attitude of service to persons, especially those furthest away and less known. Service is the soul of that fraternity that builds up peace.

May Mary, the Mother of Jesus, help us to understand and live every day the fraternity that springs up from the heart of her Son, so as to bring peace to each person on this our beloved earth.

From the Vatican, 8 December 2013

[1]Cf. Encyclical Letter [*Caritas in Veritate*](#) (29 June 2009), 19: AAS 101 (2009), 654-655.

[2]Cf. FRANCIS, Encyclical Letter [*Lumen Fidei*](#) (29 June 2013), 54: AAS 105 (2013), 591-592.

[3]Cf. PAUL VI, Encyclical Letter [*Populorum Progressio*](#) (26 March 1967), 87: AAS 59 (1967), 299.

[4]Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter [*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*](#) (30 December 1987), 39: AAS 80 (1988), 566-568.

[5]Encyclical Letter [*Populorum Progressio*](#) (26 March 1967), 43: AAS 59 (1967), 278-279.

[6]Cf. *ibid.*, 44: AAS 59 (1967), 279.

[7]Encyclical Letter [*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*](#) (20 December 1987), 38: AAS 80 (1988), 566.

[8]*Ibid.*, 38-39: AAS 80 (1988), 566-567.

[9]*Ibid.*, 40: AAS 80 (1988), 569.

[10]*Ibid.*

[11]Cf. Encyclical Letter [*Caritas in Veritate*](#) (29 June 2009), 19: AAS 101 (2009), 654-655.

[12]*Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 66, art. 2.

[13]SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 69; cf. LEO XIII, Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum* (15 May 1891), 19: ASS 23 (1890-1891), 651; JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (30 December 1987), 42: AAS 80 (1988), 573-574; PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 178.

[14]Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Hominis* (4 March 1979), 16: AAS 61 (1979), 290.

[15]Cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 159.

[16]FRANCIS, *Letter to President Putin*, 4 September 2013: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 6 September 2013, p. 1.

[17]Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris* (11 April 1963), 17: AAS 55 (1963), 265.

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20131208_messaggio-xlvi-giornata-mondiale-pace-2014_en.html

January 3, 2014

Congregations turn to compost for lessons on life, death and the environment

By Adelle M. Banks
Religion News Service

WASHINGTON (RNS) -- The wheelbarrow outside the sanctuary was overflowing with vegetable scraps; decomposing matter filled the baptismal font; and a pile of rich brown soil replaced the Communion table.

Ashley Goff, minister for spiritual formation at Church of the Pilgrims, wanted to convey a message about the cycle of nature this fall, and she could think of no better analogy than the congregation's growing [enchantment with compost](#).

"I wanted them to see the process of life and death and change," she said of her Presbyterian Church (USA) congregation of 70. "It's a dying and a rising, where new life begins."

Across the country in the past decade, hundreds of houses of worship have started composting, relating it to theological concepts of resurrection and stewardship.

Read the full article at:

<http://www.religionnews.com/2014/01/03/congregations-turn-compost-lessons-life-death-environment/>

January 6, 2014

UN Applauds China Efforts to Combat Illegal Ivory Trade

Six Tonnes of Ivory Destroyed at Landmark Event in China

United Nations Environment Programme

Nairobi – Six tonnes of confiscated ivory were destroyed by the authorities in China, Monday, in an effort to combat the illegal trade in elephant tusks.

The seized ivory was fed into crushing machines in the southern city of Dongguan, in what was described as the first public destruction of ivory in China.

According to the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES), elephant poaching in Africa could lead to local extinctions if the present killing rates continue.

The situation is particularly acute in Central Africa, where the estimated poaching rates are twice the continental average.

UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) Achim Steiner said, “We congratulate China and the State Forestry Administration on this milestone event.”

“The largest remaining land mammal on the planet is facing one of the greatest crises to hit the species in decades. The latest CITES data estimates that some 47,000 animals were killed in Africa in 2011 and 2012.”

“Yet, there is reason for optimism. International cooperation is paving the way towards improved law enforcement and increased efforts to reduce demand. These efforts need to be stepped up and strengthened to produce the desired results.”

“We have also seen the destruction of ivory stockpiles across range, transit and demand states: in the Philippines, the Gabon, the US and China among others. As well as create critical public awareness, such actions send a clear message that wildlife crime will not be tolerated,” he added.

Increased poaching and loss of habitats are decimating African elephant populations – especially in Central African countries – according to a report entitled *Elephants in the Dust: The African Elephant Crisis*, released last March.

The UN estimates that over 17,000 elephants were illegally killed in monitored sites in 2011 alone. Overall figures may be much higher.

Secretary-General of CITES John E. Scanlon, speaking at the event, said, "Despite considerable efforts to combat wildlife crime, it continues to be a problem worldwide. Illegal trade in elephant ivory is having a devastating impact on the African elephant, and it also poses a threat to people and their livelihoods – it must stop. China, and the entire international community, are determined to end this illicit trade."

The *Elephants in the Dust* report – produced by UNEP, CITES, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and the Wildlife Trade Monitoring Network (TRAFFIC) – says that the illegal ivory trade has tripled since 1998.

Criminal networks are responsible for the illegal trafficking of ivory between Africa and Asia. Large-scale seizures of ivory destined for Asia have more than doubled since 2009 and reached an all-time high in 2011.

The international community is looking at measures to address the crisis, including collaborative action to combat the illegal trade in wildlife and timber, which would include:

- * Improved law-enforcement across the entire illegal ivory supply chain;
- * Strengthened national legislative frameworks;
- * Training of enforcement officers in the use of tracking, intelligence networks and innovative techniques, such as forensic analysis;
- * Better international collaboration across range states, transit countries and consumer markets;
- and
- * Action to fight collusive corruption, identifying syndicates and reducing demand.

Notes to Editors

* UNEP is strengthening and focusing its work to further assess global and regional environmental threats caused by the illegal trade in wildlife and timber, to provide policy advice on such threats, and to further catalyze and promote international cooperation and action to address the threats caused by the illegal trade in wildlife and timber. Such efforts build on four decades of UNEP's work in support of the conservation and sustainable use of wildlife and forest resources.

* A range of regional initiatives have also been developed and adopted. In Africa, the Lusaka Agreement on Co-operative Enforcement Operations Directed at Illegal Trade in Wild Fauna and

Flora was adopted in 1994 to support member states and collaborating partners in reducing and ultimately eliminating illegal trade in wild fauna and flora.

* In other regions, Regional Wildlife Enforcement Groups/Networks have been developed (in North America, Europe, Southeast and South Asia, and the Middle East), which aim to facilitate cross-border cooperation among agencies involved in preventing and suppressing wildlife crime.

* Regional Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (FLEG) processes have also been initiated in South-East Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin America and North Asia. The FLEG processes provide soft legislation which aims to improve governance in the forest sector and to strengthen cooperation to address illegal logging and timber trade.

* To download the Elephants in the Dust report, please visit the following link:

<http://www.grida.no/publications/rr/elephants/>

About UNEP

Created in 1972, UNEP represents the United Nations' environmental conscience. Based in Nairobi, Kenya, its mission is to provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations.

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About CITES

With 179 Member States, CITES remains one of the world's most powerful tools for biodiversity conservation through the regulation of trade in wild fauna and flora. Thousands of species are internationally traded and used by people in their daily lives for food, housing, health care, ecotourism, cosmetics or fashion.

CITES regulates international trade in close to 35,000 species of plants and animals, including their products and derivatives, ensuring their survival in the wild with benefits for the livelihoods of local people and the global environment. The CITES Permit System seeks to ensure that international trade in listed species is sustainable, legal and traceable.

The CITES Programme for Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants (CITES MIKE) has been monitoring trends in elephant poaching in a representative sample of sites spread across 43 elephant range States in Africa and Asia. These sites include many of the largest elephant populations on both continents. The operation of the MIKE programme in Africa was made

possible thanks to the support of the European Union.

CITES banned international ivory trading in 1989.

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<http://www.unep.org/NewsCentre/default.aspx?DocumentID=2758&ArticleID=10688>

January 9, 2014

Former Grace Church leader takes on new role promoting care of Earth

By Debra Scherban
Gazettenet.com

In 1988, the first year she was ordained as a priest in the Episcopal Church, Margaret Bullitt-Jonas of Northampton, remembers being alarmed as headlines about the dangers of greenhouse gases began appearing.

Then, a year later, after the massive Exxon Valdez oil spill off the shore in Alaska, she was moved to give her first sermon on environmental threats. It was Good Friday, and she couldn't help but connect the devastating pollution with the religious observance at hand. "I felt we were getting a glimpse of the crucifixion of the Earth," she said.

She was proud of her words that day, but when she sat down, a woman approached her, unimpressed: "I just don't get it. What does religion have to do with ecology?"

Bullitt-Jonas has been explaining ever since.

Now, after 25 years of parish work in five congregations, including nine as priest associate at Grace Church in Amherst, she has created the perfect job for herself.

In September, Bullitt-Jonas asked Bishop Douglas Fisher to make her Missioner for Creation Care — a title she made up — for the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts.

He said yes, if he could find the funds. And right then, a donor presented the diocese with money to use for climate change work.

"It all came together in this very graceful way. It was amazing," Bullitt-Jonas said.

She said her goodbyes at Grace Church — with lots of tears on both sides — and started her new job Jan. 1. The church has not yet chosen a replacement.

“We are so desperately sad to see her go but excited that she is going to do this,” said Lucy Robinson of Amherst, a Grace Church parishioner. She and Bullitt-Jonas headed a group called Greening Grace that promoted conservation at the church and participated in state and national events and protests.

“She was amazingly dynamic,” Robinson said. “She’s just been a total inspiration to so many people.”

Focusing Bullitt-Jonas full time on environmental work now is a way for the diocese to show support for reviving the planet, said Fisher.

“The environment belongs to God and we have really abused it through the years,” he said in a telephone interview. “Climate change is a real threat to future generations.”

He wants churches to lead the way, much as they did in past movements for change, such as civil rights. Bullitt-Jonas, he said, is a strong advocate.

“She’s authentic in her belief about this and she’s very, very knowledgeable,” Fisher said.

Nature’s spirituality

Bullitt-Jonas now works out of an office on the third floor of her home in Northampton, which is filled with books, posters and pictures of her ancestors. Her cluttered desk, where tomes on prayer are side-by-side with environmental treatises, faces a bay window that looks out over Bancroft Road. A painting of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology, which used to hang in her Grace Church office, adorns her hallway.

“I love to see him now at the top of my stairs,” she said. The painting, which incorporates the moon, waves, and the wind in his body, inspires her. “Everything is part of him. He knew his kinship was with all living beings and the elements.”

KINSHIP, in that same context, is printed on her Prius’ license plate. “All of creation is being sustained by God,” she said, and the mission should be to cherish, not destroy it. “I believe that God is very much with us when we work to get off fossil fuels and close down coal-fire power plants and turn toward clean safe renewable energy.”

Regardless of their religious beliefs — or non-beliefs — Bullitt-Jonas sees people drawn to nature in a way she deems spiritual. “When we want a conscious connection to a larger presence we go to the mountains, to the lake, to the ocean,” she said. “We have a sense of the sacred disclosing itself to us.”

Over the years Bullitt-Jonas has participated in protests — and been arrested for helping to block the doors at the Department of Energy in Washington, D.C., a dozen years ago — preached, organized marches, lobbied legislators, arranged workshops, held retreats, wrote books, articles and letters, and advised and practiced ways to cut the use of fossil fuels.

But that isn't enough.

“It wakes me up sometimes in the middle of the night when I think about how the climate is changing,” she said. “The oceans are heating up, the arctic is melting, the tundra is thawing and droughts are growing across Africa. It seems to me we have a very short window of time in which to make a difference.”

It was clear what she had to do.

“If I was on my death bed and looked back on my life, if I had not given 100 percent of my attention to caring for God's creations I would feel that I had been living without integrity.”

Simplified life

She and Fisher will meet regularly to set her agenda. She'll continue the work she has been doing all along, adding communicating through social media, organizing churches' efforts and networking with climate activists to the mix. She is a board member of the Massachusetts-based Better Futures Project, and plans to use that position to make more connections.

She says she'll take an interfaith approach. “The good news and bad news about climate change is that it affects all of us.”

Bullitt-Jonas, 62, is married to Robert Jonas, a retired psychologist who is chairman of the board of trustees of the Kestrel Land Trust in Amherst. They have grown children: a son, together, Sam Jonas, who is teaching English in Thailand, and Jonas' daughter, Christine Labich, a landscape painter, who lives in Shutesbury with her husband and two children.

Bullitt-Jonas, who was wearing a clerical collar under a bright red sweater the day I visited, says she loved the pastoral work she did at Grace Church, including visiting parishioners in hospitals and in their homes. But, she said, she needed to simplify her life.

“How many years, God willing, of healthy life and ministry are ahead of me? While I still have the energy, health and time, I want to give myself to what I care about most deeply and where I feel God is truly calling me.”

Finding her way

Though she grew up the second of four children in Cambridge as an Episcopalian, she did not take religion seriously until she was 30 and well into graduate school at Harvard University. It was her desperate struggle with a longtime eating disorder that brought her back to the church she had abandoned in her teens. The illness and her rocky home life is detailed in her memoir “Holy Hunger” published in 1998 by Knopf, New York, and on her [website](#).

“I never went to church once when I was in college,” she said. That was at Stanford University in California where she had fled to be far from home.

After travels and dabbles in teaching and law, she had returned to study comparative literature at Harvard in 1975 where her father was a professor. Her mother worked at Radcliffe College. She said she was ready to face her family conflicts, but still very much in the grips of eating binges that started in her adolescence. “I was living a double life,” she said. “Outwardly I was a star. I was a graduate student at Harvard, but inwardly, I was secretly bingeing and secretly fasting and running.”

Finally, she could bear it no longer. “When you are sitting down to eat a dozen doughnuts at once there is something deathly about that. I realized I had to choose between life and death.”

It was Good Friday — another life-changing moment for her on that holy day — and so she went to a monastery in Harvard Square. “Good Friday is all about the day Jesus is crucified. I realized that there was a lot in me that needed to die and it would only be through God’s help that I could let the necessary death happen.”

Receiving communion confirmed it. “I vividly remember as I stretched out my hands to receive the bread and the wine that I felt that God was speaking to me in the only language I could understand at the time, which was the language of food. It was a huge moment. I realized that at the base of my food addiction was a religious hunger.”

She promptly left graduate school, got into a 12-step recovery program, began praying and meditating and entered the seminary.

“I wanted to find out, who is this God that just saved my life?”

She has come to believe that beneath her attachment to food was a universal longing for something other-worldly. “If you think of people who have it all, they have the resume, the portfolio, the yacht, the perfect husband or wife ... they still say to themselves, is that all there is? To me that is a spiritual longing.”

The story she tells in her memoir, Bullitt-Jonas said, is akin to the work she is doing now. “The same love that had empowered me to make peace with my body is now calling me out to help heal the larger body of the Earth.”

Debra Scherban can be reached at DScherban@gazettenet.com.

<http://www.gazettenet.com/news/townbytown/northampton/10123515-95/former-grace-church-leader-takes-on-new-role-promoting-care-of-earth>

January 17, 2014

Workers of the World, Faint!

By Julia Wallace
New York Times

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia — Just over two years ago, at the Anful Garments Factory in Kompong Speu Province, a young worker named Chanthul and 250 of her colleagues collapsed in a collective spell of fainting. They had to be hospitalized; the production line shut down.

Two days later, the factory was back up, and the mass faintings struck again. A worker started barking commands in a language that sounded like Chinese and, claiming to speak in the name of an ancestral spirit, demanded offerings of raw chicken. None were forthcoming, and more workers fell down. Peace, and production, resumed only after factory owners staged an elaborate ceremony, offering up copious amounts of food, cigarettes and Coca-Cola to the spirit.

This episode, however bizarre, was not singular. In the past few years, Cambodia has experienced a slew of mass faintings among garment workers: One after the other, hundreds of women have fallen to the floor of their factories in a dizzy spell called duol sonlap in the Khmer language. The swooning has been attributed, variously, to heat, anemia, overwork, underventilation, chemical fumes and food poisoning. But according to one group of medical anthropologists and psychologists who have studied the phenomenon, two-thirds of these episodes are associated with accounts of possession by local guardian spirits, known as neak ta.

The mass faintings have paralyzed production, to the consternation of the government, factory owners and international clothing retailers. The United States opened its market to Cambodian exports in the 1990s, and the garment industry in Cambodia has since become a \$5 billion-a-year business. According to the country's Garment Manufacturers Association, there are now over 600 garment factories, most owned by Taiwanese, Korean, Chinese, Hong Kong and Singaporean companies. Many were hastily erected on the dusty outskirts of Phnom Penh and in a few other free-trade zones — on land where people believe neak ta have lived for generations.

Although Theravada Buddhism has been the official religion of Cambodia since the 13th century, it never supplanted the existing pantheon of ancestral spirits, local gods and Brahmanic deities. Perhaps the most important of these is the neak ta, a spirit strongly associated with a specific natural feature — a rock, a tree, a patch of soil. These spirits represent a village-based morality and are inseparable from the land. This connection is so strong that in past times even some kings were seen to be merely renting the land from neak ta.

Like those kings of old, Cambodia's deeply superstitious prime minister, Hun Sen, in power for almost three decades, calls on land and water spirits to curse his enemies. Most Cambodians today, while Buddhist, ply spirits with tea and buns at small altars.

These days, when neak ta appear on the factory floor — inducing mass faintings among workers and shouting commands at managers — they are helping the cause of Cambodia's largely young, female and rural factory workforce by registering a kind of bodily objection to the harsh daily regimen of industrial capitalism: few days off; a hard bed in a wooden barracks; meager meals of rice and a mystery curry, hastily scarfed down between shifts. These voices from beyond are speaking up for collective bargaining in the here and now, expressing grievances much like the

workers' own: a feeling that they are being exploited by forces beyond their control, that the terms of factory labor somehow violate an older, fairer moral economy.

Early last year, I met a 31-year-old woman called Sreyneang, a worker at Canadia Industrial Park, west of Phnom Penh. She had recently caused dozens of her co-workers to collapse after speaking in the voice of a neak ta. While entranced, she had also assaulted the president of the factory's government-aligned union, pounding him with her fists and pelting him with insults.

We chatted on the dirt floor of the tiny wooden house where she lived; there was nowhere else to sit. She said she had been feeling ill on the day of the fainting, and that the factory nurse had refused to let her go home. She did not remember most of what had happened next, but a spirit healer later explained that a neak ta had entered her, infuriated that a banyan tree on the factory site which had been his home for centuries was chopped down, with neither ritual propitiation nor apology, during the construction of the building.

A few months after that event, something similar happened at a sporting-goods factory near the capital that was said to have been haunted ever since it opened in August 2012. Female workers asked their supervisor, a man named Ah Kung, if they could hold a ceremony and offer a chicken to a neak ta angered at being displaced from the site. He refused. Two days later, the spirit entered the body of a young female worker, Sreymom, and claiming, in her voice, to have been "looked down upon," began shouting in a mixture of Khmer and short, quick syllables her colleagues took to be Chinese. Several dozen other workers lost consciousness and had to be treated at a local clinic.

"When she was possessed, she just pointed around everywhere," one eyewitness explained afterward. "She said, 'I want to meet Ah Kung.' She said, 'I want to meet him because I lived here a very long time and he never respected me and this is my land.'" When Ah Kung arrived, the bystander said, "He came out and knelt down in front of her and offered whatever the neak ta asked."

What the spirit was asking for was respect. He demanded that an altar be built and that ritual offerings be made to him there four times a month. He demanded that the owner roast a pig for him and throw a Khmer New Year party for the workers. The owner complied. The faintings stopped.

In other times and places, ethnographers have also noted seemingly magical manifestations when indigenous populations first confront industrial capitalism. As the manufacture of linen intensified in northern Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries, household spirits began to appear in textile workshops in a more malevolent form. There was the story about the demonic imp Rumpelstiltskin, for example, who helped a young woman spin grotesque amounts of thread, but only in exchange for her firstborn. Other fairy tales sublimated the distress caused by the environmental and social costs of intensified flax production. The anthropologist Michael Taussig has written about Colombian peasants who were newly incorporated into wage labor on sugar cane plantations in the 1970s and reportedly sold their souls to the devil to increase their productivity.

Aihwa Ong, another anthropologist, documented an outbreak of spirit possession in the 1970s among Malaysian women in Japanese-owned electronics factories. These workers often screamed hysterically and attacked their supervisors under the influence of a native spirit called a datuk. Ms. Ong interpreted these acts as a spiritual rebellion against the drudgery of factory life and the rupturing of the women's longstanding social ties as they migrated from villages to newly established free-trade zones.

She also concluded that the spirit visitations did the women little good because they allowed the factory owners to cast the women's valid complaints about working conditions as mass hysteria.

In Cambodia, the opposite seems to be true. Like Ms. Ong's subjects, the vast majority of garment workers here are female and young. Many are the first generation in their families to work outside their native rice-farming communities. They often send a large portion of their wages back home, and feel both lucky to be able to do this and desperate. "The conditions are terrible — very, very bad," Sreyneang told me as she described working six days a week to eke out \$120 a month, without being allowed to take days off even when sick. "The factory has always been really strict."

Despite efforts to diversify, the garment industry in Cambodia still makes up around 80 percent of the country's total exports. Because the economy is so vulnerable to instability in the sector, the government has often reacted harshly, even violently, to garment workers' efforts to unionize or take any collective action to ask for higher wages. During recent demonstrations, on Jan. 2 and 3, striking workers at Canadia Industrial Park and another factory near Phnom Penh were set upon by soldiers and military police; at least four were killed and dozens were injured.

Cambodian workers frequently complain that they are forced to work overtime and threatened when they try to join independent unions rather than one of the many government- or factory-backed unions that have sprung up over the past decade. (For an estimated garment workforce of at least 450,000, by the International Labor Organization's tally, there are now over 400 unions, according to Solidarity Center, an international labor rights group.) Pro-government and pro-factory unions occupy most of the seats allotted to labor on the national committee that determines wage increases, and their dominance complicates collective bargaining.

In September 2010, when the national minimum wage was \$61 per month, some 200,000 workers took to the streets to ask for a raise. It was the largest-ever strike in the garment sector, but after just three days it came to an anticlimactic halt due to police violence and threats against union leaders. Hundreds of the striking workers were illegally fired in retaliation. The minimum wage remained the same.

Then the neak ta appeared. Mass faintings in garment factories increased exponentially in early 2011, just a few months after the mass strike fizzled. Production lines shut down after the workers' bodies shut down, and spirits bargained with management on the factory floor.

Public sentiment started to shift. During the 2010 strikes, few seemed preoccupied with workers' rights. Even the foreign media and the Asian Development Bank's chief economist wondered aloud whether the workers' demands would hurt the industry. But when the mass faintings

began, concern for the workers grew: Were they earning enough to feed themselves? Were they being exposed to dangerous chemicals?

Since then, basic pay for garment workers has risen from \$61 to \$80 per month, and is set to rise again to \$100 in February. Numerous conferences on occupational health and safety have been convened. Individual factories, the consortium of garment producers and mass retailers like H&M have commissioned studies of working conditions in Cambodian factories. Garment workers have started to receive monthly bonuses for health and transportation.

Not all improvements can be attributed to spirit visitations: The country's six independent unions have been fighting hard for wage increases. And working conditions still leave a great deal to be desired; labor rights advocates say that \$160 a month is the minimum workers need to adequately feed and house themselves. But insofar as conditions have gotten better, it is partly because the factory-floor faintings have reframed the debate. The government's brutal repression of this month's strike has shown that it will still not tolerate large-scale collective bargaining. But mass swooning is a rare form of group action that can hardly be suppressed.

And now neak ta have been showing up to defend other victims of development. The spirits have appeared at demonstrations and sit-ins organized by the political opposition, which has been contesting the results of elections held in July, which kept Hun Sen's governing party in power. At protests against urban dispossession in Phnom Penh, traditional animist curses are often levied at state institutions. Salt and chilies are hurled at courthouses, chickens are offered to spirits, mediums summon local gods to mete out justice in land disputes.

Last year, in a slum in Phnom Penh, a demonstration by residents who were being evicted by a wealthy landlord was interrupted when a neak ta possessed an indigent woman who lived under a staircase with her mentally ill husband, both suffering from H.I.V. The woman assaulted a local official who was trying to shut down the protest, forcing him to stand down. Previously, the landlord had cut down an old banyan tree believed to be the neak ta's home.

"I have been protecting this area for a long time," the woman shouted, "and I am very angry because the company demolished my house. I am very, very angry."

Julia Wallace is executive editor of The Cambodia Daily in Phnom Penh.

<http://mobile.nytimes.com/2014/01/18/opinion/workers-of-the-world-faint.html>

January 22, 2014

New Web Platform Launched to Accelerate Green Economy Transition

CHF 1.6 million commitment from Swiss government, 29 international knowledge partners to strengthen Green Growth Knowledge Platform

United Nations Environment Programme

Geneva - A robust, state-of-the-art knowledge-sharing platform was launched today by the newly established Green Growth Knowledge Platform (GGKP), a diverse consortium of leading institutions and organizations working in areas related to green growth and green economy.

The website is in response to increasing demand from both policy makers and the public for information on ways to achieve sustainable economic growth.

Like the GGKP itself, the website - which features a searchable e-library with over 600 technical and policy resources, as well as dashboards with data and policies for 193 countries - transcends the traditional divide between economy and the environment.

It mobilizes knowledge, experience and support from disparate partners in both the global economic and environmental arenas, all of which share the common goal of accelerating green growth.

"The GGKP is quickly emerging as the leading platform for managing and sharing knowledge around green growth and its new web platform will help to empower others", said Howard Bamsey, Director-General of the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI).

He added: "Through world-class knowledge management, the GGKP is able to provide decision makers with the policy analysis, guidance, information and tools necessary to support a green economy transition."

The Geneva-based GGKP also confirmed a CHF 1.6 million (US \$1.7 million), three-year commitment from the Swiss government.

The pledge bolsters the initiative's existing support from its founding partners: the GGGI, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Bank. The GGKP's Geneva-based office will be jointly managed by the GGGI and UNEP.

UN Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner said: "The Green Growth Knowledge Platform provides a much needed tool to bridge knowledge gaps, exchange information and deliver policy guidance to accelerate and support the transition towards green economic development."

"A transformation towards a green economy is not just about the environment. It must be a priority across all facets of the post-2015 development agenda in order to deliver growth and prosperity and improved livelihoods. Achieving this goal rests on the integration of social, economic and environmental goals in public and private decision making, emphasizing a holistic and far-sighted approach", he added.

Green growth - meaning a path of economic growth which uses natural resources sustainably and works towards a global green economy - is a rapidly developing field encompassing aspects of science, global trade and investments, job creation and other areas.

"Geneva is already host to a number of different international organizations, NGOs, think tanks, and academic institutions working on green growth, building a green economy cluster. We are very excited to have the GGKP establish its roots here. It will benefit from the cluster and reinforce it at the same time", said Bruno Oberle of Switzerland's Federal Office for the Environment.

He added: "A green economy will allow us to achieve and keep high living standards. GGKP contributes to the solid knowledge base necessary for the transition towards this green economy."

As of January 2014, the GGKP confirms agreements with 29 knowledge partners, including international organizations, research institutes and think tanks.

Moving forward, the GGKP will work with these partners to promote collaboration and coordinated research on a number of priority themes, including green growth indicators and measurement, trade and competitiveness and green technology and innovation.

A Green Growth Practitioners' Workshop is scheduled for 5-6 February in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, and UNEP will host the GGKP's next Annual Conference in September 2014, in Nairobi, Kenya.

Notes to Editors:

About the GGKP

The Green Growth Knowledge Platform (GGKP) is a global partnership of international organizations and experts that identifies and addresses major knowledge gaps in green growth theory and practice.

By encouraging widespread collaboration and world-class research, the GGKP offers practitioners and policymakers the policy guidance, good practices, tools, and data necessary to support the transition to a green economy.

The GGKP was established in January 2012 by the Global Green Growth Institute, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the United Nations Environment Programme, and the World Bank. This group of partners has since expanded to include a large, diverse group of leading institutions and organizations active in areas related to green growth and green economy at the local, national, regional, and international levels.

For more information, please visit: <http://www.greengrowthknowledge.org> or follow us on Twitter at @GGKPlatform

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<http://www.unep.org/NewsCentre/default.aspx?ArticleID=10695&DocumentID=2758>

January 23, 2014

Nevada's diverse faith leaders to jointly pray for drought affected West

Merinews

Nevada faith leaders belonging to various religions and denominations are gathering in Sparks on February one for an afternoon of prayers urging for divine intervention in view of persistent drought conditions in Western USA.

Distinguished religious statesman Rajan Zed, who is coordinating this Nevada Multi-faith Drought Relief Prayers Service, states that leaders of Christian (various denominations), Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Native American, Baha'i, etc., faiths will pray in their respective traditions and scriptural languages seeking God's blessings for rain and snow.

According to reports, currently over 81% area of the West is facing drought conditions. Many counties in Arkansas, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Kansas, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, and Utah have been declared as drought disaster areas; with California, Nevada and Oregon as worst affected, Zed points out.

Reports suggest that about 97% of Nevada is in drought, with all its counties designated as disaster counties. Most of Nevada is under "Extreme" and "Severe" drought categories; but part of the state is under the highest D4 category of drought known as "Exceptional Drought". Many Nevada farmers are considering not irrigating this year, which will reportedly be first time in recorded history, Rajan Zed adds.

Organizers; declaring February one as a "day of prayer for rain, moisture and snow"; are asking all Nevadans belonging to diverse faiths to join them in prayers at three pm, wherever they are,

for two minutes of prayers. They are also urging Nevada churches and other religious centers to hold prayer-sessions at three pm on February one to help farmers, ranchers and other residents, Zed notes.

When God will see Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Native American, Baha'i, etc., leaders sitting together in unity and harmony and praying in diverse traditions, God will be naturally moved to provide the devotees relief from drought so that it will not affect their quality of life, livelihood and health, Rajan Zed says.

Joseph E. Johnson, President of Sparks Stake of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who is Co-Coordinator of this Service, stresses: Our belief is that prayers are answered and connect us with God. We also need to be responsible stewards of what God has given us.

Sparks Mayor Geno R. Martini will also participate in this Nevada Multi-faith Drought Relief Prayers Service.

<http://www.merineews.com/article/nevadas-diverse-faith-leaders-to-jointly-pray-for-drought-affected-west/15894258.shtml>

January 23, 2014

Inquiry into the Design of a Sustainable Financial System

United Nations Environment Programme

Davos - The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) launched an Inquiry today into policy options for guiding the global financial system to invest in the transition to a green economy.

In the wake of the global financial crisis, there is growing recognition that the financial system must be not only sound and stable, but also sustainable in the way it enables the transition to a low-carbon, green economy.

The Inquiry, extending over 18 months to mid-2015, aims to engage, inform and guide policy makers, financial market actors and other stakeholders concerned with the health of the financial system and its potential for shaping the future economy.

In addressing its core aim, it will map current best practice, draw together principles and frameworks, catalyze new thinking, and ultimately lay out a series of options for advancing a sustainable financial system.

It will also engage with global financial experts and commission-relevant research, as well as contribute to related initiatives across the UN system and elsewhere.

As leading financial institutions increasingly appreciate the imperative of climate change,

resource scarcity and other environmental challenges, the current financial 'rules of the game' may not be well suited to accelerate this transition.

World Economic Forum estimates suggest that globally, investment in infrastructure of an estimated US\$6 trillion annually to 2030 is needed to deliver a low-carbon economy. Of this, nearly US\$1 trillion is over and above the business-as-usual trajectory.

Such evidence shows that when investments are targeted towards greening key economic sectors, they can produce multiple benefits for the economy, environment and society.

In launching the Inquiry, Achim Steiner, UNEP Executive Director and Under-Secretary General of the United Nations, said: "UNEP is working to advance a rapid transition towards an inclusive, green economy. The Inquiry will catalyze actions to enable the financial system to support the transition, building on policy innovations and countries' best practices".

The Inquiry extends UNEP's ground-breaking work on the green economy, and draws on the commitment and wealth of practical expertise of the 200 financial institutional members of the UNEP Finance Initiative (UNEPFI).

David Pitt-Watson, Co-Chair of UNEPFI, said: "The world's financial institutions are there to finance a growing, sustainable economy, but the evidence suggests that, today, the industry performs that task poorly. The Inquiry will support the urgent need to reshape a practical and agreed agenda of reform that ensures that the finance industry fulfills its purpose."

An Advisory Council has been established to guide the Inquiry, comprising financial regulators, senior executives from leading financial institutions and international organizations and financial market and sustainability experts, currently including:

Naina Kidwai, Group General Manager and Country Head, HSBC India

Rachel Kyte, Group Vice President of the World Bank

David Pitt-Watson, co-Chair of UNEP Finance Initiative

Atiur Rahman, Governor of the Central Bank of Bangladesh

Murilo Portugal, President of the Brazilian Bankers Federation

Neeraj Sahai, President of S&P Rating Services

Rick Samans, Managing Director of the World Economic Forum

Mallam Sanusi, Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria

Andrew Sheng, President of Fung Global Institute.

Lord Adair Turner, Senior Fellow of the Institute of New Economic Thinking, ex-Chair of the Financial Services Authority

Naina Kidwai, Chair of HSBC India, said: "The Inquiry offers the financial world a timely opportunity to engage on critical issues and examine how we can best respond to pressing challenges such as water stress, energy efficiency and indeed climate change. I look forward to moving this important agenda forward."

"The Inquiry provides a vehicle for taking a strategic look at how the financial system can play

its part in mobilizing capital for a low-carbon, resilient economy", added Rachel Kyte, Group Vice President, World Bank Group.

Two Co-Directors and a Head of Strategic Outreach have been appointed to lead the Inquiry from its Geneva base:

Nick Robins, currently head of HSBC's Center for Excellence in Climate Change
Simon Zadek, ex-Chief Executive of AccountAbility and Senior Fellow of the Global Green Growth Institute and the International Institute for Sustainable Development Mahenau Agha will serve as UNEP Advisor. The first Advisory Council meeting is scheduled to be held in April 2014.

For more information, please visit: <http://www.unep.org/greeneconomy/financialinquiry/>

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<http://www.unep.org/GreenEconomy/InformationMaterials/News/PressRelease/tabid/4612/language/en-US/Default.aspx?DocumentId=2758&ArticleId=10698>

January 23, 2014

Friends Fiduciary calls for fossil fuel risk assessment

Friends Fiduciary

FFC, as part of a coalition of 70 global investors representing over \$3 trillion in assets under management, launched the first-ever coordinated effort to spur 45 of the world's largest oil & gas, coal and electric power companies to assess the financial risks that current and probable future climate policy pose to their business plans.

The World Bank warns of catastrophic climate change impacts at the world's current path for global warming of 4 degrees Celsius or more. Recent studies by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the International Energy Agency (IEA) suggest that achieving the international goal of limiting global warming to 2 degrees Celsius requires a global carbon budget and leaving proven fossil fuel reserves in the ground.

In 2012 alone, however, the 200 largest public fossil fuel companies collectively spent an estimated \$674 billion on finding and developing new reserves, according to the Carbon Tracker Initiative's *Unburnable Carbon* report. Some of these reserves, however, may never be utilized due to the probability of increased carbon emission regulation.

FFC supports mitigating climate change risks and is concerned that directing capital towards high carbon assets, in the wake of growing climate change concern and the probability of increased carbon-limiting policy, would ultimately lead to share value loss. As a long term investor, FFC advocates and anticipates a low-carbon future, and calls for companies to assess business plans in an environment of greater fossil fuel emission restrictions.

View letter: <http://www.friendsfiduciary.org/files/Carbon-Risk-CompiledCompanyLetters-1.20.14.pdf>

View list of signatories: http://www.friendsfiduciary.org/files/Carbon-Asset-Risk-Investor-Signatories-November-2013_final-1.20.14.pdf

<http://www.friendsfiduciary.org/news-resources/>

January 24, 2014

Hundreds of Millions of Hectares, Nearly the Size of Brazil, Face Degradation Threat - UN Report Warns

Implications on Food Security and Natural Systems

United Nations Environment Programme

Davos / Switzerland – Up to 849 million hectares of natural land – nearly the size of Brazil – may be degraded by 2050 should current trends of unsustainable land use continue, warns a report by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

The need to feed a growing number of people globally has led to more land being converted to cropland at the expense of the world's savannah, grassland and forests.

This has resulted in widespread environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity, affecting an estimated 23 per cent of global soil.

Agriculture currently consumes more than 30 per cent of the world's land area, and cropland covers around 10 per cent of global land.

Between 1961 and 2007, cropland expanded by 11 per cent, a trend that continues to grow.

The report, entitled *Assessing Global Land Use: Balancing Consumption with Sustainable Supply*, was produced by the International Resource Panel: a consortium of 27 internationally renowned resource scientists, 33 national governments and other groups, hosted by UNEP.

UN Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director, Achim Steiner, said, "The findings

of the International Resources Panel show that the world has witnessed an unprecedented sharp decline in terrestrial ecosystem services and functions during the past decades. Forests and wetlands have been converted to agricultural land to feed growing populations but at a cost that is not sustainable".

"Recognizing that land is a finite resource, we need to become more efficient in the ways we produce, supply and consume our land-based products. We must be able to define and adhere to the boundaries within which the world can safely operate to save millions of hectares by 2050." he said.

"Recommendations from the report are meant to inform policy and contribute to on-going discussions on targets and indicators for sustainable resources management as the world charts a new course for sustainable development post-2015, " he added.

The report outlines the need and options to balance consumption with sustainable production.

It focuses on land-based products, such as food, fuels and fibre, and describes methods to enable countries to determine whether their consumption levels exceed sustainable supply capacities.

At the same time it distinguishes between gross and net expansion of cropland.

While net expansion is a result of rising demand for food and non-food biomass – which cannot be compensated by higher yields – gross expansion comprises the shift of cropland to other areas due to losses caused by severe degradation.

Under a business-as-usual scenario, the net expansion of cropland will range from 120 to 500 million hectares by 2050.

Shifts to more protein-rich diets in developing countries and a growing demand for biofuels and biomaterials, especially in developed countries, are increasing the demand for land.

A Safe Consumption Level

The report attempts to answer the question: how much more land can be used to serve the growing demand for food and non-food biomass while keeping the consequences of land use change (e.g. deforestation) at a tolerable level?

A combination of rising incomes and urbanization are changing diets and increasing the demand for land to the point that dietary change soon may override population growth as the major driver behind land requirements for food.

To manage these and other challenges the International Resource Panel uses the "safe operating space" (SOS) concept as a starting point to understand how much more land use can occur before the risk of irreversible damage – in particular through biodiversity loss, release of carbon dioxide, disruption of water and nutrient cycles and loss of fertile soil – becomes unacceptable.

The report says that if the goal of halting global biodiversity loss by 2020 is to be reached then cropland expansion, a key driver of that loss, will need to be halted.

Using the SOS concept, it calculates that the global cropland area available for supplying demand could safely increase by up to 1,640 million hectares.

Under business-as-usual conditions, the report warns that expected global land demands by 2050 will overshoot this safe operating space.

As an interim target, the report proposes 0.20 hectares (1,970 square metres) of cropland per person by 2030.

Monitoring global land use of countries and regions for their domestic consumption gives an indication of whether they have exceeded or are within their safe operating space.

For the European Union, for instance, 0.31 hectares per person were required in 2007. This is one-fourth more than what is domestically available in the EU, is one-third more than the globally available per person cropland in 2007, and it well above the 0.20 per person SOS target for 2030.

The report says that the key causes of our global challenges are linked to unsustainable and disproportionate consumption levels, but in high-consuming countries only a few policy instruments address excessive consumption habits and the structures that encourage them.

At the same time, with an expanding global population and a worldwide trend towards urbanization, up to 5 per cent of the global land (around 15 billion hectares) is expected to be covered by built-up areas by 2050.

In many cases, built up areas expand at the expense of agricultural land, and agricultural land expands at the expense of forests, particularly in tropical regions.

In addition, in the past five decades, deforestation has occurred at an average rate of about 13 million hectares per year.

Reducing Land Demand

While the world's average agricultural yield growth is slowing, the opportunity to increase productivity in regions with lagging yields, like sub-Saharan Africa, seems promising.

Capacity building on best management practices, integrating scientific and local know-how and investing in the remediation of degraded soils offer strong potential for maximizing yield.

In high-consumption regions, more efficient and equitable use of land-based products is required.

Up to 319 million hectares of land can be saved by 2050, if the world follows a combination of measures designed to keep cropland expansion within the 'safe operating space'.

These measures include:

- Improve land management and land use planning in order to minimize the expansion of build-up land on fertile soils;
- Invest in the restoration of degraded land;
- Improve agricultural production practices to increase intensification in an ecologically and socially acceptable way;
- Monitor global land use requirements of countries for the total consumption of agricultural goods in order to allow comparisons with the global average and sustainable supply and implications on sectoral policies;
- Reduce food waste and shift towards more vegetable diets;
- Reduce the subsidization of fuel crops – including the reduction and phase out of biofuel quotas in consuming countries.

More Findings from the Report

- More than half of the synthetic nitrogen fertilizer ever produced has been used up in the past 25 years.
- By 2005, the 10 largest seed corporations controlled half of all commercial seed sales; the top 5 grain trading companies controlled 75 per cent of the market, and the 10 largest pesticide manufacturers supplied 84 per cent of pesticides.
- International agricultural trade has increased tenfold since the 1960s.
- A global agricultural trade has emerged, characterized by high levels of agribusiness concentration, a rapid increase in the share of retail food sales by supermarket chains, and growth in the trade of foodstuffs, fertilizers and pesticides.
- Food prices remain below their peak in 2008, but are higher than pre-crisis levels in many developing countries.

Towards More Sustainable Land-use

The report makes a number of cross-cutting recommendations, which taken together could help limit cropland expansion to an additional 8-37 per cent by 2050, allowing the world to stay within its safe operating space.

These include:

- Improving information systems, especially to monitor domestic land use, and foreign land use for domestic production and consumption;
- Land use planning to prevent the loss of high-value natural areas to the encroachment of cropland and to avoid the spread of built-up areas onto fertile soil;
- Harmonizing food security, energy, rural development and industrial policies through economy-wide programmes for sustainable resource management;
- Economic instruments to trigger sustainable supply and demand; for example, a “subsidy to sustainability” approach to foster long-term soil productivity;

- Targeting public investment to focus on the needs of smallholders to enhance food security and living conditions in rural areas.

For more information, please contact:

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Notes to Editors

- To download a copy of the report, please visit: www.unep.org/resourcepanel (from 24 January)
- UNEP's 2012 Foresight report ranked the issue of global food safety and security among the top three global challenges. The integration of the biodiversity theme into environmental and economic agendas and the new rush for land were within the top twelve.

About the International Resource Panel

The International Resource Panel was established in 2007 to provide independent, coherent and authoritative scientific assessment on the sustainable use of natural resources and the environmental impacts of resource use over the full life cycle. By providing up-to-date information and best science available, the International Resource Panel contributes to a better understanding of how to decouple human development and economic growth from environmental degradation. The information contained in the International Resource Panel's reports is intended to be policy relevant and support policy framing, policy and programme planning, and enable evaluation and monitoring of policy effectiveness.

About UNEP

Created in 1972, UNEP represents the United Nations' environmental conscience. Based in Nairobi, Kenya, its mission is to provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations. UNEP's Division of Technology, Industry and Economics – based in Paris – helps governments, local authorities and decision-makers in business and industry to develop and implement policies and practices focusing on sustainable development. The Division leads UNEP's work in the areas of climate change, resource efficiency, harmful substances and hazardous waste.

Visit: <http://www.unep.org>

<http://www.unep.org/newscentre/default.aspx?DocumentID=2758&ArticleID=10697>

January 25, 2014

Pope Francis preps tome on the environment

By Jonathan Easley
The Hill

Pope Francis is drafting an encyclical on the environment.

According to multiple media reports, the Vatican announced Friday that the pope is in the early stages of a work on “the ecology of man.”

The pope adopted his name from St. Francis of Assisi, known for his love of nature and the environment. Francis has previously spoken about the exploitation of the earth’s natural resources and urged followers to “respect for the whole of creation and the protection of our environment.”

Since taking control of the church in March, Francis hasn’t shied away from taking strong political positions, often with a populist bent. Many Democrats have been encouraged by his focus on combating poverty and his criticisms of unrestrained capitalism.

President Obama will meet with Pope Francis at the Vatican at the end of March.

The Catholic church, however, sharply disagrees with a number of the Obama administration’s policies, such as the health law’s contraception coverage and the U.S. government’s tacit support for gay marriage and legalizing marijuana.

Catholic leaders are also concerned about allegations that the National Security Agency spied on the Vatican.

<http://thehill.com/blogs/e2-wire/196419-pope-francis-preps-tome-on-the-environment>

January 28, 2014

UNEP Releases Video on Sea Level Rise and How Nature Can Help Protect Coastal Communities

Video Part of Two Minutes on Oceans with Jim Toomey Series

United Nations Environment Programme

Washington, D.C. —The United Nations Environment Programme Regional Office for North

America (UNEP RONA), UNEP's Division of Environmental Policy Implementation (DEPI) and nationally-syndicated cartoonist Jim Toomey announced today the release of a new video on how communities can adapt to sea level rise. This production is part of a series of six innovative ocean awareness videos entitled *Two Minutes on Oceans with Jim Toomey*.

The video will be launched at a panel discussion at the National Council for Science and Environment (NCSE) National Conference on Building Climate Solutions. The discussion, sponsored by UNEP and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), will deal with what makes a climate-smart city and how we can build them.

The video demonstrates how coastal communities can adapt to sea level rise by restoring nature's resilience. New research shows that sea level could rise between 0.5 to 2 meters towards the end of this century - threatening low-lying regions with floods and storm surges. The health of many ecosystems, which traditionally were able to cope with shifts in sea levels have been weakened, leaving them less able to protect coastal communities from these impacts. The video also offers ways to restore natural flood barriers, like coral reefs and mangroves, to protect vulnerable regions from sea level rise.

Keith Alverson, Coordinator of UNEP's Climate Change and Adaption Programme in DEPI, shares the video's hopeful message when he says that "Unlike the intractable problems that keep stalling progress on reducing greenhouse gasses, getting started on adaptation does not require any intergovernmental agreements at UN summits, nor does it depend on enormous global sums of money. By preserving and restoring coastal ecosystems, and harnessing their innate resilience to sea level change, any coastal community can dramatically decrease their vulnerability to climate change today."

"What I like about this video is the fact that it offers concrete and economical approaches to mitigating the effects of sea level rise that just about any community anywhere in the world can adopt with success," said Toomey. "It's a video that packs a lot of practical advice to a very urgent problem."

Using animation and humor, the six videos in the Toomey series, provide in clear and simple language, information about cutting-edge science and policy issues regarding our oceans, their importance to human well-being and the challenges facing our oceans. They address a wide range of ocean topics including: blue carbon, the true value of our oceans, the impacts of climate change, as well as threats such as marine litter.

Each video ends with a call to action for individuals, decision-makers and organizations across North America – inviting them to do their part. The videos are released using web based marketing tools and are free for all those who want to show or air them.

You can watch this video, as well as the previous ones at: <http://www.rona.unep.org/toomey>, or find us on Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/RONA.UNEP>.

To help UNEP promote this ocean-awareness initiative, please share it with your networks or post it to your webpage. For more information about the series please contact:

- Elisabeth Guilbaud-Cox, Head of Communications, UNEP RONA at elisabeth.guilbaud-cox@unep.org, Tel.: (202) 974-1307
- Monika Thiele, Programme Officer, UNEP RONA at monika.thiele@unep.org, Tel.: (202) 974-1309
- Keith Alverson, Coordinator, Climate Change and Adaptation Programme, UNEP DEPI at keith.alverson@unep.org or Tel: +254 714636317

UNEP's Regional Office for North America (RONA)

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is the leading authority on the environment within the United Nations system. RONA's mission is to build support in the region for UNEP's work, to promote effective responses to international environmental challenges and to foster cooperation on environmental issues between North America and the broader international community. To achieve this mission, RONA's strategy is to promote collaboration between UNEP and all sectors of North American society, including U.S. and Canadian governmental institutions, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and other civil society groups.

<http://rona.unep.org/documents/news/Sea%20Level%20Rise%20Video%20Launch%20Press%20Release%20FINAL%20Jan%202014%20%282%29.pdf>

January 29, 2014

UNEP Invites Nominations for 2014 Champions of the Earth Award

United Nations Environment Programme

Climate Change Action in Focus as World Works towards New Climate Deal

Nairobi – The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is inviting nominations for the 2014 Champions of the Earth Award, which honours visionaries whose actions and leadership have had a positive impact on the environment.

UNEP's Champions of the Earth—lauded each year in the fields of Policy and Leadership, Science and Innovation, Entrepreneurial Vision, and Inspiration and Action—serve as an inspiration for transformative action as the world transitions to an inclusive Green Economy.

Previous laureates have been recognized for their efforts in areas such as the management of natural resources, demonstrating new ways to tackle climate change and food waste, taking uncompromising business decisions based on sustainability models and raising awareness of emerging environmental challenges.

This year, UNEP is particularly interested in individuals who have made a substantive contribution to tackling climate change as the global community works towards the agreement of a new comprehensive climate deal, which will be adopted in 2015 and implemented from 2020. Women and youth nominees are also strongly encouraged.

Google Earth, Brazil's Minister of Environment Izabella Teixeira and Carlo Petrini, the founder of the Slow Food Movement, were among the award winners in 2013.

Other winners in 2013 were European Commissioner for Environment Janez Potocnik; Veerabhadran Ramanathan, Professor at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, UCSD; Jack Dangermond, founder of the Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI), and Martha Isabel Ruiz Corzo from the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve in Mexico.

Champions of the Earth is now in its 10th year, and since its inception has seen steady growth in both profile and the number of nominees. It has recognized heads of state, companies, activists, musicians and many others at award ceremonies in major cities such as Singapore, Paris, Seoul, New York City and Rio de Janeiro.

The 2014 winners will be unveiled at a gala event towards the end of the year. China's Guangdong Wealth supported the 2013 awards, and will continue to do so in 2014.

About Champions of the Earth

Champions of the Earth, which was launched in 2005, is the UN's flagship environmental award. To date, it has recognized 59 individuals and organizations for their leadership, vision, inspiration and action on the environment. The list of previous Champions laureates include Mongolian President Tsakhia Elbegdorj, Mexican President Felipe Calderon, Chinese actress and environmental advocate Zhou Xun, the Women's Environment & Development Organization (WEDO) and global music legend Angélique Kidjo. Visit <http://www.unep.org/champions/> to register your nomination.

About Guangdong Wealth

Guangdong Wealth Environmental Protection is a leading supplier of water purifying products and water treatment integrated solutions in China. The company practices a business model that puts social welfare before economic interests. Their development concept "let the sky be bluer and the water clearer" supports UNEP's goals of maintaining, if not improving, the health of our natural resources. The company invests in environmental scholarships for young university

students, organizes clean-up operations and donates tonnes of purifying tablets to tackle pollution in rivers in Guangdong and Beijing.

For more information, please contact:

UNEP Newsdesk (Nairobi), on Tel. +254 725 939 620 or e-mail unepnewsdesk@unep.org

<http://www.unep.org/champions/news/2014-call-for-nominations.asp#sthash.gSggKLCg.dpbs>

January/February 2014

Religious Naturalism and Its Place in the Family of Religions

By Donald A. Crosby

From *The Fourth R*

Volume 27, Issue 1

To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun. At least, they have a very superficial seeing. The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and heart of the child. The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood. His intercourse with heaven and earth becomes part of his daily food. In the presence of nature a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows. Nature says—he is my creature, and maugre [despite] all his impertinent griefs, he shall be glad with me.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson¹

Religious naturalism deserves recognition as an important form of religious faith among the various religious stances and outlooks of the world. It does so especially today, when its significance is coming to be increasingly acknowledged, vigorously developed, and actively propounded. What is religious naturalism? Simply put, it is the recognition that to be is to be natural and the conviction that nature in all of its forms and manifestations is a proper focus of religious commitment. When I say that to be is to be natural, I am exempting from reality anything other than nature, meaning that, for religious naturalism, there is no such thing as a supposed *supernatural* being, beings, regions, revelations, origins, purposes, destinies, and the like. All of reality is natural, or, to state the matter negatively, nothing beyond, beneath, or above nature and its multifarious forms exists. This does not mean that there can be no deeply fulfilling and saving religious faith, outlook, or devotion. It means that the appropriate source and object of such faith, outlook, and devotion can rightly be regarded as nature itself.

Nature gives birth to each of us humans and to our species, nurtures us, supports us, surrounds us with rejuvenating beauty and awesome sublimity, and fills us with gladness and wonder—even in the face of loss, sadness, or pain. The words of Ralph Waldo Emerson in the epigraph to this essay express this idea with forceful beauty and exactness. Nature can assure us, demand the

utmost of us in loyalty and dedication, and empower us to live meaningful, constructive, and contributing lives. However, nature also allows us and other natural beings to die, and sometimes not in the fullness of time. And it not only permits but also warrants in numerous ways untold sufferings for the creatures of earth. I shall say more about this troubling fact later.

As natural beings among diverse other natural beings, we humans are at home in nature. We need not wistfully yearn for some other home or for some other form of existence. Religious naturalism maintains that our central task in life and the deepest fulfillment of our existence is to serve nature, not to think, act, or react as if nature were put here to serve us. Nature is not to be regarded as mere raw material for human use but is to be revered as having ultimate, abiding, and inexhaustible worth. Its vast reaches of space and time do not center on us, but we are products of its evolutionary processes here on earth and an integral part of the earth-wide community of living beings sustained by our respective natural environments. The environments of humans may be modified by human technology, but they are still at bottom aspects of nature turned to human use.

Should nature be worshipped or prayed to, then? Does it have an overall purpose? Can the fact of its existence be explained without recourse to God or to a transcendent, non-natural source or ground akin to God? Is religious commitment to the ultimacy of nature a form of pantheism? Can it have religious meaning without being acknowledged as the creation of God, without relying from moment to moment on the sustaining power and presence of God? Is nature not rife with indifferent danger, destructiveness, and waste, and thus hardly qualifying for religious reverence and commitment? Exactly how or in what ways can nature assure us religiously, call forth our utmost dedication and commitment, or empower us to live richly meaningful and amply fulfilling lives? In short, can nature save us? I shall spend the rest of this essay responding to these questions as a proponent of the version of religious naturalism I label as Religion of Nature.

Can we worship or pray to nature?

Religion of Nature does not expect us to worship or pray to nature. Worship is appropriate only for a personal being, and nature is not a personal being. And while meditation and prayer have an important place in the outlook and practice of Religion of Nature, they are focused on nature but not addressed to nature as if it were personal. There can be prayers of gratitude for nature's magnificence and our place as humans within nature. There can be expressions of commitment to serving the well-being of nature and its creatures, including its human creatures. There can be meditations on the mysteries and wonders of nature. There can be confessions of failure to live up to the ideals of Religion of Nature. And so on. But petitionary prayers, as one type of prayer, can be addressed only to a personal religious ultimate, not to nature. We cannot entreat a non-personal nature to help us. But rituals of various sorts, both public and private, can be created and celebrated in Religion of Nature.

Does nature have an overall purpose?

For Religion of Nature, nature as a whole has no purpose. But there are ample purposes within nature, that is, in the distinctive modes of aspiring, acting, and flourishing among sentient beings and especially in the lives of human beings. So purpose has emerged in nature even though there is no overarching purpose of nature. It is natural for us humans to live purposively as we go about planning our lives, rearing our children, relating to one another, devoting ourselves to our

careers, involving ourselves in creative activities, and committing ourselves to moral and religious ideals. The absence of an overarching purpose of nature as a whole does not disqualify Religion of Nature from having profound and lasting religious significance.

Nature may not focus primarily on us or care for us in the way a personal God could be expected to do, but it should be remembered that the personal God of traditional religion has today to be conceived as presiding over a universe of well over a hundred billion galaxies, each with at least a hundred billion stars, and who knows how many planets. (Just to give some image to these overwhelming numbers, there are more stars in the universe—100 billion \times 100 billion—than there are grains of sand on all the beaches on earth.) It seems unlikely that such a God could be intimately concerned exclusively or even primarily with the human species on one small planet or with the relatively parochial concerns of individual human beings. It may be claimed that such a God has a comprehensive purpose for the universe as a whole, but that purpose may be so radically general as not to be directed specifically to human beings. At any rate, nature does “care” for us in the perspective of Religion of Nature by providing us with the nurture, support, resources, abilities, and motivations to find our own purposes in life and to pursue those purposes in challenging and meaningful ways.

Can the existence of nature be accounted for apart from a divine creator?

It was traditionally believed that the existence of the universe could only be explained if there is a God to create and sustain it. The universe was viewed as contingent or critically dependent on God for its existence and persistence in being. Only God exists necessarily, it was believed, meaning that only in the case of the existence of God does it make sense not to require a reason for that kind of existence. To refer to God as a necessary being is to assert that it is impossible for God not to exist, precisely because God does not depend on anything else for existence. By contrast, it is possible for everything other than God not to exist. That is why everything else, and the universe as a whole, could not have come into being or continue in being unless it depended throughout on God’s providence and power. Or so we have frequently been told in past religion and philosophy.

But there is no compelling reason, from the standpoint of Religion of Nature, to conceive of the universe as existing contingently rather than necessarily, and thus as requiring a transcendent ground and reason for its existence. If there is such a thing as necessary existence, it can apply to the universe itself rather than to God. The universe in some shape or form has always existed and always will exist, according to this view. It did not arise from nothing, nor was it created from nothing by a God. In fact, sheer nothingness is not even a meaningful conception, as is shown by the theist’s felt requirement to posit the prior existence of God. There is no need to explain the existence of the universe any more than there is need for the traditional theist to explain the existence of God.

What about the supposed Big Bang origin of our present universe, as argued for by contemporary science? Does that not strongly suggest origination out of a prior nothingness? And is that idea explicable apart from the existence of God or some sort of previously existing ground? In today’s physics, the Big Bang is not held to have originated out of sheer nothingness. Theories of its occurrence tell us that our universe resulted from fluctuations within a so-called “quantum vacuum” or empty space, or that it was a tiny cosmic nugget of incredible density and potential

power. But neither the vacuum nor the space is really claimed to be completely empty or devoid of character, and the nugget is acknowledged to have previously existed. The laws of physics by which the Big Bang occurred must similarly have existed prior to its occurrence. In all these cases, something is alleged to have given rise to something else. Religion of Nature takes this way of thinking into account and is open to the possibility, if not probability, that this universe and its rapid expansion arose from the crunch or collapse of a previous universe, and that universe from another universe, and so on back into infinite time. The universe as a whole in all of its successive guises and forms has therefore always existed, and our universe is a phase of this ongoing process of the creation and destruction of universes over endless time.

For Religion of Nature, therefore, all meaningful explanations are those relating one part of the universe to some other part. The universe is the given context within which all explanations should take place. To have recourse to God is to seek to explain one alleged inexplicable mystery (the existence of the universe) in terms of another one (the claimed existence and nature of God) that is in many ways even more deeply uncertain, mysterious, and elusive. So it is not entirely clear that anything is really explained. In saying these things, I do not mean to demean or dismiss out of hand theistic belief or those who hold to it. I mean only to show that it is possible to be authentically religious and philosophically coherent in the absence of such a belief. I respect those who think differently, even though I am not swayed by their reasoning. I am seeking here to exhibit the rationale for a satisfying and fulfilling religious vision that does not require belief in God.

Is Religion of Nature a kind of pantheism?

It might seem to be the case that Religion of Nature is a kind of pantheism. Pantheism means literally that everything (*pan*) is God (*theos*). But there is no God of any sort in Religion of Nature, whether God be conceived as one with nature or whether nature be conceived as contained within God (panentheism). In other words, there is no divine spirit pervading nature and giving guidance and support to nature. Spirituality is contained within nature and provided by nature quite apart from the existence of a deity of any kind. In Religion of Nature, nature is deemed worthy of the religious devotion, loyalty, and commitment accorded to God in theistic religions. But Religion of Nature is not a theistic religion.

For people of Western and Middle Eastern cultures, long accustomed to having religion closely associated with belief in God and commitment to the will and purpose of God, it may seem strange to speak of a religious outlook that does not focus on God or assume the ultimacy of God. But there are Eastern religions that do not devote their reverence and loyalty to God but are nevertheless deeply and undeniably religious in character. Examples are Advaita Vedanta Hinduism, Theravada Buddhism, and Daoism. Atheism or the absence of belief in God is not equal to non-religion, even though it is often assumed to be so here in the West. This idea is provincial and ill-informed. The increasing interdependence of various parts of the world with one another should help to disabuse us of the notion that belief in God and religion are synonymous.

To be free of this misconception is to attain an important new level of religious literacy. Religion of Nature is admittedly a godless religion, but it is not, by virtue of that fact, lacking in profound religious meaning and value. Atheism and irreligion are not one and the same, and there is no

good reason to designate positive religious outlooks, that are alternatives to types of religious theism, solely with the negative epithet of atheism. This is especially so in view of the fact that nontheistic religious outlooks and commitments have nourished millions of the world's peoples over extremely long periods of time.

Is nature not rife with indifferent danger, destruction, and waste?

It could be argued that nature is hardly fit to be the object of religious commitment. It is dark, threatening, and even terrifying in some of its manifestations and not focused directly or primarily on human well-being. It is shot through with danger, destruction, and waste. Unpredictable and hugely destructive catastrophes occur frequently in nature, sweeping everything before them: ecosystems, plants and animals, including insects, sea creatures, and humans. Examples are forest fires, earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, volcanic eruptions, droughts, and plagues. Predatory practices abound in nature, with routine sacrifices of one life for another. Innumerable creatures—human and nonhuman alike—also die from such things as birth defects, lack of adequate food, or disease. How can such a seemingly uncaring, harshly destructive force be a candidate for religious veneration?

Apart from the fact that we could also ask such a question of a God who is said beneficently to rule the universe in which such things occur, we need to recognize that nature's awesome power is such that its creations and its destructions go hand-in-hand. Nature's laws are generally supportive and beneficent, but they can also have destructive effects. Moreover, laws and chance go necessarily together. The human species would not be around if nearly 99% of previous species had not become extinct, including the dinosaurs of 65 million years ago, whose extinction prepared the way for the flourishing of mammals. Momentous natural forces have carved out river valleys, upthrust and chiseled out mountain ranges, routinely rid forests of old, decrepit trees and choking understory, and so on. Ecosystems are dynamic and ever-changing, not static. Malformed creatures are born as well as normal ones, although in far less numbers.

As creatures of nature, humans can find ways sometimes to anticipate and perhaps mitigate such natural disasters, but they are part of the creative processes of nature. Everything in nature is subject to natural laws, and the human species is no exception. The destructiveness of nature is part of its majesty. And its destructiveness must be weighed in relation to its pervasive nurturing and sustaining power. As for the charge of nature's wanton wastefulness, we should note that everything is efficiently recycled in nature, much more consistently and thoroughly than by human beings. It may seem easy to imagine a better world here on earth than the one we live in, but on reflection, it is not as easy overall as we might have thought. And we should note soberly that as precious as our human autonomy and freedom is, it also contains the seeds of disastrous evil and rampant destruction. We cannot have the gift of freedom without its potential misdirections and misuses. Even the lazy or indifferent failure to act can in many instances have disastrous consequences. Our present ecological crisis testifies to this truth.

Having noted all of this, can we imagine a better world? And would we, after careful reflection, want to live in a different world? A nature without potential disaster could not be a nature ruled in general by natural law. We could not execute our choices without the expectation of lawful regularities in the world. For example, I might try to lift a chair, wash a dish, design a machine, or bestow a kiss but find that I could not do so. Without natural laws, the world would not even

be a world; it would be sheer chaos. But these regularities can, on occasion, hurt us or even kill us. Gravity and fire, for example, are of great use, but they can also have destructive and even disastrous effects. And the gift of meaningful freedom also contains within it the seed of its misuse, and even of its rampantly destructive misuse—as human history sadly testifies.

Were there no risks or uncertainties in our lives, we would have lost many of our lives' most admirable aspects, such as the challenge of creativity accompanied by the risk of failure, courage in the face of danger, acts of temperance and honor despite temptations to the contrary, the overcoming of odds by dint of sustained effort, the effortful building of character and of a way of life in the face of an uncertain future, and the like. In fact, the very notion of freedom is unintelligible if there is no liability to make mistakes in choosing between better and worse, reasonable and unreasonable, true and untrue, and so on. I could not write this article without the assumption of my having such freedom, but my freedom exposes me to the risk of unclarity, mistakes in reasoning, and error in what I write. A world that guarantees only good outcomes would be one in which human effort and freedom could make no difference. In such a world, we humans would be robots, not persons.

With the ambiguity of the world goes genuine responsibility in and for the world. Without it, such responsibility, and in fact the very meaning, value, and importance of human life, would seem to be lost. It is highly doubtful, therefore, that we would want to live in a world devoid of ambiguity. The traditional religious depiction of heaven seems often to be oblivious to this observation. The world of nature is in many undeniable ways threatening, sobering, and precarious—replete with systematic natural evils and the doleful evils brought about by human misuses of freedom. But it is also in many other equally undeniable ways welcoming, joyful, and sustaining. The evils and the goods are woven inextricably together. The possibilities for the bad allow for innumerable, otherwise unattainable possibilities for the good.

Does nature have saving power?

Can nature provide deep and lasting assurance? Can it place rigorous, soul-searching demands on us? And can it empower us to respond effectively to such demands? These three questions encompass what it would mean to find salvation in Religion of Nature. The answer to all three is affirmative. Let us see why. The assurance that nature provides to the human spirit is aptly depicted in this essay's epigraph, where Emerson speaks of the lovers of nature as experiencing "wild delight" in their close attunements with nature over the course of their lifetimes and of the intimate "intercourse with heaven and earth" that has become an essential part of their "daily food." We fail to give due recognition sometimes to how extraordinary it is to be not only alive but consciously alive and to have the ability to reflect upon, marvel at, and settle gratefully into our place in the natural order. What a spectacular gift this is for any reasonably thoughtful human being! We have the assurance of being at home in nature and of being in need of no more than this cherished fact to confidently live our lives, exercise our choices, and make our contributions to our fellow humans and to other living beings of this planet.

But what about the hope of an afterlife? How can nature assure us if absolute extinction of our existence and bodily consciousness awaits us at the end of our lives? My answer to this question is that we need to free ourselves of the assumption that salvation means going to heaven when we die. For Religion of Nature, we—like all creatures of nature—have a finite span of life. We

come into being and we pass away. But while we are here we can strive to make the most significant contributions we can to the ongoingness of life on earth. The meaning of our lives is measured by the quality of our experience and awareness here and now and by what we give to the earth and its creatures, not by expectation of an endless life to come. Our influences can live after us and be sown into the fabric of lives of those who come after us, humans and nonhumans alike. The emphasis throughout is not on egoistic preoccupation with endless personal survival but on doing as much with our relatively brief lives as we can for the good of others. This is privilege enough and more than gift enough.

In speaking of the importance of the contributions we can and should make to the well-being of earth and its creatures, including its other human creatures, I have already alluded to the demand aspect of salvation, as envisioned by Religion of Nature. Any so-called religion without rigorous demands is not worth the name. If it demands little or nothing of us, it can have little or no transformative power in our lives. Salvation is a gift, in this case the gift of being alive and aware, and of experiencing on every side the wonders of the natural world. But it is also a requirement, a challenge, a task—with deeds to be performed that adherents of Religion of Nature must determine for themselves, in light of each person's particular talents and abilities. But in all cases the task should include profound care for the ecosystems of earth, especially in this time of grave ecological crisis.

In the perspective of Religion of Nature, human ethics is a subset of ecological ethics, and ecological ethics is conceived in the context of a powerfully demanding religious outlook and commitment. There is much suffering, pain, and deprivation in the nonhuman aspects of nature and among human beings, and we should devote our energies to preventing or alleviating these sufferings, pains, and deprivations as far and as appropriately as we can. Religion of Nature demands this of us. An essential part of the meaning of our lives is what we do and are called on to do to address and minister to the needs of others.

But in the midst of its strenuous demands, Religion of Nature also highlights our empowerment to respond positively and effectively to them. What is the source of this empowerment? Fundamentally, it is the love of nature in all of its aspects, a love that courses in the veins of all who are genuinely attuned to nature and deeply aware of its splendor and magnificence. This love can be awakened by the steady hum of cicadas on a warm summer night; by the rise of an orange moon in the mists of an early evening; by a snowcapped mountain range towering in the distance; by the white-capped waves of a wind-swept sea; by the playful antics of a puppy or kitten; by the light steps and easy bounds of a mule deer; by the ratta-tat-tat of a ladderbacked woodpecker on a sweet gum tree; by the sparkle and rush of a waterfall cascading over a cliff; by the miracle of birth, whether of animals or humans; by the delicately linked tendrils in the orb of a spider's web; by the human facility for language and other forms of symbolic thought and expression; and by countless other miracles. The list is endless.

The empowerment of such love is all around us, and it dwells within us, only awaiting fuller and richer sensitization and development. If we humans lose our instinctive capacity for intense imaginative love as we grow into maturity and take on the responsibilities of adult life, as Emerson suggests we are apt to do, then this regrettable situation calls for concerted, effective cultivation of such love by every individual and cultural means available. Such cultivation is

essential for every human life and for every human culture. It is deeply engrained in the rituals of Paleolithic cultures, and we have much to learn from them.

Enlivened, fully aware, childlike appreciation and imagination in the presence of the marvels of nature can have great and lasting effects for good in the world and in the lives of humans as integral parts of nature. Stimulations of nature's empowering love are no deep secret and are not in short supply. They lie ready at hand. We have only to wake up and see, to become fully alive in order to experience their luminous meanings and to understand.

On the basis of these all-too-brief musings, I argue that the three components of religious salvation—assurance, demand, and empowerment—are readily and fully available in Religion of Nature. And I am convinced that this religious perspective should be welcomed into the world-wide family of highly significant religious outlooks and commitments. When we are deeply convinced of the truth of a particular religious outlook, as I am of this one, it is all too easy to become intolerant or even contemptuous of religious views other than one's own. This tendency must be strongly resisted. No one religious faith, however compelling or conclusive it may seem, is adequate to capture the full range of the mysteries of life or the meanings, prospects, and demands of human existence. We can share our various perspectives and commitments even as we are centered within them. And as we do so, can continue to learn from one another and experience ongoing transformations and enhancements of our respective outlooks on the world.

Want to know more? Watch for another article on religious naturalism in the May/June 2014 issue of *The Fourth R*, or read this [Evolution 2014 interview](#) with Westar Fellow Lloyd Geering.

Donald A. Crosby is emeritus professor of philosophy at Colorado State University. He has expounded religious naturalism in three books: *A Religion of Nature* (2002), *Living with Ambiguity: Religious Naturalism and the Menace of Evil* (2008), and [The Thou of Nature: Religious Naturalism and Reverence for Sentient Life](#) (2013). He lives in Tallahassee, Florida.

<http://www.westarinstitute.org/resources/the-fourth-r/religious-naturalism/>

February 2014

Green Church Newsletter

http://egliseverte-greenchurch.ca/green/index.php?option=com_acymailing&ctrl=archive&task=view&mailid=45&key=793e9330c9354aa6e8aaeb7a37b56a04&subid=189-dbe0c9b642707e4c37fc810b1cf1134f

February 2014

Member Spotlight: A field course in the mountains of Usambara led Stephen Awoyemi to make conservation his purpose in life

Society for Conservation Biology

Stephen Awoyemi's passion for conservation was ignited in the Usambara Mountains in Tanzania in 2002 where he was participating in a field course sponsored by the [Tropical Biology Association](#).

The mountains are a biodiversity hotspot and it was there, engaged in on-the-ground conservation projects and learning about the scale of humanity's impact on the environment, that Stephen realized that conservation is the cause to which he would dedicate his career.

Since then he has "not turned back. Not even once."

Today Stephen is a Miriam Rothschild Scholar at the [Conservation Leadership Program](#) (MPhil) at the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom.

In the following Q&A, Stephen, who is from Nigeria, offers advice to conservation biology students on how to make a difference and discusses leadership, the role of religion in conservation biology, and why he is pursuing a Master of Philosophy in conservation.

You are one of the founders of SCB's Religion and Conservation Biology Working Group. Most don't associate religion with conservation. What role does religion play in conservation?

Steven: If you observe trends you will find out that in the last 50 years humanity has increased tremendously in its capacity to self-determine and above all be responsible for its destiny and its planet. Irrespective of the shortfalls, there is a dawning, an awakening in humanity that we can change things, we are in control and therefore responsible.

This consciousness is also spreading across religious communities in different parts of the world. Religions have more strongly emphasized, refined and altered their teachings about conservation in ways that call for changing human behavior toward nature. This is a welcome development. We know that religion drives three behavioral pivots in the human: beliefs, emotions and values. Facts, figures and statistics do little to foster the commitment conservation badly needs. And religion can help us place meaning, value and concern for biodiversity in society where science cannot tread.

Why did you decide to pursue a Masters of Philosophy in Conservation Leadership?

I have always known that conservation is all about leadership. Long before I saw the MPhil in Conservation Leadership Program in Cambridge, I had been studying leadership and

management literature for years. I knew this was as far self-help could take me. I needed capacity building of international standards in what I know how to do best. So I seized the opportunity. Thanks to my mentor Phoebe Barnard who encouraged me to apply.

There are people in your program from literally all corners of the world. What have you learned from your classmates and what is it like to participate in group discussions where so many different cultures, experiences, perspectives and approaches are represented?

I have learned even more that there is strength in diversity. From saving octopuses in Madagascar, solving complex policy issues in protected areas in Colombia and protecting snow leopards in India, each classmate affirms the need for courage, persistence, creativity and the passion to make an impact. Each of us is distinct in our views, tackling conservation from the basis of our strengths and peculiarities. This makes a stimulating atmosphere for discussions and team work when we address conservation problems in class.

How is the program shaping your views on the challenges of conserving Earth's biological diversity?

As the program exposes the breadth of conservation problems and the different approaches in addressing these problems, I see even more profoundly the daunting challenge before humanity. Importantly, I see how hard conservation organizations and individuals round the world are working and making a difference. This gives me hope, telling me no matter how little, each individual can make a difference; whether a researcher, practitioner or policy maker.

You talk about the leadership mind to solve conservation problems. What do you see as the key characteristics of a leadership mind?

The leadership mind is a choice. It is not a given. What characterizes the leadership mind are:

1. Sustained “initiative” all through one’s life and career not just a flash in the pan demonstration.
2. A heart of service, contribution and personal responsibility. In essence, a leader should consistently ask: how can I contribute? What is needed of my strengths and personality to make a difference in my organization, society and world?
3. The leadership mind is an embodiment of love. Love for work, humanity, and biodiversity. Without love, service becomes mechanical, dull and ineffective.
4. Lastly but not limited to these, the leadership mind is one that is self-aware. The reason why many cannot lead is because they have not found themselves; their identity; their voice.

On a local scale, what conservation issues in Nigeria are dear to you? What about a continent wide scale?

Wildlife conservation is not considered a priority in Nigeria and many parts of Africa. I see religion as the most apt conduit to reach the hearts and minds of many Africans. The essence

would be to enlighten and bring to their consciousness the importance of biodiversity and the African's role in contributing to save life on Earth from an imminent catastrophe.

What advice do you have to offer to conservation biology students looking to follow their dreams and make a difference in the field?

Defining purpose is central to any aspiration. The conservation biology student must search deeply within him or her to identify their purpose. When this is done, all things, all activities will converge at a point of concentration. There will be less frivolous activity, distraction and waste of opportunity. Purpose will fuel passion and passion in turn will fuel perseverance, creativity and innovation. My friend and teacher Tom Lombardo observes "Although it is important to strive for self-improvement through education and to pursue education to realize professional goals and advancement, these goals are one-sided and self-centered; one should also pursue education so that one can contribute something to the world – to humanity, to something beyond oneself".

<http://www.conbio.org/membership/members-spotlight/awoyemi>

February 2, 2014

Slow down

By Abbot Stanislaus Gumula
Post and Courier

The Brothers at Mepkin Abbey have followed the discussion about the fate of Cainhoy Plantation over the past three months. We are hopeful that a positive outcome can be achieved for this important property, and with that in mind offer a message of patience and hope.

Mepkin Abbey, a Trappist monastery at the confluence of the two forks of the Cooper River, played a role in the conservation of the historic Cooper River corridor. Mepkin was originally the estate of several historic families including Sir John Colleton, Henry Laurens, and thereafter the well-known publisher, Henry Luce. In 1949, the Luces donated a large portion of the property to the Trappist Order. It was then that we accepted the hallowed role of stewards of Mepkin, a place we believe to be set in one of the most beautiful and sacred landscapes in America.

Our goal has been to respect the historic and ecological integrity of the property and be good members of the Cooper River community. Leading a monastic life, traditionally our community involvement is of the quiet kind.

In the mid-1990s, however, development pressures were soaring and land prices escalating, leaving the future of the Cooper River corridor uncertain. Sensing a tipping point, Father Francis Kline, then Abbot of Mepkin and now deceased, and his long-time colleague, Strachan

Donnelley, then director of the Center for Humans and Nature and also now deceased, proposed a series of meetings loosely called the "Cooper River Forum." The purpose of the forum was to bring all of the community interests to the table to develop a common vision for the corridor. What was it that we all - fishermen, hunters, foresters, industrialists, landowners, historians, recreationists, and monks - valued? Over the course of several meetings we all resolved to move forward slowly and with controlled growth. On Mepkin's part, in August 2006 we placed the abbey under a conservation easement. In turn, our neighbors, the Meads, the Royalls and many others, including industries, placed easements on their properties.

Of course, there were instances of temporary conflict. For example, the remains of Childsbury, a colonial town established in 1707 on a high bluff along the river, was threatened with development. The community took the time to come together to find a solution. Today, Childsbury is protected in perpetuity for the public as a South Carolina Heritage Preserve.

Likewise, there was Bonneau Ferry. Then-owner Mead-Westvaco announced that it was selling 10,000 acres of its prime Bonneau Ferry holdings to a private developer. Again, the community worked together for an alternative. Bonneau Ferry was saved and given to South Carolina's Department of Natural Resources. Altogether some 30,000 acres have been protected.

Cainhoy Plantation is part of the Cooper River corridor. It anchors the southern end of the river much like we at Mepkin anchor the north. For good or for bad we are all connected. Like Childsbury, Bonneau Ferry and Mepkin, Cainhoy has enormous historic, cultural and ecological wealth and has irreplaceable strategic value given its place in this immensely complex and intricate system that includes the Francis Marion National Forest and the Cooper and the Wando Rivers.

We at Mepkin Abbey believe Cainhoy deserves a plan that accurately reflects its historical, cultural and ecological sensitivity as well as allowing smart development. Further, we believe we can arrive at a plan for Cainhoy that benefits all parties. Such a positive outcome cannot happen overnight and without the sincere collaboration of all interested parties.

And surely it cannot happen if the City of Charleston moves forward with its current fast-track approval process.

Some have coined the first of the Cooper River Forum meetings the "Miracle Meeting" as it set the stage for abundant good will and solid cooperation. In truth, at work then was not a miracle but inspired leadership.

In the spirit of Father Francis Kline and the many leaders who labored with him to protect the Cooper River, I humbly suggest that the City of Charleston slow down the approval process and that we convene another Cooper River Forum, again at Mepkin Abbey, to help the community focus on the shared values of this unique and treasured landscape and plan for its development and conservation.

Cainhoy is a jewel that must not be lost.

And it will not be lost if we agree to move forward together slowly and with grace.

Abbot Stanislaus Gumula was elected the fourth abbot of Mepkin Abbey in 2006.

<http://www.postandcourier.com/article/20140202/PC1002/140209912>

February 6, 2014

Tikkun Tevel – A Spring to Heal the Planet, from Pesach to Shavuot

By Rabbi Arthur Waskow
The Shalom Center

Snow two feet deep and a huge tree-limb down in our back yard, thermometer dancing with Zero, 620,000 folks here in Philly without electricity — winter gone haywire from what some call “Global Weirding” –

I am yearning toward the coming thaw. Not just of flowers rising up against Winter, but the people rising up against Pharaoh. Springing up in active hope to save us all from the Carbon Pharaohs that are bringing on the climate crisis – Plagues that afflict us all.

So let’s begin to plan now. I am writing with suggestions, hopes. I especially hope many of us will comment, suggest, and begin planning now for vigorous action.

The first night of Pesach comes Monday evening, April 14. Palm Sunday comes the day before. Not surprising! -- The first Palm Sunday was a protest against oppression by the Roman Empire, a protest march in the provincial capital of the Empire – Jerusalem — led by a radical Rabbi from the Galilee.

Not surprising for these nonviolent Jewish marchers to choose Passover-time to raise green palms of life and protest: Passover was the archetypal festival of a victorious challenge to Imperial power, as well as the festival of life reborn.

So ——— already from The Shalom Center on our own and within Interfaith Moral Action on Climate and Philadelphia Interfaith Power & Light there are plans afoot for action in Philadelphia, NYC, and Washington DC. We’d also be glad to assist wherever possible if activist groups emerge in other cities — in synagogues and havurot & independent minyanim, in churches and mosques everywhere.

FIRST EVENT IN A SPRING OF TIKKUN TEVEL: On April 9 or 10, with Matzah in one hand and Palms in the other, we who seek to heal our wounded Mother Earth will gather in a house of worship, pray and praise that ONE who breathes all life.

Then we will march with Palms in hand to some Pyramid of Power: an office of the American Petroleum Institute, or a coal-powered plant spewing asthma into the neighborhood and drought upon the planet, or railroad tracks where derailed tanker cars threaten to bring flames of terror upon an entire city.

There to pass a Globe from hand to hand, singing “We’ve got the whole world in our hands/
Trees and tigers in our hands/ Our children and their children in our hands / We have the whole world in our hands!”

And to eat the Matzah that is the Bread of Haste, “for there was no time for the dough to rise”; it is the Bread of the “fierce urgency of Now.”

NEXT POSSIBLE CLIMATE-FOCUS TIME: On Shabbat morning April 12, Jews will read a passage from the last of the Prophets – Malachi — specially designated for the Shabbat before Passover:

Here! The day is coming that will flame like a furnace, says the Infinite YHWH / Breath of Life, when all the arrogant and all evil-doers, root and branch, will like straw be burnt to ashes. Yet for those of you who revere My Name, a sun of justice will arise with healing in its wings / rays... .

Here! Before the coming of the great and awesome day of YHWH/ the Breath of Life, I will send you the Prophet Elijah to turn the hearts of parents to children and the hearts of children to parents, lest I come and smite the earth with utter destruction.” (Malachi 3: 20-21, 23-24; See commentary at <https://theshalomcenter.org/node/1497>)

This Haftarah passage lends itself to bringing together different age groups in the congregation to learn more deeply about the climate crisis and to plan for action.

NEXT: During the week of Pesach and Holy Week, clusters of people can plan an Interfaith Seder for the Earth: perhaps a Second or Third Seder, perhaps on Holy Thursday in memory of the Last Supper, perhaps on the evening of Earth Day, April 22, beginning just after Passover ends. Check at <https://theshalomcenter.org/haggadah-for-the-earth> for a PDF version of such an Interfaith Seder for the Earth and at <https://theshalomcenter.org/content/palms-passover-interfaith-healing-seder-earth> for a version that can easily be edited to your own taste.

In a separate letter, I will suggest ways of pointing Shabbat B’Har (May 10); Lag ba’Omer (Sunday May 18); and Shavuot (beginning the evening of June 3) toward the Torah of Tikkun Tevel – Healing of the Planet.

Let me repeat: I welcome comments, suggestions — write them below; and I hope some of us will respond to the wailing of our wounded Mother Earth by drawing on these ideas to shape our own actions.

February 10, 2014

Top Scholars Address Religious Ethics and Animal Protection

Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics News Release

More than forty scholars worldwide will be speaking at the Summer School at Oxford in July 2014 to address the role of religion in furthering animal protection.

“There has been so much interest in the Summer School” said Professor Andrew Linzey, “that we have had to arrange parallel sessions to cope with the demand”.

The top scholars include Professor Richard Gombrich (University of Oxford) and Professor Sudhir Chopra (University of Cambridge) on animals in Buddhist Ethics;

Rabbi Dr Tony Bayfield (President, The Movement for Reform Judaism) and Dr Khayke Beruriah Wiegand (University of Oxford) on Judaism and animals;

The Rt Revd John Pritchard (Bishop of Oxford), Professor Kurt Remele (Karl-Franzens-University in Graz, Austria) and Professor Daniel Dombrowski (Seattle University) on Christianity and animals;

Dr Tim Winter (University of Cambridge) and Dr John Chesworth (University of Oxford) on Islam and animals;

Professor Clifton Flynn (Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, University of South Carolina Upstate), Dr Kay Peggs (University of Portsmouth), Professor Chien-hui Li (National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan) and Professor Lisa Johnson (University of Puget Sound) on the historical, sociological and legal analyses of the role of religion.

The Revd Professor Adrian Anthony McFarlane (Vice President, International University of the Caribbean) and Professor Kai Horsthemke (University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg) on Caribbean and African religions and animals;

Professor Deborah Cao (Griffith University, Australia) on animals and Confucianism; Dr Jagbir Jhutti-Johal (University of Birmingham) on animals and Sikhism, and Dr Kenneth Valpey (University of Oxford) on Hinduism and animals.

In addition, the special Gala Dinner speakers will be Professor Joy Carter, Vice Chancellor of the University of Winchester, and Sir David Madden, formerly British Ambassador to Greece.

“This promises to be the most important event ever on religion and animals”, said Professor Linzey, Director of the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics.

The Summer School will be held at St Stephen's House Oxford on 21-23 July. The full programme of events will be published in March 2014. For more details, see [here](#) or contact Clair at depdirector@oxfordanimaethics.com.

<http://www.oxfordanimaethics.com/2014/02/news-release-top-scholars-address-religious-ethics-and-animal-protection/>

February 11, 2014

2014 SEED Awards Applications Now Open

United Nations Environment Programme

Nairobi - Start-up social and environmental entrepreneurs who have developed innovative products or services and are working with local communities can win a tailor-made business support package through the 2014 SEED Awards, which open for nominations today.

SEED Award Winners, based in emerging economies, developing and least-developed countries, will receive \$5000 towards their most urgent needs.

In addition, over a period of about 6 months, they will be offered expert advice on developing their business plans, the opportunity to take part in specially-designed workshops to enhance their skills, high-level profiling of their enterprises and access to an international network of businesses, governments and development institutions.

For the 2014 SEED Awards, SEED has received support from the European Union; the International Climate Initiative of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Protection, Building and Nuclear Safety; the Government of Flanders; the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women); the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO); and the international law firm Hogan Lovells. Additional support is provided by the SEED Partners.

SEED this year will make available up to:

-30 SEED Africa Awards to enterprises in Ethiopia, Malawi, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania and Uganda;

-12 SEED South Africa Awards to enterprises in South Africa, with up to four of them to enterprises in the provinces of Free State, Limpopo or KwaZulu-Natal;

-10 SEED Low Carbon Awards to enterprises in Colombia, India, Tanzania, Uganda and Viet Nam;

-3 SEED Gender Equality Awards to enterprises in countries that are not OECD or EU Member countries.

Winners of the 2013 SEED Awards included enterprises in Uganda for a biogas plant which utilises agricultural waste to produce renewable energy for rural communities; in Colombia for an alternative lighting system based on recycled plastic bottles for off-grid housing; in Ethiopia for improved cook stoves and briquettes for various end-users throughout the country; and in Namibia for a value-added fish and food processing facility which focuses on solar-dried food. Details about these and other SEED Winners are at: www.seedinit.org

The deadline for applications is 08 April 2014, 23:59 Central European Time (CET).

Applications can be filled in online at the SEED Initiative website www.seedinit.org. Alternatively, the application form can be downloaded and emailed to seedawards2014@seedinit.org. Applicants may also contact the SEED Initiative by email or phone (+49 30 89 00 068 99) should they not be able to submit their application electronically.

For more information please contact:

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You can also read this press release in [Spanish](#), [French](#) and [Portuguese](#).

You may also follow the SEED Initiative on the following social media channels:

-<https://www.facebook.com/The.SEED.Initiative>

-https://twitter.com/SEED_Initiative, #SEEDAwards

-<http://www.linkedin.com/company/the-seed-initiative>

About the SEED Initiative

SEED was founded by UNEP, UNDP, and IUCN at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. It is hosted at Adelphi Research, in Germany.

Partners in the SEED Initiative, in addition to the Founding Partners, are the governments of Flanders, Germany, India, the Netherlands, South Africa, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States of America; the European Union; Conservation International; and SEED's corporate partner, Hisense.

The SEED Initiative is a global partnership for action on the Green Economy. It identifies and supports promising small-scale start-up social and environmental entrepreneurs around the globe who, in working towards a greener economy, also tackle poverty, marginalisation and social

exclusion. SEED provides these social entrepreneurs with know-how and networks, taking the lessons learnt at local level up to decision-makers with a view to promoting evidence-based policymaking on the green economy.

<http://www.unep.org/newscentre/default.aspx?DocumentID=2762&ArticleID=10708&l=en>

February 12, 2014

Church of England vows to fight 'great demon' of climate change

General Synod says it is willing to disinvest from companies that do not live up to its theological, moral and social priorities

By Sam Jones
The Guardian

The Church of England has said that it will, as a last resort, pull its investments from companies that fail to do enough to fight the "great demon" of [climate change](#) and ignore the church's theological, moral and social priorities.

Although the church's Ethical Investment Advisory Group (EIAG) has resisted calls for the church to pull its money from fossil fuel companies, insisting that engagement is the best way to effect change, its deputy chairman told the General Synod that it was considering "all options" when it came to developing future investment policy.

"Make no mistake, we reserve the final option of disinvesting from those particular companies who resist change," said the Rev Canon Professor Richard Burridge, adding that the church had sold its £3.8m stake in the controversial mining company Vedanta four years ago following concerns about its human rights record.

"Climate change is in sharp focus at the moment, with the UK experiencing such extreme [flooding](#) that even the chief scientist of the [Met Office](#) links [it] to climate change – not to mention forest fires in Australia and blizzards in the USA," he told the synod meeting in London on Wednesday. "Scientists warn about the damage we are creating but we do very little to mitigate the threat, or adapt to it."

But he added that while the EIAG recognised that climate change was a huge ethical investment issue, swift disinvestment from fossil fuel companies was not the answer.

"Pointing the finger at the extractive industries gets us off the hook and avoids the fundamental problem which is our selfishness and our way of life, which has been fuelled by plentiful, cheap energy and more and more people around the world wanting that," he said.

Burridge said that the church's investments and engagement with large UK companies with poor carbon emission management had led to 72% of the companies targeted improving their emission management.

His comments came during a debate that culminated in a vote approving the creation of a working group on the environment to monitor the church's action on climate change and other environmental issues.

Canon Giles Goddard of Southwark diocese, who proposed the motion, said the church needed to "align the mission of the church with its investment arm and with the life of the parishes".

He added: "Climate change is a moral issue because the rich world has disproportionately contributed to it and the poor world is disproportionately suffering. Poor communities are least equipped to deal with the impacts."

Steven Croft, the bishop of Sheffield, described the threat of climate change as "a giant evil; a great demon of our day", adding: "Its power is fed by greed, blindness and complacency in the present generation, and we know that this giant wreaks havoc though the immense power of the weather systems, which are themselves unpredictable."

He said the church had a "critical role" to play in lobbying politicians on climate change in order to bring about manifesto commitments to reach the target of an 80% reduction in UK greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

The church's renewed commitment to tackling climate change was welcomed by Christian charities.

"Climate change is increasingly becoming one of the moral issues of our time and the church has a powerful voice with which to speak," said Christian Aid's senior climate change adviser, Dr Alison Doig.

"The next 18 months will significantly shape the politics of climate change with the UN global deal on emissions expected in Paris next year and the publication of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report next month. The church can now engage prophetically on this subject and speak with a united voice for those suffering both here and abroad."

Paul Cook, advocacy director of Tearfund, said the current flood in Britain were serving as a wake-up call to the church.

"The climate really is changing, and it's happening now," he said.

"It's not just a problem for our grandchildren, it's not just a problem for polar bears, it's not just a problem for people thousands of miles away; it's a problem for us too, today."

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/12/church-climate-change-investment-great-demon-flooding>

February 12, 2014

Operation Noah welcomes CoE Synod decision to act on climate change

Independent Catholic News

Operation Noah has welcomed Wednesday's decision at the Church of England's General Synod to engage seriously with the issue of climate change.

The Synod voted overwhelmingly in favour of a motion to ensure that C of E investment policy is aligned with their policies on climate change, and to establish a working group on the environment to monitor this and other environmental issues.

"Today the Church of England has taken the first step to re-engaging with the issue of climate change," said Dr Isabel Carter, Chair of Operation Noah today. "This vote commits the Church to seriously consider how its investments reflect the urgency of climate change, including the option of disinvestment from fossil fuels.

"As Canon Goddard's resolution made very clear we need to make a series of radical transformations in our economy and society if we are to avert catastrophic and uncontrolled changes to the climate system. That is going to require leadership from the Church."

'We are delighted with the backing from Synod, and particularly welcome the support from the Ethical Investment Advisory Group.'

The motion debated today follows a resolution passed by Lambeth North Deanery for Southwark Diocesan Synod, calling on the Church's national investment bodies to ensure that their investment policy is aligned with the theological, moral and social priorities of the Church.

Canon Giles Goddard, who presented the motion, said: 'This vote proves that there is a hunger for us to do more on climate change as a church. But this is not the end, it's the beginning.'

Speaking at a fringe meeting shortly after the debate, Mark Letcher, Vice Chair of Operation Noah said, 'The record-breaking weather in the UK this winter, and statistics that show both the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events to be increasing, provides an opportunity for a step change in the debate on climate change.

'There is now recognition of the need for a fresh public conversation about climate change and the future habitability of our planet, and whether we want a future for our children which is cleaner, safer and healthier. There is a need for the government to be willing to take responsibility for change. The Church could help lead that conversation. The need for leadership has never been greater. We look forward to working with the C of E on this issue.'

Last year, Operation Noah launched their campaign ‘Bright Now: towards fossil free churches’, calling on Churches in the UK to disinvest from companies involved in the extraction of fossil fuels, take a leading and influential role in the national debate on the ethics of investment in fossil fuels, and support the development of clean alternatives to fossil fuels through their investment policies.

For more information see: <http://www.operationnoah.org/>

<http://www.indcatholicnews.com/news.php?viewStory=24150>

February 13, 2014

Statement by Ibrahim Thiaw, UN Assistant-Secretary-General and UNEP Deputy Executive Director at the London Conference on Illegal Wildlife Trade 2014

United Nations Environment Programme

Your Excellencies,
Colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Over 30 years ago, the mighty African elephant went extinct in my homeland Mauritania, where it once roamed.

Elephants are intelligent and compassionate creatures, whose capacity for joy is only matched by that for grief. The emotional attachment elephants form may rival our own.

The gruesome images of slain herds of elephants across all regions in Africa are heart wrenching. And the surge in the killings continues.

Today, the demand for ivory is carving a bleak future for already vulnerable populations.

The world’s rhinos and tigers, along with other species, face similarly bleak futures, unless we act now.

As His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales eloquently said, humanity is less than humanity without the rest of creation.

Today, the international community comes together in solidarity and resolve to consider critical action to curb the global poaching crisis and the illegal trade in wildlife.

Such criminality – fuelled by demand and lawlessness – is not only destroying species, habitats, and communities, but is also jeopardizing peace and security.

Organized criminal networks are cashing in on the poaching crisis, operating with relative impunity and with little fear of prosecution.

The rise in the illegal killing of species does not only threaten wildlife populations but the livelihoods of local communities and the lives of rangers in their fight to stem the illegal tide.

The illegal exploitation of wildlife exacerbates other long-term threats to the species' survival, such as the increased loss of habitat and climate variability.

In our search for solutions, it is important to realize that there is no “one size fits all” answer to the poaching crisis.

Fast-track measures must be implemented to address the current poaching crisis, taking into account the diverse socio-economic, legal and market dynamics across range, transit and consumer states.

Such measures will vary from strengthening law enforcement, building adequate human and financial capacity, raising public awareness, and fighting corruption, to supporting national legislation and the overriding need to curb demand for wildlife products that are illegally sourced or unsustainably harvested.

However, in addition to short-term measures, longer-term considerations need to be given to natural resource management and sustainable economic development, based on sovereign priorities and choices.

Implementing nationally and internationally agreed biodiversity strategies and targets and other relevant existing commitments must be at the heart of such action.

The African Elephant Action Plan and the African Elephant Fund, for example, were established under the CITES to support the long-term survival of African elephants.

But without adequate political and appropriate financial support, it is difficult for such mechanisms to become truly effective.

In the first ever UN Environment Assembly (UNEA), which will convene in Nairobi in June, the environmental rule of law in relation to the illegal exploitation of wildlife and timber will feature as a key topic.

This will help maintain the political momentum following the London Conference and will provide an opportunity to galvanize the attention of the United Nations bodies on this critical issue.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The last two years have been momentous for many in this room who have worked tirelessly for years-on-end to combat the trafficking in wildlife: from the CITES COP in Bangkok to the

Botswana Elephant Summit and the French Government-hosted Summit for Peace and Security in Africa, to the UNEP-INTERPOL Conference or the UNODC Conference and, most recently, the UN Security Council resolutions (21/34 and 21/36) which recognize the inter-linkages between the illegal exploitation of wildlife and ongoing conflicts in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Building on these initiatives and on many other ongoing positive undertakings, such as the most recent decision by the US Government made just yesterday, it is imperative that 2014 becomes a year of concrete and decisive action.

I would like to thank the UK Government for convening this important meeting - allowing us all to join hands for a more sustainable and humane future.

<http://www.unep.org/newscentre/Default.aspx?DocumentID=2762&ArticleID=10710&l=en>

February 13, 2014

First International Hindu Environment Week

The Bhumi Project Press Release

For the first time in history, Hindus worldwide are coming together for a week-long celebration of the environment. Hindu Environment Week, taking place from 17th-23rd February, will see Hindu leaders, communities, temples and organisations raising awareness about the importance of caring the planet.

Launched in Varanasi in October 2013, Hindu Environment Week will see a variety of Hindus taking part in a number of events.

Some of the highlights of the Week include:

- A conference on the importance of water and the River Ganges will be held at the Parmarth Niketan ashram in Rishikesh.
- The holy town of Vrindavan will see school children taking to the streets to raise awareness about environmental problems facing the town
- The famous Jagannath temple in Puri will be organising a number of events, including tree planting in the areas surrounding the temple
- In Varanasi, students from Benaras Hindu University will be conducting a week of events including the cleaning of temple grounds
- 50 students will help clean the main temple in Dwarka before a special lecture on the importance of caring for the environment will be delivered by temple leaders to over 300 pilgrims

- Students at both Oxford University in England, and Princeton University in America, will hold special discussions to learn and share what young people can do to help the environment

The Week is being organised by The Bhumi Project - a joint initiative between the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies and the Alliance of Religions and Conservation. Launched in 2009 at Windsor Castle with HRH Prince Philip and HE Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the UN, the Project works with Hindu groups across the world to address environmental concerns.

Gopal Patel, Project Manager for the Bhumi Project commented, “Hindu traditions have much to say about good environmental care. We hope through this Week those messages are shared with as many people as possible and people begin to make practical changes in their lives to take better care of the environment.”

NOTES FOR EDITORS

With Hindus forming 80.5% of India’s population, they are the largest religious group in the sub-continent.

Key Hindu texts such as Atharva Veda discuss the environment, and its importance to human and animal life in great detail. Compassion for all life is therefore considered to be a key tenet of Hinduism.

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February 18, 2014

Fossil Free PC(USA) divestment movement gains momentum

By Leslie Scanlon
The Presbyterian Outlook

Concerned about the impact of climate change, Presbyterians are asking the 2014 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to take a stand — to instruct the Board of Pensions and Presbyterian Foundation to immediately stop any new investment in fossil fuel companies — and over the next five years to divest any assets the denomination already has placed in oil, gas and coal firms.

With concerns about global warming increasing, the Fossil Free divestment movement is gaining momentum across the United States — making allies out of church-going retirees and college students, bringing secular environmental groups such as 350.org in alignment with faith-based advocates, some of whom see stopping the progression of climate change as a moral issue.

Critics contend such initiatives could have a steep economic price, costing jobs and putting pressure on corporate targets ahead of consumers changing their own energy consumption. Advocates draw strength from the success of previous divestment campaigns — including pressure brought to end apartheid in South Africa — and argue that big differences in carbon usage won't be made unless more fossil fuel resources remain untapped, forcing companies to develop and support alternate energy sources.

Environmental activists and some investment analysts cite the “two degree” target — the goal of limiting global warming to 2 degrees Celsius (or 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit), endorsed by many governments. To achieve that, they contend, about 80 percent of the oil, gas and coal reserves need to stay in the ground.

Some Presbyterians also make an argument based on justice — saying the economic and environmental impact of climate change falls disproportionately on the poor in underdeveloped countries.

“I definitely view it as a huge concern for my life,” said Joy Gresham, a high school senior and a youth elder at St. Luke Presbyterian Church in Wayzata, Minn. “It’s something I find not as a future concern, but as a now concern” — she wants to have children, but worries about badly the planet will be damaged during the course of their lives.

Gresham also contends that people of faith have a responsibility to speak up for people in undeveloped countries whose land and ways of making a living are taking a hit from global warming. “It’s affecting especially the least of these,” she said. “People in the poorest countries are being devastated by superstorms and floods. If we’re going to live by the words of Jesus, then we need to do something about it.”

Responding to concerns such as these, Presbyterians have organized a group called Fossil Free PC(USA) and hope to convince the 2014 General Assembly to use divestment as a tool to pressure oil, gas and coal companies to leave fossil fuel resources in the ground. The Presbytery of Boston passed the first fossil fuel divestment overture last September, with a concurrence from the Presbytery of San Jose — that’s enough to get the issue on the General Assembly docket in Detroit in June. The Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area passed an overture in January, and votes are expected in more presbyteries later this spring.

At St. Luke Presbyterian, the youth group pushed the adults to take a stand — convincing the session to send an overture to Twin Cities Area presbytery (as did another congregation, Church of the Apostles in Burnsville, Minn.)

Cody Kirk, a high school senior, spoke at the presbytery meeting in favor of the overture. Kirk’s passion for environmental concerns was sparked in part by a backpacking trip he took last summer in the Yellowstone Mountains, where he realized “how quickly the consequences of our actions are going to catch up with us,” unless something changes.

“This has really become a moral issue of what do we as individuals and a community, as a church and a presbytery, want to do with the earth that we are given by God? It’s more than just trying to take a political stand. It’s doing as I like to think of it as Jesus would do, taking action against things we know are immoral and destroying the planet.”

The adults listened to the teenagers’ passion, said Karen Larson, who was recently ordained as a teaching elder and is Gresham’s mother. “There’s been kind of a feeling of hopelessness around climate change that keeps people from being able to do anything,” Larson said. “Somehow, the kids broke through that.”

Opposition. Not everyone buys the divestment argument. Some academic institutions, including Harvard and Middlebury College, have decided not to divest — worried that the issue might polarize their campuses and that divestment might ultimately not make much difference in pressuring the fossil fuel companies or slowing global warming.

Harvard’s president, Drew Faust, wrote in an open letter in Oct. 2013 that if Harvard divested, other “willing buyers” would purchase the shares, and the decision would have would “negligible impact” on the firms and could “diminish the influence or voice we might have.”

Faust also wrote that she finds “a troubling inconsistency in the notion that, as an investor, we should boycott a whole class of companies at the same time that, as individuals and as a community, we are extensively relying on those companies’ products and services for so much of what we do every day.”

Some presbyteries have voted no — in the Presbytery of East Tennessee, a fossil fuel divestment proposal lost by a vote of 53-50. In presbytery debates, some have raised questions about the impact divestment might have on retirement income for Presbyterian pastors; about whether jobs would be lost in areas that depend on coal mining or other fossil fuel industries. Some also raise concerns about hypocrisy — about why divestment makes sense when Presbyterians continue to fill their cars with gasoline and run their air conditioning in the summer.

Dan Terpstra, who works in supercomputing and is a ruling elder at First Presbyterian Church in Oak Ridge, Tenn., got involved with Fossil Free PC(USA) after attending a climate change rally in Washington D.C. in February 2013, where the environmentalist Bill McKibben was one of the speakers.

Responding to the hypocrisy argument, McKibben makes the analogy that “when we get in our cars in the mornings and drive to work, we care about getting to work — we don’t necessarily care about using gasoline,” Terpstra said. “If we had viable options fueled by anything else, that would be perfectly fine.”

The companies that produce fossil fuels “have shown no interest or willingness in investing significantly in renewable energy sources,” Terpstra said. “We don’t have a choice to use other technologies easily because the entire market is being controlled by the fossil fuel industries. They’ve got enough money to be able to control the conversation.”

The Fossil Free PC(USA) organizers also are aware that divestment in other contexts has been controversial for past General Assemblies — and likely will be this year too, if the assembly considers another recommendation from the Mission Responsibility Through Investment committee to divest in three companies said to be involved in non-peaceful pursuits in Israel-Palestine.

“We know the word ‘divestment’ is a really touchy word and has a lot of sensitivity, especially from the last General Assembly,” said Rob Mark, pastor of the Church of the Covenant in Boston, whose session sent the fossil fuel divestment overture to Boston presbytery. “The word is big. We’re aware of it. It could be problematic. It could be hopeful,” as Presbyterians link to a wider fossil fuel divestment movement drawing strength from students and environmental activists.

In July 2013, the United Church of Christ became the first U.S. religious denomination to take steps fossil fuel divestment, starting with increased shareholder engagement and moving towards the creation by 2015 of a list of “best in class” fossil fuel companies. Mark said he’s seen the climate change issue cut across some of the traditional divisions between progressives and evangelicals within religious groups — and become a place of common ground between people of faith and the “nones” who don’t identify with a religious tradition.

Mark also sees the climate change issue as an opportunity for evangelism for the PC(USA). Having worked in a college chaplain’s office, he’s seen how worried many young people are about the impact of global warming.

“If we’re not talking about something like climate change, which is at the forefront for people in their 20s ... if we are not speaking that language, we lose a huge chance for evangelism and witness and speaking about who Jesus is,” Mark said. “I call it creative evangelism.”

Congregations. Many of those involved in the Fossil Free PC(USA) movement also belong to congregations that take eco-stewardship seriously. At First Presbyterian Palo Alto in California, a Cool Planet group has been meeting since 2006, doing everything from planning earth-themed worship services to educating parishioners on how to reduce their carbon footprints. They’ve raised money for people in Cameroon “who are on the frontlines of climate change already,” said Shirley Eglinton, a retired teacher active in the effort.

“To me, it seems as if we don’t have a sustainable environment then all of the things I care about in terms of dignity and justice for human beings are threatened,” Eglinton said. With climate change, “the disruption of food sources hits the poor so hard ... It’s a catastrophe if you’re living on a dollar a day.”

<http://www.pres-outlook.com/infocus-features/current-features/19371-fossil-free-pcusa-divestment-movement-gains-momentum.html>

February 18, 2014

Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies host an organic meal for Hindu Environment Week

Bhumi Project Press

On Wednesday, February 19th, the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies and HUMSoc, the Hindu student group at Oxford University, will celebrate Hindu Environment Week. The Centre's weekly Wednesday luncheon will feature locally grown, organic food. HUMSoc will host a talk by representatives of the Bhumi Project, and a discussion afterwards. Both events will take place at the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies on Magdalen Street.

Both are part of a series of events taking place across the world during Hindu Environment Week. For the first time in history, Hindus worldwide are coming together for a week-long celebration of the environment. Hindu Environment Week, taking place from 17th-23rd February, will see Hindu leaders, communities, temples and organisations raising awareness about the importance of caring the planet.

Launched in Varanasi in October 2013, Hindu Environment Week will see a variety of Hindus taking part in a number of events.

Some of the highlights of the Week include:

- A conference on the importance of water and the River Ganges will be held at the Parmarth Niketan ashram in Rishikesh.
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Gopal Patel, Project Manager for the Bhumi Project commented, "Hindu traditions have much to say about good environmental care. We hope through this Week those messages are shared with as many people as possible and people begin to make practical changes in their lives to take better care of the environment."

NOTES FOR EDITORS

There are over 800,000 Hindus in the UK, making them the second largest minority community in the country.

Key Hindu texts such as Atharva Veda discuss the environment, and its importance to human and animal life in great detail. Compassion for all life is therefore considered to be a key tenet of Hinduism.

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February 21, 2014

Dynamic New Platform to Protect Forests Worldwide Launched

More than 40 partners launch near-real time forest monitoring system

United Nations Environment Programme

WASHINGTON—The [World Resources Institute](#) (WRI), Google, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and a group of more than 40 partners on Thursday launched the [Global Forest Watch](#) (GFW), a dynamic online forest monitoring and alert system that empowers people everywhere to better manage forests. For the first time, Global Forest Watch unites the latest satellite technology, open data, and crowdsourcing to guarantee access to timely and reliable information about forests.

“Businesses, governments and communities desperately want better information about forests. Now, they have it,” said [Dr. Andrew Steer](#), President and CEO, WRI. “Global Forest Watch is a near-real time monitoring platform that will fundamentally change the way people and businesses manage forests. From now on, the bad guys cannot hide and the good guys will be recognized for their stewardship.”

According to [data](#) from the University of Maryland and Google, the world lost 2.3 million square kilometers (230 million hectares) of tree cover from 2000 to 2012—equivalent to 50 soccer fields of forest lost every minute of every day for 12 years. The countries with the highest tree cover loss are: Russia, Brazil, Canada, United States, and Indonesia.

“Managing the world’s forest resources is today both a local and global undertaking, and technology has provided Global Forest Watch with an unprecedented opportunity to connect not only information and data but people, whether they be forest managers, businesses and private sector, or consumers across the globe. This is a great example of a community coming together and providing the world with a truly groundbreaking and pioneering product. Hopefully in a few years’ time we will be able to monitor the impact and the results in terms of what actually happens on the ground – that will be both a litmus test and I think the greatest affirmation that the time for this idea had come,” said Achim Steiner, UN Under Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director.

“We are honored to partner with WRI and power the Global Forest Watch platform with Google cloud technology, massive data and turbo-powered science,” said Rebecca Moore, Engineering Manager, Google Earth Outreach and Earth Engine. “GFW is an ambitious vision, and yet it’s both timely and achievable given WRI’s knowledge of environmental science and policy, strong partnerships, and the high-performance Google cloud technology that we’re donating to this initiative.”

What’s new about Global Forest Watch:

- * **High-resolution:** Annual tree cover loss and gain data for the entire globe at a resolution of 30 meters, available for analysis and download.

- * **Near-real time:** Monthly tree cover loss data for the humid tropics at a resolution of 500 meters.

- * **Speed:** Cloud computing, provided by Google, multiplying the speed at which data can be analyzed.

- * **The crowd:** GFW unites high resolution information from satellites with the power of crowdsourcing.

- * **Free and easy to use:** GFW is free to all and no technical expertise is needed.

- * **Alerts:** When forest loss alerts are detected, a network of partners and citizens around the world can mobilize to take action.

- * **Analytical Tools:** Layers showing boundaries of protected areas worldwide; logging, mining, palm oil and other concessions; daily forest fire alerts from NASA; agricultural commodities; and intact forest landscapes and biodiversity hotspots.

Global Forest Watch was launched on Thursday 20 February at the Newseum in Washington, D.C by a group of leaders in government, business, and civil society.

“Partnerships like Global Forest Watch that bring together governments, businesses and civil society and technological innovation are the kinds of solutions we need to reduce forest loss, alleviate poverty and promote sustainable economic growth,” said Administrator Rajiv Shah, U.S. Agency for International Development.

Global Forest Watch will have far-reaching implications across industries. Financial institutions can better evaluate if the companies they invest in adequately assess forest-related risks. Buyers of major commodities such as palm oil, soy, timber, and beef can better monitor compliance with laws, sustainability commitments, and standards. And suppliers can credibly demonstrate that

their products are “deforestation free” and legally produced.

“Deforestation poses a material risk to businesses that rely on forest-linked crops. Exposure to that risk has the potential to undermine the future of businesses,” said Paul Polman, CEO, Unilever. “That is why Unilever’s Sustainable Living Plan has set targets to source 100 percent of agricultural raw materials sustainably. As we strive to increase the visibility of where the ingredients for our products come from, the launch of Global Forest Watch – a fantastic, innovative tool – will provide the information we urgently need to make the right decisions, fostering transparency, enforcing accountability, and facilitating partnerships.”

Global Forest Watch can support other users like indigenous communities, who can upload alerts and photos when encroachment occurs on their lands; and NGOs that can identify deforestation hotspots, mobilize action, and collect evidence to hold governments and companies accountable. At the same time, many governments like Indonesia and the Democratic Republic of Congo, welcome Global Forest Watch because it can help them design smarter policies, enforce forest laws, detect illegal forest clearing, manage forests more sustainably, and achieve conservation and climate goals.

“Indonesia is committed to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 26 percent, or 41 percent with international support, which reflect national and international commitments to combat climate change. How Indonesia meets that commitment is largely defined by how we manage our forests,” said Heru Prasetyo, Head of the REDD+ Agency, Indonesia. “The ability to better monitor our forests and have up-to-date information to make decisions are critical. I commend the Global Forest Watch initiative, will continue to support it, and expect that it will be an effective tool for the world and each nation as we leave neglect and ignorance in the past.”

Global Forest Watch was created by the World Resources Institute with over 40 partners, including Google, Esri, University of Maryland, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Imazon, Center for Global Development, Observatoire Satellital des Forêts d’Afrique Centrale (OSFAC), Global Forest Watch Canada, ScanEx, Transparent World, the Jane Goodall Institute, and Vizzuality. Major companies have also provided early input, including Unilever and Nestle, and the wider Tropical Forest Alliance 2020 Partnership. Core funders include the Norwegian Climate and Forests Initiative, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Global Environment Facility (GEF), U.K. Department for International Development (DFID), and the Tilia Fund.

For more information visit: www.globalforestwatch.org.

Note to Editors

About World Resources Institute

WRI is a global research organization that spans more than 50 countries, with offices in the United States, China, India, Brazil, and more. Our more than 300 experts and staff work closely with leaders to turn big ideas into action to sustain our natural resources—the foundation of economic opportunity and human well-being. (www.wri.org)

About Global Forest Watch

Global Forest Watch (GFW) is a dynamic online forest monitoring and alert system empowering people everywhere to better manage forests. For the first time, GFW unites satellite technology, open data, and crowdsourcing to guarantee access to timely and reliable information about forests. Armed with the latest information from GFW, governments, businesses, and communities can halt forest loss. (www.globalforestwatch.org)

About UNEP and the UN-REDD Programme

As one of the key agencies for the UN-REDD programme, UNEP leads and delivers on a variety of activities at both the national and global level.

At the global level, UNEP in conjunction with the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) leads on the multiple benefits agenda which consists of a variety of activities which aim to highlight the many benefits and ecosystem services of REDD+ that go beyond carbon sequestration. These include water, forest-based products, tourism, community development, biodiversity and others.

UNEP is working to identify the interventions that add value to the economy, increase revenue, and provide new livelihood opportunities while conserving forests and reducing emissions and collaborates with national counterparts to demonstrate the potential of forest sector investments, institutional changes and targeted tools to contribute to both development and climate mitigation goals.

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<http://www.unep.org/newscentre/Default.aspx?DocumentID=2762&ArticleID=10714>

February 22, 2014

Faith and reason: Scientists are not as secular as people think

The Economist

TO GREENS, men like John Shimkus—the chairman of a congressional body that oversees work to curb air, soil and water pollution—represent a special sort of bogeyman. Mr Shimkus, a Republican from rural Illinois, is not just staunchly pro-industry, anti-regulation and sceptical of claims that man’s activities menace the planet. He also brings his Bible to work. At a hearing on greenhouse gases, he opened it and quoted God’s words to Noah after the Flood. “Never again

will I destroy all living creatures,” God promised. This, said Mr Shimkus, was “infallible” proof that neither man’s actions nor rising flood waters will destroy the Earth. So let’s not worry too much about global warming.

Folk like Mr Shimkus feed a perception that American religion and science are doomed to be in conflict, with unhappy consequences for public policy. For decades, the loudest boffin-on-believer fights involved the teaching of evolution in public schools (a battle the boffins nearly always won), followed more recently by disputes about stem-cell research. Rows about global warming are catching up. In conservative states such as Louisiana, Missouri, Tennessee and Oklahoma, Republicans have introduced bills urging schools to teach children that there are competing opinions on such “controversial” scientific issues as evolution, global warming and human cloning.

Ostensibly the goal is to foster critical thinking. But the country’s largest science-promotion body, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), has urged states to reject such bills, protesting that the basic facts of global warming and evolution are not in significant dispute. (Even if the policy response to global warming is hotly disputed, as are the ethics of cloning.) Pro-evolution campaigners are blunter, calling the bills a ploy by the political and religious Right to muscle their way into science classrooms.

Political and religious conservatives do not perfectly overlap. Black churchgoers, for instance, may be stern traditionalists when it comes to morality, yet reliably vote Democratic. Not all conservatives who oppose government action to tackle climate change are religious: plenty of businesses straightforwardly oppose rules which they fear will cost money and jobs. Meanwhile, some strict believers and church leaders think God wants people to take care of the environment; they talk of their responsibilities as “stewards of creation”. But in general the very religious—and especially the third of all Americans who call themselves evangelical or born-again Christians—have been allies for conservatives itching for a scrap with the scientific establishment. Though most evangelicals say that the earth is warming, in polls they are much less sure than the average American that this matters, or that man is to blame.

Why this should be so is a subject of debate, and until recently a lot of guesswork. Evangelical Christianity is a slightly hazy term. To simplify, it describes a faith anchored by a believer’s personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and which closely follows the Bible. It is an individualistic faith—many jump from church to church until they find a style of worship that appeals—rooted in conservative communities (evangelicals are a majority in nine states, all in the South).

A much-cited theory advanced in 1967 by Lynn White, a historian, charges that the devout draw from Genesis the idea that mankind has “dominion” over nature, and thus think they have a right to exploit the world’s resources. A hypothesis floated in the 1980s draws a link between “environmental apathy” and the belief, among some evangelicals, that the End Times are near. In 2010 Elaine Howard Ecklund, a sociologist at Rice University, caused a stir with a survey of 1,700 scientists at Harvard, MIT and other elite colleges. About a third were atheists (as opposed to fewer than one-in-20 ordinary Americans), just under a third were agnostics, and the rest reported varying degrees of belief.

At the annual meeting of the AAAS in Chicago on February 16th Dr Ecklund unveiled the first results of a still-larger study into science and religion, involving more than 9,000 survey respondents and lots of follow-up interviews. This new survey sought out “rank-and-file” scientists: researchers in company labs, engineers, dentists and so on. To her surprise, Main Street scientists are only a bit less religious than the average American. Perhaps Ivy League scientists are ultra-secular because they are Ivy League, not because they are scientists?

The Al Gore effect

Evangelicals are wary of calls to environmental action, but not necessarily because they feel strutting dominion over nature, Dr Ecklund adds, in a forthcoming paper in the *Review of Religious Research*. Instead, many describe a rigid hierarchy placing God above humans and humans above the environment. To “respect the earth more than its due”—to quote a young Southern Baptist in the study—is to risk worshipping creation rather than the creator. Many simply trust that “God’s in control”. The evangelicals in the study barely engage with the science of environmentalism, instead querying the motives of those pushing such arguments. They especially bridle when Democratic politicians push for big-government solutions (“The Al Gore Effect”, the paper calls it).

Dr Ecklund and her colleagues at the Chicago seminar wondered if the devout might be won round by environmental arguments stripped of politics and focused on helping people in poor, ecologically vulnerable countries. Climate change need not challenge evangelical theology, it was argued: mankind can cause terrible harm that stops short of ending the world. As for secular-minded scientists, they should beware of conflating their work (explaining the world in terms of natural forces) with what they personally believe (that the natural world is all there is). The worlds of religion and science will not always agree. But America, a big country, has room for both.

<http://www.economist.com/news/united-states/21597021-scientists-are-not-secular-people-think-faith-and-reason>

February 26, 2014

‘The fragile world’: Church teaching on ecology before and by Pope Francis

By Donal Dorr
Thinking Faith

It is reported that Pope Francis is preparing a text on the environment, and Donal Dorr expects that the resulting document will develop the links that Francis has already and repeatedly made between ‘concern for the exploited earth and concern for marginalised and exploited people’. How does Pope Francis’ thinking about the environment compare with that of Popes John Paul II

and Benedict XVI?

Read full article:

http://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/20140226_1.htm

March 2014

SAFCEI - South African Faith Communities Institute Newsletter

<http://us6.campaign-archive2.com/?u=887c3de8b0&id=96202c6bb9&e=a758405790>

March 2014

Green Church Newsletter

http://egliseverte-greenchurch.ca/green/index.php?option=com_acymailing&ctrl=archive&task=view&mailid=46&key=9be40217ae15f1be3aae0c51edb48559&subid=189-dbe0c9b642707e4c37fc810b1cf1134f

March 4, 2014

Lent a reflection pool for diving into water usage issues

By Sharon Abercrombie
National Catholic Reporter

Diving deeply into prayer and making sacrifices are the primal stuff of Lent.

For many U.S. Catholics, participating in weekly parish faith sharing gatherings around Scriptural themes, foregoing those luscious squares of 72 percent dark chocolate, eating simple, meatless meals, donating the resulting grocery savings to Catholic Relief Services' Rice Bowl program to feed hungry people in 100 countries -- all these have become the spiritual staples of this penitential season.

For ecologically minded parish coordinators searching for materials relevant to their midweekly Lenten and Advent gatherings, Sr. Terri MacKenzie's ongoing creativity has proven to be a real gift.

Since *NCR* featured MacKenzie's Ecospiritualityresources.com in February 2013, the site has continued to brim generously with Scriptural references, contemporary music resources, poetry, YouTube videos and selections from contemporary environmental spirituality pioneers that are relevant to global developments around ongoing climate crises.

For Lent 2014, MacKenzie has tackled water issues. In her free-to-download resource -- titled "[I Thirst: A Lenten Journey from Desert to Garden](#)" -- MacKenzie, a member of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, first takes us back in time to Matthew's account of Jesus' 40-day desert fast (Matthew 4: 2-3).

"It seems safe to assume that Jesus was also in a state of extreme thirst," she writes. "Humans can live without food for weeks, but after one day without water, dehydration leading to death can begin."

As part of the first week of Lent lesson, MacKenzie asks us to reflect, "What is the thirstiest you can remember being?" That reflection could lead to also asking, what would it be like to walk in a thirsty Jesus' footsteps?

In the week two lesson, contemporary developments enter the picture when MacKenzie reminds that that nearly one billion people have no access to clean drinking water, and that drought, desertification or flooding threaten the lives of at least one billion people in more than 110 countries.

Besides water deprivation, water pollution also comes into play in the worldwide water crisis. In the week three lesson, MacKenzie lists the multitude of factors that contribute to the contamination and subsequent suffering: industrial animal production; chemical fertilizers; synthetic chemicals from laundry, dishwashing soaps and chlorine bleaches; drugs flushed down toilets; and hydraulic fracturing and mountaintop coal removal.

Climate change, too, she notes plays a part as droughts and flooding exacerbate, the number of people migrating as a result grow. On energy usage's role, MacKenzie offers us a mind-boggling bit of math: To produce four gallons of gasoline or a pound of plastic, 70 gallons of water is needed.

"As you review these and other issues that damage and threaten water and all life, what do you hear God saying?" she asks.

For some, MacKenzie said the call is "to lament and grieve the causes of pollution and scarcity"; for others, it's a call to learn more, to show greater reverence for water and to conserve its use, or to get involved by lobbying for greater protections of rivers, lakes and oceans.

“Perhaps you'll ‘hear’ connections between issues and one or more Stations of the Cross or one or more of Jesus' last words. For example, millions of people are being condemned to death by water pollution and scarcity. Many are forced to say: I am thirsty,” she said.

MacKenzie's “I Thirst” resource offers similar reflections for the remaining weeks of Lent. Additional resources on water issues are also available. In a November 2013 interview with “Democracy Now” Kevin Anderson and Alice Bow-Larkin of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research in England observed “we'll have to consume less” as they discussed remedies to lowering carbon emissions. Their “simplify life” message contained hints of the same themes echoed in MacKenzie's resources and the words of Pope Francis, his namesake St. Francis of Assisi, and other creation care proponents.

In the interview, which took place during the United Nations climate change summit in Warsaw, Poland, the researchers addressed a number of environmental issues, including excessive air travel and water usage. Anderson and Bow-Larkin showed they walk the talk of their message, telling host Amy Goodman that they take trains wherever they can, even if it means traveling 11 days to get somewhere, as opposed to a few hours on a plane.

Regarding water, Anderson said people will have to think about issues often difficult to accept, such as normalized hygiene practices like showering once or twice a day.

“That means we have to wash -- change our clothes every day, and then we have to use more washing machines,” he said. “So you see this sort of build up, one thing after another, that over the last 10 or 15 years we've moved from what were quite high carbon lifestyles to these completely profligate, extraordinarily high carbon lifestyles, and we've made them normal.”

The new normalcy related to water use, lifestyle choices and their ramifications that Anderson and Bow-Larkin discuss offers ripe spiritual and conscience discussion topics as Lent approaches.

A third resource on water use comes from Christiana Peppard, an assistant professor of theology, science and ethics at Fordham University. In a recent interview the blog Catholic Ecology, she [discussed her new book](#) “Just Water: Theology, Ethics and the Global Water Crisis,” Peppard placed water in the context of justice and as a “right-to-life issue.”

“The fact is that, globally, the people who generally bear the brunt of fresh water scarcity are people living in situations of poverty and/or subsistence existence. They lack water through no fault of their own, but rather as a result of the location of their birth,” she said.

“How do we, as U.S. citizens sitting atop the global economic structure, grapple with that iniquity?” she asked. “... It's destabilizing to think that my access to fresh water is the exception, not the norm, worldwide—just because I happened to be born in a particular place and time, to a middle-class family with a house and reliable municipal infrastructure.”

Peppard also explored the issues of water in a series of TED talk videos, one looking at [where we get the water we use](#), and the other examining the [problem of water scarcity](#).

March 4, 2014

First Ever Fatwa Issued Against Wildlife Trafficking

Invoking the Koran, Indonesia's top clerical body declares wildlife trafficking to be forbidden.

By Bryan Christy
National Geographic

Indonesia's top Muslim clerical body has issued a fatwa, or edict, against illegal wildlife trafficking.

This unprecedented step by the [Indonesian Council of Ulama](#), in the country with the world's largest Muslim population, declares illegal hunting or illegal trading of endangered species to be *haram* (forbidden).

For many the word "fatwa" took on ominous tones in 1989 when Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini issued a death threat [against Salman Rushdie for blasphemy](#) in his novel *The Satanic Verses*.

But the [fatwa](#) itself is merely a call to action. Invoking passages from the Koran, the fatwa (which you can read in full below) is believed to be the first of its kind in the world.

The fatwa requires Indonesia's 200 million Muslims to take an active role in protecting and conserving endangered species, including tigers, rhinos, elephants, and orangutans.

"This fatwa is issued to give an explanation, as well as guidance, to all Muslims in Indonesia on the sharia law perspective on issues related to animal conservation," said Hayu Prabowo, chair of the Council of Ulama's environment and natural resources body.

The fatwa supplements existing Indonesian law. "People can escape government regulation," Hayu said, "but they cannot escape the word of God."

The Creations of Allah

The fatwa was inspired in September 2013 by a field trip to Sumatra for Muslim leaders co-organized by Indonesia's [Universitas Nasional \(UNAS\)](#), [WWF-Indonesia](#), and the U.K.-based [Alliance of Religions and Conservation](#). Indonesia's Ministry of Forestry and [HarimauKita](#) (the Indonesian Tiger Conservation Forum) offered additional consultation.

During a community dialogue with village representatives to discuss conflicts between villagers and Sumatran elephants and tigers, some of the villagers asked about the status in Islam of animals such as elephants and tigers.

The Muslim leaders replied: "They are creations of Allah, as we are. It is haram to kill them, and keeping them alive is part of the worship of God."

Hayu emphasizes that the fatwa applies not only to individuals but also to the government, noting that corruption can be an issue when wildlife, forests, and the interests of such industries as the oil palm business come into conflict.

The fatwa specifically calls upon the government to review permits issued to companies that harm the environment and to take measures to conserve endangered species.

A Time of Unprecedented Wildlife Crime

The fatwa comes at a time when transnational wildlife crime has reached unprecedented levels, with special burdens on countries—such as Indonesia—that are still rich in rare or unusual wildlife and plants.

It comes at a time, too, when governments are struggling to craft laws and pay for enforcement officers to fight criminal wildlife trafficking syndicates that are increasingly sophisticated and violent.

The Council of Ulama hopes its fatwa, which bridges the gap between formal law and crime and gives strong guidance to Indonesian Muslims, will help reduce wildlife trafficking.

Indonesia's action is a response to concern for the country's ecosystems rather than any Islamic practices involving wildlife. Still, throughout history, religion has played an important role as a driver in the consumption of animal species, some now critically endangered.

In 2005, [the Dalai Lama called upon his followers to end wildlife trafficking](#). Recently, the men of South Africa's Nazareth Baptist (Shembe) Church, a traditionalist Zulu church, [began using faux leopard skins](#) in their religious ceremonies. As shown in [National Geographic magazine's "Ivory Worship"](#), Buddhists in Thailand and China, as well as Catholics around the world, who collect ivory religious statues continue to play a role in the smuggling and illegal consumption of elephant ivory.

Following is the full text of the fatwa pertaining to wildlife issued by the Indonesian Council of Ulama, the country's top Muslim clerical body.

<http://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/1049328/indonesias-wildlife-trafficking-fatwafull-text.pdf>

<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/03/140304-fatwa-indonesia-wildlife-trafficking-koran-world/?now=2014-03-04-00%3A01>

March 16, 2014

Religion and Conservation Do Mix

By Bradnee Chambers

Inter Press Service News Agency

Bradnee Chambers, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Environment Programme's Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals, believes wildlife conservation is a goal that religions must take on.

BONN - They say religion doesn't mix well with certain subjects, but in the case of conservation and religion this old rule of thumb doesn't seem to apply.

Conservationists have been increasingly aligning with different religious groups to further their work, either by promoting conservation projects on the ground, or by working with religious groups to promote good conservation principles to their flocks of followers.

High in the Tibetan Plateau where some of the last snow leopards roam, Buddhist monks regularly send out patrols to ensure that the highly endangered cats are not taken by poachers. According to George Schaller, who works for a conservation group called [Panthera](#), Buddhism has as a basic tenet – the love, respect and compassion for all living beings. For the last 3,000-4,000 snow leopards this is welcomed help to ensure their continued existence.

In Indonesia, the most populous Muslim country in the world, Islamic clerics working with the World Wildlife Fund have issued a fatwa, a code of law under which violations are considered immoral and forbidden, to protect endangered animals. This fatwa could play an important role in protecting species such as the Asian Elephant sought after for its ivory, and even aquatic mammals such as dugongs, dolphins and whales.

Pope Francis, who took his name from the St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals and the environment, has on many occasions made strong statements on the subjects of climate change and nature protection. For example, upon meeting the Ecuadoran President, he is reported to have advised him to “take good care of creation. St. Francis wanted that. People occasionally forgive, but nature never does. If we don't take care of the environment, there's no way of getting around it.”

Some conservation groups say that there is still more to be done as there are links between the ivory trade and religious artefacts such as crosses and rosaries.

The Shembe Church of South Africa, officially a Baptist group but deeply immersed in Zulu customs, recently agreed to replace its leopard and animal hides seen as a symbol of wealth and prestige with faux skins.

Environmental organisations are increasingly seeing the advantage of working with different faiths to protect endangered wildlife. Most of the largest religions promote harmony with nature.

Christianity teaches that humans are meant to be stewards over God's creation with a moral obligation to protect nature. Hindus believe that the Divine is everywhere and we are not separate from nature. Muslims have many elements in their religion advocating environmental protection. Over 80 percent of the world population follow one religion or another so the potential alliance is potentially very powerful.

In 1995, Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh recognising the common goals between religion and conservation, founded ARC, the Alliance of Religions and Conservation. The group based in the United Kingdom works with religious groups to develop environmental programmes founded on their own core teachings, beliefs and practices. GreenFaith does similar work promoting social and environmental justice in the U.S.

The alliance between religion and conservation couldn't come at a better time, because the threats to international wildlife have never been greater. The Convention on Migratory Species is one of the few global wildlife conventions in place; it protects species moving between countries, but finds its tasks increasingly difficult to carry out with regard to the most iconic animals in the world.

Big cats, dolphins, whales, sharks, gorillas, elephants, bats, birds of prey and even monarch butterflies which have roamed the Earth for millennia are in danger either from direct threats such as poaching, illegal trade, overfishing, bycatch or loss of their habitat. Then there are indirect threats from climate change affecting their breeding and feeding patterns.

In the face of these threats unprecedented in human history, conservationists are exploring new avenues to protect these species. So why not religion? Conservation and wildlife organisations see the opportunity. Religion is not a threat to wildlife, but it could be a major ally for wildlife conservation because it can change and influence our fundamental values.

A question often asked is, why protect wildlife? Development can improve lives so why forgo it in place of killing off a few species? One can go through all the different arguments – its economic worth, its value importance for future generations or simply its beauty. But the powerful answer must be because it is part of our culture and therefore part of our beliefs and even our own identity. Once it's second nature and part of a value system, no one will ever again ask the question why protect it.

<http://www.ipsnews.net/2014/03/religion-conservation-mix/>

March 24, 2014

Indonesia's fatwa shows religious duty can be a route to sustainable behaviour

The edict on wildlife trafficking is leading secular organisations to recognise that environmentalism is embedded in most scripture

By Kathryn Wertz

The Guardian

In January, a holy voice rang out across [Indonesia](#)'s archipelago of lush, tropical forests and teeming mangroves. It came in the form of a fatwa, an Islamic edict, which instructed Muslims [to stop the illegal trafficking of wildlife](#).

Believed to be the first fatwa broadly covering ecosystem conservation, it seeks to make people do what the law could not. As the head of the fatwa-issuing council said: "People can escape government regulation, but they cannot escape the word of God." This notion is being recognised more and more by secular organisations such as the World Bank and the United Nations, which partner religious-based environmental [sustainability](#) programmes.

Will the fatwa work? Perhaps yes, given that other religious decrees have succeeded where secular conservation campaigns have failed. In Zanzibar last year, for example, an [Islamic-based environmental campaign](#) finally convinced fishermen to stop dynamiting coral reefs. Initiated by the aid and development organisation [Care](#), which recognised that its secular efforts were not achieving results, the campaign raises the question: do religious-based environmental programmes have practical and psychological advantages over secular organisations for inducing behaviour change?

Practical advantages include the global religious community owning about 8% of the planet's land, being the world's third largest stakeholder group and wielding huge media and consumer power. Many religious groups have strong networks, credibility, intergenerational audiences and financial backing that is less dependent on donors' funding cycles and whims than other types of organisations. A group's followers are likely already to be interested in protecting the planet - as environmentalism is often embedded in religious values. Moreover, the religious milieu reinforces key psychological constructs needed for behaviour change.

Psychological pressure can, admittedly, be key, with fatwas and other religious edicts resting on this to a degree. But, is a holy decree only successful in so much as it conjures fire and brimstone, inducing fear among followers? The complexity of the psychological effect of a faith-based decree seems to go beyond this. In fact, perhaps the reason religious-based appeals are so successful is their comprehensive psychology.

Beyond brimstone, religious-based teachings use other, extrinsic as well as intrinsic motivations to affect followers' behaviours. While secular environmentalists debate the influential power of these motivations, some supporting intrinsic motivation (awakening people to the joy of nature, and making saving the planet fun, ie gamification), and some supporting extrinsic motivation (rewards of lower heating bills or punishments of environmental destruction fees), [religion](#) often inherently blends the two, creating less polarising and more comprehensive messages and experiences.

"Our organisation asks followers to put a 'religious lens' on their environmental ethics and reflect on the joy of connecting to nature," says Rianne C ten Veen of the [Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences](#). "So, we say enjoy saving the planet, but we also throw in something about judgment day," she adds with laughter. Academia is also looking seriously at the "religious lens" effect. Mary Evelyn Tucker, co-founder of [the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University](#), researches what she refers to as people's relationality to the Earth.

"There are four types of relationality," echoes Martin Palmer, secretary general of the [Alliance of Religions and Conservation](#). "People's relationships with themselves, with the divine, with neighbours and with the rest of nature." Palmer asserts that most secular environmental organisations focus only on the latter, therefore failing to create long-term change. "We also need people to celebrate together and rejoice in their accomplishments."

Will Muslim duty supersede economic interest and stop illegal wildlife trafficking, giving Indonesians a reason to rejoice? Probably. As Dekila Chungyalpa, director of the [WWF Sacred Earth Program](#), explains about general religion–ecology relationships, "When a holy figure – the person who a follower has safeguarded their innermost being to – asks for change... a follower is obliged to act. This type of behaviour change you simply cannot buy." It is this sacred willpower, combined with networks – the Dalai Lama has 8.1m likes on Facebook – which is driving more secular environmental organisations to partner with religious-based ones.

Hurdles to partnership include fears of proselytisation and resistance to "mixing" religion and natural science, although it is already seamless in most scripture. There are intra-faith resisters, worried that environmentalism jeopardises the religion's bank account, for example oil shareholders – increasingly being countered by religions seeking ["value-based" investing](#).

Staunch opponents to religious-based environmentalism often cite the historian [Lynn White's argument](#) that religion actually distances people from nature and encourages an attitude of domination over it. Upon closer inspection, however, White also argued that religion would be the only way to get us out of our ecological mess. Will a wildlife fatwa, issued in the country with the world's largest Muslim population, demonstrate once again the sacred power of faith?

[Kathryn Werntz](#) is a food sovereignty and human rights advocate based in Germany and Senegal. Through film, writing, farming and teaching she explores global and local issues with audiences of all ages. She is happy to receive comments at kap@sahelcalling.com.

<http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/religion-environment-wildlife-trafficking-indonesia-fatwa-sustainable>

March 30, 2014

Former archbishop of Canterbury reveals global climate change fears

Rowan Williams blames western lifestyle for 'pushing environment towards crisis' ahead of IPCC report

The Guardian

[Rowan Williams](#) has spoken of his fears for the global climate, saying the winter flooding was a portent of what is to come.

Writing in the Sunday Telegraph, the former archbishop of Canterbury blamed the lifestyle of western countries, which he said was "pushing the environment towards crisis".

He said the floods in Britain and similar weather-related catastrophes around the world are the clearest indications yet that predictions of "accelerated warming of the Earth caused by the uncontrolled burning of fossil fuels... are coming true."

His warning came on the eve of a ground-breaking report on the impact of [climate change](#), and a declaration from the energy secretary, Ed Davey, that Britain must spearhead the worldwide battle against it.

Climate change is "[hugely threatening](#)" to life both in the UK and globally, [Davey told the Observer](#), saying that not to lead the fight against it would be "deeply irresponsible".

The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) will this week to release a major report that is expected to warn of catastrophic consequences to food supplies, livelihoods, health and security across the world if climate change is allowed to continue unchecked.

Leaked versions of the report, published in Japan on Monday, warn that changing temperatures, droughts and heatwaves will threaten food supplies and human health, while hundreds of millions of people will be affected by coastal flooding.

Climate change will cause economic losses, make poverty worse and increase migration and risks of violent conflict. It will also harm wildlife and habitats, the study by experts from around the world is expected to say.

In Europe, heatwaves, droughts and heavy rainstorms will increase and there will be a greater risk of coastal and river flooding, it is expected to say, while heat-related deaths will also increase.

The report, which collates work by thousands of scientists from across the world, is likely to state that climate change has already left its mark on all continents and oceans, and is expected to warn that even a small rise in temperatures could lead to irreversible changes.

Williams, who stepped down as leader of the Anglican church just over a year ago, said Monday's report put "our local problems into a deeply disturbing global context".

Writing in his capacity as chairman of Christian Aid, he said: "We have heard for years the predictions that the uncontrolled burning of fossil fuels will lead to an accelerated warming of the Earth.

"What is now happening indicates that these predictions are coming true; our actions have had consequences that are deeply threatening for many of the poorest communities in the world.

"Rich, industrialised countries, including our own, have unquestionably contributed most to atmospheric pollution. Both our present lifestyle and the industrial history of how we created such possibilities for ourselves have to bear the responsibility for pushing the environment in which we live towards crisis."

Campaigners said on Saturday that the world faced a "bleak future" without action to tackle climate change and leading environmentalists called on politicians to break the world's dependency on fossil fuels.

<http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/mar/30/archbishop-canterbury-rowan-williams-climate-change-fears/print>

March 31, 2014

IPCC Report: A changing climate creates pervasive risks but opportunities exist for effective responses

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)
Press Release

Responses will face challenges with high warming of the climate

YOKOHAMA, Japan, 31 March – The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued a report today that says the effects of climate change are already occurring on all continents and across the oceans. The world, in many cases, is ill-prepared for risks from a changing climate. The report also concludes that there are opportunities to respond to such risks, though the risks will be difficult to manage with high levels of warming.

The report, titled *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability*, from Working Group II of the IPCC, details the impacts of climate change to date, the future risks from a changing climate, and the opportunities for effective action to reduce risks. A total of 309 coordinating lead authors, lead authors and review editors, drawn from 70 countries, were selected to produce the report. They enlisted the help of 436 contributing authors, and a total of 1,729 expert and government reviewers.

The report concludes that responding to climate change involves making choices about risks in a changing world. The nature of the risks of climate change is increasingly clear, though climate change will also continue to produce surprises. The report identifies vulnerable people, industries and ecosystems around the world. It finds that risk from a changing climate comes from

vulnerability (lack of preparedness) and exposure (people or assets in harm's way) overlapping with hazards (triggering climate events or trends). Each of these three components can be a target for smart actions to decrease risk.

“We live in an era of man-made climate change,” said Vicente Barros, Co-Chair of Working Group II. “In many cases, we are not prepared for the climate-related risks that we already face. Investments in better preparation can pay dividends both for the present and for the future.”

Adaptation to reduce the risks from a changing climate is now starting to occur, but with a stronger focus on reacting to past events than on preparing for a changing future, according to Chris Field, Co-Chair of Working Group II.

“Climate-change adaptation is not an exotic agenda that has never been tried. Governments, firms and communities around the world are building experience with adaptation,” Field said. “This experience forms a starting point for bolder, more ambitious adaptations that will be important as climate and society continue to change.”

Future risks from a changing climate depend strongly on the amount of future climate change. Increasing magnitudes of warming increase the likelihood of severe and pervasive impacts that may be surprising or irreversible.

“With high levels of warming that result from continued growth in greenhouse gas emissions, risks will be challenging to manage, and even serious, sustained investments in adaptation will face limits,” said Field.

Observed impacts of climate change have already affected agriculture, human health, ecosystems on land and in the oceans, water supplies and some people's livelihoods. The striking feature of observed impacts is that they are occurring from the tropics to the poles, from small islands to large continents, and from the wealthiest countries to the poorest.

“The report concludes that people, societies and ecosystems are vulnerable around the world, but with different vulnerability in different places. Climate change often interacts with other stresses to increase risk,” Field said.

Adaptation can play a key role in decreasing these risks, Barros noted. “Part of the reason adaptation is so important is that the world faces a host of risks from climate change already baked into the climate system, due to past emissions and existing infrastructure,” said Barros.

Field added: “Understanding that climate change is a challenge in managing risk opens a wide range of opportunities for integrating adaptation with economic and social development and with

initiatives to limit future warming. We definitely face challenges, but understanding those challenges and tackling them creatively can make climate-change adaptation an important way to help build a more vibrant world in the near-term and beyond.”

Rajendra Pachauri, Chair of the IPCC, said: “The Working Group II report is another important step forward in our understanding of how to reduce and manage the risks of climate change. Along with the reports from Working Group I and Working Group III, it provides a conceptual map of not only the essential features of the climate challenge but the options for solutions.”

The Working Group I report was released in September 2013, and the Working Group III report will be released in April 2014. The IPCC Fifth Assessment Report cycle concludes with the publication of its Synthesis Report in October 2014.

“None of this would be possible without the dedication of the Co-Chairs of Working Group II and the hundreds of scientists and experts who volunteered their time to produce this report, as well as the more than 1,700 expert reviewers worldwide who contributed their invaluable oversight,” Pachauri said. “The IPCC’s reports are some of the most ambitious scientific undertakings in human history, and I am humbled by and grateful for the contributions of everyone who make them possible.”

The Working Group II contribution to the IPCC Fifth Assessment Report (WGII AR5) is available at www.ipcc-wg2.gov/AR5 and www.ipcc.ch.

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Notes for editors

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is the international body for assessing the science related to climate change. It was set up in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Environment Programme to provide policymakers with regular assessments of the scientific basis of climate change, its impacts and future risks, and options for adaptation and mitigation.

Working Group II, which assesses impacts, adaptation, and vulnerability, is co-chaired by Vicente Barros of the University of Buenos Aires, Argentina, and Chris Field of the Carnegie Institution for Science, USA. The Technical Support Unit of Working Group II is hosted by the Carnegie Institution for Science and funded by the government of the United States of America.

At the 28th Session of the IPCC held in April 2008, the members of the IPCC decided to prepare a Fifth Assessment Report (AR5). A Scoping Meeting was convened in July 2009 to develop the scope and outline of the AR5. The resulting outlines for the three Working Group contributions to the AR5 were approved at the 31st Session of the IPCC in October 2009.

A total of 309 coordinating lead authors, lead authors, and review editors, representing 70 countries, were selected to produce the Working Group II report. They enlisted the help of 436 contributing authors, and a total of 1729 expert and government reviewers provided comments on drafts of the report. For the Fifth Assessment Report as a whole, a total of 837 coordinating lead authors, lead authors, and review editors participated.

The Working Group II report consists of two volumes. The first contains a Summary for Policymakers, Technical Summary, and 20 chapters assessing risks by sector and opportunities for response. The sectors include freshwater resources, terrestrial and ocean ecosystems, coasts, food, urban and rural areas, energy and industry, human health and security, and livelihoods and poverty. A second volume of 10 chapters assesses risks and opportunities for response by region. These regions include Africa, Europe, Asia, Australasia, North America, Central and South America, Polar Regions, Small Islands, and the Ocean.

http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/ar5/pr_wg2/140330_pr_wgII_spm_en.pdf

April 2014

SAFCEI - South African Faith Communities Institute Newsletter

<http://us6.campaign-archive1.com/?u=887c3de8b0&id=a1a3486222&e=d85b57a294>

April 2014

Sacred Sites Research Newsletter (SSIREN)

http://sacrednaturalsites.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/SSIREN_April_2014.pdf

April 2014

Green Church Newsletter

http://egliseverte-greenchurch.ca/green/index.php?option=com_acymailing&ctrl=archive&task=view&mailid=48&key=8a30399f5d38ee0ef1eff2bbae4c5297&subid=189-dbe0c9b642707e4c37fc810b1cf1134f

April 2014

Come with Me into the Fields: Inspiring Creation Ministry among Faith Communities

By Erin Lothes Biviano

New Theology Review Vol. 26, No. 2 (2014)

Abstract

Climate change is a dominant reality of our time, a series of physical changes to earth's systems that will impact human wellbeing, social stability, biodiversity, and the familiar patterns of harvest and storms on God's green earth. The Fifth Assessment Report clearly states that climate change is already having an impact on our planet and will worsen the lot of the poor in particular. A critical link between this scientific assessment of the state of the planet and Christian faith is thereby found in the gospel invitation to care for the poor. Yet arguably many Christians have not internalized this reality, and the central symbols of Christian faith are not yet consciously intertwined with the reality of climate change in the ways needed to summon strong action. Therefore, the critical question addressed here is how ministers can help lead their communities to understand the links between climate change and faith -- and then inspire them to act.

My focus group research among over 135 faith-based environmentalists show that the motivation for environmental advocacy is effectively created through group discussion in the kinds of trusted groups that congregations and faith communities exemplify. Congregations and faith communities are privileged places for engaging potential environmental leaders, and for supporting the work of already active environmentalists.

Research Objectives: Empirical research was conducted while a fellow of the Earth Institute, Columbia University, and was approved by the Columbia University Institutional Review Board. The objective was to engage environmental decision theory as well as theological analysis to understand the factors that motivate faith-based environmentalists.

Methods: Participants were chosen from mainstream congregational sustainability committees. The Christian groups included Baptists (WA), three groups of Catholics (suburban NJ, urban NY, rural WA), two groups of Episcopalians (suburban and urban NJ), megachurch Christian Evangelicals (FL), Reformed Christians (NJ), two groups of Presbyterians/ PCUSA (MD), Unitarian-Universalists (NJ), and southern pastors (NC).

Participant statements provided the primary starting point for analysis. I asked questions about congregational activity, personal motivations, how beliefs developed, and behavior change, and employed semi-structured questions to permit systematic comparison and analysis. Discussions were transcribed and coded both inductively and deductively using NVivo 8 content analysis

software (QSR Software, Melbourne) to compare and rank the responses. This essay represents analysis of a small portion of the data collected and the conclusions drawn from it.

Download a PDF of the full article:

<http://newtheologyreview.org/index.php/ntr/article/view/998>

April 4, 2014

Evangelicals Organize 'Day of Prayer,' Call for Action on Climate Change

Young Evangelicals for Climate Action is highlighting the effects of global warming.

By Alan Neuhauser
USA Today

Hundreds of evangelical Christians gathered across the country Thursday for a “Day of Prayer and Action” on climate change.

The event, made up of vigils, speeches and discussions, was part of a weeklong series being held on 20 Christian college campuses this week, all geared toward spurring churches and local communities to reduce harmful carbon emissions, educate local residents about the effects of climate change, and fight the rise of temperatures and greenhouse gases worldwide.

“This may not be an issue that evangelicals in the U.S. have been known for being out in front on, but there are a lot of evangelicals in this country, and not everybody speaks for everybody,” says Ben Lowe, national spokesman for the event’s organizer, Young Evangelicals for Climate Action. “Those of us 30 and younger, we’ve come of age in a world that’s dealing with the reality of global warming.”

The National Association of Evangelicals, which represents evangelical churches, has also called for action on climate change.

A 2013 survey found that while 61 percent of evangelicals agreed that global warming was occurring (compared to 78 percent of non-evangelicals), less than half thought it was being caused by human activities (compared to 69 percent of non-evangelicals).

Nevertheless, most of the evangelicals surveyed said they supported taking action to fight climate change.

“Despite some stereotypes of evangelical Christians as anti-environmental or dismissive of climate change, it is important to note that majorities of evangelicals do believe global warming is happening, human caused, and are at least somewhat worried about it,” authors Neil Smith and

Anthony Leiserowitz, of University College London and Yale University, wrote in their [paper](#), which was published in the journal Global Environmental Change.

As Lowe describes, “This is first and foremost a moral issue and a spiritual issue. The impacts of climate change, we’re starting to understand more and more, are very diverse and very far-reaching. As some of the relief and development organizations we’re working with are telling us, this is a major challenge to the work the church does around the world.”

While “for many other social issues, including fighting AIDS and reducing poverty, evangelicals exhibit widespread agreement with each other,” climate change has become “as divisive within this group as it has among the broader American public,” Smith and Leiserowitz found.

By the time the study came out, Young Evangelicals for Climate Action had in fact already been active for more than a year. Founded by a group of evangelicals during a February 2012 retreat in Washington, D.C., it achieved a national presence in just a matter of months, and soon won support from the Christian Reformed Church, an evangelical denomination.

“There is a near-consensus in the scientific community that climate change is occurring and very likely is caused by human activity,” the CRC [declared](#) at a June 2012 conclave. Delegates there concluded that global warming is “an ethical, social justice, and religious issue,” and therefore “the CRC is compelled to take private and public action to address climate change, especially since those who are already most impacted by it live in poor countries.”

The National Association of Evangelicals, which represents evangelical churches, and David Neff, former editor-in-chief of the Billy Graham-founded magazine Christianity Today, have also called for action on climate change.

<http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2014/04/03/evangelicals-organize-day-of-prayer-call-for-action-on-climate-change>

April 5, 2014

Climate Change Threats To 'The Least Of These' Compel Evangelical Christians To Act

By Lynne Peeples
Huffington Post

"Climate change is a really bad reason to get divorced."

Katharine Hayhoe, a leading climate scientist, recalled the trial she and her husband Andrew, an evangelical Christian pastor, faced when they discovered they weren't on the same page about global warming.

After a number of intense discussions, mediated by shared values and beliefs, their marriage persevered. Andrew accepted the overwhelming scientific evidence, and they even went on to co-write a [book](#) for Christians on climate change. But in evangelical churches across the U.S., a

faith community to which Hayhoe herself belongs, many pastors and parishioners continue to perceive an incompatibility between their faith and the climate science.

This kind of dissonance is unnecessary, according to Hayhoe, and an unhealthy roadblock to much-needed action.

"The [climate change] issue is not inconsistent with Christian values," Hayhoe, director of the Climate Science Center at Texas Tech University, told The Huffington Post. "In fact, Christian values demand we take action. Climate change disproportionately affects the poor and vulnerable -- the very people Christians are called to care for and love."

That the poor bear the brunt of global warming's effects, from food insecurity to waterborne diseases, is one of the key takeaways from the United Nation's latest [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\) report](#), released this week. The same theme emerges in a new Showtime series, "[Years of Living Dangerously](#)," set to premiere April 13. Co-produced by James Cameron and starring celebrities including Harrison Ford and Matt Damon, the documentary addresses the entanglement of politics, faith and science that impedes acceptance and action on climate change.

Hayhoe is a prominent figure in the first episode.

Evangelicals, who currently represent about a quarter of the U.S. population and wield significant political clout, aren't necessarily worried about the Earth itself, noted Rev. Mitchell Hescox, president of the [Evangelical Environmental Network](#), a ministry dedicated to caring for the natural world.

But a growing number, himself among them, "realize the overwhelming impacts of climate change on human life, both here and around the world," said Hescox, who worked for 14 years in the coal industry and 18 years as an evangelical pastor before taking the helm of the EEN.

"It affects all the social concerns of the church -- poverty, immigration, and the list goes on," he said. "What the IPCC report really helped to highlight is that this is a people problem, not an Earth problem."

The environmental movement among evangelical Christians -- also known as "creation care" -- isn't new. Dedicated leaders such as [Rev. Richard Cizik](#) have been working to engage fellow evangelicals for more than a decade. And despite resistance from colleagues, they've made progress. In a study published last year, researchers found that about [half of evangelicals](#) now believe climate change is happening and that we should adopt policies to reduce it. The majority of evangelicals surveyed, however, did not think human activity is to blame.

"Within the community, there are still some stark differences of opinion," said Anthony Leiserowitz, director of the [Yale Project on Climate Change Communication](#) and an author of the study. "A lot of that falls on political grounds."

Leiserowitz called the relationship between evangelicals and right-wing politicians "symbiotic."

"If all of a sudden, Mitch McConnell, Speaker [John] Boehner, Rush Limbaugh and 'Papa' [Bill] O'Reilly all started to say, 'You know what? We've been wrong all these years about climate change,' then that would dramatically change the conversation," he said. "At the same time, most of those folks are going to respond to what their constituents and key influencers are telling them."

"No doubt, evangelicals are still a powerful force within the Republican Party," added Leiserowitz.

Rev. Hescox, too, underscored the need to uncouple science from politics in order to move forward on the issue. Other evangelicals echoed the call.

"A thermometer is not Republican. A thermometer is not a Democrat," Andrew Farley, an associate professor of applied linguistics at Texas Tech, tells Don Cheadle, a celebrity correspondent, during the first episode of "Years of Living Dangerously." (The show will also be available online April 7.)

Farley, of course, is Hayhoe's husband -- her first climate change convert. She sits next to him during the conversation with Cheadle in their Lubbock, Tex., home. Later in the show, Hayhoe travels to Plainview, Tex., one town over, where she gives a talk to residents on climate change's role in the devastating drought of 2013. About 10 percent of the area's workforce lost their jobs when the heat and lack of rain drove the Cargill meat plant to shut down. The popular view in the small town was that the drought was God's will, or part of a natural cycle.

Cheadle interviews a cattle rancher in town before Hayhoe's visit. "There's only one man who knows how much rain we're gonna get," the rancher said. "That's God, and he's not a scientist."

One of the roadblocks to climate change becoming a nonpartisan issue, and to opening up more ears to the science, according to Hayhoe, is the evangelical community's lack of strong hierarchical leadership. There are influential people like Cizik, but unlike with other faith traditions, there is no pope, archbishop or other central figure that everyone can look to.

"We have this leadership vacuum that I think has been filled with conservatives who aren't necessarily Christian. People get their opinions from AM talk radio, or from Fox News," Hayhoe told HuffPost.

"This is also a generational issue. If you talk to the average 20- or 30-year-old, you might get a very different perspective," she added.

Anna Jane Joyner and her father, Rick Joyner, an evangelical megachurch preacher, exemplify that age gap.

"Growing up, the focus of the conversation was always on sin and salvation and the afterlife," recalled Anna Jane, 29, of her upbringing. "There wasn't a big emphasis on our experience in this life and this world, other than what you shouldn't do."

During college, much to Rick's initial chagrin, Anna Jane became an environmental activist.

The fourth episode of "Years of Living Dangerously" profiles Anna Jane's attempt to convince her father that climate change is real. He had already followed his daughter's lead on some environmental issues, such as pollution. While Anna Jane said she couldn't yet disclose to HuffPost where her father landed on climate change at the end of the show, she offered one hint: "I underestimated the power of ideology when we're talking about this issue, for sure."

This week, more than 20 Christian colleges across the country hosted climate change events in response to the IPCC report, including a nationwide "[Day of Prayer and Action](#)" on Thursday. Ben Lowe, national spokesman for the event's organizer, [Young Evangelicals for Climate Action](#), suggested there are many reasons he and his peers are embracing the issue.

"I consider myself pro-life," he said. "I see this as an issue affecting lives and health of people all around world."

Recent work by Leiserowitz and his colleagues identified two key messages from the Bible that appear to compel evangelists to take up the issue. In the Old Testament, God calls on people to be stewards of his creation. In the New Testament, Jesus commands people to care for "the least of these" -- the poor, the sick, the elderly, the powerless.

"Many of these churches invest millions of dollars, and their young people often go abroad, to try to help people who are in dire straits of poverty, disease," said Leiserowitz. "So they say, 'How could we in good conscience ignore a problem that is going to push millions more people into those exact same circumstances?'"

Hescox and Lowe noted that their organizations led a [trip to Malawi](#) last May for evangelical leaders and youth to witness firsthand the effects of climate change on the poor.

As people across America have seen and experienced in recent years, climate-related problems are escalating in the U.S., too. Hayhoe is an author of the [U.S. National Climate Assessment](#), due out at the end of April, which will document the impact on Americans' health and livelihoods of climate events like intense storms, extreme heat and more frequent wildfires.

"When I look at the information we get from the planet, I look at it as God's creation speaking to us," Hayhoe told residents of Plainview during her visit. "And in this case, there's no question that God's creation is telling us that it's running a fever."

The message resonated with people in the audience. "You know, when you have somebody who believes the same way as you," one man told Cheadle, "when you see that conservative side telling you the message -- it sure makes a lot of difference."

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/05/climate-change-evangelicals-poverty-health_n_5088537.html

April 8, 2014

Young people seek an earth restored

If the church wants to remain relevant for students and the youth generation, it should increase and amplify its call to action on climate change, says a young Christian leader.

By Emily Wirzba
Faith and Leadership

As a 22-year-old politically engaged Christian woman, I want to be a part of a church that takes seriously its mandate to protect God's creation and the vulnerable. For me, one of the most important ways to fulfill this mandate is to address climate change.

I take seriously Numbers 35:33-34, which says, "You shall not pollute the land in which you live. ... You shall not defile the land in which you live, in which I also dwell" (NRSV).

Proverbs 31:8-9 also deeply resonates with me when it proclaims, "Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy." For me, a church that fails to do these things is hypocritical and therefore unattractive.

I am not alone but part of a powerful youth movement desiring action on climate change. As the next generation that will inherit the world, young people speak with intense moral authority on the issue of climate change.

If the church wants to remain relevant for students and the youth generation, it should increase and amplify its call to action on climate change. By speaking from a moral perspective on a national level, the church can show young people across the country that it is a relevant place where youth can be supported in their quest to seek an earth restored.

I've worked with many student groups -- most from religious backgrounds -- and I see how passionately young people desire to engage with others on climate change. In early February, as part of my job as a program assistant with the Friends Committee on National Legislation, I engaged with students, faith leaders and Quakers across the Research Triangle area on our moral obligation as people of faith to act on climate change.

While in North Carolina, I gathered with Randall Williams, a Carolina Friends School (CFS) teacher, and Susannah Tuttle, the director of [North Carolina Interfaith Power & Light](#), to give training and advice to 10 CFS high school students before leaving for a day of lobbying in Raleigh.

The group of students met with Michael Jones, Sen. Kay Hagan's regional liaison in Raleigh, and delivered their challenge: "We are here to ask Sen. Hagan to take a moral stand on action regarding climate change. Will she use the recent coal ash spill on the Dan River as an opportunity to take a strong stance supporting renewable energy and the reduction of coal use?"

Their class on climate advocacy inspired the students to create a [NC Students for Climate Action](#) group. They planned a massive carpool day and created a “Love Our Climate NC” campaign, complete with a video, information sheets, postcards and a social media package.

These students are serious about working for climate solutions. They are motivated by the science, but also something deeper: they are motivated by their faith and the moral call to conscience on climate disruption.

I returned to Washington, D.C., incredibly impressed at the maturity, passion and fierce desire these students had to seek an earth restored.

Many churches today mourn the loss of young people and are searching for ways to be relevant and engaging places for students and youth. Here is an opportunity for churches to do just that. I believe that the faith community is uniquely situated to make the moral call to action on climate disruption. As people of faith, we have a deep concern for God’s creation. We are called to care for the least of these, who often will experience the effects of climate change most severely. We have an obligation to future generations.

There are concrete ways that faith leaders and pastors can take action. Churches are making environmental stewardship a priority of their congregations -- physically “greening” their church buildings by undergoing energy audits, purchasing energy-efficient appliances and installing solar panels.

Pastors are writing to and meeting with their political representatives, advocating from a faith perspective why stronger environmental policies are needed.

This call to action is already resonating with congregations across the country. In early February, faith communities coalesced around the National Preach-In on Climate Change, hosted by Interfaith Power & Light, to mobilize the faith voice.

Youth movements are rising up across the planet urging action from a moral or faith perspective. A World Wildlife Federation faith project, Sacred Earth, encourages youth to make the connection between their faith and conservation, calling upon them to share their stories of how and why they are environmental advocates.

There is data that shows the importance of climate change to young voters. Eighty percent of voters under 35 support President Barack Obama’s Climate Action Plan, and 73 percent would oppose members of Congress who got in the way of the plan.

A study done by the Yale Project on Climate Change and the George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication found that 81 percent of 18- to 34-year-old evangelicals trust religious leaders as an information source on global warming. Faith leaders must not abandon the youth generation by failing to communicate boldly the importance of acting on climate disruption.

What a perfect chance for the church to revitalize its relationship with youth by acknowledging, respecting and reciprocating their passion and voice on this issue. By leading on climate change, the church can once again capture the imagination of the youth movement while fulfilling its mandate to love and protect all of God's creation.

<http://www.faithandleadership.com/content/emily-wirzba-young-people-seek-earth-restored?page=full>

April 8, 2014

Giving up carbon for Lent

Can the Ecumenical Lenten Carbon Fast help reverse climate change and revitalize the church at the same time?

By Joshua Eaton
Faith and Leadership

Katharina Wilkins still passes on things like alcohol and Facebook during the season of Lent, but what's really important to her is giving up needless car rides and investment in fossil fuels. That's because, for the third year in a row, Wilkins is participating in the annual Ecumenical Lenten Carbon Fast.

"I have done Lent before, but in comparison, there's so much more sense of purpose now," said Wilkins, a member of the Congregational Church of Weston, Mass. "It certainly is still an exercise in self-discipline in many ways, but somehow it fits better into a bigger picture."

The [Carbon Fast](#) was started in 2011 by New England Regional Environmental Ministries (NEREM), which describes itself as "a loosely affiliated group of Christian environmental activists from throughout New England."

It asks Christians to deepen their commitment to the fight against climate change between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday.

Participants receive a daily email with suggestions for reducing activities that emit carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases, advocating for change, and connecting with the broader climate movement. This year's Carbon Fast has 3,800 participants by email and 2,350 via Facebook from at least 34 countries.

Traditionalists may dismiss the Carbon Fast as a quirky way for liberals to rebrand the church, but its organizers believe that Christians have a deep, biblical obligation to care for God's creation.

They also hope that the church can reprise its historic role at the forefront of transformative struggles like the civil rights movement -- and maybe even come to have fresh relevance among socially conscious millennials.

“For me to give up chocolate -- sure, it’s an exercise in self-discipline, and that’s great,” Wilkins said. “But is that really the thing that my life needs to happen the most? Or that life in general needs to happen the most?”

Repentance on a larger scale

The Rev. Dr. Jim Antal, the conference minister and president of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ, helped found NEREM in 2010 and writes the Carbon Fast's daily messages.

“I’m 63 years old,” Antal said, “so I think of all the 63 seasons of Lent that I have participated in. Virtually all of them have encouraged individual members to focus on their own personal need for repentance.”

At first, the Carbon Fast was little different. That started to change in its second year, when organizers added two entries per day -- one for individuals and the other for congregations.

They also started encouraging participants within congregations to form discussion groups and added more entries aimed at getting participants involved in the broader climate movement.

The goal is to reduce carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas driving human-made climate change. It is created when people burn fossil fuels and clear forests. In 2013, mean atmospheric carbon dioxide reached more than 395 parts per million (ppm), according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Many climate scientists believe that the safe upper limit is 350 ppm.

This year, each week of Lent has a different focus. Themes so far have included public witness, simplicity and fossil fuel divestment. One link has an online calculator so participants can figure out the carbon cost of their current lifestyle and develop a goal to reduce it. Other suggestions range from flying less and living more simply to talking to a congregation about divestment and joining with others to protest the proposed Keystone XL tar sands pipeline.

“That shifts the consciousness of what Lent is all about from me and my personal repentance to a larger scale. It begins to ask questions about, ‘What about us? What about humanity? What about our congregation? What about Christians in general?’ That was an important shift in the Carbon Fast itself, to begin to ask these larger questions,” Antal said.

As a Christian minister, Antal is acutely aware of the questions’ significance. He often tells other ministers that every third sermon should be about the climate. When they look at him in disbelief, Antal lays out what he believes is at stake for religious leaders: if every third sermon isn’t about climate change now, he tells them, then within 15 years every sermon will be about grief.

The gospel of climate change

Antal sees public witness on behalf of the climate as inseparable from the broader work of building the church and proclaiming the gospel.

“The thousands of young people through 350.org who have showed both surprise and respect at my leadership -- getting arrested a couple of times at the White House, and other brands of leadership -- it opens their eyes to say, ‘My goodness, maybe there is something in the church,’” he said.

The Carbon Fast’s popularity has certainly expanded beyond the Massachusetts church, and Antal hopes the Massachusetts Conference’s prominent stand on climate change will convince increasingly secular young people that the church has an important role to play.

“As churches voice their concern for future generations and begin organizing their towns and lobbying Congress and the White House to pass laws to protect the earth, ‘nones’ will begin to partner with church folk,” he said. “It’s already happening in Massachusetts, because the United Church of Christ has been one of the loudest public voices on behalf of the climate.”

That public witness is a big part of what attracted Wilkins, who grew up Roman Catholic, to the United Church of Christ.

“I think the reason I ended up in the UCC is that this church ties in things that I think about anyway with my faith -- social justice issues, the environment,” she said. “For me, [the Lenten Carbon Fast] is really close to my faith, because it’s in the end about loving all people. How could I love all people if I didn’t care about people in island nations or people who get their land taken away by a pipeline?”

Her words recall the verses from the prophet Isaiah that many Christian churches read to mark the beginning of Lent:

"Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?" (Isaiah 58:6-7 NRSV)

That sentiment is familiar at Wilkins’ church, where the Rev. Dr. Joseph Mayher regularly preaches on climate change. The church has a strong environmental action group, and it even hosted two talks by 350.org founder Bill McKibben in 2011.

But Antal still works to convince ministers who are worried about declining church attendance and budget shortfalls that addressing climate change is more solution than distraction.

“The key is to help pastors recognize that it really is about being an anchor for moral witness. It is certainly not about institutions for institutions’ sake,” explains Antal. “There is a world that

needs to be changed. If you spend a lot of time focused on climate the way I do, change can't be big enough and can't be soon enough."

That may seem like mission drift when mainline churches are facing existential threats. According to the Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, the number of white mainline Protestants declined by three percentage points between 2007 and 2012 alone. Church closures tell the same story: the Barna Group found that some 8,000 mainline congregations across the country closed their doors between 1950 and 2009.

Still, Antal believes the church has a critical role to play in creating that change. Drawing on examples from the civil rights movement and other causes, Antal argues that religious leaders have long been at the forefront of America's fights for social change.

"We have the capacity to do it," he said. "We just have to manifest the determination."

It's a message that the Rev. Reebee Girash gets loud and clear. About three years ago, she had a "wake-up moment" that she credits to public witness by Antal, McKibben and Religious Witness for the Earth. Now, she is active in the climate justice movement and serves on the board of directors for the Cambridge-based Better Future Project, which convenes 350 Massachusetts.

"In a time of mainline shrinkage where we're all anxious about our institutional survival, it can be really hard to step out into the world," Girash said. "And yet if we really want to be serving the world and relevant to the world -- and particularly relevant to socially conscious young adults -- this is a place we need to go. God didn't tell us to hide our lamps under bushels."

Institutional commitment to activism

Antal devotes 15 to 20 percent of his time at the Massachusetts Conference to climate work, with the blessing of its board of directors and member congregations. That includes national speaking engagements, running the Carbon Fast and even getting arrested in front of the White House protesting the Keystone XL pipeline with groups like 350.org and the Sierra Club.

In 2009, the Massachusetts Conference became the first religious body in the U.S. to pass a resolution urging elected officials to pass legislation that reduces the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere to below 350 ppm.

Last year, the conference took an even bolder stance by spearheading a successful effort to make the United Church of Christ the nation's first religious body -- and the first national body of any kind -- to divest from fossil fuel companies.

People concerned about the scientists' predictions on climate change may wonder whether efforts like the Ecumenical Lenten Carbon Fast aren't too little, too late. Others might accuse it of giving middle-class, white liberals a way to ease their guilt without engaging in real, systemic change. But Antal sees things differently.

“I tell congregations, ‘I want to trade a shriveled hope that you will recycle, or maybe walk or bicycle a little more instead of using your car -- I want to trade in that tiny hope for a much grander hope. ... I have 100 percent confidence that the people in this congregation know exactly where the railroad tracks are, and that soon enough you will put your bodies on the tracks and block the transport of oil from the Canadian tar sands to our processing plants,’” he said.

He’s fully aware of how radical that sounds.

“I know I’m way out ahead,” he said. “That’s what leadership is all about. Leadership is about being far enough out ahead to cast a vision, to extend the horizon and to then invite people to come with you.”

Questions to consider:

- The Carbon Fast encourages individual and collective repentance. In your organization are there ways to broaden individual practices to a “larger scale”?
- For Jim Antal, innovating on the traditional Lenten practice is a way to make the church relevant. Are there practices that could be made more relevant in your institution?
- The Massachusetts UCC supports Antal’s work on climate change, even though it doesn’t fall within traditional ministry. If you could spend 15 to 20 percent of your time on a project, what would it be?
- Antal sees his role as a leader as being “way out ahead” of those whom he leads. What are the pros and cons of this leadership style? Would it suit you?

<http://www.faithandleadership.com/features/articles/giving-carbon-for-lent>

April 10, 2014

We need an apartheid-style boycott to save the planet

We must stop climate change. And we can, if we use the tactics that worked in South Africa against the worst carbon emitters

By Desmond Tutu
The Guardian

Twenty-five years ago people could be excused for not knowing much, or doing much, about climate change. Today we have no excuse. No more can it be dismissed as science fiction; we are already feeling the effects.

This is why, no matter where you live, it is appalling that the US is debating [whether to approve a massive pipeline transporting 830,000 barrels of the world's dirtiest oil from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico](#). Producing and transporting this quantity of oil, via the Keystone XL pipeline, could increase Canada's carbon emissions by over 30%.

If the negative impacts of the pipeline would affect only Canada and the US, we could say good luck to them. But it will affect the whole world, our shared world, the only world we have. We don't have much time.

This week in Berlin, scientists and public representatives [have been weighing up radical options for curbing emissions](#) contained in the third report of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The bottom line is that we have 15 years to take the necessary steps. The horse may not have bolted, but it's well on its way through the stable door.

Who can stop it? Well, we can, you and I. And it is not just that we can stop it, we have a responsibility to do so. It is a responsibility that begins with God commanding the first human inhabitants of the garden of Eden "[to till it and keep it](#)". To keep it; not to abuse it, not to destroy it.

The taste of "success" in our world gone mad is measured in dollars and francs and rupees and yen. Our desire to consume any and everything of perceivable value – to extract every precious stone, every ounce of metal, every drop of oil, every tuna in the ocean, every rhinoceros in the bush – knows no bounds. We live in a world dominated by greed. We have allowed the interests of capital to outweigh the interests of human beings and our Earth.

Throughout my life I have believed that the only just response to injustice is what [Mahatma Gandhi termed "passive resistance"](#). During the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, [using boycotts, divestment and sanctions](#), and supported by our friends overseas, we were not only able to apply economic pressure on the unjust state, but also serious moral pressure.

It is clear that those countries and companies primarily responsible for emitting carbon and accelerating climate change are not simply going to give up; they stand to make too much money. They need a whole lot of gentle persuasion from the likes of us. And it need not necessarily involve trading in our cars and buying bicycles!

There are many ways that all of us can fight against climate change: by not wasting energy, for instance. But these individual measures will not make a big enough difference in the available time.

People of conscience need to break their ties with corporations financing the injustice of climate change. We can, for instance, boycott events, sports teams and media programming sponsored by fossil-fuel energy companies. We can demand that the advertisements of energy companies carry health warnings. We can encourage more of our universities and municipalities and cultural institutions to cut their ties to the fossil-fuel industry. We can organise [car-free days](#) and build broader societal awareness. We can ask our religious communities to speak out.

We can actively encourage energy companies to spend more of their resources on the development of sustainable energy products, and we can reward those companies that do so by using their products. We can press our governments to invest in renewable energy and stop subsidising fossil fuels. Where possible, [we can install our own solar panels](#) and water heaters.

We cannot necessarily bankrupt the fossil fuel industry. But we can take steps to reduce its political clout, and hold those who rake in the profits accountable for cleaning up the mess.

And the good news is that we don't have to start from scratch. Young people across the world have already begun to do something about it. The fossil fuel divestment campaign is the fastest growing corporate campaign of its kind in history.

Last month, the General Synod of the Church of England voted overwhelmingly to review its investment policy in respect of fossil fuel companies, with one bishop referring to climate change as "the great demon of our day". Already some colleges and pension funds have declared they want their [investments to be congruent with their beliefs](#).

It makes no sense to invest in companies that undermine our future. To serve as custodians of creation is not an empty title; it requires that we act, and with all the urgency this dire situation demands.

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/apr/10/divest-fossil-fuels-climate-change-keystone-xl>

April 13, 2014

IPCC Presents Assessment on Measures to Mitigate Climate Change

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

Berlin, Germany – The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the group of the world's leading climate change scientists established by the UN General Assembly and working under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organization, has just released in Berlin, after 6 years of intensive work reviewing all available science, its 2014 assessment on measures to mitigate climate change.

Among its main findings is that the concentration of Green House Gasses (GHGs) – gasses which cause climate change – have grown more quickly during the last decade than in each of the previous three decades.

Globally, economic and population growth continue to be the most important drivers of increases in CO2 emissions from fossil fuel combustion. The contribution of population growth between 2000 and 2010 remained roughly identical to the previous three decades, while the contribution of economic growth has risen sharply.

Scenarios show that to have a likely chance of limiting the increase in global mean temperature to two degrees Celsius, means lowering global greenhouse gas emissions by 40 to 70 per cent compared with 2010 by mid-century, and to near-zero by the end of this century.

The panel analyzed the causes for this increase in the main economic sectors: energy, transport, construction, and building, industry, land use, agriculture and forestry among others.

CO₂ emissions from fossil fuel combustion and industrial processes contributed about 78 per cent of the total GHG emission increase from 1970 to 2010, with a similar percentage contribution for the period 2000–2010.

About half of cumulative anthropogenic CO₂ emissions between 1750 and 2010 have occurred in the last 40 years. Annual anthropogenic GHG emissions have increased between 2000 and 2010, with this increase arising directly from energy supply (47 per cent), industry (30 per cent), transport (11 per cent) and buildings (3 per cent). Accounting for indirect emissions raises the contributions of the buildings and industry sectors.

The panel analyzed different scenarios for stabilizing or reducing emissions in each of these sectors and made a number of recommendations to policy makers on this regard. It concluded that without additional efforts to reduce GHG emissions beyond those in place today, emissions growth is expected to persist, driven by growth in global population and economic activities.

Baseline scenarios, those without additional mitigation, result in global mean surface temperature increases in 2100 from 3.7 to 4.8°C compared to pre-industrial levels (median values; the range is 2.5°C to 7.8°C when including climate uncertainty).

Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director, welcomed the assessment and said: “UNEP congratulates the IPCC for producing once again a masterpiece of assessment and advice on how to address climate change. Reading this last assessment, the urgent need for making further progress in greening our economies is clear. UNEP stands ready to continue providing advice and support to countries around the world on how to design and implement policies that will move us towards low-carbon economies and societies.”

For more information, contact: UNEP News Desk unepnewsdesk@unep.org

Or visit: <http://www.ipcc.ch/>

IPCC Official Press Release: http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/ar5/pr_wg3/20140413_pr_pc_wg3_en.pdf

April 15, 2014

Celebrate Mother’s Day by Honoring Mother Earth

Climate Change Film Debuts in NYC May 11

Press Release

“You can’t talk about it. Mainstream society doesn’t want to hear about our sorrow for life on Earth.” Author Joanna Macy’s soft voice delivers the heartfelt message of [*The Wisdom to Survive: Climate Change, Capitalism and Community*](#). The new documentary is one of the few to face the impending climate catastrophe head on.

Wisdom to Survive makes its New York City premiere at Judson Memorial Church on May 11, at 2 pm. The filmmakers will be present for Q&A. The screening is free, but donations will be accepted. The church is located at 55 Washington Square South in Manhattan. For more information, [visit the Judson website](#).

The 56-minute film accepts the consensus of scientists that climate change has already arrived, and asks—what is keeping us from action? In discussions with thought leaders and activists, *The Wisdom to Survive* explores how unlimited growth lies behind climate disruption, and is devastating our planet’s life support system, our social fabric, and the lives of billions of people. The film features Bill McKibben ([350.org](#)), author Joanna Macy, whale scientist Roger Payne, Herschelle Milford (Surplus People Project), Quincy Saul (Ecosocialist Horizons), and more. They provide insights, answers, and hope. What becomes clear is, we already have the tools we need to change our economy and lifestyle. Our attention must focus on taking action and building community.

Writes Mary Evelyn Tucker of the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale: “This film is deeply moving and profoundly engaging. Indeed, it has the potential to transform lives because it provides visions of how we should live in the midst of massive environmental challenges. I cannot recommend it more highly!”

[Bullfrog Films](#) is the educational distributor for *The Wisdom to Survive*; Bullfrog is a premier distributor of environmental films.

Featured in the Film

- Rucha Chitnis, Women’s Earth Alliance
- Nikki Cooley, Jihan Gearon and Roberto Nutlouis, Black Mesa Water Coalition
- Ben Falk, Whole Systems Design
- Eugene M Friesen, Composer and Cellist
- Terran Giacomini
- Richard Heinberg
- Rev. Daniel Jantos
- Anya Kamenskaya, Future Farmers
- Stephanie Kaza and Amy Seidl, University of Vermont
- Joanna Macy, Author
- Bill McKibben, Founder of [350.org](#)
- Herschelle Milford, Surplus People Project
- Lawrence M Khaliph
- Roger Payne, [Whale.org](#)
- Quincy Saul and Joel Kovel, Eco Socialists
- Gus Speth, Co-Founder, National Resources Defense Council (NRDC)

- Seema Tripathi, Gorakhpur Environmental Action Group (GEAG)

What Viewers Are Saying

“Marvelous and moving. Beautiful work.”—**Fran Korten, *Yes! Magazine***

"A starkly prophetic film. It combines the direst of warnings with deep love of life. Better than any other film I know, it makes clear that our profit-oriented growth economy has caused the climate catastrophe and cannot itself rescue us from disaster. We need new thinking and a new way of life."—**Tom F. Driver, Paul Tillich Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology, Union Theological Seminary**

“Brilliant, achingly poignant. Please SEE THIS FILM—bring it to your community, talk about it, share it with others. It is one of the most artfully-rendered films on the planet’s crisis (and how we move through it) I have ever seen. Extraordinarily moving.—**Shyla Nelson, Founder, One Earth One Voice Campaign**

“Beautiful, heartbreaking, urgent.” —**Organic Soul, Natural & Holistic Living**

Directors’ Statement

“Our primary goal for *The Wisdom to Survive* is to recruit activists. We need a big movement. And we have to connect existing movements. Some of what we’re showing is hard to watch. Whales being killed. Children starving. We’re urging our audience not to look away: take a good look! You must. Otherwise, you won’t do anything about it. You can’t remain the same, once you know. We want to inspire our viewers. Yes, climate change is horrifying. We need to know the facts and their implications, and then take action. You can be fully involved, fully aware, know that your house is on fire, and still be joyful and committed.”

About the Filmmakers

Ankele divides his time between Accord, NY, and New York City. As a producer of radio and TV programming in the 1960s, Ankele used mass media to empower faith communities advocating for civil rights and against the Vietnam War. During the struggle for independence in southern Africa, he worked with and trained political activists in the use of media to bring about social change. As an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church and as a student in the Zen and Shambhala Buddhist traditions, he has been involved for many years in interfaith dialogue around contemplative practice and social justice.

Macksoud is based in Woodstock, VT, and is co-founder of Sustainable Woodstock. She spent 17 years as a teacher (English literature, photography, and music) before transitioning to film and video production. Once she discovered the “eye-opening” power of the documentary medium, she brought rented documentaries into her classroom on a regular basis. Eventually, Macksoud began helping her students make their own films and slide shows on the issues of the day (civil rights, the Vietnam War, and global poverty, to name a few). She approaches filmmaking from the perspective of an artist as well as an educator.

Through their non-profit company Old Dog Documentaries, Macksoud and Ankele have produced timely documentaries on urgent issues about the environment, social justice, and spirituality for over 25 years. Some of their films, such as *The Global Banquet: The Politics of Food* and *Arms for the Poor*, are classic references for educational use. Like their past films, *The Wisdom to Survive* supports Old Dog's mission of promoting environmental justice and inspiring viewers to become activists.

For more information about *The Wisdom to Survive* or to view the trailer visit: olddogdocumentaries.org.

For a press screener or to book interviews with the filmmakers, contact Angela Alston at angela@mocamedia.tv or [718-407-0670](tel:718-407-0670).

April 16, 2014

Pope Francis urged to back fossil fuel divestment campaign

Letter from religious groups in Australia and North America says it is 'immoral' to profit from fossil fuels

By Graham Readfearn
The Guardian

Religious groups have urged [Pope Francis](#) to back a campaign to encourage millions of people, organisations and investors to pull their money out of the fossil fuel industry.

Multi-faith groups in [Australia](#) and North America [have sent a letter](#) to the pope saying it is "immoral" to profit from [fossil fuels](#).

The letter, shown exclusively to the Guardian, says 80% of global fossil fuel reserves must "stay in the ground" if dangerous [climate change](#) is to be avoided.

"We urge you, as a person held in high esteem by many millions around the world, to speak clearly about the place of divestment from fossil fuels as one significant means to avert the worst of climate disruption," the letter says.

"You could have a desperately needed influence on the direction humanity takes from here. We urge you to use this influence."

The plea to the Vatican follows a [call from archbishop Desmond Tutu for an anti-apartheid style boycott](#) of the fossil fuel industry. [Writing in the Guardian](#) last week he said, "People of conscience need to break their ties with corporations financing the injustice of climate change."

The letter sent to the pope's offices in February is co-signed by the [Australian Religious Response to Climate Change](#) (ARRCC) and US-based [GreenFaith](#).

Thea Ormerod, chair of ARRCC and a practising Catholic, said: "If the extracting and burning continues, the world's children and grandchildren may have little or no chance of any kind of decent life on this planet, particularly those who live in the global south.

"For corporate bodies to continue seeking to profit from extracting coal, oil and gas in spite of this fact, is institutionalised greed, selfishness and arrogance. I believe as a Catholic that it is sinful."

Both ARRCC and GreenFaith are umbrella organisations working mainly with Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist and Jewish groups.

The letter was also signed by a New Zealand campaign that has seen five Anglican dioceses pledging to divest from fossil fuels.

GreenFaith executive director, the Rev Fletcher Harper, said: "Pope Francis's support would provide a powerful validation of the moral rightness of divestment and reinvestment in response to the climate crisis, and would immediately signal the need for dramatic action. It would be of vital significance."

Bill McKibben, the US environmentalist and one of the leaders of the divestment campaign, said: "For people of faith, it's become clear that we can't fulfill the commandment to love our neighbors without breaking the fossil fuel addiction.

"That's why so many churches have been divesting from the richest companies on earth. After all, where your treasure is, there is your heart as well."

Scores of religious groups, educational institutions, philanthropic foundations and cities have pledged to go "fossil free", while others, [such as Harvard University](#), have pushed back against requests.

Last September the White House announced it had joined Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden "in ending public financing for new coal-fired power plants overseas, except in rare circumstances."

That followed the US Export-Import Bank tightening its rules on lending to foreign coal-power projects in an attempt to cut greenhouse gas emissions. The World Bank has introduced similar restrictions on its lending.

The Norwegian government is reviewing its US\$838bn sovereign wealth fund, ranked the largest in the world, to consider stopping fossil fuel investments.

In response to moves in Norway, the World Coal Association has said major coal companies who were the potential targets for divestment were also spending money on so-called "clean coal" technologies.

The association said divesting coal assets would not cut demand for the fuel, ignored its contribution to economic development and would "do nothing" to address climate change.

The letter to the pope was sent a week before Australia's Cardinal George Pell was appointed to an influential senior position within the Catholic church and the Vatican as the head of a new secretariat for the economy.

Cardinal Pell has expressed extreme scepticism of the science linking greenhouse gas emissions to climate change.

In 2011 he delivered the annual lecture of the UK's sceptic group the Global Warming Policy Foundation, founded by Lord Nigel Lawson, and claimed carbon dioxide was "not a pollutant" and animals would not notice a doubling of atmospheric CO2.

He said climate change campaigners were following a "mythology" which he said was attractive to the "religionless and spiritually rootless".

The Vatican declined to comment on the letter.

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/apr/16/pope-francis-back-fossil-fuel-divestment-campaign-religions-groups>

April 17, 2014

National Energy Efficiency Network event series to launch in Canberra, April 30th

Catholic Earthcare Australia
Press Release

Energy efficiency is high on the agenda for many households and businesses across Australia, with electricity and gas prices rising sharply over recent years. For the not-for-profit, community sector in particular, identifying cost-effective and practical ways to become more energy efficient is especially critical, as these rising energy costs divert much needed funds away from important programs and operational budgets. It is into this setting, that Catholic Earthcare Australia, in partnership with the Uniting Church, is launching the National Energy Efficiency Network (NEEN).

Supported with funding from the Department of Industry as part of the Energy Efficiency Information Grants, Program, NEEN enables small to medium sized, faith-based and not-for-profit community organisations to respond to the demands of a changing energy landscape with

the aim of *using less, to save more*. To meet this end, NEEN members are provided with FREE access to specialist energy efficiency information, energy savings calculators, NEEN+ Community events and a digital open learning & collaboration forum.

The program is launching nationally with a **NEEN+ Community Event series**, kicking off in Canberra on April 30th. Join leaders & change agents from across the community sector in exploring the benefits & opportunities energy efficient practices bring to individual organisations and the communities within which they work.

The NEEN+ Community events combine an energy efficiency seminar, a NEEN+ community workshop & a networking light lunch to enable attendees to connect, explore, collaborate & take action on energy saving opportunities relevant to their organisation.

Following the Canberra launch, NEEN will be hosting events in Melbourne, Hobart, Adelaide, Perth, Brisbane, Darwin and Sydney.

UPCOMING NEEN EVENTS:

NEEN+ Community Launch Event – Canberra

Venue: The Great Hall, University House, Australian National University, Canberra

Date/Time: April 30th, 9am – 2pm

Cost: FREE

RSVP: [Event Website](#) or to events@neen.org.au

NEEN+ Community Launch Event – Melbourne

Venue: Catholic Leadership Centre, East Melbourne

Date/Time: May 9th, 9am – 2pm

Cost: FREE

RSVP: [Event Website](#) or to events@neen.org.au

NEEN+ Community Launch Event – Hobart

Venue: Baha'i Centre of Learning for Tasmania, Hobart

Date/Time: May 21st, 9am – 2pm

Cost: FREE

RSVP: [Event Website](#) or to events@neen.org.au

NEEN+ Community Launch Event – Adelaide

Venue: Adelaide Catholic Cathedral Hall, 39 Wakefield Street

Date/Time: June 5th, 9am – 2pm

Cost: FREE

RSVP: [Event Website](#) or to events@neen.org.au

NEEN+ Community Launch Event – Brisbane

Venue: Francis Rush Centre, Cathedral Precinct

Date/Time: June 18th, 9am – 2pm

Cost: FREE

RSVP: [Event Website](#) or to events@neen.org.au

* Perth, Darwin & Sydney dates TBC

To keep up to speed with NEEN+ Community event dates and energy efficiency opportunities, subscribe to the [NEEN newsletter](#), or follow us on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#). To learn more about NEEN initiatives and discover a better energy future for the community sector, visit the [NEEN website](#) or contact your NEEN Regional leader.

For further information on the NEEN+ Community event series, please contact Clare Morgans, Communications & Marketing Manager on (02) 8907 9500 or clare.morgans@neen.org.au

April 20, 2014

Archbishop of Wales: Fundamental action needed to combat climate change

By Aled Blake
Wales Online

In his Easter sermon at Llandaff Cathedral, Dr Barry Morgan called on worshippers to make changes to their way of life to protect the planet.

Climate change disaster can be combated by people living by the values of Jesus Christ, the Archbishop of Wales has said.

In his Easter sermon at Llandaff Cathedral, Dr Barry Morgan called on worshippers to make fundamental changes to their way of life in order to protect the planet for future generations.

He said the increasing extreme weather patterns in the UK and abroad meant Christians needed to take climate change and its effects seriously and respond, not bury their heads in the sand.

Dr Morgan said: “The Resurrection is also about the transformation of the universe. That being the case, not only must we care for one another, we must also have a care for God’s world as well.

“That is why, as Christians, we have to take climate change and its effects seriously. Rising global temperatures are causing droughts, melting glaciers, warming of permafrost, heat waves and coastal floods in almost every part of the world. Already this year we have seen extreme weather patterns, not just in distant far flung places where it is nothing new, but here in Wales and the rest of the UK – this is no longer someone else’s problem. It is ours.

“And we cannot bury our heads in the sand and pretend we don’t know about it and the part we play in it anymore.

“Just a couple of weeks ago, a report published by the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change pulled no punches as it outlined the dire consequences to food supplies, livelihoods, health and security across the world if global warming was allowed to continue unchecked.

“It warned that climate change will cause economic losses, exacerbate poverty and increase migration and risks of violent conflict, as well as causing damage to wildlife and habitats.

“And we can and we ought to do something about it for all the evidence points to the fact that climate change is indeed primarily a result of our behaviour, particularly in the West.

“The UN Report’s Chair, Dr Chris Field, said there was nothing inevitable about the worst impacts of climate change on people and nature and urged people to think creatively about how they could change their lives and improve the lives of others.

“Clearly, governments can do much to limit the damage by cutting emissions and local air pollution, for example, by ending, as Christian Aid suggests, the £314bn the world spends on fossil fuel subsidies.

“At the same time, we can adapt to changes by building sea defences and creating decent homes for people in countries such as Bangladesh.

“The question for us is how do we respond as a church and as Christians? How can we not only give up ingrained habits but make fundamental changes to our way of life?

“There are practical actions some of our churches are already doing – such as installing solar or photovoltaic panels.

“We need to make fundamental changes to our lifestyle by living and working sustainably. That means promoting social justice and equality through Fair Trade, foodbanks, outward giving, night shelters and helping those in need; leading communities on ideas and learning about sustainable living; and seeking to reduce the use of resources through recycling, car sharing or making our graveyards havens for wildlife.

“Caring for creation means enjoying the gifts that God has given us, but also ensuring that they are there for future generations and that we do not destroy our planet.

“Resurrection is about a new humanity, a new world, a new creation – a new order of being as a result of the Resurrection of Jesus.

“Our task now is to live by the values of His risen life – to bring about God’s kingdom on earth as it is in Heaven. And that is good news for all people and for the whole of creation.”

<http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/archbishop-wales-fundamental-action-needed-7010852>

April 21, 2014

Getting Out of Oil

By Doug Demeo

America: The National Catholic Review

Catholic universities can make a difference through divestment.

Catholic colleges and universities have a long and storied history of providing full scholarships and affordable higher education to low income, minority and immigrant students. In addition, they continue to fulfill their mission to develop the whole person (*cura personalis*) by linking liberal arts and professional studies to critical moral thought, promoting retreats, building faith-centered community service and justice programs and more. But today there are key issues that challenge the fidelity of Catholic colleges and universities to their core mission. John R. Wilcox, emeritus professor of religious studies at Manhattan College, has made a compelling case in these pages that there is an urgent need to address the “erosion” of the “Catholicity” of Catholic colleges and universities (**Am.** 9/6/13). He argues that the best way to do this is through the creation of “mission communities” on Catholic campuses. Primarily, their call would be to “play a prophetic role, at times ‘speaking truth to power’” for the purpose of “keeping Catholicity vital in all areas of [institutional] life.”

Professor Wilcox offers several examples of how Catholic mission communities might work to maintain and strengthen the Catholic character of colleges and universities. The investment and management of Catholic universities’ financial endowments is one such area in which a new “living endowment” could preserve and promote Catholic mission. In particular, he suggests that mission communities would “offer reviews of college policy and strategic planning and foster a palpable Catholic culture as shaped by the religious heritage of the founders.” While it would be interesting to examine more fully the issues, practices and value perceptions of “mission-based” investing at Catholic institutions, the singularly urgent issue of climate change—and the powerful momentum that has been growing within the fossil fuel divestment movement—deserves attention in this moment.

Considering the strength of Catholic teaching on climate change and ethical investing, the divestiture of stocks and bonds from fossil fuel corporations taking place in a growing number of secular and non-Catholic religious organizations is bringing Catholic higher education—which, with a few exceptions, has been largely absent from the national conversation—to a crossroads of mission. At this critical junction of institutional integrity, mission communities could play an important role in helping university administrators and trustees to envision a new way of being faithful to Catholic mission and to grasp the prophetic (and arguably financial) urgency of divesting from fossil fuel corporations.

The Catholic Church accepts that human actions like burning fossil fuels have a negative impact on the earth’s climate, and it understands that the effects of climate change raise crucial ethical issues as to how we tend to God’s creation. In his message for the World Day of Peace in 2010, Pope Benedict XVI highlighted the “urgent moral need for a new solidarity...in the face of signs

of a growing [ecological] crisis which it would be irresponsible not to take seriously.” He called for “strengthening the linkage between combatting climate change and overcoming poverty.” At the same time, scientists warn that our planet is rapidly reaching a level of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere that will likely cause permanent, accelerating climate change. As described in numerous scientific reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a vast majority of climate scientists agree that humanity can emit only 565 more gigatons of carbon dioxide by 2050 if it is to avoid a catastrophic level of climate change. Yet, the world’s largest fossil fuel corporations still plan to burn the 2,796 gigatons of carbon dioxide in their reserves, a business strategy that would result in levels of human suffering and ecological degradation unmatched in human history.

In order to address the systemic causes of climate change, an increasingly global array of religious groups, colleges and cities are moving to divest from fossil fuel corporations in order to diminish their political and economic influence. Some are also pursuing reinvestment in clean technology and energy efficiency initiatives within their own facilities and holdings. The movement has been spearheaded by the Go Fossil Free campaign, which calls on institutions to “immediately freeze any new investment in fossil fuel companies, and divest from direct ownership and any commingled funds that include fossil fuel public equities and corporate bonds within 5 years.”

While the divestment campaign’s ostensible goal is to decrease the value of fossil fuel corporations’ stocks, it carries deeper implications. The campaign’s proponents recognize that the political process has failed to produce a legislative response to the grave threat represented by climate change, largely because of the outsized influence of the fossil fuel lobby. Campaigners believe that divestment represents a way to turn public opinion against this lobby. At a time when there is no prospect for climate legislation, the fossil fuel divestment movement seeks to rekindle debate on a critical moral issue and to create an environment in which genuine solutions become possible.

In that light, this campaign resembles past divestment campaigns, like the anti-apartheid efforts of the 1980s, in which impassioned divestment debates in educational, governmental and religious institutions played a vital role in undermining the legitimacy of the apartheid regime in South Africa. Through a similar approach, the fossil fuel divestment campaign seeks to redraw society’s collective moral boundaries by asserting that institutions with a moral or educational mission should no longer profit from the fossil fuel industry. Its primary method is to force a morally challenging debate about the long-term impacts of climate change, the entrenched power of the fossil fuel industry and the incompatibility of these with a thriving future for humanity and the wider community of life.

To date, the divestment movement is supported by several faith communities, including the national United Church of Christ, the Anglican Diocese of Wellington, New Zealand, the Episcopal Dioceses of Olympia in Washington State and Massachusetts, individual Lutheran and Unitarian churches in the United States and GreenFaith, an interfaith alliance devoted to environmental stewardship, where I am a fellow. On the Catholic side, the Franciscan Action Network recently made the bold decision to join the movement and is encouraging Franciscan

colleges and universities to support growing student and faculty activism for divestment, which is already occurring on several Jesuit campuses.

Corporate Responsibility

In its statement “Economic Justice for All” (1986), the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops points out that while economic markets can encourage beneficial economic development, markets alone do not “automatically produce justice” that protects the common good of all people, to which our climate is unmistakably linked, especially with respect to the poorest among us. The church therefore insists that when economic activity in free markets damages the common good, free markets must be circumscribed by “ethical norms” grounded in Catholic teaching. Thus, the U.S. bishops’ document “Socially Responsible Investment Guidelines” urges investors to draw on “the values, directions and criteria which guide its financial choices from the Gospel, universal church teaching and Conference statements.”

In “Ex Corde Ecclesiae” (1990), Pope John Paul II insisted that in order to remain faithful to the church, “Catholic ideals, attitudes and principles [must] penetrate and inform university activities” across all areas of an institution. This necessarily includes the investment and management of a Catholic university’s endowment. Given the magnitude of the climate crisis, as well as other destructive impacts of fossil fuel extraction, such as mountaintop removal and groundwater contamination, Catholic university administrations should at the very least enter into the fossil fuel debate. Some, like the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass.—my alma mater—have taken steps in this direction.

The Duties of Justice

In response to the claim that Catholic institutions should divest from fossil fuel holdings in order to uphold their Catholic mission, at least three rebuttals can be anticipated—and refuted.

First, college and university administrators and trustees might argue that the best way for Catholic institutions to address climate change is to focus on reducing their own carbon footprints. Although such direct activities to alleviate injustices are important and commendable, the U.S. bishops point out that their program *The Two Feet of Love in Action* calls for micro-level actions coupled with macro-level efforts (i.e., social justice) to address the systemic dynamics that cause and perpetuate what John Paul II, in “On Social Concerns” (1987), called structures of sin. Pope Pius XI cautioned in “*Divini Redemptoris*” (1937) that “no one [should] attempt with trifling charitable donations to exempt himself from the great duties imposed by justice.” Since fossil fuel corporations are at the heart of the systemic perpetuation of climate change, Catholic institutions should take steps to divest from fossil fuel companies even as they continue to reduce their own carbon footprints and remain faithful to their mission at large.

A second possible argument against fossil fuel divestment is that this activity may compromise institutional endeavors (like scholarships and facilities expansion) by restricting endowment growth. This is essentially an appeal to fiduciary responsibility. In response, it should first be mentioned that the highly-respected *Chronicle of Higher Education* reports that divesting from fossil fuel companies is unlikely to harm the endowments of colleges and universities. Many

other financial studies likewise argue the fiduciary responsibility of divestment, given the looming prospects of “stranded assets” or a “carbon bubble”—meaning the future of fossil fuels is highly tenuous, at best. But even if fossil fuel divestment were to restrict endowment growth, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that for a given action the “end does not justify the means” (No. 1753). In reference to Catholic colleges and universities, the end of institutional advancement does not justify investment in fossil fuel companies that profoundly contradict Catholic teaching. This is especially true when the quality of the future of graduating students is at stake—a big reason why more of our students are raising their voices on behalf of divestment.

A third argument is that socially responsible investment, rather than divestment, is the best way to mitigate climate change from an equity ownership perspective. Socially responsible investing, as described by Christian Brothers Investment Services Inc., a leader in Catholic S.R.I., involves shareholder advocacy and “a multi-strategy approach—stock screening, proxy voting, corporate dialogues and shareholder resolutions.”

While S.R.I. has achieved notable successes with respect to influencing corporate behavior, two points should be highlighted about S.R.I. and the fossil fuel industry. First, scientists say that fossil fuel corporations must keep 80 percent of their carbon reserves in the ground in order to keep climate change from causing runaway harm. For all intents and purposes, this means that oil companies will have to stop drilling for oil and coal companies will have to stop mining coal. These activities are the principal ways that fossil fuel companies make their profits, and shareholder advocacy is unlikely to effect changes to core corporate practices to the degree required to reverse the most unthinkable effects of climate change.

Furthermore, S.R.I. in fact recognizes a role for “screening companies from our investment portfolios,” as Christian Brothers Investment Services says. This means that even investors actively committed to corporate engagement and advocacy sometimes acknowledge that circumstances may justify or even require the refusal to invest in a company or companies in order to remain faithful to Catholic teaching. Conscious of the way fossil fuel corporations manifestly undermine Catholic teaching by fostering climate change for profit, fossil fuel corporations are a prime example of companies (not unlike manufacturers of weapons of mass destruction) in which Catholic mission requires the use of such “avoidance screens.”

Although fossil fuel divestment is a crucial tool to address climate change, this strategy alone is an insufficient response to climate change for the Christian community. Local, national and global leaders as well as the U.S. bishops have advocated that responses to climate change must provide transitional and adaptation funding. Additionally, divestment must be accompanied by the type of reinvestment in clean energy technologies advocated by GreenFaith’s campaign Divest and Reinvest Now.

While climate change and endowment investment are both complex issues demanding careful thought, Catholic mission requires that financial returns not foster or exacerbate climate change. In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus tells his followers: “No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (6:24).

Climate change has brought Catholic colleges and universities that invest in fossil fuel corporations to a moral crossroads. These institutions must now decide whether they will prioritize the integrity of their mission or the status quo of their investments in fossil fuels. Climate change shows the two to be mutually exclusive.

One of the most important ways that mission communities can preserve and promote Catholic fidelity at colleges and universities is to advocate that administrators and trustees divest their endowments from an industry whose essential practices blatantly contradict and undermine the teachings and mission of the Catholic Church.

Doug Demeo, a fellow with GreenFaith, an interfaith coalition for the environment, is an adviser on socially responsible investments.

Links:

[1] <http://americamagazine.org/toc-past/2014-04-21>

[2] <http://americamagazine.org/users/doug-demeo>

<http://americamagazine.org/issue/getting-out-oil>

April 24, 2014

Celebrities Gisele Bündchen, Don Cheadle, Yaya Touré and Ian Somerhalder Issue Call to Action for World Environment Day

United Nations Environment Programme

NAIROBI – Supermodel Gisele Bündchen, Actors Don Cheadle and Ian Somerhalder and footballer Yaya Touré – all Goodwill Ambassadors for the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) – have launched a challenge to see who can rally the most registered activities for World Environment Day 2014.

Their call to action, Message in the Bottle, asks individuals around the world to join one of the celebrities' teams and make a difference by pledging to take action in support of World Environment Day. These pledges can be registered at wedchallenge.com.

The campaign features a variety of Public Service Announcements in 7 languages which will run on CNN, large format billboards in Times Square in New York City and Piccadilly Circus in London, and on-line. (To view the videos, please visit https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZ4sOGXTWw8GqnygMSOxWirZN_m-Gphn9)

In a unique creative approach, viewers get to see Don Cheadle playing trumpet to prepare for his

upcoming directorial debut and lead role as Miles Davis, Gisele practicing her beloved martial art, Kung Fu, and Yaya Touré getting mentally prepared for the run up to the World Cup.

“These global celebrities are giving fans a unique glimpse into the private moments that make them who they are,” said Jeffrey Nachmanoff, director of the Public Service Announcements, screenwriter for the climate blockbuster “The Day After Tomorrow” and writer/director of “Traitor” and the CBS series “Hostages”.

“They are then interrupted in these moments by a message in the bottle which is an unexpected play on their roles and provides a twist that should get the viewer’s attention and encourage them to want to go to the site to get involved,” he added.

This is the second time that Nachmanoff has lent his talent to create a UNEP public service announcement, the first was for the Seal the Deal Climate Campaign in 2009. He worked alongside accomplished cinematographers, Jim and Nicole Whitaker, on both UNEP projects. Game 7 Films of New York City produced the films.

Notably, the award-winning band The Police donated the sound track of the iconic song, “Message in the Bottle”, to support the campaign

World Environment Day (WED) is the United Nations’ principal vehicle for encouraging worldwide awareness and action for the environment.

Over the years, it has grown to be a broad, global platform for public outreach that is widely celebrated in over 100 countries. It’s the “people’s day” for doing something good for the environment, and for galvanizing individual actions into a collective power that generates a substantial positive impact on the planet.

In support of the UN’s designation of 2014 as the International Year of Small Island Developing States, WED 2014 has adopted Small Island Developing States as its theme in the broader context of climate change.

The objective is to encourage a greater understanding of the importance of Small Island Developing States and the urgency to help protect the islands in the face of growing risks and vulnerabilities, particularly as a result of climate change, and to demonstrate the connections between these ecosystems and ours.

From Trinidad and Tobago to Tonga, Samoa to Suriname, the problems that these small islands face – climate change, waste management, unsustainable consumption, degradation of natural resources, extreme natural disasters in the midst of overpopulation and continuing

industrialization – are the problems that face us all.

For Small Island Developing States, climate change is foremost among these challenges, as global warming is causing ocean levels to rise. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), global sea levels are rising at an increased rate. This is projected to be increase even further this century. When the global temperature warms, seawater expands and occupies more space. Sea levels also rise when polar ice melts.

Coastal communities in every country are then threatened with floods and storm surges, to which Small Island Developing States are the most exposed. Many of these islands' inhabited areas and cultural sites are potentially in danger of being lost to sea-level rise.

WED 2014 underscores that we all face similar challenges and are connected and united by a common goal: a sustainable and prosperous life for everyone on this planet. Every action, pledge, and activity counts and, when multiplied by a global chorus, becomes exponential in its impact. Make your voice heard and register at www.unep.org/wed and wedchallenge.com.

How to Get Involved:

Each celebrity Goodwill Ambassador is championing his or her own cause in support of this year's WED theme, "Raise Your Voice not the Sea Level". YOU can cast your own vote by pledging support to one of their activities at wedchallenge.com or on Twitter. You can also support via social media networks:

Hashtags

#WorldEnvironmentDay #WED2014 #WEDchallenge

Teams:

GiseleBüchchen Twitter account: @giseleofficial

Yaya Touré Twitter account: @Toure_yaya42

Don Cheadle Twitter account: @IamDonCheadle

IanSommerhalder Twitter account: @iansommerhalder

Facebook/Google +

For #WorldEnvironmentDay this year Gisele Bündchen will work against food waste, Don Cheadle wants you to power down, Ian Sommerhalder asks you to go greener and Yaya Touré to purge plastics. Which team will you join? #WEDchallenge

UNEP Goodwill Ambassadors have taken up #WorldEnvironmentDay challenge. How will you step up to the challenge? Join a team and register your activity!

Notes to Editors:

Upon request, behind-the-scenes footage is available of Don Cheadle playing trumpet with his band and Gisele Bündchen practicing Kung Fu with her instructor, Yao Li.

Available language versions are: Arabic, Chinese, French, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish.

Song credit

"Message In A Bottle"

Performed by The Police

Written by: Sting

Courtesy of SonyATV Music Publishing & Universal Music

By arrangement with Suzanne Hilleary for WACBIZ

Special thanks to Nicole VanGiesen & KSM, Inc.

In addition to the current campaign, UNEP Goodwill Ambassadors Don Cheadle and Ian Somerhalder will also feature in a groundbreaking series on the television channel Showtime, known as “Years of Living Dangerously”.

The series harnesses the power of these and other celebrities – including Jessica Alba, Mark Bittman, Matt Damon, America Ferrera, Harrison Ford, Thomas Friedman, Michael C. Hall, Chris Hayes, Olivia Munn, M. Sanjayan, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Lesley Stahl – to travel the globe as “celebrity investigators”, uncovering the intimate experiences of people directly affected by climate change.

The first episode of the nine-part series can be viewed online at

<https://www.youtube.com/user/Years>.

Don Cheadle’s episode can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gh9lxylVDY>.

A separate communiqué on this innovative series will be issued by UNEP in the coming weeks.

Learn more at <http://yearsoflivingdangerously.com>

For more information, contact: UNEPnewsdesk@unep.org

About UNEP: Created in 1972, UNEP's mission is to provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations.

<http://www.unep.org/NewsCentre/default.aspx?DocumentID=2787&ArticleID=10834&l=en>
