The lake lures me to pray

By Ellen Dauwer
Global Sisters Report

When I entered religious life almost 40 years ago, living singly was not one of my expectations. Having grown up in a family that taught me to share, persuade and compromise, I had a bit of a head start adjusting to community life and have grown to love and value it deeply.

When I was a child and adolescent, my parents would call an occasional "family meeting" when the daily tensions of life mounted in our home. We each found a seat as well as a voice and were required to stay in the conversation until the issues at hand were resolved. In the democratic process, we each had a vote (including my parents), but plenty of persuasion was needed, as we were an even number. Perhaps this early experience helped me survive convent "house meetings"!

While all walks of life are marked by highs and lows, with most times somewhere in between, living in community with my sisters over the past four decades has been no different. There have been periods of loneliness as well as companionship, conflict as well as solidarity, and challenge as well as support. Overall, I have found that life in community encourages me to live honestly and authentically. It has taught me a lot about differences as well as how to decide which issues are critical and which are best left alone. Perhaps, along the way, it has dulled a few of my rough edges, too.

During this past year, community life has shifted significantly for me and finds me living singly. The year has seen two moves within seven months: first to Washington, D.C., and then to Chicago. In one city, I found a community with whom I shared life for the interim period, while in the second I floundered in the search.

Hence, I write this reflection from a postage-stamp-sized space perched 15 stories along the Chicago skyline. What it lacks in size, it possesses in view: a panoramic view of some of the Southside shores of Lake Michigan.

Both searches for housing stirred resistance within me. In the first, I fought homesickness for the community with whom I had lived for the past 14 years. I longed for evenings in the community room and the easy familiarity of home. In the second, I struggled with fears of the unknown: a
new city, unfamiliar geography, few connections, and no network. It was painful to have an unsuccessful search and it was tempting to turn inward with negative self-talk. What's the matter with me, I wondered?

Reluctantly, I settled on a small, furnished apartment in a high rise within walking distance to work. I've done my best to adjust and try to focus on the benefits rather than dwell on the deficits. Top among them is my view of the lake and my mornings spent contemplating it.

The lake lures me daily to pray. It draws me into its depths and across its expanse, whether it be lit by golden sun or dulled by gray clouds and fog. And when I travel, which I often do, I feel a gentle longing beckoning me home to this morning perch.

The view also reshapes my vision daily with its changing weather and seasonally with its accompanying shifts. In the summer, I looked out on treetops of various hues and shapes in the nearby park and lakeshore. The colors slowly rusted into shades of red, yellow and brown as the defoliating trees revealed their structures and shapes.

Now, in early winter, the vista is that of a black-and-white photo with a snow covering that edges the dark tree boughs and robs the color and variety from the line of parked cars, rendering them into a uniform row.

These days, the lake reflects the deep blue winter sky. Without the humidity of summer, clear days yield a cloudlessly perfect vista. Sometimes it is the only color in the black-and-white landscape. It speaks to me of longing, long for more: more color, more love, more peace, more justice, more God.

I still am not at peace in living singly and long for community and a greater sense of connection. Yet, within the resistance is a gift of morning contemplation that reshapes and recolors the rest of the day.

[Ellen Dauwer is a Sister of Charity of St. Elizabeth of Convent Station, New Jersey, currently living in Chicago. She spent 20 years in higher education, teaching educational technology and serving in administration. She recently completed eight years in congregational leadership and began as executive director of the Religious Formation Conference in January.]

http://globalsistersreport.org/column/spirituality/lake-lures-me-pray-44151

January 4, 2017

Muslim environmentalists give their religion — and their mosques — a fresh coat of green

By Chris Bentley
WCAI – NPR for the Cape, the Coast, and the Islands
The Koutoubia Mosque is one of the iconic landmarks of Marrakech’s old city. Its first stone was laid in 1150, and almost 900 years later, renovations continue.

The latest can be found up a flight of stairs off the sahn, or courtyard, where the mosque's visitors wash their feet before they pray. On top of the north riwaq, or arcade, a sleek array of solar panels stretches along the roof to the base of the mosque's 253-foot, red stone minaret.

“This is enough for 100 percent of the consumption of the mosque, including also for the house of the imam,” says Ahmed Bouzid, head of energy efficiency for SIE, Morocco’s national energy investment company. “So this mosque is 100 percent powered by solar energy.”

The 8-kilowatt panels were installed just before Marrakech played host to the latest United Nations climate summit in November, and Koutoubia is just one of 600 Moroccan mosques slated for similar solar installations over the next three years. Morocco’s government owns 15,000 mosques, and eventually it wants to retrofit all of them with solar panels and energy efficient technology.

Bouzid says investments in solar power are an easy call here in Morocco. The payback period is typically less than five years. After that, the energy is essentially free.

But he says it’s not just about saving the mosques money.

“We are increasing the awareness by showing some real solutions,” Bouzid says. “When you try to sensibilize somebody, first of all you try to get his brain. And from his brain you try to get his heart. When you go to a mosque, the first thing that you open is your heart.”

Morocco is almost completely dependent on imported fossil fuels, but it has a lot of wind and sun. It’s also already being hit by the effects of climate change, through droughts, floods and sea-level rise.

Overall, Morocco has pledged to get more than half of its electricity from renewable sources by 2030, and to cultivate more awareness about energy and climate change in general.

That's why the solar panels on Koutoubia's roof are about more than just cutting the state-funded mosque's energy bills. In this almost entirely Muslim country, the government believes that Islam could be a powerful vehicle for its environmental message.

**Green mosques**

You can see the effort at work in other ways here as well, like in a classroom on the outskirts of Marrakech where 27 imams and mourchidates, female Muslim clerics, are huddled in small groups, poring over copies of the Quran.

That’s hardly unusual in Morocco, but the subject of their study is. They’re scouring the text for passages about environmental stewardship.
About 300 Muslim leaders from around Morocco have signed up in the last year for the government’s “green mosques” program.

After this study group breaks up, a few imams take turns practicing khutbahs, or sermons, about environmentalism that they’ll deliver to their congregations across the country during Friday prayers, stressing verses from the Quran and other Muslim holy texts.

Often-invoked passages include “corruption has appeared on the land and in the sea because of what the hands of humans have wrought,” and “the servants of [Allah], the Most Gracious, are only those who walk upon the Earth softly.”

Morocco’s state-sponsored program to preach environmental stewardship through Islam may be unique, but Muslims in many countries are starting to connect their faith with climate change.

Nana Firman is from Indonesia, the world’s biggest Muslim country, and is a co-founder of the Global Muslim Climate Network. Firman came to Marrakech for the UN climate summit, and she believes that connecting Islam and environmental consciousness isn’t a stretch.

“Over 700 verses in the Quran talk about nature and environment,” Firman says. “For example there’s a verse that says ‘the human is the khalifa upon this earth. The word khalifa means guardian, so you’re the maintainer, the protector, the one who takes care of the Earth.”

Firman and her organization are trying to do globally what the Moroccan government is trying to do locally — encourage Muslims to take steps to reduce their own carbon footprints. But she also has a bigger goal. She wants Muslims to lead the global transition away from fossil fuels.

Making that happen won’t be easy, of course. Like a lot of devout Christians, many Muslims don’t believe that climate change is even happening, that humans could be responsible, or that their holy texts preach environmentalism.

“There’s some deniers,” Firman says, but hundreds of millions of Muslims also live in places that are already feeling the effects of climate change. And she says that’s where her message is catching on.

“A lot of us are the victims of climate change, so they see it. When the disaster happens, when the drought happens, when the flood happens, they actually understand. Maybe they don’t call it climate change, but farmers know they can’t harvest.”

In her native Indonesia, Firman worked on recovery efforts after the 2004 tsunami in the religiously conservative region of Aceh. She says it was hard to convince local people of the benefits of planting mangroves to reduce the impact of storm surges, until she remembered a verse in the Quran about planting trees. Firman says that’s when she first realized Islam could help her increase environmental awareness in Indonesia.

Since then she’s taken that message worldwide. Last year Firman helped draft the Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change. It calls on Muslims everywhere to take action, from
conserving water during the cleaning rituals of *wudu* to reducing plastic waste during the annual *Hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca.

The Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change came out not long after Pope Francis’ *climate encyclical*, which said that Catholics have a “duty to protect the Earth … for coming generations.”

*Saffet Catovic*, an imam and teacher of religious studies from New Jersey, says the efforts among Muslims globally are part of a broad religious awakening on the climate crisis.

“Faith plays an important role not just for Muslim communities but for other communities, as well,” Catovic says. His *Noor Ul-Iman school* and mosque in Central New Jersey are part of the Islamic Society of North America, which recently announced it would divest from fossil fuels and is pushing other Muslim organizations to do the same.

Catovic also helped write the Islamic declaration on climate change. Since then, he says he’s heard from priests, rabbis and all kinds of religious leaders.

“With this climate change issue, especially these last two years, religious leaders around the world are not praying against each other,” says Catovic, “they’re praying with one another for a common cause. Because the realization has set in that we’re gonna have nothing left.”

So far most of the steps are small, like Morocco's green sermons and solar-powered mosques.

But together they could be a recipe for how religious leaders might help tackle climate change: through a mixture of political will, private investment, and a little faith.


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**January 6, 2017**

Amazon Indigenous REDD+: an innovative approach to conserve Colombian forests?

By Eliana Garzón
Mongabay

Summary:

* The Amazon Indigenous REDD+ (RIA) initiative led in Colombia by the indigenous organization OPIAC is being implemented in the departments of Amazonas and Guainia, territories made up of 169 indigenous reservations of 56 different villages, not counting the populations that are in voluntary isolation.
* In 2012, the reservation of the Upper Basin of the Inírida River (CMARI), inside the Puinawai Nature Reserve, was chosen as the location of the first pilot implementation project of RIA in Colombia, which had its official presentation at COP18, the 18th meeting of the UN Climate Change Conference.

* For indigenous communities in the Amazon, it is important that their ancestral traditions are recognized as the basis for the implementation of RIA and used as a mechanism to safeguard Amazonian biodiversity.

Some indigenous communities in South America have been working on a way to participate in REDD+ (Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation) on their own terms. In 2009, Colombia began to create the National Strategy for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (ENREDD+), an offshoot of REDD+. Currently 64 countries use REDD+ as a national strategy for climate change mitigation. It aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions caused by deforestation in developing countries by offering financial incentives in exchange for the protection of forest resources and their sustainable use.

Some communities in Colombia didn’t agree to participate in the REDD+ process over fears of losing territorial sovereignty. Thus, the coordinator of the Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon River Basin (COICA) joined the ENREDD+ strategy and adapted it based on their ancestral knowledge. COICA opted to “adjust this initiative to our life without losing autonomy,” according to Mateo Estrada Córdoba, the Territory and Environment Coordinator of the Organization of Indigenous Peoples of the Colombian Amazon (OPIAC), and a member of the Siriano del Vaupés village.

From there, the Amazon Indigenous REDD+ (RIA in Spanish) was born, which operates in Peru, Colombia, Brazil and Ecuador.

“[It is] a model that seeks to incorporate, in an equitable and culturally appropriate way, indigenous territories, Amazonian peoples and organizations to the national REDD+ initiatives,” Pía Escobar, government and social development officer of World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Colombia, said in an interview with Mongabay. WWF provides technical support to this process in Ecuador, Peru and Colombia.

“RIA has to do with broader ecosystem development. The integral part of indigenous peoples, the way of life that goes in harmony with natural resources and the environment […] this is a proposal according to indigenous life plans. We manage governance, the empowerment of the territory and the adaptation of public policies to our context,” Córdoba said.

The initiative led in Colombia by the indigenous organization OPIAC was launched in a region that has “169 indigenous reservations of 56 different villages and 52 languages, not counting the populations that are in voluntary isolation,” according to Córdoba. It seeks to be a model of conservation that can be replicated, not only in other ancestral territories but all national forests.
Pilot plan: reservation of the basin of the Inírida River

In the department of Guainía, inside the Puinawai Natural Reserve, is the reservation of the Upper Basin of the Inírida River (CMARI). It's inhabited by 17 indigenous communities of the Puinave and Curripaco peoples. It contains 2,762,000 hectares of a variety of ecosystems, and provides habitat for many species of fauna and flora.

In 2012, the CMARI area was chosen as the location of the first pilot implementation project of the Amazon Indigenous REDD+ (RIA) in Colombia, which had its official presentation at COP18, the 18th meeting of the UN Climate Change Conference.

For Arcángel Agapito Luzardo, a member of the Puinave people and leader of the RIA initiative at CMARI, “this pilot carries the indigenous vision. It is a proposal that is born from the communities and has as its baseline the governance of the reservation, the social structure and the context of the territory.” Luzardo added that the area’s deforestation is connected, “to the fact that the governance and conservation traditions have been followed in order to avoid displacement and strengthen education, health, communications, housing, infrastructure, public services, means of transportation.” He says that the result has been an improvement in the livelihoods of indigenous communities.

Luzardo said shifting cultivation is part of the indigenous peoples’ ancestral knowledge, and should be valued.

“We call our crops conucos,” he said. “We use [the land] for three years and then we abandon the land so it can naturally recover. During that period the last uses of the products are made. After the end of this period, following traditional knowledge another area is sought, where the land is fertile and productive for the family. If they do not make a strategic selection, their food security could be in danger.”

Luzardo adds that the scale of use is also small.

“These products are used for family consumption, in the case of wood it is only used to build houses, it is not commercialized,” Luzardo said.

OPIAC’s Córdoba says the approach puts an emphasis on balance. To preserve the environment, indigenous people use resources without the purpose of making a profit; “we do not accumulate resources or have greed,” he said.

Luzardo hopes that the RIA will help future generations to “know their territory, appreciate it and take care of it.” It is also about balance for him.

“Let them develop in harmony with the planet and thus improve the communities’ livelihoods so that they do not have to migrate from the place they live today,” he said.
Preservation of cultural traditions in La Chorrera

La Chorrera is an administrative district located in the department of Amazonas, part of the Predio Putumayo reservation, an area of 5,869,447 hectares. Indigenous people of the communities of Witoto, Mirañas, Boras, Andoques, Ocinas, Muinanes, Nonuyas, and others live in the territory.

In this reservation, the Zonal Association of Traditional Authorities of the Chorrera (Azicatch) is developing the second RIA process.

“It is a pilot that is producing technical inputs, community monitoring, safeguards and ecosystem services studies. Information that we could replicate in other territories and serve for decision making,” Córdoba said.

He added that it is important for these communities to “recognize traditional authorities for the construction and implementation of the RIA as a mechanism to safeguard Amazon biodiversity.” It is also necessary to highlight governance and the strengthening of technical capacities, according to the presentation document of the RIA mechanism in Azicatch.

That is why WWF Colombia has been lending technical help. As Pía Escobar points out, “indigenous organizations are very strong in their political advocacy capacity, but sometimes they need additional support in the technical components.”

That technical support includes cartographic and carbon content information, ecosystem services, threats to the territory and other issues essential for demonstrating the value that indigenous territories have in mitigating climate change and complementing policy proposals.

The future of the RIA in Colombia

OPIAC’s Córdoba continues to look to the future in hopes of future success.

“Our knowledge must be applied,” he said. “We expect the RIA to be included in the national REDD strategy as a special chapter. This is being done by the Indigenous Amazonian Environmental and Climate Change Bureau and the Amazon Regional Bureau, a space for legitimate dialogue that we have with the Colombian state.”

For indigenous communities and organizations, RIA is an important step towards the conservation of their territories, but above all, of their ancestral knowledge.

“We dream that the territories can be preserved as they are, with the abundance that exists, because the quality of life of the indigenous people is not measured in how much I have, but if hunting, fishing and medicinal plants are nearby or not,” Córdoba said. “We dream that schools have a curriculum where the center of education is the culture and the environment, [and] that communities have sustainable public services and that municipalities are green. What we can leave as teaching is a harmony between man and nature and between both: spirit; in addition to integrity among peoples. We have conflicts, but we do not live in war.”
Eliana Garzón is a freelance journalist based in Colombia.


January 7, 2017

Ecuador’s leading environmental group fights to stop forced closure

NGO Acción Ecológica responds to the government’s attempt to close the organization down

By David Hill
The Guardian

Members of one of Latin America’s most well-known environmental organisations, Acción Ecológica, are fighting for their survival against a controversial attempt by Ecuador’s government to shut them down.

The move by the government came six days after violence between soldiers, police and indigenous Shuar people opposed to a Chinese-run copper development, Panantza-San Carlos, in the Cordillera del Condor region, and just two days after Acción Ecológica had called for a Truth Commission to be set up to investigate events there. The attempt to close the organisation has sparked severe criticism from UN human rights experts and outrage from numerous civil society organisations in Latin America and elsewhere.

On 20 December the Vice-Minister for Internal Security, Diego Torres Saldaña, requested the Minister of Environment, Walter Garcia Cedeño, to begin the process to “immediately dissolve” the Quito-based organisation. According to Torres Saldaña, Acción Ecológica has been using social media to express support for violence by Shuar against soldiers and police, to claim that extractive operations will negatively affect the environment, and to allege “supposed human rights violations”, including “unjustified militarisation”, against the Shuars. Such behaviour has been “repeated”, Torres Saldaña wrote, and also included mobilising the public and organising demonstrations, making it clear that the NGO “rejects any kind of natural resource exploitation.”

Torres Saldaña’s conclusion was that, by allegedly promoting and committing violence, Acción Ecológica has strayed from its legally-constituted objectives and poses a threat to national security.

The Ministry of Environment heeded Torres Saldaña’s request and gave Acción Ecológica 24 hours to respond initially and then 10 days to respond in full. In its initial response the NGO denied it has ever supported any kind of violence and described claims that it represents a serious threat to Ecuadorian society as “disproportionate.” It accepted it has denounced extractive operations on environmental and human rights grounds, as is permitted under its statutes, and carried out “different types of social mobilisations”, as in accordance with the right to freedom of expression, freedom of association, and Ecuador’s Constitution defending nature. It also
accepted it has made allegations of human rights violations in Shuar territory, pointing out that other Ecuadorian and international organisations have done likewise.

Acción Ecológica’s initial response to the Ministry of Environment copied in various UN offices, an EU delegation, and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. “We’re confident that what the Ministry of the Interior has stated is an error of interpretation or based on erroneous information obtained out of context,” wrote Acción Ecológica legal representative Natalia Bonilla.

On 3 January a 27-page document authored by Torres Saldaña and three other functionaries from the Ministry of the Interior was sent to the Ministry of Environment elaborating on their allegations, providing 11 pieces of evidence for why Acción Ecológica should be shut down. These included three of the NGO’s Facebook links, four of its website links, and two police reports.

Acción Ecológica’s newly-elected president Alexandra Almeida dismisses Torres Saldaña’s allegations. “We looked over the documents that they sent and, really, it is “evidence” that has no substance,” she told the Guardian. “All this we’re including in the document that we’re going to submit on Friday 6 January.”

That document was submitted to the Ministry of Environment yesterday following a public presentation in Quito by several Acción Ecológica representatives. Gloria Chicaiza said the claim they were promoting violence was “false”, and the fact they have been making statements about human rights violations and the negative impacts of extractive operations means they are “fully complying” with their objectives.

Acción Ecológica’s Natalia Bonilla and Esperanza Martinez also spoke. Bonilla said the attempt to dissolve the organisation was far from an isolated attack, but the latest in a long “chain” of “different types of aggression” dating back 10 years, most allegedly originating from the government. In a particularly impassioned speech, Martinez told the audience the government’s accusations were “outrageous” and politically motivated, and compared its attempt to close them to trying to stop a jaguar from roaring:

You can’t prohibit a civil society organisation from expressing and organising itself, from holding protests, from filing legal complaints, if those are its objectives. . . The possibility that they may close us pains us greatly. But this isn’t just our problem, because it’s not only against us. It’s a problem that really involves everyone. . . We’ve been on this road for 30 years and we’re going to continue. If they decide to close us, no doubt about it, we will be reborn, stronger, in greater numbers. This isn’t just about defending nature or land, but the right to participate, the right to work together, the right to protest, the right to speak.

There were also contributions from constitutional lawyer Ramiro Ávila, from the Universidad Andina Simon Bolívar, and Ximena Reyes, from the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH). Ávila argued the government has “no evidence” to close Acción Ecológica and it should abandon the process to do so, saying that the NGO has suffered from “systematic persecution”
and those responsible should be investigated instead. Reyes described the move to silence the NGO as part of “a regional and global phenomenon.”

Five UN human rights experts are also calling on Ecuador to backtrack closing Acción Ecológica and to reform its legislation, noting that two other organizations, Pachamama and Union Nacional de Educadores, have been shut down in recent years. The experts include the UN special rapporteurs on human rights defenders, the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

“It seems Ecuador’s government is systematically dissolving organisations when they become too vocal or challenge official orthodoxy,” the UN experts claim. “This strategy to asphyxiate civil society has been implemented through two decrees - 16 and 739 - that give the authorities power to unilaterally dissolve any kind of organisation.”

Ecuador’s Foreign Ministry responded to the UN claims by accusing the experts of “flagrantly violating” norms and a UN Code of Conduct, and effectively deceiving the Ecuadorian government. It argues that the UN statement is impartial, lacks objectivity, and makes “tendentious statements that misrepresent” events in Shuar territory. It also categorically disputed the assertion it is “systematically dissolving” organisations and “asphyxiating” civil society, and that current legislation is “restrictive.” It stated:

It’s important to highlight that there are more than 70,000 social organisations in our country which are testimony to an active, participative and organised citizenry. The Ecuadorian state fully complies with its human rights commitments.

Support for Acción Ecológica has poured in from around the world. US NGO Amazon Watch calls it a “pioneering” organisation “largely responsible” for Ecuador’s modern environmental movement, having worked on issues such as extractives, climate change, deforestation, trade and GMOs.

“Many of the [current president] Correa administration’s landmark environmental initiatives actually originated with Acción Ecológica, like the 2007 Yasuni-ITT Initiative, which sought to keep close to a billion barrels of crude in the ground underneath Yasuni National Park,” Amazon Watch states. “And the groundbreaking inclusion of the Rights of Nature in the country’s 2008 Constitution would not have happened without the organisation’s work.”

Ecuador’s government, under Correa, made an earlier attempt to close Acción Ecológica in 2009, but failed to do so. “Then 1,000s of people in Ecuador and around the world spoke out against that injustice,” reads a 20 December statement from the NGO saying it is “strictly” complying with Ecuadorian law. “This time we’re receiving new demonstrations of support. We know that, with this type of protest, we’ll be able to reverse the arbitrary and illegitimate closure of Acción Ecológica.”

To the south of Panantza-San Carlos is another copper project, Mirador, also in Shuar territory. Both are run by companies reportedly controlled by two Chinese state-owned firms: the China
Railway Construction Corporation and the Tongling Nonferrous Metals Group Holding Company.

Both projects have been marked by conflict. The violence in December left at least 2 soldiers injured, 5 policemen injured and one policeman dead, according to Torres Saldaña, and was followed by a government decision to militarise the region and send in tanks. In August soldiers and police forcibly evicted Shuar families, and houses and other community buildings have been destroyed. In 2014 José Tendetza Antún, a Shuar leader and leading critic of Mirador, was killed and secretly buried just days before he was due to denounce the project to the International Tribunal for the Rights of Nature held in Lima.

The Guardian reported that the results of an initial autopsy on Tendetza Antún were “unclear”, and that activists linked his death to his opposition to Mirador.

Torres Saldaña did not respond to questions from the Guardian sent via email. The Ministry of Environment could not be reached for comment.


January 9, 2017

Native Americans fight Texas pipeline using ‘same model as Standing Rock’

By Sam Levin
The Guardian

The Two Rivers camp, protesting the Trans-Pecos pipeline, is the latest sign that the Standing Rock movement is inspiring indigenous-led activism across the US.

Indigenous activists have set up camps in the Texas desert to fight a pipeline project there, the latest sign that the Standing Rock “water protector” movement is inspiring Native American-led environmental protests across the US.

The Two Rivers camp, located south of Marfa near the border, has attracted dozens of demonstrators in its first week to protest the Trans-Pecos pipeline, a 148-mile project on track to transport fracked natural gas through the Big Bend region to Mexico.

Citing concerns about damage to the environment and sacred indigenous sites, the camp parallels the high-profile effort to block the Dakota Access pipeline (DAPL) and is one of multiple Native American land campaigns building on the momentum of the demonstrations in North Dakota.

“We’re going to follow the same model as Standing Rock,” said Frankie Orona, executive director of the Society of Native Nations and an organizer at the Two Rivers camp. “This is a
huge historical moment for environmental issues, for protecting our water, protecting our land, protecting sacred sites and protecting treaties.”

Two Rivers emerged weeks after the Obama administration denied a key permit for the Dakota Access pipeline, a major victory for the Standing Rock tribe and thousands of indigenous and environmental activists who spent months camped in Cannon Ball in hopes of thwarting the $3.7bn oil project.

Though the fight against DAPL is not over – given that Donald Trump is an investor in the company and supporter of the project – the temporary win has energized ongoing indigenous environmental battles and inspired new ones.

The campaign against the Trans-Pecos project, which is also owned by Texas-based Energy Transfer Partners, has the closest connections to Standing Rock, with activists adopting similar tactics, including setting up spiritual camps in the region of construction and planning nonviolent “direct actions”.

“Our hope is that we can create a public pressure crisis,” said Lori Glover, a Big Bend Defense Coalition spokeswoman who owns the land in Texas where the camps are expanding. “I hope this helps us stop the pipeline long enough to get the government and Energy Transfer Partners’ attention and push them to do the right thing.”

Vicki Granado, ETP spokeswoman, said the Trans-Pecos pipeline is nearly 90% complete and defended the project in an email, claiming that “underground pipelines provide the most environmentally safe and the most efficient means to transport natural gas, crude oil or other carbon-based energy products that are critical to Americans’ daily lives, and to our economy”.

Standing Rock garnered support from hundreds of indigenous tribes in a collaboration that some said was unprecedented, and Yolanda Blue Horse, a Native American activist in Texas, said she hoped Trans-Pecos would attract a similarly diverse and unified group.

Reports of intense police brutality and mistreatment in North Dakota have also inspired people to fight back, said Blue Horse, a member of the Rosebud Sioux tribe.

“What happened up there could very well happen to any of our communities if big money gets involved. That’s a scary thing.”

The protests escalated in Texas the same week that the US department of justice filed a motion against ETP to dismiss the company’s lawsuit challenging DAPL construction delays – the latest sign that Obama is working to impede the pipeline in his final days in office.

Some DAPL demonstrators are now on their way to Texas, according to Orona.

Outside of Texas, indigenous activists involved with Standing Rock have also recently turned their attention to environmental battles in a number of states, including Minnesota, Florida, Hawaii, Washington and Wyoming.
Elliott Moffett, a Nez Perce tribe member from Idaho, who has been fighting for the removal of dams to save wild salmon from going extinct, said the international attention on Standing Rock has helped the public better understand the intersection of indigenous rights and environmental activism.

“We’ve been here for thousands of years. We’ve had to deal with sustainability issues,” said Moffett, whose group Nimipuu Protecting the Environment argues that dams in the Snake river impede tribal treaty rights.

In New Mexico, Native American groups have been fighting for stronger fracking restrictions after an oil field explosion affected a Navajo community. And after indigenous activists protested a proposed oil pipeline, which some had labeled “New Mexico’s DAPL”, the operator withdrew plans.

Lori Goodman, a Navajo activist and treasurer of Diné Citizens Against Ruining Environment, attributed the withdrawal to fears of a North Dakota-style protest.

“Standing Rock has really opened eyes. Now there’s no going back,” she said. “Enough is enough.”

After Standing Rock, some Native American activists said they hoped there would be broader support for protecting indigenous sites, even when there aren’t high-profile oil projects threatening the land.

“We’re still in a very perilous position regarding sacred places,” said Klee Benally, a Diné activist based in Arizona. “There is an awakening for indigenous resistance. It’s about cultural survival.”


January 10, 2017

Utah’s new national monument marks big win for the protection of Indigenous cultural sites

By permanently protecting an area rich in indigenous cultural history, Obama has shown that some things are worth more than money.

By Jacqueline Keeler
Nation of Change

On Dec. 28, with only 22 days left in office, President Obama set aside nearly 1.35 million acres in southeastern Utah’s San Juan County as the Bears Ears National Monument. The announcement capped several years of work by a unique tribal coalition that proposed this first-in-the-nation monument to be comanaged by tribes and the federal government. Obama also
designated 300,000 acres at Gold Butte in Nevada, homelands of the Paiute people, ironically, near militant rancher Cliven Bundy’s cattle operation.

The national monument – proposed by the Bears Ears Inter-tribal Coalition, which includes the Navajo Nation, the Pueblo of Zuni, the Ute Mountain Ute, Ute tribe, and Hopi tribe – will preserve an area rich in biodiversity and human history amid one of the country’s most iconic landscapes. It, and the political battle that continues to stem from it, also raises a greater question for a nation at odds with itself: What is the value of land?

This is at the heart of land disputes from the Malheur Wildlife Refuge in Oregon to the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in North Dakota. Does the value of unspoiled wildness, the cultural heritage of indigenous people, and their ancestral connection to the land outweigh the exploitation of oil, coal, timber, grassland, and water to create wealth?

“Every time I hear something new and great, like the rediscovery of a bean species or something our ancestors learned to grow during a great drought historically, [I know] we wouldn’t make those discoveries if it all gets destroyed and thrown in a pile of rubbish,” said Regina Lopez-Whiteskunk, Ute Mountain Ute tribal councilwoman and coalition chairwoman. “It takes a page out of our history,” she said.

The name Bears Ears – called the same in the languages of each of the regional tribes – refers to a pair of red sandstone buttes that rise 2,000 feet above juniper-covered Cedar Mesa. The surrounding area encompasses some 100,000 culturally significant sites, including cliff dwellings, burial sites, and ancient roads that span thousands of years of human history.

Like the Fertile Crescent of the Middle East, Bears Ears has served as a nursery for many cultures in the Southwest and holds ancient remains dating back as much as 13,000 years. Examples include the stunning House on Fire and Moon House, built by Ancestral Puebloans around 800 years ago. These stone towers and multilevel cliff houses, as well as the more humble remains of early Navajo hogans, display the incredible ingenuity that this unique landscape has fostered. For Navajo people, Bears Ears also holds significance as the birthplace of the great 19th century Navajo leader Chief Manuelito, who led a resistance against the forced removal of his people.

Today, these sites are under threat of looting and destruction. Global positioning systems and social media sharing have made visible places that were previously only known to a few. All of the 1.35 million acres now protected were previously public lands owned by the American people and managed by the Bureau of Land Management. However, without the national monument designation, the BLM could afford only two law enforcement officers to patrol it. Under so little oversight, entire petroglyphs had been cut from canyon walls and trucked away.

In 2014, San Juan County Commissioner Phil Lyman joined forces with Ryan Bundy, son of Nevada rancher Cliven Bundy, to conduct an illegal, armed ATV ride over an ancient Puebloan village in Recapture Canyon, now within the monument’s boundaries. The rally, about which Lyman expressed last minute apprehension to the gathered crowd of sagebrush militia and local media, was staged to protest the government’s closure of a road to protect ancient artifacts and
graves. Lyman was later convicted of two federal misdemeanors, fined, and sentenced to 10 days in jail.

But in San Juan County, hostility toward Native Americans has not been isolated to historical sites. In early 2016, the Navajo Nation sued the county for violations of the Voting Rights Act. A U.S. district court sided with the Navajo, finding that “the county had race-based motives” in how it gerrymandered Navajo voters into a single district to prevent them from asserting influence over the county. The lawsuit included statements made by Lyman telling Navajos they had “lost the war” and had no right to comment on public land management.

In July, U.S. Reps. Rob Bishop, R-Utah, and Jason Chaffetz, R-Utah, introduced to Congress the Public Lands Initiative Bill as an alternative to the Inter-Tribal Coalition’s national monument proposal. Their bill not only proposed removing protections of 18 million acres of federal land in Utah, but also sought to take 100,000 acres of land from the Ute tribe and open it up to oil and mining companies without tribal consultation.

Ute leaders including Lopez-Whiteskunk said that Bishop and Chaffetz never mentioned this audacious land grab, written into a bill designed to protect Bears Ears, to the tribes. This disrespect is echoed at not only the county level of Utah government but also at the state.

“I was very, very shocked by the way I was treated by the Utah Legislature,” Lopez-Whiteskunk said. “I felt belittled and disrespected because the legislature, the committee cut me off … I didn’t respond back in a negative manner. But it left me feeling very disrespected as a tribal leader.”

This lack of respect at the local level forced the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition to turn to Obama and seek national monument designation for lands that hold both historical and future potential for the five tribes.

“What we are seeking to do with the Bears Ears National Monument is to stabilize our community and to bring the youth back to the reality of the natural world,” said Willie Grey Eyes, Diné elder, president of the Utah Diné Bikeyah, and former tribal councilman. “We want to teach them how to utilize these resources in a way that not only benefits them in their pocket, but spirituality … This circle of relationships continues a cycle where the youth know how to protect these natural resources and how to utilize it in a sustainable way.”

This desire for harmony – called Hózhó in Navajo – has been met with threats of violence. In an interview with the Washington Post in June, Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, warned, “I would hope that my fellow Utahans would not use violence, but there are some deeply held positions that cannot just be ignored.”

And yet, contrary to how Hatch may characterize his constituents, a clear majority of Utah voters supported protecting Bears Ears as a national monument in a 2016 survey commissioned by the Pew Charitable Trusts.
Despite this, newly minted Utah Attorney General Sean Rayes said he plans to file a lawsuit to fight what some view as an overreach of presidential power. Echoing this concern, a crowd of hundreds gathered in Monticello on Dec. 29 to protest the designation, calling on President-elect Trump to undo the decision. Previous courts, however, have upheld the Antiquities Act.

A glance west across the Colorado River may offer some insight into how these battles have played out previously. The Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument was controversial when it was designated under the same authority by then-President Bill Clinton in 1996. By 2008, job opportunities in the surrounding counties had grown by 38 percent, per capita income by 30 percent; Utahans now consider the designation to be a good thing for the state by a margin of more than 2 to 1.

Had Escalante’s 1.8 million acres of unspoiled natural beauty been rolled over for resource extraction, scientists may not have discovered the tens of thousands of dinosaur fossils, 46 previously unidentified species of bees, or the ancient Anasazi sites that it holds.

“We’re here to take care of it. We’re here to look after it. We’re here to preserve it,” said Jonah Yellowman, a Navajo elder. “If you take care of it and look after it – it’s going to take care of you, you’re going to get healed from it, and you’re going to heal the land, too.”

This is at the heart of the unique monument proposal brought forward by five Native American nations, indigenous grassroots community members, and environmentalists. What worth does the past hold? Is there more value in mining, a quick dollar, and the right to ride an ATV unbounded?

This is the question Obama heard at Bears Ears and Gold Butte. Although Native Americans are still waiting to hear what will happen at Standing Rock and face the prospect of a combative Trump presidency, in this moment we can see an America where the future, the past, and the land are in harmony.


January 10, 2017

Face to face with Pope Francis: A reminder of why we must fight inequality and injustice everywhere

By Fred Krupp
Environmental Defense Fund

It was one of those rare moments in life that crystallize your sense of purpose, at a most critical time.
We were in Rome at the *Fortune-Time Global Forum*, a gathering of business leaders tasked with brainstorming ways to help the world’s poor. My job had been to lead a discussion about concrete actions companies can take to expand affordable clean energy and to shield impoverished communities from the worst impacts of climate change – and now I was in the Vatican, in line to meet with Pope Francis himself.

I felt humbled to be in his presence. People greeted him in different ways; I just clasped his hand with both of mine and thanked him for his leadership on climate change. It’s clear the issue moves him greatly, and his global platform championing solutions has been invaluable.

I had seen from afar how the pope is able to move people toward a greater awareness of our common bonds, and toward a deeper resolve to confront inequality, injustice and suffering. Now, in his presence, that is exactly where he moved me.

**The human dimension of clean air and water**

Our presence in the room was a sign of hope, he told forum participants, because “it shows that you recognize the issues before us and the imperative to act decisively.”

In the context of my work at Environmental Defense Fund, this means trying to improve the human condition by standing up for cleaner air and water, public health, a stable climate, and sustainable stewardship of the resources on which all life depends.

At a time when a new White House administration is threatening to withdraw from global climate action and dismantle environmental protections that benefit all lives, including the poor, we will approach the human dimension and moral underpinning of our work with renewed purpose.

We have an obligation, as human beings, to meet the challenge of climate change and avert catastrophic impacts that will disproportionately affect those least able to protect themselves.

It’s why we’re:

- fighting to replace the lead pipes in Flint and beyond that deliver water and pose potential health risks to up to 10 million homes nationwide.
- pushing sharp reductions in dangerous pollution around our nation’s ports.
- creating innovative solutions to bring new, cleaner equipment and smarter technologies to the Port of Houston and other ports around the country.
- using cutting-edge sensor technology to measure and address localized air pollution.

These and other efforts are focused on communities that have suffered painful legacies of environmental injustice, a reality that is unacceptable regardless of where one lives. As Dr. Martin Luther King said, injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.
How we get results

At EDF, we’re committed to being as diverse and vibrant – in our people, our values and our work – as the communities we serve. We must recognize that being a force for good in the world also means heeding the pope’s admonition to listen to, learn from and include the people we seek to help.

Regardless of background or belief, we need to find a way to look people in the eye, to recognize their true needs and priorities, and to roll up our sleeves and collaborate. This ethic guides EDF towards enduring bipartisan alliances and unique partnerships with diverse organizations, some of which don’t fit the conventional mold of an environmental partner. It’s how we get results and broaden the conversation.

As I stood facing Pope Francis on that early December morning, I thought of how critical it is that those who seek solutions and a path forward stand together resolutely.

Listening to the pope, it struck me that his diagnosis of the unrest and inequality in the world comes with a hopeful plea that humans be guided by the better angels of our nature – not by the dark forces of hatred, discrimination and exclusion.

His prescription is exactly what the United States and the world needs now: a call for benevolence and compassion, and for lifting people up rather than tearing them down.

It’s why millions of people around the world, including non-Catholics like myself, are drawn to and get inspiration from this humble man who is a leader because he’s able to connect the dots between economic prosperity and environmental stewardship – and to propel us to act.

https://www.edf.org/blog/2017/01/10/face-face-pope-francis-reminder-why-we-must-fight-inequality-and-injustice

January 12, 2017

Eucharistic prayer in the 21st century

By Thomas Reese
National Catholic Reporter

One of the greatest liturgical challenges of the church in the 21st century is to figure out how to do liturgy in a way that is meaningful to people in a post-Darwin, post-Einstein, post-Hubble world.

Traditional liturgical prayer, based on biblical imagery, presumes a pre-scientific worldview where Earth is the center of the universe and the world was created quickly and perfectly. Everything was wonderful until Adam sinned.
In fact, the universe is some 13.8 billion years old, with organic life appearing about 3 billion years ago, and humans evolving relatively recently. Rather than appearing in an idyllic paradise, humans crawled out of the mud fighting, scratching out an existence in a brutal and highly competitive environment.

Current liturgical worship requires that we park our scientific minds at the church door and enter into the pre-scientific world of our ancestors when we pray. This schizophrenic existence is not viable in the long run. How do we do liturgy with people having a "quantum-cosmological, developmental-evolutionary worldview," asks Jesuit Fr. Robert Daly, who has been thinking about this question for a number of years.

This is no easy task. In truth, it is part of a larger task of theologians trying to figure out how to make Christianity intelligible to people in the 21st century.

Daly finds inspiration for his work in theologians like Elizabeth Johnson (Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love), Dawn Nothwehr (Ecological Footprints: An Essential Franciscan Guide for Faith and Sustainable Living), and Dennis Edwards (Partaking of God: Trinity, Evolution, and Ecology).

Here we see theologians grappling with ancient questions of Christology, ecclesiology and soteriology in the context of contemporary science.

These theologians are imitating the great theologians of the past — Augustine and Thomas Aquinas — who used the intellectual thought of their times to explain Christianity to their contemporaries. Augustine used Neoplatonism and Aquinas used Aristotelianism because these represented the intellectual worldviews of their times. Today’s theologians who use science and contemporary thought are very traditional; they are simply following in the footsteps of Augustine and Aquinas.

But in some ways, Daly's challenge is even greater because what he wants to do will impact not only the thinking of the intellectually curious, but also the lived experience of worship of millions of Christians. If you think the translation wars were rough, you ain't seen nothing yet.

Daly recognizes this challenge and says his "goal has been to formulate prayer/praying in which both people comfortable in a pre-modern, pre-critical, pre-scientific worldview and people comfortable in a quantum-cosmological, developmental, evolutionary worldview can happily pray together."

He first presented his thinking in a March 2015 article in Worship, "Ecological Euchology." Euchology is a book of the Orthodox church containing Eucharistic rites and other liturgical matters.

Included in this article was a first draft of a Eucharistic prayer designed for contemporary worship. This draft did not include a "preface."
Last week, Father Daly presented a revised draft with preface to the Seminar on Eucharistic Prayer and Theology of the North American Academy of Liturgy (NAAL) meeting in Washington, D.C. Although the prayer has been discussed at the seminar for the last three years, he acknowledges that the prayer is still a draft.

"Its language, imagery and rhythms need to be honed by the praying and proclaimed experience of many mouths and communities," he wrote. "It betrays the awkwardness of an early attempt to pray in a language that is not only traditionally biblical in its allusiveness, but that is also ecologically sensitive."

It is "at least referentially expressive of the thoughts and feelings of a modern scientist," but at the same time not so obtrusive "as to alienate those not fully at home in that world of thought."

In short, he attempted to write "a poetic, Trinitarian song of praise and thanksgiving expressing the feelings and aspirations of a Judaeo-Christian faith that is also comfortable with a quantum-cosmological, developmental-evolutionary worldview."

Daly's Eucharistic prayer includes all of the traditional classical elements of a model Eucharistic prayer in the Basil/Chrysostom tradition: Introductory dialogue, preface, Sanctus, anamnesis, institutional narrative, acclamation, epiclesis, solemn petitions and doxology.

After the introductory dialogue ("The Lord be with you. …"), he begins with words of praise in the preface:

Father, we praise you, with all your creatures
great and small,
from measureless galaxy
to tiniest particle.
They all came forth from your hand.
Filled with your presence,
they are signs of your undying love:
Praise be to you!
A. Praise be to you!

From the very first sentence, the Eucharistic prayer goes beyond an Earth-centric and visible world to include "measureless galaxy" and "tiniest particle." These are seen as "signs of your undying love," and the congregation responds with "Praise be to you!" The congregation gives praise not by itself but "with all your creatures."

With a Trinitarian focus, the prayer goes on to Jesus and the Spirit:

Word of God, Jesus, we praise you.
Through you all these things were made
and have their being.
And when you took your bodily shape
in the womb of Mary our mother,
you entered into the chaos of our lives
to bring us to the beauty of your love:
Praise be to you!

A. Praise be to you!

Holy Spirit, we praise you,
who breathed over the primal chaos,
spoke to us through the prophets' voices,
hovered over Mary's womb
and made us temples of your love:
Praise be to you!

A. Praise be to you!

The scientifically literate would note references to "chaos theory" in this section of the
Eucharistic prayer, but not in a way that marginalizes the scientifically illiterate.

After the Sanctus, the Eucharistic prayer continues with more images from contemporary
understanding of creation:

Where once was nothing, your love
brought matter into being and motion,
thus creating time itself,
and countless galaxies, each with its countless stars,
and, to prepare a home for us,
delicately circling round a single star,
this one small globe, our mother earth.

And on this globe, aeons later,
you brought forth, infinitely small, but inexorably growing,
the beginnings of the life we share with all that lives.

And then, past billions of years,
past aeons of seemingly random developments,
past the seeming chaos of countless extinctions
— but springing from those deaths ever new forms of life —
your Word breathed not just life but Spirit too
into man and woman, your image and likeness.

Thus, the creation of man is put into the context of the creation of not only galaxies and stars but
matter and time itself. Nor does man appear in some idyllic Eden.

Past further countless generations you lovingly watched us grow,
becoming part of the life-death-life
of all that lives and grows on earth,
until, at last, you made a rainbow covenant with us
bringing us to know you more clearly as our Maker
and ourselves as your people.

Only then does the Eucharistic prayer connect us to Abraham, the prophets, and ultimately to Jesus, "born of the Spirit and of Mary's YES, to enter into the chaos of our earthly lives. …"

After the institutional narrative, the acclamation is addressed to the Father, rather than to Jesus, which allows the congregation to not only remember the death and resurrection of Jesus but also to offer to the Father the sacrifice of this Eucharist:

Remembering his cross and death,
and mindful of his loving words,
we give you praise and thanks, O Lord,
and offer you this bread and cup,
while offering ourselves,
until he comes again.

The prayer continues with calling down the Spirit in the epiclesis:

Mindful, then, of your loving gift,
and in awesome praise of the chaos-beauty
of the constant death-into-life
of this your garden globe,
and mindful too of your mandate to bless and keep it
with the same loving care with which
You bless and keep us, we pray:

Send down on us and on these gifts
full portions of your Holy Spirit
who with your Word and before all time
brought forth the galaxies,
breathed over the primal waters,
came upon the prophets
and hovered over Mary's womb.

The calling down of the Spirit in this epiclesis is the same Spirit that was present at creation and that has been active throughout time. In prayer, the congregation asks that this same Spirit may help us to "know our place in this your universe, on this your earth, and in this your Church." All of this "so that in and through our living, dying, and rising with your Son we may learn to till and keep this earth with the same love with which you till and keep us."

This Eucharistic prayer is a first attempt to imitate the early fathers of the church who wrote similar prayers to fit their historical and cultural contexts. Daley understands that the role of liturgists is not simply to learn from the past but also to speak to the present in prayer and song in a way that responds to our changed worldview.
The prayer, as Daly acknowledges, is not perfect. (Click here to read the full prayer.) For example, I find it impossible to proclaim the sentence beginning "Where once was nothing. …" One of the seminar participants suggested it be split into shorter sentences.

Another questioned directing the prayer in the preface and doxology to the Trinity rather than only to the Father, as is traditional in Eucharistic prayers from the fifth century on. Most Eucharistic prayers are addressed to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit. Some found breaking with that tradition disconcerting.

The most interesting comments came from members of the NAAL seminar on liturgy and the environment who joined the discussion.

One suggested having the prayer reflect the idea that the incarnation began with the Big Bang and using the language of energy when speaking of the Spirit.

Another suggested that when using the word "we," the prayer might include not only humans but all creation. Likewise, the Spirit would be described as inhabiting all nature, not just humans. One even suggested that when speaking of the Father sending the patriarchs and prophets to teach us, the prayer also recall the sending of locusts, floods and other natural phenomena.

Another participant suggested that the prayer be more explicitly environmental rather than solely scientific. In other words, reflect the thinking of environmentalists like John Muir rather than just scientists like Darwin.

Despite the suggestions, all participants agreed this is an admirable attempt to create a Eucharistic prayer for the 21st century, a prayer that can resonate with the scientifically literate and environmentally sensitive. Members of the seminar also acknowledged that no one prayer can include everything without becoming too long and too complicated. Rather than trying to get everything in one prayer, it would be better to have a number of prayers.

Immediately after Vatican II, many celebrants were writing their own Eucharistic prayers with little knowledge of what they were doing. In suppressing these excesses, the Vatican also shut down more intelligent experimentations. Liturgists concluded that it was a waste of time working on new Eucharistic prayers that would never get approved. Creativity continued in Protestant churches, but not in Catholicism.

With the papacy of Pope Francis, perhaps the church is ready for a period of limited experimentation by liturgical professionals working with congregations willing to be beta sites for new liturgical practices. This would allow for creativity, testing, and adjustments before any new practice is let loose on the entire church.

Meanwhile, liturgical professionals are doing the slow work of thinking about and discussing the how to do liturgy in the 21st century.

[Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese is a senior analyst for NCR and author of Inside the Vatican: The Politics and Organization of the Catholic Church. His email address is treesesj@ncronline.org.]
January 16, 2017

Women Are 'Backbone' of Native Actions Against Dakota Pipeline

teleSUR

*Several Native American women spoke with teleSUR about their role in the protests against the oil project in North Dakota.*

The actions and protests against the Dakota Access pipeline could not have yielded success if it had not been for the participation of the Native American women water protectors as they took on a leadership role in the months-long protests in North Dakota against the oil project.

“Our people always believe that the women are the backbone and with our warriors back in the day, the women would meet first, then the guys would act on our meeting,” Char bad Cob, a member of the Lakota people and a water protector, told teleSUR from the encampment at Standing Rock.

“It is more important than ever that we stay and we stand and prevent the Dakota Access pipeline from going through.” Cob said, adding that what pushed her to join the action is half a millennia of “oppression and genocide” against the Indigenous people in North America.

She has been there since the beginning of the protests back in August but when people ask her how long she has been in North Dakota she proudly responds, “I've been here for 500 years through every ancestor who has suffered. This can't happen no more. Things have got to change.”

For Bernie Lafferty, a Lakota elder, the role of women against the pipeline is just as important as it used to be hundreds of years ago. “Like if the men went out and if they didn't come back, then the women had to defend your camps, you had to defend your children and the elders. And to me, that's how we are here.”

Women are the foundation of the fight against the Dakota Access pipeline, Catawba water protector Linda Black Elk told TeleSUR, echoing Lafferty’s sentiment, and adding that water protectors are there to protect the environment for future generations.

The action against the US$3.8 billion pipeline has attracted more than 300 Native American tribes from across the United States in a show of unity that is being called historic.

They said the project will damage burial sites considered sacred to the Standing Rock Sioux tribe and pollute the area's drinking water.
“In our blood memory, when something happens to the earth, when she's being dug into and extracted from, we physically feel that pain within our own bodies,” Kendi Mosset, a Lead Organizer with the Indigenous Environmental Network, told teleSUR, as protesters brave harsh winter conditions.

“So standing there watching them dig, as they did on Sept. 3 and Sept. 4 when they destroyed sacred sites. We couldn't just stand there and watch, we had to break down the fences and run out into the fields and stop them.”

The water protectors scored a victory in December when the Corps of Engineers decided to deny the route for the Dakota Access pipeline.

“I am from Standing Rock. As a child, I used to play along the Missouri River. It is 12,000 years old, and 17 million people benefit from it,” Waniya Locke, a Lakota water protector, said speaking her native language. “We are standing in opposition to the fossil fuel industry to protect the drinking water of 10 million people.”

After the victory, the Standing Rock Sioux tribe then called on those who are not locals to leave because it was hard for the tribe to accommodate the thousands of people who were there.

However, many worry that President-elect Donald Trump, who takes office in a few days, will reverse the decision and push for the completion of the project. The tribe asked people to come back after his inauguration in order to keep up the pressure.

Lafferty concluded by calling on people to keep supporting the Indigenous and native nations in their fight.

“Because we're not gonna give up. We're gonna stay here, even if it comes down to just a few of us, we are gonna still be here. And I just would hope everybody out there believes in what we're doing and supports us and prays for us, I guess that is all we would ask.”


**January 19, 2017**

American sisters tackling climate care resolve to stay the course

By Elizabeth Eisenstadt Evans
Global Sisters Report

For decades — whether they are raising heritage chickens, running an organic farm that provides food for local residents as well as their own community, or addressing the impact of climate change here and abroad — sisters around the United States have made care of creation a priority, incorporating it not only into their prayers but into the fabric of their community strategic plans.
Now faced with the presidency of Donald Trump, who has expressed doubts about the very underpinnings of environmental activism — threatening to cut clean energy and climate-change spending and roll back protections — some sisters say they are prepared to mobilize their communities to resist.

"What we're hearing [from members] is a rising concern," said Sr. Mary Pellegrino, president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, which represents about 80 percent of the approximately 49,000 U.S. women religious. "We have seen some positive things happening to protect the climate, so we are concerned about what might happen in the future."

A Sister of St. Joseph of Baden, Pennsylvania, Pellegrino said that LCWR will continue to advocate for care of the environment, and be available to help member congregations seeking to do the same.

It can sometimes be hard to separate issues, Pellegrino said, because so many are so closely tied together. One example: "Addressing the climate issue and using sustainable development will help address some of the underlying causes of poverty and forced migration," she said.

Now prioress of the Adrian Dominican community in Michigan, Pat Siemen is also a lawyer and founder of the Center for Earth Jurisprudence at Florida's Barry University, where she taught for 10 years.

"We have a president-elect who doesn't have a basic understanding of the role the environment plays in sustaining all of life and the very ecological and biological foundations of it," she said.

"Maybe our worst fears will not materialize, but when one looks at his slate of cabinet nominees, they are [almost] all white men with a business background. I have nothing against that, but it usually comes with a certain business bias, and not necessarily a consideration of all of the needs that need to be addressed."

Jeanne Hagelskamp, a member of the leadership team of the Indiana-based Sisters of Providence of St. Mary-of-the-Woods, said her fellow sisters are of the same mind — problems like environmental stress, the forced movements of populations, and poverty need to be addressed together.

"We really do believe at the core that these issues are related. The more we can look at these relationships the more we can address what's at the core," she said.

Though for many years the sisters have had an environmental education and retreat hub (the White Violet Center for Eco Justice), in July they decided that they would pay particular attention to the causes of environmental injustice — with an eye to assessing their current work and mobilizing sisters for new activities and partnerships.

The upcoming change of administration finds them engaged in a series of small-group meetings designed to report back to their newly formed Justice Coordinating Commission, said Hagelskamp.
But the discernment process in which they are engaged hasn't stopped them from looking past Inauguration Day, she said. "It's probably going to sound very Pollyannaish, but we're really hoping that he will back down on his statements about climate change. In the meantime, we're not sitting by passively." The sisters' plans include participating in rallies, continuing their partnership with the Catholic Climate Covenant, and sending out petitions.

"We are taking an active stance, but we want to be nonviolent about it. For us that is key," said Hagelskamp.

Almost 2,000 miles away, nestled among the old-growth forests of Northern California, Redwoods Monastery Abbess Kathy DeVico, a Cistercian, echoes that sentiment. She referred to Pope Francis' message commemorating the 50th anniversary of the World Day of Peace on Jan. 1, in which he urged the faithful to be governed by charity and nonviolence in their interactions with others. "It is important not to polarize. We need to work with one another on behalf of God's creation: one heart, one mind holding before us the needs of our environment," DeVico said in an interview.

"As religious, even more so now, since Pope Francis' encyclical, 'Laudato Si', Care for Our Common Home,' we do have a responsibility to pray for the needs of our Earth and to voice our concerns in appropriate ways when and where God's creation is being misused and its resources being destroyed," she added in an email that followed.

In addition to growing much of their own food, the nuns at the monastery have a commitment to environmental stewardship of the pristine surroundings they inhabit.

Sr. Anne Curtis, who serves on the Sisters of Mercy's leadership team, said that the congregation has pursued an approach that integrates environmental concerns with other commitments, like those to nonviolence and health-care access, since a pivotal chapter meet in the 1990s. The North American Mercy Institute is part of worldwide organization spanning South and Central America as well as Guam and the Philippines.

Like other religious interviewed for this story, Curtis credited Francis' encyclical on the environment with challenging them to "deepen significantly a commitment we have already made."

"We feel an urgency at this point as we look at what's happening with climate change. Our sisters in Guam are watching the islands suffer around them," while more locally, religious have witnessed the devastation wrought by Hurricanes Sandy and Katrina, said Curtis.

While remaining grounded in their spiritual tradition, the sisters are likely to take a multitude of approaches, including participating in Catholic groups like the Catholic Climate Covenant and maintaining relationships with the interfaith organizations in which they participate, she added. "Everyone is in a mode of 'What do we do?' There's no clarity about that. We have never experienced what we are facing right now. It doesn't seem like business as usual."
American political leadership that denies the impact of climate change on human lives and Earth causes Siemen and others with whom she has spoken "hesitation, concern and caution." Siemen noted that her Adrian Dominican community is pursuing a plan to lessen its dependence on fossil fuels, partner with the poor and vulnerable, and seek out new coalitions of those with similar concerns.

In California, the Dominican Sisters of San Rafael recently completed an in-depth study of the papal document on the environment directed by the Earth Committee, Sr. Carla Kovack, a member of the congregation's leadership team, wrote in an email. The group also partners with Interfaith Power and Light (a multistate coalition that promotes conservation and public-policy advocacy), as well as other like-minded organizations, she said.

After consulting with several sisters active on the Earth Committee and with the congregation's social justice coordinator, Kovack wrote, the San Rafael Dominican Sisters are taking a cautious, wait-and-see approach: "Until we exactly know what the new president actually does, we don't know how to resist."

As executive director of the New Mexico branch of Interfaith Power and Light, Joan Brown, a Franciscan from the Rochester, Minnesota, community (and a Global Sisters Report contributor), is actively charting the impact of climate change on her state. New Mexico, she said, now confronts the impact of continual drought, with snow from the higher elevations prone to run downstream fast without sinking in to replenish the soil.

New Mexico's long history of exploitation by extractive industries like uranium mining, its poverty and its colonialist legacy have forced her organization and others like it to be creative, said Brown. "We're faith-based and not partisan," she said. "We'll just keep doing our work. We believe that things can shift. We're called to keep moving forward and doing what's right."

For Brown and colleagues around the country, that mean participating in prayer vigils timed around the Jan. 20 inauguration as well as support for the Green Climate Fund (an anti-climate-change initiative supported by 194 countries), and ongoing local initiatives to alleviate air and water pollution, she said.

Whereas some are anxious about the future under a Trump administration, Brown, citing both the protests at Standing Rock and increased sensitivity to racial and urban and rural divisions, sees both the challenges as well as multiple opportunities to promote positive changes.

"It feels like we are being called to a moment of transformation of consciousness," she said, suggesting that environmental advocates will be more effective if they work across racial, geographical and class boundaries.

Rather than being caught in a reactive and negative mode that fuels clashing perspectives, she said, it's important that advocates for creation care make it clear that they are affirming positive changes. "We're simply lifting up care of creation and of communities for the common good."
"As a member of a Dominican congregation of women religious," said Siemen, "I think that the potential threat to Catholic social teaching and the well-being of people and the planet ... serve as impetus to those of us who are members of faith communities to actually become the people we are meant to be."

In this transformational moment, Brown said, it's time to pause, reflect prayerfully "and think about how we want to move next. The prophetic view of people of faith is essential. Are we up for that challenge?"

[Elizabeth Eisenstadt Evans is a religion columnist for Lancaster Newspapers, Inc., as well as a freelance writer.]


January 21, 2017

The ecology of burial: Choices reflect beliefs about life after death

By Robert Duncan, Catholic News Service
National Catholic Reporter

Vatican City - In a craftsman's workshop on the edge of Rome's Campo Verano cemetery, two designers are working to revive what they see as a dying art: burial.

Unlike the masons who make the cemetery's gravestones and memorials, Anna Citelli and Raoul Bretzel are fashioning biodegradable burial pods.

Their prototype is an egg-shaped sarcophagus that can hold a corpse in the fetal position. A young tree, chosen ahead of time by the deceased, will be planted over the pod in place of a headstone. Citelli and Bretzel imagine a future where "sacred forests" co-exist with cemeteries.

The burial pods are part of a widespread movement focused on "green burial" practices, which use decomposable materials and avoid the use of embalming chemicals.

A growing number of Catholic cemeteries offer "green burials," but do so emphasizing how the practices and the motivations behind such a choice must coincide with Catholic faith.

"By burying the bodies of the faithful, the church confirms her faith in the resurrection of the body and intends to show the great dignity of the human body as an integral part of the human person whose body forms part of their identity," said an instruction on burial and cremation issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in October.

The Catholic Church, it said, "cannot, therefore, condone attitudes or permit rites that involve erroneous ideas about death, such as considering death as the definitive annihilation of the
person, or the moment of fusion with Mother Nature or the universe, or as a stage in the cycle of regeneration, or as the definitive liberation from the 'prison' of the body."

The Italian pod makers, who named their firm Capsula Mundi (Latin for "earth pod") say the burial process should reflect the natural processes of the world with the dying and recycling of biological materials by other organisms.

"We are earth and to earth we will return," said Bretzel, echoing the words from the Book of Genesis spoken during the distribution of ashes on Ash Wednesday. Yet Capsula Mundi was inspired not by Catholicism or New Age spirituality but a critique of modern culture.

Consumerism, with the many creature comforts it affords, has led people to think of themselves as "outside of nature, of the biological cycle of life," and thus encouraged them to counteract the natural process of decay by embalming, Bretzel said.

"In ancient times, monks were buried in the cloister of their convent; they were wrapped in a sheet, but laid in the ground," he said.

Opus Dei Father Paul O'Callaghan, an expert on church teaching about end-of-life questions and a professor at Rome's Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome, said burial methods often indicate underlying attitudes about the afterlife.

Christians recognize, "in all humility, that the body has to go back to where it came from, it goes back to the earth," said O'Callaghan, noting that the words "human" and "humility" both come from the Latin word "humus," meaning earth.

"The authentic Christian practice," O'Callaghan said, is burial "followed by natural decay." The eventual resurrection of the body promised in the Creed will be the "fruit of divine intervention," he said.

The priest said he understands why Catholics might be motivated to be ecologically aware when planning for their death and burial.

Burial is more ecological than cremation, O'Callaghan argued, because the ground can "just take from the body what it wants, rather than the body being burned and heating up the atmosphere" where "most of the organic material is actually lost and is turned into CO2."

But O'Callaghan also cautions Catholics to understand the philosophy undergirding some green burial initiatives.

"When you are promoting something" that deals with death and burial, "normally you have an anthropology, you have a view of what human beings are, and how they work, and where they're destined," he said. "There is a religious element, whether you like it or not."
For Citelli, "true immortality is to return to nature. That is where the sharing of and continuity of life take place. Because the transformation of the substances, of the organic material, gives life to death."

In the Catholic view, when a person dies, it is not merely that "a part of life has disappeared and can now sort of get mixed up in the ground and in the trees and in the plants," O'Callaghan said. "This particular person, who lived in this particular body, and who was loved as a person in this particular form, is being remembered."

Because the bodies of Christians have received the Eucharist during their lives, they have been carriers of God, the priest said. A corpse should be seen not only as something loved by other people, "but also from the religious point of view as something that's sacred."

Because proposals for ecological burials vary from country to country, bishops and bishops' conferences "need to look into the anthropology, the eschatology and the theology behind" these diverse initiatives, he said.

For O'Callaghan, the important questions are: "Is there a real affirmation of the human body" as a "carrier of the Holy Spirit?" Is there "a clear element of the name of the person?" Is the commemoration not just of nature, but "of the person and the life they lived?" How is the belief in the resurrection represented?

"Very often that is represented by a headstone with a cross, which represents the power and salvation won by Jesus Christ," he said. Comparable symbolism, along with the name and dates of the individual's birth and death, would have to accompany any Christian form of a green burial.

"There's a very powerful message of concreteness, of that particular person who died in this particular situation, and his name and the date. The place is there; the cross is there. There is something that speaks to people in that," he said.


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January 25, 2017

Native Americans condemn Trump's executive action on pipeline

By Emily McFarlan Miller, Religion News Service
National Catholic Reporter

President Trump's executive orders advancing the construction of pipelines are drawing condemnation from the Native American and religious groups that have opposed them.
The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe issued a statement on Facebook saying the president's order Jan. 24 regarding the Dakota Access pipeline, to extend from the oil fields of North Dakota to Illinois, violated both U.S. law and tribal treaties.

"Nothing will deter us from our fight for clean water," said Tribal Chairman David Archambault II.

In a similar order on construction of the Keystone XL pipeline, which would bring oil from the tar sands of Canada to Texas, Trump said it would create "a lot of jobs, 28,000 jobs, great construction jobs."

The president also ordered all pipes used in pipeline construction in the United States to be manufactured domestically, saying it would "put a lot of workers, a lot of steelworkers back to work."

"We'll see if we can't get that pipeline built," he said.

To many Native Americans and others who have opposed construction of the Dakota Access pipeline, the movement was not primarily about jobs, money or energy. It was about protecting holy sites and water.

Shantha Ready Alonso, executive director of Creation Justice Ministries, a Christian organization whose members have joined the camps at Standing Rock, said they were "shocked" by the Trump administration's lack of regard for tribal sovereignty.

"As Christians we are committed to responsible stewardship of the gifts of God’s creation and to justice for our indigenous brothers and sisters," Alonso said. "We call on the administration to respect indigenous rights and the safety of drinking water for millions."

Kyle Meyaard-Schaap, national organizer and spokesperson for Young Evangelicals for Climate Action, issued a statement saying its members were "deeply disappointed" by the president's action, which they believe will damage recent climate gains.

"As evangelical Christians, we are committed to a vision of the gospel that understands that all things are under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and that the entire creation is being reconciled back to God through Jesus. This commitment will always lead us to advocate for the well-being of all people and for the protection of God’s good creation," Meyaard-Schaap said.

"We will continue to stand with those around the world who are made most vulnerable by a changing climate. We will continue to stand with Native peoples asserting their right to clean air, water, and a stable climate."

The American Humanist Association, who also had sent members to visit Standing Rock and raised funds for the camps there, issued a statement condemning the executive action:
"It’s clear that the Trump administration’s idea of putting 'America first' doesn’t apply to First Americans indigenous to this land. As humanists, we stand in solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in their ongoing resistance against dehumanizing environmental and racial injustice."

As many as 8,000 people at one time have gathered in the camps in the hills along the Cannonball River in North Dakota in solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux against the pipeline. On Jan. 20 the tribal council had passed a resolution asking people to leave the camps in the reservation's Cannonball District, noting the strain on the citizens and resources of the Sioux Nation and the work that will be required to clean up before the land thaws and floods.

And just last month, many had expressed cautious optimism after the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers denied an easement for the $3.8 billion Dakota Access pipeline under President Barack Obama.

Trump said the construction of both pipelines still is "subject to a renegotiation of terms by us."

The president had owned stock in Energy Transfer Partners, the company building the Dakota Access pipeline, through at least mid-2016, according to Reuters. His nominee for U.S. energy secretary, Rick Perry, was — until recently — a member of its board, it said.

Its chief executive, Kelcy Warren, also had donated $100,000 to the Trump campaign.


January 25, 2017

The Indigenous Environmental Network Responds to Presidential Memorandum for Approving KXL & DAPL

Native News Online

WASHINGTON – On Tuesday, January 24, 2017, President Trump signed five executive actions, two of which will advance construction of the controversial Keystone XL and Dakota Access pipelines. The other three memorandums will serve to expedite environmental reviews for high priority projects.

The following is a statement from Tom BK Goldtooth, the Executive Director of the Indigenous Environmental Network:

“The Indigenous Environmental Network is extremely alarmed with President Donald Trump’s announcement of the two Executive Orders setting the stage for approving the dirty energy pipeline projects of the TransCanada Keystone XL pipeline and the Dakota Access Pipeline.
“The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and other Sioux Tribes, as sovereign Native nations, were never consulted by Trump or his Administration on this decision that further violates the treaty rights of the Lakota, Nakota, Dakota people. Trump is portraying his true self by joining forces with the darkness of the Black Snake pipelines crossing across the culturally and environmentally rich landscape of the prairie lands of America.

“These actions by President Trump are insane and extreme, and nothing short of attacks on our ancestral homelands as Indigenous peoples. The actions by the president today demonstrate that this Administration is more than willing to violate federal law that is meant to protect Indigenous rights, human rights, the environment and the overall safety of communities for the benefit of the fossil fuel industry.

“These attacks will not be ignored, our resistance is stronger now than ever before and we are prepared to push back at any reckless decision made by this Administration. If Trump does not pull back from implementing these orders, it will only result in more massive mobilization and civil disobedience on a scale never seen of a newly seated President of the United States.”


January 27, 2017

Compassion in Action: And the Spiritual Ecology of Translating Sky Dragons into Power Grids

By Kyle Lemle
Spiritual Ecology Fellowship

In the time when the nuns sing before the birds, the sun waits patiently as if it would not come at all. Silence given voice in an ocean of sound lapping in all directions - the thick buzz of the living, the chanting street dogs, the great crash of becoming one - the sound of the Himalayas being born to our North - harmonizing with the great crash of cymbols echoing from inside the temple walls where the nuns are busy ushering in the ritual of dawn.

With the crash, half of me becomes awake, the other half still at home in California, running laps around all my creations. And another crash, though I forgot it would come, right on time, the red sun rises over the mountains, like a whale breaching from the depths, and all the green turns to gold. The nuns raise the flag, and another day is blessed.

I’m here at the Tilokpur Nunnery for a strange experiment, the meeting of 50 nuns and 11 Spiritual Ecology Fellows. We are the guests of Khoryug, a network of Buddhist monasteries and nunneries across the Himalayas working on environmental protection and mitigation. This is the first time Khoryug has hosted a workshop at this nunnery, and the first time a group of foreigners have collaborated with Khoryug on a workshop.
We’ve come together to discuss the desecration of the Himalayas and specific actions the nuns can take to better serve the environment at the personal, community and systemic levels. Despite the majesty of these mountains, the once seemingly impenetrable frontier, they are now undergoing catastrophic changes. Climate change is happening three times faster here than the rest of the world. Tigers are being poached for trade. Over 75% of Himalayan forests have been destroyed or degraded.

Forming the cultural spine of the Himalayas, the Tibetan Buddhist community has woken up to their responsibility in creating cultures of environmental stewardship in light of the big changes underway. Leading the Karma Kagyu lineage response is His Holiness the 17th Karmapa, who has said, “Environmental Conservation must be the essence of our spiritual practice.”

Under His Holiness’ auspices, we gather. The awkwardness is palpable our first morning as we enter the temple’s conference hall. The nuns and Fellows naturally sit on opposite sides of the room from each other. What common language could we possibly teach one another in? My prostrations this morning were abysmal, but I can certainly workshop a workshop, how many times have I talked about the ‘lungs of the Earth?’

“This is my first time being in a workshop,” many of the nuns share as they introduce themselves to the room, cowering away from the microphone.

To start the workshop the nuns offer a prayer of auspiciousness, and the plenary is offered butter tea and sweet rice. We get to work talking about the Earth, its rapid decline, its resilient nature. All of this with the help of five incredible Tibetan interpreters who gracefully translate complex science to the nuns and intricate cosmology back to us.

We talk about the forest: the source of the rest, the mother of rivers, the waste filter of air, the cooler of climate, the home of the animals - its disappearance is bound up with ours.

We talk about water: about our murky past, the water in which we are all born. The mechanized separation of water from water.

We talk about wildlife: about humanity’s relative inexperience on this planet, how the 250,000 years of human history is a mere 3% of elephant history walking the Earth.

We talk about waste: about cultures of disposability, how after drinking a bottle of water it takes only two seconds to dispense what will take thousands of years to decompose. We arrive at a new definition for plastic: the exploitation of the energy of our ancestors for our immediate convenience.

We talk about the science of the greenhouse effect, a concept which many of the nuns have never learned. In return they offer the following interpretation of climate change: the karmic dragon born from the spells of the animals who are dying at the hands of humans.

The internal heat manifesting external heat manifesting internal heat. Our Indian neighbors further South in Delhi had nowhere to run from the 50 degree C heat this year.
After all the problems of the Earth are named, we are asked to come up with solutions, together. The nuns know better than us the origins of greed, the fires of delusion, the sacredness of life - following the instructions of the Buddha they stay inside the nunnery every year for the duration of the monsoon months to avoid stepping on creatures of the rain. Their solutions come first from the principle of non-harming.

And maybe for the first time ever participating in a workshop, I try not to jump to efficient conclusions, to blaming, to inciting revolution. Here, I am asked to look at my own mind, the same mind that births the problems of our worlds. Turning inward for mere seconds and I can find how greedy my activism can be, the same energy that takes down polluting systems also makes war.

All this time we’ve spent trying to paint the boat blue when at the bottom of the boat there is a 200 year old leak and I am the problem I seek. Ecology is like the Golden Rule but what I do unto others I do to myself. Scientists call it climate change, Buddhists calls it Karma. This is why the Khenpo of the nunnery implores us “with Karma comes responsibility.”

The challenge today is to come up with a practical solution for helping Himalayan forests, so the nuns, my project partner Kailea, and I put our heads together. The nuns explain that many of the trees they planted have died. We discern that they were planted too young, their roots were not established enough to withstand drought, weeds, wind, monkeys and cows.

So we agree to improve resilience through building an on-site nursery to grow larger trees for planting later. A scientific solution to young tree loss and a spiritual solution to caring for life in our own backyard.

And after hours of forming our nursery plan, when we are on the verge of designing an operational strategy, when asked to come up with our final call to action, the nuns suggest that the nursery can happen later; writing a song will be a better use of our time together. I swallow my sense of urgency.

One of the younger nuns in our group, Lobsang Palmo, who was silent for the entire workshop finally speaks up. She reminds us that any living thing could have been our mother in a past life including the forest dwelling insects, animals and spirits. So we write a song together called “Eight Steps How to be a Best Friend to a Tree.” It’s about mothering all things, knowing they will care for us when we are old. And just when we think we are getting somewhere with the song, the bell rings for tea and biscuits.

The workshop comes to a close with a great feast and a Karaoke rendition of “My Heart Will Go On.” The veil of shyness shown in our initial meeting is lifted, revealing trust - our most precious commodity according to our facilitator and mentor Dekila Chungyalpa. The nuns all vy for the microphone passing it from one to the other, expressing words and songs of prayer and gratitude. And in the morning as we load our vans for departure, the nuns shower us with the traditional blessing of white scarves, so many blessings we have no more limbs to wrap them in.
They brought their study of inner environmental change, we brought our study of outer environmental change and we crashed to our mutual confusion, our mutual enlightenment. For the nuns compassion is action and sometimes the greatest action is stillness. In ceremony every morning from their cushions they shower all beings with wishes of wellness, wishes of freedom. Now, we hope they have a few more tools with which to rise from their cushions and tend their garden, a few more ideas of where their plastic biscuit wrappers may go after they are offered to Buddha, and even a vision of a future in which offerings are made with no plastic at all.

As for me, I’m still left with the question of what a prayer does. Who listens and how long does it last? I even have outcome metrics for chanting, for lighting butter lamps. But like many of my colleagues, I often burn out before the lamp, my internal resources become depleted before the projects are finished. Perhaps all I can do is show up in peace to my work, without attachment to results, to changing the world. For me it will be about flipping the question, not where can I be of most service, but how can I create the conditions for service to flow naturally through me?

It would be more convenient to continue as usual in our respective worlds, it’s hard to translate sky dragons into electrical power grids. But on the brink of collapse, we lean in, we learn from each other. And maybe one morning after the songs are uttered, the cymbals crash, and the flag is raised, the nuns will look out to the mountain side and see the forest they brought into being from their own nursery, I will be singing the nun’s forest song with a gospel choir of anxious UN bureaucrats, and we will know ourselves enough not to hurt ourselves.

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**Kyle Lemle** is a tree planter and community-based natural resource management professional with experience working for international and grassroots NGOs from Bhutan to Thailand to California. He is an inaugural recipient of the Spiritual Ecology Youth Fellowship and is currently working with leading scientists and religious leaders around the world to empower diverse moral imperatives for conservation. The Fellowship brought him to India to work with **Khoryug** at a Tibetan Nunnery near Dharmshala and then to Vandana Shiva’s biodiversity farm and seed saving institute called “Navdanya” from where he writes to us. He can be reached at kyle.lemle@gmail.com


January 27, 2017

Tips to sustain ourselves in our stumbling toward sustainability

By Donna Schaper
National Catholic Reporter

When exclamatory news alerts like this one appear in our inbox, most of us want out of the box:
BREAKING NEWS ALERT (Boston Globe, Jan. 18, 2017)

Marking another milestone for a changing planet, scientists reported on Wednesday that the Earth reached its highest temperature on record in 2016 — trouncing a record set only a year earlier, which beat one set in 2014. It is the first time in the modern era of global warming data that temperatures have blown past the previous record three years in a row.

We in the realm of environmental concern often have a simultaneous sense of needing to do more while knowing we also need to do less. We have used the slogan "Less is More" for so long that we are aware of the limits on growth. We know we are stumbling toward sustainability and want to walk confidently toward it.

Fortunately, our yearning for less becoming more in our own behavior, has spawned a small industry of continuing ecological education. Here, I name a few of the organizations that are helping activists sustain ourselves along this journey toward sustainability.

- The Windcall Institute supports visionary organizing in communities of color and engages participants in open discussions on transformative practices for staying power. Topics it discusses include: "How to create space rather than time," "Building habits of resilience," "Clearing vicarious trauma" and "Mindful breath/mindful justice." Windcall's Staying Power program works at the intersection of a multitude of issues. If climate is yours, you will be helped to become more resilient — and less afraid of headlines — by working with the wind's call.

- Etsy.com's Good Work Institute encourages spiritual and sustainable entrepreneurship where participants learn not just to do less harm but also to do genuine good. The third cohort of spiritual entrepreneurs, involving both for-profit and not-for-profit businesses, has just begun in the Hudson Valley of New York State. Etsy.org is a child of Etsy.com, and its first offspring is the Good Work Institute, which creates a community about and around people in start-up businesses who learn how to manage success in socially profitable as well as personally profitable ways.

- Yale University's first Graduate Conference in Religion & Ecology, hosted by a collaboration of different campus organizations, will take place April 21. The theme is "Ethos, Ethics and the Environment" and invites participants (it is free to the public) to consider this question: "How do beliefs about the environment affect the use of and engagement with the natural world?"

- SheEO is a new business model launched in 2015 that seeks to radically transform how we support, finance and celebrate female entrepreneurs who are creating a better world. Their goal is to recruit 1,000 generous women "Activators" per region to each commit to making a $1,000 contribution, of which 90 percent is loaned out interest-free to local women-led ventures, paid back over five years, and reinvested perpetually. Their goal for 2020? One million women in 1,000 cities making loans to 10,000 female entrepreneurs — a billion dollars of capital.

- The justice ministry education program at Auburn Theological Seminary, in New York, is a clinical pastoral program, not just for clergy but also for community organizers and others who want to dip their toes into advanced education for the 21st century.
Finally, plain old action-reflection can be very effective. You don't have to register or add to your carbon footprint by going somewhere. You don't have to apply for a scholarship or pay tuition. Instead, you start where you are and do what you have been doing and add a dimension of reflection to it. For every hour you work, you also reflect. For every action you do, you add an analysis of it. For every plan you make, you evaluate your achievements, intentionally, at a later date, so that you can decide whether you want to do the same thing again.

Many people say we need to think as much as we act, hour for hour, day for day. I don't know if any of us can afford more learning, even though we may all need it. I do know all of us need to reflect deeply on what we should be doing next and ongoing. Some of us will need formal programs. Others will know how to do it yourself — and create communities of reflection inside their own practices. Either way, as we stumble along, we need to learn and re-learn how to stay balanced.

I'd like to put in a good word for that word "stumble." My friend who now spends her days in a wheelchair says that her rehab is learning how to walk again. The main teaching, she says, is re-learning balance.

The environment that we want to protect requires that we stumble along to balance, as well. Less can become more, as we stumble along, either actively or reflectively toward more impact and calm. Action reflection is a method not just for more impact and not just for more calm, but each acting and reflecting together as part of the same motion.

In acting and reflecting, we experience the way less can become more.

[Donna Schaper is senior minister of Judson Memorial Church in New York City.]


January 31, 2017

Severe drought brings starving Kenyans to church doorsteps

By Fredrick Nzwili
Religion News Service

MATUU, Kenya (RNS) When her pantry runs dry, Agnes Mwikali walks down a dusty road to the local Roman Catholic Church mission.

There, beyond the metal gate and the church garden where the crops are withering, she steps into the administration building and asks for a 4-pound bag of cornmeal.
In Thatha, her home, about 93 miles northeast of Nairobi, a severe drought has left many families without food, water and pasture for their livestock.

Mwikali, a 40-year-old mother, has watched in consternation, as extreme temperatures have destroyed crops, drained water sources and laid grazing fields to waste.

“We are trying everything,” she said. “There are many of us. Many families don’t have enough food.”

Mwikali has 14 mouths to feed; her children range in age from 23 years old to 3 months. She has supported herself by weeding, herding or fetching water. But that kind of work has become scarce with the advent of the drought.

“The rains are our greatest disappointment,” she said. “Every season, we plant our seeds and watch the crops germinate, only for the rains to leave before they mature.”

At the Thatha Roman Catholic Mission, part of the Machakos Diocese, the Rev. Gerard Matolo increasingly sees more people seeking help.

“You can’t tell them that there is nothing,” Matolo said. “As their shepherd, I have to find a way to ensure they get something to eat. Sometimes I share my own food.”

Matolo estimates that nearly 3,000 people in his parish urgently need food aid. About 30,000 are at risk.

A bag of cornmeal or a bottle of oil would make a difference for a family, but the priest said there is too little to give.

The last time this region received meaningful rainfall was seven years ago. So Matolo has been storing the little food he gets as part of the agricultural tithe that small farmers and others have traditionally given the mission.

But unless things change, Matolo fears, soon cows, goats, sheep and donkeys will start dying.

East Africa is in the grips of yet another severe drought, largely attributed to climate change. The United Nations’ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicts the continent will be hardest hit by climate change, in part because 1 in 4 people in the region lives in extreme poverty.

The recurrent droughts have taken a heavy toll on religious leaders, as they move to aid communities threatened by starvation. The current drought has hit Kenya, Tanzania, Somalia, South Sudan and Ethiopia, disrupting livelihoods for millions of people.

According to religious leaders, the battles against the drought have been fierce and draining and governments are not doing enough.
Agriculture in Africa is underfunded, although several governments in the African Union Maputo Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security committed to spending 10 percent of their national budget on agricultural development. Only 13 countries have met that target.

In Kenya the drought stretches across the coastal, north, northeastern and southern lowlands. Even the western region, which has not traditionally experienced severe droughts, is affected. Experts warn that the situation may persist for the next six months.

“The drought is of great concern to us as Muslims,” said Sheikh Hassan Ole Naado, the deputy secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims. “We are praying and we are mobilizing.”

Kenya’s government has been delivering relief food to nearly 1.6 million in arid and semi-arid areas. Officials say the number will surpass 2 million by the end of February.

Last week, President Uhuru Kenyatta ordered the resumption of school feeding programs so that children can stay in school. The schools are also required to accept food as school fees.

In the north and northeastern regions, the Kenya Red Cross has been buying livestock from farmers, slaughtering the animals and distributing the meat to the community.

Meanwhile, Matolo and other many faith leaders in East Africa continue to stress better farming methods, the use of quality seeds and increased water harvesting.

“When I see the people starving, I feel desperate. I also feel disappointed that many of the promises by government officials to deliver water have not been honored,” said Matolo.

“If these people can get water for irrigation, the area will become the country’s bread basket. They are doing it in Israel, which is a desert. Here, the soils are very fertile and the people are not lazy.”

(Fredrick Nzwili is an RNS correspondent based in Nairobi)


February 2, 2017

The Lasting Effects of Pope Francis’ Climate Change Edict

New research finds thinking about the pontiff changes the way we frame the issue.

By Tom Jacobs
Pacific Standard
Last fall, a study reported that Pope Francis’ much-discussed encyclical on climate change largely fell on deaf ears. Researchers from Texas Tech University found the appeal “failed to rally any broad support on climate change” among Americans, whether or not they were Catholic.

But newly published research suggests the pontiff’s call for taking care of the Earth has had a more subtle impact on American public opinion. It finds brief exposure to a photograph of the pope “increased perceptions of climate change as a moral issue.”

What’s more, this shift in how the issue is perceived was particularly strong among Republicans—a group that has traditionally been resistant to acknowledging the fact that humans are affecting the Earth’s climate in dangerous ways.

“The pope’s message may transcend political boundaries and fundamentally reshape how the issue is conceptualized among the public,” a research team led by Jonathon Schuldt of Cornell University writes in the journal Climatic Change.

The study utilized an online survey that featured 1,212 American adults. It was conducted in May of 2016—11 months after publication of the encyclical, and seven months after his visit to the United States.

Half the participants were shown a photo of Pope Francis and asked how familiar they were with his views on climate change. All were then asked three climate-change-related questions:

- “Do you consider climate change to be a moral or ethical issue?”
- “Do you feel personally responsible to contributing to the causes of climate change?”
- “Do you feel personally responsible for helping to reduce climate change?”

For each, they answered “Yes, definitely,” “Yes, somewhat,” or “No.”

Among those who had briefly thought about the pope, 51 percent said they viewed climate change as a moral issue. For those who had not, that figure was 46 percent.

This gap was particularly large among Republicans. Thirty-nine percent of those who were exposed to the pope’s image said they considered it a moral issue, compared to 30 percent among those who were not. That’s a potentially important shift, as pondering about the ethical consequences of environmental destruction may shift behavior more effectively than thinking in utilitarian terms.

Similarly, the percentage of people who felt personally responsible for contributing to climate change increased from 48 to 52 if they had seen the photo of the pope. On this issue, it was Democrats who made the difference: Sixty-four percent of those who were exposed to the pontiff expressed responsibility, compared to 56 percent who were not.

Thinking about the pope did not increase the percentage of Republicans who felt personal responsibility for climate change, which stayed steady at 36 percent.
Nevertheless, the results suggest a reminder of the pope’s views can change the ways members of both parties think about the issue. Given the dangers of inertia, that has to be a positive sign.

https://psmag.com/the-lasting-effects-of-pope-francis-climate-change-edict-89e5c111159b#.80zshva3i

February 3, 2017

Review of Living Cosmology, by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim


Review by Jay D. O. Potter
Reading Religion: A Publication of the American Academy of Religion

Living Cosmology: Christian Responses to ‘Journey of the Universe’ is a diverse and hopeful reflection on the work Thomas Berry and his call towards the “Great Work” for an ecologically sustainable future. Living Cosmology combines many of the great ecological thinkers within a comprehensive range of Christianity. It contains selections ranging from Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to process thought, from ecofeminism to ecopoetics, as well as including important topics such as race and class. The connecting thread through this volume is that each of the authors finds both hope for the Great Work and a call to particularity for their given location within Christianity.

The ecological crisis facing the world demands the largely silent North American Christian church to put into practice its beliefs of creation care. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, in the introduction, say, "if scientific cosmology gives us an understanding of the origins and unfolding of the universe, religious and philosophical reflection on scientific cosmology can provide a sense of our place and larger purpose in the universe" (4). This text provides the ecumenical resources to reimagine the place of the cosmos in Christian theology.

Considerable work has been done in the study of ecology and human impacts on the earth, and many Christian theologians have been writing and teaching on ecotheology, but this has gone largely unnoticed by the larger North American church. What Living Cosmology provides for us is a place to begin the process of reimagining future theologies and practices with the resources that Berry, Brian Thomas Swimme, Tucker, and Grim have been working on for quite some time. This book stands as a call to professors, pastors, and engaged laypersons to put theologies of ecology to work within the practices of the spiritual life of the church.

Beyond the need for Christians to work across theological borders, this text also reminds us that we need to work with those concerned about the ecological crisis that are outside of the Christian tradition. Catherine Keller urges us out of our comfort zone when she says, "I am here supposed to be speaking as a representative of Christianity, let me use that voice to declare: God doesn't
care whether we believe in God—just that we do God. That we enact, that we actualize sacred community in its planetary *convivencia*" (113). Pastors, professors, and committed lay people need to, according to Keller, find ways of being a community with one another, across ideological lines, so that we have a future to look forward to enjoying together.

In the forward to the book, Swimme makes a similar point, drawing on the deep relationality of the universe. We need relationships to sustain the work set before us, and only through relationships can we provide a sustainable future for generations to come. I will leave you with his words: “A neutron, if traveling alone through the universe, will disintegrate entirely within fifteen minutes. But take that exact same neutron and bring it together with other neutrons and protons in a carbon nucleus and it will suddenly discover it has the power to endure for billions of years. Relationships open up possibilities for creativity that are absolutely unrealizable by solitary individuals” (xiv).

**About the Reviewer:** [Jay D. O. Potter](http://readingreligion.org/books/living-cosmology) is a doctoral student in Religion-Process Studies at the Claremont School of Theology.

**About the Author(s)/Editor(s)/Translator(s):** Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim are codirectors of the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale. They were students of Thomas Berry and have devoted themselves to his legacy by editing his books and producing the Emmy-award-winning film, *Journey of the Universe* with Brian Swimme. They co-edited Thomas Berry: *Selected Writings on the Earth Community*.

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February 3, 2017

Divinity School adds new concentrations

By Adelaide Feibel
Yale Daily News

With the addition of new concentration programs in Latinx theology and ecology, Yale Divinity School is making an effort to bring an age-old discipline into the 21st century.

Yale Divinity School announced in December the addition of two new concentrations to its Master of Arts in Religion Concentrated Program: Latinx and Latin American Christianity and religion and ecology. The school’s Concentrated Program is a two-year curriculum that allows students to pursue in-depth work in a specific discipline of theological study. These two new concentration programs, which debut next academic year, emerged from the school’s efforts to increase faculty and student diversity as well as to encourage environmental consciousness throughout its campus.

“These are [master’s of arts in religion] that are relevant to the intellectual desires and goals of many young people,” said Dax Crocker DIV ’17, one of the students who has been lobbying for a concentration in Latin American Christianity for the past two years.
Headed by professor of Latino/a Christianity Erika Helgen GRD ’15 and visiting professor Benjamin Valentin — two of the seven new faculty appointments at the Divinity School this year — the Latinx and Latin American Christianity program focuses on the expanding and increasingly diverse forms of Latinx Christianity in Latin America and the United States.

According to Helgen, the establishment of this program recognizes that Christianity today is increasingly centered in the Global South and Latin America.

Helgen said this specific concentration also intends to promote diversity within the future student body. The creation of a diverse faculty and student body has been a major focus of the Divinity School, especially in the past year as a result of the five-year, $50 million University-wide faculty diversity initiative announced in 2015. Last spring, the Divinity School made seven new appointments to their faculty, the majority of whom are from racial or ethnic groups typically underrepresented in higher theological studies. Furthermore, 36 percent of the incoming students in the 2016-17 school year came from underrepresented groups, the most in the school’s history.

With the Latinx and Latin American Christianity concentration, the administration hopes to attract and recruit more minority students, especially Latinx students.

“Naturally, there is a group of young Latino and Latina who are looking for graduate studies in theology that speaks to their culture, their ethnic roots,” Crocker said. “They want to find God in the color of their skin and the music that their culture celebrates. They want to find God in their language.”

Crocker, who has been involved in both pushing for the school to implement the new program and recruiting the new heads, said administration was “open-minded” and “accommodating” to students’ requests. It immediately contacted scholars to ask for professional opinions about the new concentrations and started a nationwide search for scholars in Latinx studies, Crocker said.

Part of the impetus for the creation of the religion and ecology concentration also came from student interest in the topic, said Peter Wyrsch DIV ’17, secretary of the student government and a co-chair of the school’s Faith and Environment Working Group. The group seeks to increase awareness within the Divinity School community about new ecological initiatives the school could implement, both academically and administratively.

Wyrsch added that a great deal of the drive for the new concentration came from the work of senior lecturers in religion and ecology John Grim and Mary Tucker, who have worked in the field for decades and in recent years have collaborated with the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies.

“We have scholars here in liturgical theology who have long been concerned with the nexus of religion and ecology and equipping our students to deal with it in churches and NGOs and all the places our students go after graduation.” said Carolyn Sharp, acting associate dean of academic affairs and professor of Hebrew scriptures.
According to Sharpe, interest for the new programs has already been growing: the school’s admissions office has received applications for these concentrations, and some current master of arts in religion students are trying to transfer to one of the new concentrations.

Since the deadline for applications is Feb. 8, Associate Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid Vernice Randall DIV ’11 wrote in an email to the News that it is far too early to make any quantitative predictions about this application cycle.

“What we’re working on and what is going to come out of these new concentrations is going to be a strengthening of what YDS is good at — really academically sound theological inquiry,” Wyrsch said

Current concentrations in the master of arts in religion program include Asian religions, black religion in the African diaspora and ethics.

http://yaledailynews.com/blog/2017/02/03/divinity-school-adds-new-concentrations/

February 7, 2017

Religion can make us more environmentally friendly – or not

By Niki Rust
BBC

Eight out of 10 people around the world consider themselves religious. That figure shows that, while in many countries religion is not as dominant as it once was, it still has a huge influence on us.

What does that mean for the environmental movement? Does a belief in God or the supernatural make people more or less likely to take care of animals and the environment?

It is easy to make up stories to answer this question. You might say that many religions push the idea that the world will soon come to an end, in which case surely they encourage a "let it burn" ethos: what does it matter if the rainforest gets cut down, if the Rapture is next week? But just as plausibly, you might point out that many religions are big on kindness, and some such as Jainism even forbid killing animals. This should nudge their followers towards caring for the natural world.

But these are just stories. What does the science of human behaviour tell us?

Let's start with Christianity. Writing in the high-profile journal Science in 1967, historian Lynn White proposed that Christian religions undermine wildlife conservation by advocating a domination ethic over nature. Because the Bible talks about “dominion” over nature, White argued that Christianity teaches its followers that "it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends".
This was, to say the least, controversial. Other historians and theologians have argued that White was misreading the Bible, and that the text actually implies that we have a duty of care towards nature. Perhaps more to the point, White offered no evidence about the attitudes or behaviours of actual Christians.

In 2013, researchers tackled that question by asking whether there was a relationship between a country's main religion and the number of important biodiversity areas it contained. They found that Christian countries, particularly Catholic ones, tended to have more areas set aside for nature than other countries.

However, this does not mean White was completely wrong. Other studies suggest that conservative Christians really are less environmentally friendly than other denominations.

In a study published in 1993, priest and sociologist Andrew Greeley looked at how much Americans were willing to spend on conserving the environment. He found that Christian fundamentalists were less willing, and Catholics more willing, to financially support the environment. This suggests that it is not whether a person is Christian, but rather what type of Christian they are, that influences their behaviour towards nature.

It also seems that people's attitudes towards the environment can be affected by the way Christianity interacts with other religions.

In her PhD thesis, undertaken whilst at the University of Kent in Canterbury, UK, Emma Shepheard-Walwyn looked at how Kenyans felt about sacred sites. These are places of biological and spiritual significance, created and maintained by communities who adhered to a traditional faith.

Shepheard-Walwyn found that "some of the Christian people interviewed felt the forests should be destroyed as they are associated with the traditional faith, which they believe to be evil."

One Christian interviewed said that "tradition is now witchcraft". Others described the sacred sites as places associated with demons and superstition.

This suggests that conflicts between opposing faiths could influence how people feel about protected areas. In particular, a shift away from more traditional faiths could be bad for nature.

In a study published in 2006, Leela Hazzah of Lion Guardians showed that Maasai who had converted from a traditional faith to become evangelical Christians had a higher intent to kill lions than those that kept their traditional faith. "These converted Protestants did not have very positive attitudes towards national parks or wildlife either," says Hazzah.

Christianity can play a part in how, and indeed whether, we think about nature

Because the Maasai are not exposed to much television or other media, they look to their pastors for information about the world. If a pastor does not include positive stories about nature in their sermons, the churchgoers would not get any guidance on how to be environmentally friendly.
The evangelical churches also ran religious events, sometimes a week long, which pastoralists were invited to attend. That meant no one was around back at the homestead to protect the livestock from predators. Two pastoralists lost 35 cows during one such event. When Hazzah asked them why they left their livestock unattended for so long, one man replied: "There is no need to return home when I am in the house of God. He will protect my livestock from danger".

All this suggests that Christianity can play a part in how, and indeed whether, we think about nature. So how do other religions compare?

A study published in August 2016 analysed Indian people's attitudes towards large carnivores. It found that Buddhists tended to have more positive attitudes towards carnivorous animals than Muslims.

Given Buddhism's reputation for avoiding all harm to animals, this may not come as a surprise. However, the findings are not quite as straightforward as they first appear.

The more often a Buddhist undertook religious activities, the more likely it was that they had a more positive attitude towards wolves and snow leopards. In other words, the link between Buddhism and pro-environment attitudes was only apparent for the more deeply religious Buddhists.

As with the study of American Christians, the key issue is not whether or not a person is religious, but rather the form their religion takes: in this case, how devoted they are to it.

These findings mean that conservationists must frame their messages differently depending on the audience, says lead author Saloni Bhatia of the Nature Conservation Foundation in Mysore, India. "We must stress environmental stewardship with Muslim communities and religious leaders, while the idea of human-wildlife interdependence would resonate more strongly with the Buddhist communities and leaders."

In other words, conservationists need to integrate their ideas into religious thinking. "Religions, and certainly the versions of Islam and Buddhism that we have studied, seem to have well-developed philosophies towards nature and wildlife," says Bhatia. "Religious practitioners and leaders therefore have a potentially important role in conserving nature."

But instead, conservationists and religious leaders have largely grown apart.

Shepheard-Walwyn believes conservationists have mostly ignored religion because of "the false belief that science and religion don't mix, and that to be a good scientist you cannot engage with religion, because they feel religious people apply less rigorous science to their work."

She also thinks there are problems with the ways conservationists and religious individuals talk about nature. The two parties are not, so to speak, singing from the same hymn sheet.

However, some groups are trying to bridge this divide.
The Alliance for Religions and Conservation (ARC) is a secular body that helps faith leaders to create environmental programs based on their faith's core beliefs and practices.

One of their most successful projects is based on an island off the coast of Tanzania. Fishermen there had been using dynamite as a quick and easy way to bring in the day's catch. But this method of fishing is very damaging, destroying coral and killing immature fish and turtles.

Local conservation organisations tried to educate the fishermen on the harms of dynamite fishing, but this fell on deaf ears. The government then banned the practice, but again the fishermen took no notice. Then ARC stepped in.

ARC members realised that all the fishermen were Muslim, and that the local sheikhs had a lot of influence in the community. So they showed the sheikhs passages in the Koran that promote pro-environmental behaviour, and told them that dynamite fishing goes against these teachings. The sheikhs spread the information to their community and, as devout Muslims, the fishermen listened.

One local fisherman, interviewed in the Christian Science Monitor in 2007, said: "I've learned that the way I fished was destructive to the environment. This side of conservation isn't from the mzungu ["white man" in Swahili], it's from the Koran."

ARC was not the only organisation involved with the fishermen. Another key party was the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences (IFEES).

Its founder Fazlun Khalid started the organisation in the 1980s because of his passion for nature. After studying theology at university, Khalid concluded that Islam is intrinsically environmentalist.

But he also noticed that Muslims had lost their connection with nature, because like so many other people they had become preoccupied with wealth. So he set up IFEES to show Muslims the core teachings of the Koran that convey an environmentalist ethic.

In Indonesia, a country rich in biodiversity but under threat from development, IFEES is working with schools to restore the rainforests.

Similarly, in Tanzania they have created an Islamic eco-village for orphans, where they are establishing renewable energy plants and recycling projects. "This eco-village was built based on the practices of the prophet on how to manage natural resources," says Khalid.

Khalid believes that there is a new global religious movement building, which is keen to embrace nature. "Faith-based organisations played a key role in the recent climate change negotiations, and IFEES were cornerstones in the creation of the Islamic Declaration on Climate Change," he says.

There is some tentative evidence that this sort of approach can work.
A 2013 study in Indonesia showed that incorporating conservation messages into Islamic sermons increased both public awareness and levels of concern. "Since then, Indonesia [has] issued its first fatwas [rulings on Islamic law] prohibiting illegal wildlife trafficking and poaching," says lead author Jeanne McKay of the University of Kent.

Beyond that, ARC argues that conservationists can learn a lot from religion about how to engage people and build support. After all, religions are famously good at garnering lots of followers all devoted to a common cause.

ARC says that, first and foremost, religions are great at telling compelling stories that can inspire and inform. They also tend to celebrate what we already have, rather than focusing on what we have lost. Conservationists may want to heed their example.

When we read stories about the environment, we can be confronted with narratives of doom and gloom about how yet another species is closer to extinction or how we have destroyed even more wilderness. This is all factually correct, but research suggests that stories with a positive framing are better at motivating people to act than stories with a negative framing. In other words, feel-good stories can be very powerful.

"Using faith-based approaches can prove to be a positive way forward, and indeed has the potential to gain far-reaching benefits rather than staying confined to a conventionally science-based approach," says McKay.

It would be silly to downplay the environmental crisis we are facing. But in order to solve it, conservationists may need to harness the power of hope and optimism, just as the world's religions do.


February 9, 2017

Standing Rock Sioux vow to challenge pipeline in court

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

A double-back decision by the Army to approve a final, critical permit for the Dakota Access Pipeline, while bypassing an environmental review, has led the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and its allies to double down in their near-yearlong opposition to the contentious project they maintain endangers tribal water and sacred lands.

"As Native peoples, we have been knocked down again, but we will get back up," Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Chairman David Archambault II said of the order in a statement. "We will rise above the greed and corruption that has plagued our peoples since first contact."
The order from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers granted a 30-year easement, or permission, for the pipeline to cross federal land under Lake Oahe, a manmade reservoir of the Missouri River in south-central North Dakota. The lake is located roughly a half mile upstream of the Standing Rock Sioux reservation.

Since April, the site has served as the center of the opposition against the pipeline for the Standing Rock Sioux and their allies from other Native Americans tribes, as well as the environmental and faith communities. Communal prayer has been prominent throughout the standoff, which has been called the largest modern gathering of Native tribes, with as many as 8,000 assembled at one point.

At other times, the camp near Cannon Ball, N.D., has seen violent clashes between Standing Rock allies, who call themselves "water protectors," and local law enforcement and pipeline workers.

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The Missouri River crossing is the last major piece of the 1,172-mile pipeline to be constructed. Once completed, it would carry daily 470,000 to 570,000 barrels of oil across four states from North Dakota to Illinois. Dallas-based Energy Transfer Partners, which is building Dakota Access, has said it is the safest way to transport the oil and that it has followed all necessary review processes for the $3.8 billion project.

Energy Transfer Partners officially received the easement the evening of Feb. 8. A spokeswoman told The Associated Press that construction would resume immediately. The company said it would be operational within months.

Sen. John Hoeven, R-N.D., welcomed the easement's issuing, saying, "We must have a process to build safe, efficient and environmentally sound projects like pipelines and power lines." But he added that the permitting process needs to be reviewed "to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to be heard and that a fair, certain, and legal process has been followed."

The current route takes the pipeline adjacent to the Standing Rock Sioux reservation, and across sacred lands they say are protected under past treaties. At one point, the pipeline was to travel near Bismarck, N.D., but was rerouted after concerns a spill could contaminate municipal water supplies.

"It is so concerning that we're not questioning what motivated that decision," said Mercy Sr. Aine O'Connor. In her view, it was driven by discrimination and a lack of consideration of Native American peoples' rights.

Virginia Fifield, a Mercy associate and Mohawk, told NCR she would have liked for the Army at least require an alternate route: "It would have cost [Energy Transfer Partners] more money, but it's money versus people." She said Dakota Access is a civil rights issue for Native Americans,
and worries that the pipeline's approval of the pipeline could be "the tip of the iceberg" for the Trump administration in its interactions with indigenous peoples.

The Sisters of Mercy of the Americas in a statement said the Army's order represented a "morally unacceptable decision" that "ignores the dignity and tribal sovereignty of our Native American brothers and sisters."

"This action is yet another chapter in the U.S. government's history of injustice to tribal nations and people," they said.

The Franciscan Action Network pointed back to its statement opposing President Donald Trump's executive orders on the Dakota Access and Keystone XL pipelines, stating about the former, "Building a pipeline through indigenous people's sacred land is a violation of their religious freedom just the same as if President Trump gave permission to tear down St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York to build an oil refinery on the site."

Franciscan Sr. Karla Kloft of Dubuque, Iowa, who visited the Standing Rock camp in November, said the Army order sickened her and represented "another instance where big money and big companies oppress people."

The Army's decision feels "like such a step backwards," said Kristin Juarez, a junior at Loras College in Dubuque studying theology and international studies who also made the trek to the Standing Rock camp.

"It is completely disrespectful to the people whose land it is, who have no voice in the matter. It is disheartening that we put emphasis on fossil fuels instead of seeking new sources of energy," she told NCR.

O'Connor, who joined an interfaith solidarity witness in November, said that it was "irresponsible and reckless" for the Army Corps to grant the easement without completing the environmental impact statement and without full consultation of the Standing Rock Sioux. She referred to Pope Francis in "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home," when he said,

If objective information suggests that serious and irreversible damage may result, a project should be halted or modified, even in the absence of indisputable proof. Here the burden of proof is effectively reversed, since in such cases objective and conclusive demonstrations will have to be brought forward to demonstrate that the proposed activity will not cause serious harm to the environment or to those who inhabit it.

"I think that we have failed to exercise a precautionary or a critical approach," O'Connor said.

The order said it was complying with Trump's Jan. 24 memorandum that instructed the Army to expedite approval of Dakota Access "to the extent permitted by law," and consider withdrawing a prior directive for an environmental impact statement on the project, which the order also did. The environmental impact statement was requested by the Army in December, and was to include an examination of alternate routes and the risk of oil spills.
In the statement Feb. 7, the tribe vowed to challenge the order in court and continue to push for the completion of the environmental impact statement.

"We are a sovereign nation and we will fight to protect our water and sacred places from the brazen private interests trying to push this pipeline through to benefit a few wealthy Americans with financial ties to the Trump administration," Archambault said.

He asked that instead of returning to Standing Rock that supporters instead head to "exercise your First Amendment rights and take this fight to your respective state capitols." He also asked people to join them and other tribes March 10 for the Native Nations March on Washington.

The tribe added that if the pipeline is completed, it will seek to shut operations down.

The Feb. 7 order "is not the end of the fight — it is the new beginning," Tom Goldtooth, executive director of the Indigenous Environmental Network, said in a separate statement.

He said granting of the easement goes against protocol and legal process, disregards more than 100,000 comments already submitted for the environmental review process, and "goes against the treaty rights of the entire Seven Councils Fires of the Sioux Nations."

He added that Trump has not met with the leadership of the Native Nations. Archambault said he flew to Washington Feb. 7 to meet with Trump administration officials, but canceled the meeting upon hearing as he landed the decision about the easement.

The tribal chairman called disrespectful Trump's "complete disregard for Native Nations and our treaty rights," and spoke of his "brazen conflict of interest to the pipeline" — an apparent reference to Trump holding investments in Energy Transfer Partners. A campaign spokeswoman told The Washington Post that he sold off his shares during the summer.

Responses to the easement approval began Feb. 8, with protests held outside the White House and elsewhere around the country.

Earlier in the day, Trump had said, "I haven't had one call from anybody" complaining about his memorandum. He added, "I don't even think it was controversial."

In response, the Sierra Club and other environmental groups urged people to sound off their opposition to the pipeline on Trump's personal and presidential Twitter accounts, and by calling the White House or the numerous golf courses and hotels bearing his name.

O'Connor said she and other Mercy sisters plan to join the Native Nations March and will call on their representatives in Congress to support a letter sent the evening of Feb. 7 from Democratic members of the Senate and House natural resources committees that calls on the president "to immediately reverse this decision and follow the appropriate procedures required for tribal consultation, environmental law, and due process."
"If anything," O'Connor said, "it causes us to join together in solidarity, as we have been doing over the last several weeks. ... Our sense of Gospel work and Gospel hope tells us that we have to keep showing up and to keep resisting."

Fifield, the Mercy associate, said that Standing Rock represents the beginning of a movement, one by which Native Americans "have finally found our voice."

"Indigenous people around the world have found their voice, and we will not be pushed, we will not be silenced. It’s gone on long enough," she said.

A week before the judge's order, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe said it would "vigorously pursue legal action" to ensure an environmental review occurs.

"To abandon the [environmental impact statement] would amount to a wholly unexplained and arbitrary change based on the President's personal views and, potentially, personal investments. We stand ready to fight this battle against corporate interest superseding government procedure and the health and wellbeing of millions of Americans," the tribe said in a statement.

Throughout the protests, the tribe has insisted it does not oppose infrastructure or energy projects but that it was intent on making sure that decisions on such projects are made with input from and consideration of indigenous peoples, and do not pose a threat to the land.

Trump has promised to cut back environmental regulations that he said harms businesses, and to expedite the environmental review process.

"I'm a very big person when it comes to the environment. I've received awards on the environment, but some of that stuff makes it impossible to get anything built," he said during a meeting with business leaders Jan. 23.

"We can't have that. If somebody wants to put up a factory, it's going to be expedited. You have to go through the process, but it's going to be expedited, and we're going to take care of the environment, we're going to take care of safety and all the other things we have to take care of," Trump said.

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February 9, 2017

Catholics supporting #NoDAPL movement see call to protect creation

By Jeannine M. Pitas
National Catholic Reporter
Dubuque, Iowa -- In one of Donald Trump's first acts as president, he signed executive orders expressing support for two controversial pipelines: the Keystone XL transnational pipeline and the Dakota Access Pipeline.

The latter project has seen thousands of people in the past year gather in solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe of North Dakota in a sustained, mostly nonviolent resistance to the pipeline.

For the Standing Rock Sioux and their allies, the main concern with Dakota Access, approved for construction in March, is that its projected route goes under the Missouri River, half a mile upstream from the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation. They contend a possible oil spill would contaminate their water and threaten sacred burial sites. The pipeline's route takes it through four states: North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa and Illinois.

The project was temporarily halted Dec. 5 by the Army Corps of Engineers in order to allow further review and to complete an environmental impact assessment. On Tuesday, the Army changed course, informing Congress that it will grant permission for an easement — a special permit allowing a company to cross private or federal land — and complete the project, without finishing the environmental review.

Advocates for the 1,172-mile, $3.8 billion pipeline, which is all but complete outside the 1-mile stretch under the river, argue it will create jobs and other economic opportunities, while also promoting energy independence for the United States. Sen. Heidi Heitkamp, D-N.D., said that Army's decision brings "certainty and clarity" to the conflict.

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Opponents contend that, in addition the risks it poses to the Standing Rock Sioux, the pipeline will encourage the use of more fossil fuels, which are a major contributor to climate change. They also cite human rights abuses, noting the nearly 700 people who have been arrested since the standoff began in April, including 76 people earlier this month. While the Standing Rock Sioux have insisted on prayerful, peaceful opposition, violence has broken out numerous times between pipeline opponents, who call themselves "water protectors," and local law enforcement.

Throughout the past several months, many Catholics, including some in Dubuque, Iowa, have felt called to stand with the Standing Rock Sioux, whether by contacting elected officials about the issue, divesting funds from banks that support the pipeline, or in some cases traveling to the site itself to show solidarity with the native peoples who are fighting to protect their water.

Franciscan Sr. Karla Kloft of Dubuque felt drawn to the #NoDAPL movement in part due to her religious order's charism.

"St. Francis was so steeped in creation. The sun was his brother; the moon was his sister," she said. "Francis also had a profound conversion experience with a leper, which led him to abandon his wealthy way of life and live in solidarity with the poor and marginalized."
"I want to ask, who are the lepers in our society today?" she said. "What we as a country have done to native people is atrocious. We need to reach out to them as brothers and sisters."

When Kloft visited Standing Rock in November, she was touched by the reverence she saw that all people showed for the Earth and by the non-hierarchical way that they related to one another.

"Every action started and ended with prayer," she said. "It made me angry at the media coverage, which sought to portray the water protectors as violent. Drugs, alcohol and weapons were not allowed in camp, and everything was done with a sense of reverence. People are being treated as so-called terrorists for doing nonviolent protests, being arrested and charged for doing nothing wrong."

In Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment, "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home," he asserts that many Catholics need an "ecological conversion," whereby their encounter with Jesus becomes "evident in their relationship with the world around them."

"Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience," Francis stated in his encyclical.

Some Catholics who visited Standing Rock believe they were engaged directly in this call to protect God's creation, and that they intend to hold to that in spite of the Army's greenlighting of Dakota Access. Kristin Juarez, a junior studying theology and international studies at Loras College in Dubuque, also found the experience to be moving and transformative.

"In Catholic social teaching, we hear of the dignity of every person," Juarez said. "We toss this term around without knowing what it means. Standing Rock was a prayerful setting where solidarity meant taking a step back from my own agenda, hearing the pain of what people were going through."

Juarez said that when one man asked her why she was at the camp, she replied, "To stand with you."

"He paused and responded, 'Thank you.' We need to make sure that we are standing with people, not standing up for them," she said.

Other activists have felt that their call to stand with Standing Rock is likewise grounded in Catholic social teaching. Dominican Sr. Peggy Ryan, who currently works with Latino/a populations in Lake County, Ill., felt compelled to leave her ministry for a weekend and make the pilgrimage.

"Stewardship, common good and solidarity are the principles of Catholic social teaching that guide me," she told NCR. "The main Vatican II document, Gaudium et Spes, says that we need to change our human action in order to take care of everyone. The universe is meant equally for all people."
According to Mark Schmidt, who directs the social justice and respect life office for the Dubuque archdiocese, Catholic social teaching offers guiding principles for people to follow according to their well-formed conscience.

"The church would not necessarily say all pipeline construction is bad," he said. "The church urges us to switch to renewable energy sources as quickly as possible, but for now, our economy is still based on fossil fuels. Stopping all construction would further burden the current aging pipeline infrastructure, leading to more leaks and endangering life and creation. It would also make the product more expensive for low-income people who do not have the money to transfer to renewable energy."

Schmidt continued: "However, if a pipeline is to be built, legitimate concerns from all stakeholders must be addressed. With the Dakota Access Pipeline in particular, many of those voicing opposition seem to have such concerns. Have indigenous people been true stakeholders in the decisions that will affect them, and have their rights been respected? Does the pipeline serve the common good and respect human dignity? There are also documented instances of contractors not following their permits, damaging the soil and destroying biodiversity."

Brenna Cussen Anglada, a co-founder of the St. Isidore Catholic Worker Farm in Cuba City, Wis., said that if we are truly to respond to Francis' call to care for creation, as outlined in *Laudato Si*, we must listen to the voices of indigenous people. She believes the effort to oppose the pipeline project can help the church and its members correct mistakes of the colonial era — an opportunity that the U.S. government has not taken.

"The Earth that God has given us is precious. We are wasting this chance in this country to repair our relationship with indigenous communities. A great opportunity was given to reverse the damage and make things right. This decision is a slap in the face to the Earth," she said.

Despite the Army's approval of the Dakota Access Pipeline, the Standing Rock Sioux are not giving up the fight. New lawsuits are likely to come, and a Native Nations March on Washington is scheduled for March 10.

"I am in awe of the resilience and stamina the Sioux have shown," Cussen Anglada said. "I have so much respect for them standing up for what they believe in the face of the violent punishment they are facing, and I hope that many people will respond to their call for continued support."

"People from all over the world are watching this movement," Kloft said. "It is giving people the courage and energy to fight against these multibillion-dollar corporations. It is offering a little light."

Each of the people who went to Standing Rock expressed a desire to take what they have learned and translate it into their daily lives, by working to protect local watersheds, becoming more engaged in the concerns of indigenous peoples, and further educating others about Dakota Access and other environmental issues.
Juarez, the Loras College student, is doing just that with her fellow students on campus. In light of the Army order, she is determined to maintain hope. By standing with Standing Rock, she said, water protectors and their allies have drawn attention back to the need to care for the Earth.

"I hope that this will refuel people's fire of concern," she said. "We may be back to square one, but Mr. Trump does not speak for all of us. It is back to square one. We have faced this before, and we will stay strong."


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**February 13, 2017**

To Fight Urban Heat, Louisville Is Appealing to a Higher Power

By Laura Bliss

The Atlantic: CityLab

In the country’s fastest-warming urban heat island, places of worship are banding together to cool down.

Louisville, Kentucky, is the nation’s *fastest warming “urban heat island.”* Local temperatures in the center of this city of 600,000* are significantly warmer than in surrounding rural areas, thanks to a *uniquely sparse—and rapidly diminishing*—urban tree canopy. Cars, parking lots, buildings, and heat-trapping construction materials don’t help, either. The effects of UHI vary from neighborhood to neighborhood; some spots can be as much as 10 degrees warmer than others within city limits. For the most vulnerable locals, the effect can be lethal: an *analysis of the scorching summer of 2012* showed 53 people in the Louisville area alone died from causes likely related to human-amplified temperatures. Climate change is making things worse.

But the Derby City also has unique strengths to play on. For one, America’s “*city of compassion*” is home to a growing diversity of religious communities, celebrated every year with the internationally recognized, week-long *Festival of Faiths*. Now, environmental and spiritual leaders are teaming up to help some of Louisville’s heat-fighting strategies take root in vulnerable neighborhoods—and to better align preaching and teaching with the city’s environmental needs.

“This is about talking to folks we’re not used to talking to,” says Chris Chandler, the director of the Nature Conservancy’s urban conservation program. The Conservancy has partnered with the city of Louisville to help it deploy science-backed cooling strategies. “It’s about creating allies and working across different communities in inclusive way with new people.”

The need for such outreach reflects the often-fractious relationship between the faith community and the secular one on climate issues: *Surveys show that certain religious groups* in the U.S. show less concern than others about environmental issues; many reject the influence of climate
scientists and advocates like those at the Nature Conservancy. But a growing contingent of religious groups—including Evangelical Protestants, a group that represents the majority of believers in the Louisville area—are squaring their faith with science’s climate warnings. Some call it “creation care.”

A vast body of research shows keeping urban canopies healthy and robust is one of the best guards against UHI. According to pioneering 2015 study commissioned by Louisville, a 40 percent increase in urban tree cover in U.S. cities was found to decrease air temperatures by up to 10 degrees. More than 20 percent of annual heat-related deaths in Louisville could be avoided through city-led actions like robust tree-planting, according to Brian Stone, a UHI expert at Georgia Tech and the author of the 2015 study.

But getting local property owners on board with tree-planting, especially in the neighborhoods that need shade most, is another question, Chandler says. The areas with the smallest share of canopy cover—and the hardest-hit by UHI—often have a lot other problems to contend with: racial and economic disparities, plus years of chronic neglect by the city. Planting and tending trees takes money and time. Yet the cooling benefits of healthy trees only accrue when entire neighborhoods invest in the effort.

If his organization was going to help Louisville, it needed to tap heavy influencers within its communities, Chandler realized, to see if they were willing to be models of environmental care. After attending a Festival of Faiths a few years ago, it hit him: houses of worship are bedrocks of community life in Louisville, and many of the city’s churches, mosques, and temples are already connected through the festival. So the Conservancy approached the Center for Interfaith Relations (CIR), the group that organizes the festival and promotes other expressions of interfaith action, to develop a landscape “audit” designed especially for religious communities. CIR leapt at the opportunity.

“Talking about the environment wasn’t a random subject for us,” says Sarah Reed Harris, the managing director of CIR. Every mainline religion teaches the concept of planetary “stewardship” in one way or another, and green issues have been a frequent topic of conversation at the festival. The scope of threats to life on earth has clearly grown, she says. “What is new is the practice. It’s how to express stewardship in a contemporary context.”

After a series of focus groups, the CIR recruited participants from an all-boys Catholic high school, an Episcopal church, and a mosque—all located in particularly hot spots around Louisville—to pilot a four-part landscape audit this past fall. The groups are now planning to overhaul their landscaping practices. But as a first step, they took an inventory of all the trees on their properties using the Conservancy’s Healthy Trees, Healthy Cities App. That app shows the environmental, economic, and health benefits of individual tree species, which helps users understand how landscaping choices can serve them or not.

Second, the auditors mapped parts of their properties that best support wildlife and pollinators with another online tool. This doesn’t directly assist with cooling down landscapes, exactly, but birds and butterflies are a very effective way to draw people to nature. Next, the participants analyzed their landscape maintenance practices, looking for energy-reducing improvements.
These three steps could serve any kind of property owner, religious or secular. It’s the last part of the audit that sets it apart. Here, participants answered a series of questions that probed how the environment is woven into their faiths. Are there local wildflowers on altars and centerpieces? Are religious leaders holding services outdoors? Are sermons and teachings infused with observations about the local environment? “This is really about creating a change we can’t measure,” says Halida Hatic, CIR’s director of community relations and development. “It’s about reaching a broad base of people, and hopefully changing their own connection between faith and the outdoors.”

Sikander Chowhan, chief strategic officer at Muslim Americans for Compassion and former board member at the River Road Mosque, served as the point of contact for the mosque’s auditing work. Prior to the audit, Chowhan says, his mosque had never appreciated how an overgrown wooded expanse in the back of its property could tie into Islamic teachings. Now, armed with scientific knowledge on how to put that tangle of trees to better service, Chowhan is spearheading plans to clear a small nature trail and plant a wildflower garden. The very act of revamping the landscape will serve as a conversation-starter among congregants, and maybe even a topic at services. He quotes the Quran: “And do good as Allah has been good to you. And do not seek to cause corruption in the earth.”

“Faith-based organizations are the places people look for direction,” he says. “So hopefully we’ll get folks seeing what we’re doing to make things more beneficial, and becoming more aware of their own properties.”

That’s the hope of the Nature Conservancy. At the very least, perhaps the intentions and goals of audit will trickle down to congregants. Meanwhile, feedback from the Louisville pilot is guiding the Conservancy as it packages the four-step audit into a ready-made, online handbook that any faith-based organization can use, accessible on the Conservancy’s website and that of GreenFaith, an organization specializing in connecting religious groups to conservation practices.

The faith-based landscape audit is one small heat-fighting action among many others in Louisville. Following the recommendations of the 2015 study, Mayor Greg Fischer has set a goal of attaining a 45 percent tree canopy coverage citywide. The city is rounding out incentive programs to encourage all kinds of property owners to revamp rooftops and lawns to deflect more heat, and it’s revising its land-use plan to include trees and other natural infrastructure options to cool cities.

These actions can serve as models for other places battling UHI—which is to say, nearly every city. Engaging communities through their places of worship seems a particularly promising approach. Progressive proponents of environmental causes often forget that nearly 90 percent of American adults say they believe in God with at least some level of certainty. With the global climate forecast growing increasingly apocalyptic, it may be the time for climate advocates to make a leap of faith.

February 14, 2017

Wasting water: Waiting for true wake-up call

By Kari Pohl
Global Sisters Report

I recently returned to live in the United States after six years in Nicaragua, where I had become accustomed to irregular water service — or rather, the regular stoppages in water service. During the dry season and much of the rainy season, our water would go out in the morning and stay out until sometime in the afternoon. We'd considered ourselves fortunate, though — other barrios in the nation's capital only had water service for a couple of hours in the middle of the night. Meanwhile, in many rural communities, wells had gone completely dry.

I watch what's happening with Earth's water, and I alternate between wanting to cry in sorrow and scream in rage. Bolivia lost its second largest lake last year when Lago Poopó completely dried up, taking with it the fish, birds and other wildlife the Uru-Murato people used to depend on for their own survival. What does a traditional fishing culture do when there are no fish, when there's not even water?

I hear about Flint, Michigan, and Valle de Siria, Honduras, where the water itself — the very thing that it supposed to give life — has become a poison, sickening thousands and causing damage that will reach into the next generation.

I follow reports on the disappearance of the Aral Sea in Uzbekistan — which only a few decades ago was the world's fourth largest inland body of water and is now practically gone due to the avarice of just a handful of people insistent on cultivating cotton in a part of the world whose climate was never suitable for such a thirsty crop. How can such a miniscule group cause so much destruction?

I read about Lake Turkana in Kenya — the world's largest desert lake, which is as risk of drying up due to the construction of a massive hydroelectric dam 100 miles upstream. I can't even wrap my mind around bodies of water of that size simply disappearing.

I pray with Laudato Sí, and find myself drawn over and over again to paragraph 14, which, in English, states, "Regrettably, many efforts to seek concrete solutions to the environmental crisis have proved ineffective, not only because of powerful opposition but also because of a more general lack of interest."

In the Spanish version, the same paragraph says, "Lamentablemente, muchos esfuerzos para buscar soluciones concretas a la crisis ambiental suelen ser frustrados no sólo por el rechazo de los poderosos, sino también por la falta de interés de los demás." (Translated: "Regrettably, many efforts to seek concrete solutions to the environmental crisis are usually frustrated, not only because of rejection by the powerful, but also because of a lack of interest among the rest.")
The Spanish version is closer to my truth (and I like to think that it's closer to what Pope Francis intended to say): efforts to seek concrete solutions to the environmental crisis haven't "proved ineffective" — they've been frustrated; and they haven't been frustrated by some vague "powerful opposition" — they've been frustrated by the powerful themselves. Efforts have been frustrated by bottling companies who buy entire aquifers right out from under municipalities; they've been frustrated by the mining/extraction and petrochemical industries, which show no motivation whatsoever in developing new techniques for accessing and processing raw materials that don't involve contaminating millions of gallons of ground water and/or dumping toxic residue into the nearest stream or river; they've been frustrated by the owners and managers of mega-farms who continue to use what limited water remains to grow cotton, sugarcane, tobacco, alfalfa, and other water-intensive crops in parts of the world whose climate is no longer (or never has been) able to support them; they've been frustrated by energy corporations who have no qualms about building massive ecosystem-destroying dams.

Unlike in either version of *Laudato Sí*, however, I don't see a "lack of interest" — in me or in anyone else. What I see and experience is a sense of powerlessness, a feeling of being overwhelmed, a fear of being swallowed alive by forces far beyond what the average person can control.

Where do we go with this? Where do I go with this?

We live in a world where money is power and where the accumulated wealth of 67 individuals is greater than the assets of 3.5 billion other people combined; where the laws are made by the powerful, for the powerful; where politicians are bought and sold; where lethal force is all-too-often an acceptable tool to use against protesters, environmentalists, human rights workers or anyone who has the audacity to question the status quo.

Where do we go with this? Where do I go with this?

I think the main challenge isn't getting people (or me, for that matter) to care — it's to convince us that what we do really does make a difference. It's hard to persuade a poor farmer to fix her leaky faucet when the mega-producer down the road is also wasting water — not by the drop, but by the millions (billions? trillions?) of gallons because it costs less money to drain an entire water table and dig a new well than it does to revamp the system and introduce more efficient irrigation techniques.

I've been inspired by the Standing Rock Sioux Nation, the Guardians of Yaoska in Nicaragua, and the Rak Chiang Khong group in Thailand and continue to look to them for guidance — individuals and groups of people who are willing to risk everything to protect and defend their water sources. I pray that I may someday be "there" — that I may be willing to put myself on the front line to protect the very thing that keeps us all alive, to protect the right of all of us to at least survive, and to protect the holy gift that God has given us.

[Kari Pohl is a Sister of St. Joseph of Baden, Pennsylvania, who had been serving in Nicaragua until December 2016 in the fields of community health education and pastoral ministry.]
February 15, 2017

Native Americans opposing Dakota Access get a boost from Pope Francis

By Steven Mufson
Washington Post

Two Native American tribes are fighting the Dakota Access oil pipeline in a federal court, but on Wednesday they appeared to get support from a higher authority — Pope Francis.

Pope Francis, a longtime defender of indigenous rights, said that the need to reconcile development with those rights was “especially clear when planning economic activities that may interfere with indigenous cultures and their ancestral relationship to the Earth,” according to a report by Reuters.

Although he did not mention the Dakota Access pipeline by name, the Vatican City press suggested Francis appeared to have that project in mind. “Do not allow those that destroy the Earth, which destroy the environment and the ecological balance, and which end up destroying the wisdom of peoples,” the pope said, according to Reuters.

This was not the first time the pope has indirectly commented on U.S. issues. Earlier he criticized Donald Trump’s plan to build a wall on the border with Mexico. “In the social and civil context as well, I appeal not to create walls, but to build bridges,” Francis said, according to the AP. “To not respond to evil with evil. To defeat evil with good, the offense with forgiveness. A Christian would never say ‘you will pay for that.’ Never.”

Building and burying an oil pipeline across four states is a question of earthly legal intricacies, not the views of the pope.

Yet the tribes have appealed on religious grounds, saying the pipeline interferes with the exercise of beliefs. The Standing Rock Sioux and Cheyenne River Sioux tribes had asked in a filing last week that a D.C. federal judge halt construction of the Dakota Access pipeline because it would endanger what they called sacred waters of the Missouri River.

“The waters of the Missouri are also sacred to the tribe and are central to the tribe’s practice of religion,” they said. They argued that the very presence of a pipeline below the river and Lake Oahe would “unbalance and desecrate the water.”

The U.S. District judge, James Boasberg, declined to stop construction, but he scheduled an additional hearing on the matter for Feb. 27.
“In this regard, the right to prior and informed consent (of native peoples) should always prevail,” the pope said on Wednesday, citing the 1997 U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The pope, who spoke in Spanish, was addressing the Indigenous Peoples Forum in Rome.

The tribes on Tuesday filed a new motion asking that construction be halted, alleging that the Army Corps of Engineers had violated the Administrative Procedures Act and the National Environmental Policy Act.


February 16, 2017

Mapting: New photo-sharing app to popularize Sustainable Development Goals - Earth Charter

By Dino De Francesco and Sarah Dobson
Earth Charter Initiative

Discovering the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Earth Charter Principles while spreading a positive message about the future of our planet through picture and video sharing — this is the idea behind Mapting, a new mobile app developed by Earth Charter International in collaboration with Soka Gakkai International (SGI).

Mapting is a free tool that invites users to look for everyday actions that people take which help to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Then it’s as simple as snapping a photo or video and sharing it on a world map.

Beyond a photo and video sharing app created to map positive actions worldwide, Mapting is also a learning tool. It was designed in such a way that each step, from the home page to the photo sharing process, offers an opportunity for its users to learn more about the 17 Goals and the principles of the Earth Charter. The app combines these two complementary frameworks, the SDGs and the Earth Charter, to build connections between the targets, or where we need to go (SDGs), and the fundamental shared values that we need to get there (the Earth Charter).

Mapting was officially launched at an event called “Youth boosting the promotion and implementation of the SDGs” held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on 10 November 2016. Mapting received enthusiastic support from participants and NGOs. The app quickly had users from Mexico, Japan, Brazil, Switzerland and the US with more people joining every day.

Mapting was created based on the belief that individuals, specifically young individuals, have power to initiate change. This app is a simple, entertaining way to discover and engage around the Global Goals and the Earth Charter with the potential to popularize and expand the movement for sustainable development.
February 17, 2017

Pope Francis to activists: Stand with migrants, do not deny climate science, there is no such thing as ‘Islamic terrorism’

By Michael J. O’Loughlin
America: The Jesuit Review

In a letter written to a leaders of grassroots organizations and social movements meeting this week in California, Pope Francis said Christians must resist the temptation to demonize others, protect the earth and fight against “the invisible tyranny of money that only guarantees the privileges of a few.”

Writing that the world is in the midst of an “historic turning point,” Francis said the “worsening crisis” presents both danger and opportunity, using language sure to recall tensions between some Catholic leaders and the fledgling Trump administration.

“The grave danger is to disown our neighbors. When we do so, we deny their humanity and our own humanity without realizing it; we deny ourselves, and we deny the most important Commandments of Jesus,” Francis wrote in the letter, which was dated Feb. 10 and published in Spanish.

Cardinal Peter Turkson, head of the Vatican’s department for Integral Human Development, read the pope’s letter on Feb. 16 to participants at the opening of the U.S. Regional World Meeting of Popular Movements meeting in Modesto, a new event based on similar international meetings previously held in Rome and in Bolivia. The California gathering includes participants from a dozen countries.

“I know that you have committed yourselves to fight for social justice, to defend our Sister Mother Earth and to stand alongside migrants. I want to reaffirm your choice,” the pope’s letter read.

In his letter, Francis condemned what he dubbed a global “hypocritical attitude” toward suffering and he called for more action to address a range of social ills.
“Sooner or later, the moral blindness of this indifference comes to light, like when a mirage dissipates,” he wrote. “The wounds are there, they are a reality. The unemployment is real, the violence is real, the corruption is real, the identity crisis is real, the gutting of democracies is real.”

Francis condemned leaders who rely on “fear, insecurity, quarrels, and even people’s justified indignation, in order to shift the responsibility for all these ills onto a ‘non-neighbor.’”

Though he wrote in the letter that he was not speaking about any particular leaders but of “a social and political process that flourishes in many parts of the world” that “poses a grave danger for humanity,” the letter, delivered in a border state with a large Hispanic population, is sure to suggest tensions between church leaders and U.S. President Donald J. Trump.

Last year, the pope said political leaders who propose building border walls were not Christian, a statement interpreted by the Trump campaign as a slight against the candidate.

More recently, Catholic bishops in the United States have condemned several executive orders signed by Mr. Trump placing restrictions on immigration and refugee resettlement, including an executive order to move forward with plans to build a border wall.

Rather than looking to political leaders as models to solve the world’s various crises, the pope said in his letter that “Jesus teaches us a different path.”

“Do not classify others in order to see who is a neighbor and who is not,” he wrote. “You can become neighbor to whomever you meet in need, and you will do so if you have compassion in your heart.”

Francis also repeated his warning against describing terrorism as Islamic, another major theme of Mr. Trump’s campaign.

“Christian terrorism does not exist, Jewish terrorism does not exist, and Muslim terrorism does not exist. They do not exist,” Francis wrote.

“There are fundamentalist and violent individuals in all peoples and religions—and with intolerant generalizations they become stronger because they feed on hate and xenophobia,” he continued.

Mr. Trump repeatedly criticized his predecessor for refusing to label acts of terror committed by Muslims “radical Islamic terrorism,” a phrase he has used often since his election.

“By confronting terror with love, we work for peace,” the pope wrote.

Finally, the pope reiterated his plea for believers to defend creation against exploitation, issuing a subtle warning against those who deny challenges facing the environment.
The “ecological crisis is real,” the pope wrote, and though conceding that science “is not the only form of knowledge,” he said, “we also know what happens when we deny science and disregard the voice of Nature.”

Mr. Trump has called climate change a hoax and vowed to loosen federal regulations designed to protect the environment in order to support business.

For his part, the pope said the time to act to protect the environment is at hand.

“Let us not fall into denial. Time is running out,” he warned. “Let us act. I ask you again—all of you, people of all backgrounds including native people, pastors, political leaders—to defend Creation.”


February 20, 2017

Pope says indigenous people must have final say about their land

By David Hill
The Guardian

In the 15th century papal bulls promoted and provided legal justification for the conquest and theft of indigenous peoples’ lands and resources worldwide - the consequences of which are still being felt today. The right to conquer in one such bull, the Romanus Pontifex, issued in the 1450s when Nicholas V was the Pope, was granted in perpetuity.

How times have changed. Last week, over 560 years later, Francis, the first Pope from Latin America, struck a rather different note - for indigenous peoples around the world, for land rights, for better environmental stewardship. He said publicly that indigenous peoples have the right to “prior and informed consent.” In other words, nothing should happen on - or impact - their land, territories and resources unless they agree to it.

“I believe that the central issue is how to reconcile the right to development, both social and cultural, with the protection of the particular characteristics of indigenous peoples and their territories,” said Francis, according to an English version of his speech released by the Vatican’s press office.

“This is especially clear when planning economic activities which may interfere with indigenous cultures and their ancestral relationship to the earth,” Francis went on. “In this regard, the right to prior and informed consent should always prevail, as foreseen in Article 32 of the [UN] Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Only then is it possible to guarantee peaceful cooperation between governing authorities and indigenous peoples, overcoming confrontation and conflict.”
Francis was speaking to numerous indigenous representatives in Rome at the conclusion of the third Indigenous Peoples’ Forum held by the UN’s International Fund for Agricultural Development.

The UN’s Declaration - non-legally-binding - was adopted 10 years ago. Article 32 says “states shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free and informed consent prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories and other resources, particularly in connection with the development, utilization or exploitation of mineral, water or other resources.”

Francis also told his audience “humanity is committing a grave sin in not caring for the earth”, and urged them to resist new technologies which “destroy the earth, which destroy the environment and the ecological balance, and which end up destroying the wisdom of peoples.” He called on governments to enable indigenous peoples to fully participate in developing “guidelines and projects”, both locally and nationally.

Various mainstream media including the BBC, The Independent and the Washington Post interpreted Francis’s speech as a comment, or an apparent comment, on the current Dakota Access Pipeline conflict in the US - almost as if that was the only conflict over indigenous peoples’ land they were aware of. But what about everyone and everywhere else? Such interpretations were swiftly rejected by a Vatican spokesperson, who was reported as saying “there’s no element in his words that would give us a clue to know if he was talking about any specific cases.”

So what do some of those who were with Francis that day think of his speech? How significant was it?

Myrna Cunningham, a Miskita activist from Nicaragua and former Chairperson of the UN’s Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, says the Pope was sending several main messages. These included the “need to reconcile the right to development with indigenous peoples’ spiritual and cultural specificities and territories”, and the importance of the UN Declaration and consent which was, she says, “in a way a response to indigenous demands.”

“I expected a strong message but his position exceeded my expectations,” Cunningham told the Guardian. “He is truly clear about the struggles of our people and an important voice to make our demands be heard.”

Elifuraha Laltaika, from the Association for Law and Advocacy for Pastoralists in Tanzania, says it was a “timely wake-up call to governments.”

“[His comments] come at time when, instead of scaling up, governments increasingly violate and look with suspicion at the minimum standards in the UN Declaration,” he told the Guardian. “Without heeding Pope Francis’s call, life would undoubtedly become more miserable for indigenous peoples than ever before. Greed towards extraction of hydrocarbons and minerals
will open up additional fault-lines, heightening indigenous peoples’ poverty and inability to deal with impacts of climate change and a myriad of other challenges.”

For Alvaro Pop, a Maya Q'eqchi man from Guatemala, Francis’s remarks demonstrate his ongoing commitment to indigenous peoples’ rights.

“Indigenous peoples have been the guardians of their resources for centuries,” says Pop, another former Chairperson of the UN’s Permanent Forum. “Free, prior and informed consent is one of the most important issues of the 21st century. The Pope’s comments are truly significant.”

Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, a Kankanaey Igorot woman from the Philippines and now the UN’s Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, says Francis’s comments illustrate his “understanding of the importance” of implementing the UN Declaration.

“His view that a bigger chance of overcoming confrontation and conflict between indigenous peoples and governing authorities can be achieved if prior and informed consent is respected echoes what many indigenous peoples have always stated,” Tauli-Corpuz told the Guardian.

Les Malezer, from Australia, describes it as “gratifying” that the Pope took such a “strong stance” on the need to respect indigenous peoples’ rights, and says he took the opportunity to raise with him the “Doctrine of Discovery” - the international legal concept grounded in the 15th century papal bulls.

“Each person in our audience had the opportunity to say a very few words to the Pope as he came around the room,” Malezer, from Queensland, told the Guardian. “I asked the Pope to continue to review the Doctrine of Discovery which was followed by many instances of genocide of indigenous peoples and the taking of their lands. Also I requested the Catholic Church seek to raise awareness worldwide of the situation and rights of indigenous peoples.”

In asserting indigenous peoples’ right to consent, Francis was echoing - and giving sustenance to - a growing body of international law and jurisprudence binding on governments, and guidelines, principles or operating procedures adopted by some financial institutions, UN agencies and private sector groups. According to a 2013 report by UN-REDD on the international legal basis for what is known as “FPIC” - free, prior and informed consent - “More than 200 States have ratified numerous international and regional treaties and covenants that expressly provide for, or are now interpreted to recognise, a State duty and obligation to obtain FPIC where the circumstances so warrant.”


February 23, 2017

The Indigenous Environment Network Responds to Forced Evacuation of DAPL Resistance Camps
CANNON BALL, ND - At 2 pm CT on February 22, 2017, water protectors at the Oceti Sakowin camp were evicted by the Army Corps of Engineers. Despite efforts from camp leaders requesting more time to clean up the camp, the Army Corp remained firm with its plans to vacate the camp. The Army Corp claims jurisdiction of the land that the camp is located on even though the land is within the unceded Fort Laramie Treaty land and territories.

Individuals who voluntarily left camp prior to 2 o’clock had the choice to take a bus to be transported to an evacuation center, or relocate to other campsites outside of the eviction zone. Water protectors remaining in the camp now face risk of arrest.

There are three other campsites in the area for water protectors to relocate to: Sacred Stone, Cheyenne River, and 7th Generation camps.

Various law enforcement jurisdictions were on site including Morton County Sheriff’s, North Dakota State Highway Patrol and the North Dakota National Guard and National Park Service Rangers. The Bureau of Indian Affairs Law Enforcement established a traffic checkpoint and barricade on Standing Rock Sioux Tribe reservation land, on Highway 1806, to the south of the Cannonball River bridge.

The following is a statement by Tom Goldtooth, the Executive Director of the Indigenous Environmental Network:

"We are appalled by today’s forced evacuations of indigenous people at the Camp at Standing Rock, they are a violent and unnecessary infringement on the constitutional right of water protectors to peacefully protest and exercise their freedom of speech. It hinders the camp cleanup process and creates confusion and chaos that puts the Missouri River at risk of pollution from construction and camping debris.

“Today’s expulsion is a continuation of a centuries old practice, where the U.S. Government forcefully removes Indigenous people from our lands and territories. We urge supporters of the water protectors to continue to resist this travesty by organizing mass mobilizations, distributed actions, speaking out against the violations of the Treaty rights of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and the Seven Council Fires of the Great Sioux Nation, and continuing to source up the capacity for litigation and grassroots organizing against the Dakota Access pipeline.

“Our hearts are not defeated. The closing of the camp is not the end of a movement or fight, it is a new beginning. They cannot extinguish the fire that Standing Rock started. It burns within each of us. We will rise, we will resist, and we will thrive. We are sending loving thoughts to the water protectors along the banks of the Cannonball River, today. May everyone be as safe as can be. #noDAPL”

Indigenous Environment Network
RT

Water scarcity may cause conflict and the whole globe may be on its way to a great world war over water, Pope Francis has warned, adding that the situation is very “urgent.”

“The right to water is essential for the survival of persons and decisive for the future of humanity,” Pope Francis said during a meeting with international experts participating in a ‘Dialogue on Water’ at the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on February 24, as cited by americamagazine.org.

“All people have a right to safe drinking water,” he said, adding “I ask [myself] if in this piecemeal third world war that we are living through, are we not going toward a great world war for water?”

Pope Francis said that the figures on water published by the United Nations cannot leave the world indifferent.

“Every day, a thousand children die of illness linked to water and contaminated water is consumed by millions of people every day... This situation must be stopped and reversed. Fortunately, this is not impossible, but it is urgent,” the pontiff said, as cited by ANSA news agency.

A February 2017 report from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) states that “groundwater sources are being depleted rapidly,” citing “water scarcities” as one of the major problems.

“Mankind's future ability to feed itself is in jeopardy due to intensifying pressures on natural resources, mounting inequality, and the fallout from a changing climate,” it said.

In 2016, UN Water released a report saying that about 663 million people “lack ready access to improved sources of drinking water, while the number of people without reliable access to water of good enough quality to be safe for human consumption is at least 1.8 billion.”
Since Catholic cardinals elected him as pope in March 2013, Pope Francis has become known for his liberal approach and emotional, caring statements that reach out to the poor and sexual minorities.

In 2015, Pope Francis warned that those harming the environment and the “powerful of the earth” will face the wrath of God if they don’t protect the environment and make sure everyone has enough to eat.

During a UN summit in 2015, he stated that helping the poor and excluded is part of saving the planet.

Without referring to any specific countries or individuals, the pontiff blasted a “selfish and boundless thirst for power and material prosperity,” leading to “both to the misuse of available natural resources and to the exclusion of the weak and disadvantaged.”


March 3, 2017

Pope goes electric, sets example for world leaders

By Julia Travers
NationofChange

“Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming or at least the human causes which produce or aggravate it.”

Pope Francis, long known for his commitment to environmental stewardship, has taken his call for climate action one step further. He now owns an electric car, a Nissan LEAF.

The LEAF was given to the Pope in late February by German asset manager and mathematician Jochen Wermuth. The Pope’s Nissan LEAF can travel up to 107 miles with a 30 kilowatt-hour battery. Wermuth tried to give the Pope a Tesla Model S electric limousine but the Pope preferred a smaller vehicle. The two men took a small test drive through the Vatican. Wermuth drove and the Pope sat next to him in the front seat.

Pope Francis is “the last superstar of mankind,” Wermuth said. He also described the Pope as an example for other heads of state as well as every man on Earth.

Wermuth’s connection with the Vatican extends beyond this eco-friendly gift. Wermuth’s asset management firm is working with the Vatican to update the Holy See’s investment strategy in line with the Pope’s climate views. They are using his 2015 encyclical, Laudato si’: On Care for Our Common Home, as a guide.
“Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming or at least the human causes which produce or aggravate it,” the Pope said in his encyclical.

Wermuth is known for giving the largest donation ever to the Greens, Germany’s environmental party. The 47-year-old Protestant supported the Greens’ election campaigns in Berlin, Baden-Württemberg and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, donating around $630,000. Wermuth worked for Deutsche Bank in Russia in the 90s and is now a proponent of divesting from fossil fuels, Spiegel Online reported.

http://www.nationofchange.org/2017/03/03/pope-goes-electric-sets-example-world-leaders/

March 9, 2017

Asia-Oceania Meeting of Religious inspires eco-citizens

By Gail DeGeorge
Global Sisters Report

As the Asia-Oceania Meeting of Religious XVII wrapped up March 3 in Yangon, Myanmar, participants said they would carry with them a renewed commitment to their responsibility as eco-citizens, the message of environmental care to their congregations and beyond, and an affirmation of the meeting's importance in strengthening the work of religious in the region.

The conference's theme, "A Call for Global Ecological Conversion," used Pope Francis' encyclical "Laudato Si’, on Care for Our Common Home" and his papal bull, Misericordia Vultus, which introduced the Holy Year of Mercy, as spiritual frameworks in exploring issues related to the environment and climate change.

Participants said the message of caring for the Earth, countering climate change and helping communities that global warming affects most will continue beyond the five-day Asia-Oceania Meeting of Religious, known by its acronym, AMOR.

"By doing this, we have done something for the whole Catholic church and the church in Myanmar," Sr. Margaret Maung, president of the Catholic Religious Conference of Myanmar, a Sister of Our Lady of the Missions and chairwoman of the 19-member working committee, said in an interview. "By the presentations and the table sharing and interacting, we came to know each other and the reality of the church, and that we are one with the Earth and the strengths and weaknesses of the environment and climate change."

A keynote address by Yangon Cardinal Charles Bo on the first day, Feb. 27, set the tone for the gathering of 132 participants from 21 countries. Country reports from Bangladesh, India, Korea, New Zealand and others showed the effects of climate change and pollution, as well as specific concerns, such as use of nuclear power in Japan in the wake of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.
In subsequent days, participants explored more deeply the meaning of eco-spirituality and the inherent Asian spirituality that celebrates "contemplative consciousness" and "ecological consciousness understood as awareness and sensitivity to the interconnectedness of all beings and things on Earth," as Claretian Fr. Samuel Canilang, director of the Institute for Consecrated Life in Asia, said in his presentation.

"Asians don't need anyone to tell us the environment is sacred," he said. "It is natural to us."

Not long ago, Canilang said, Asians may have felt self-conscious focusing such attention on the spirituality of the natural world, lest others accuse them of being pantheistic. But Laudato Si' is liberating Asians to speak of their relationship with nature, he said.

Moreover, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in its document "Contemplate" reminds consecrated men and women of the call to ecological conversion, he said.

"The new relationship with the natural environment, which the congregation describes as 'relational circularity,' calls for a new spirituality, one that is ecological and contemplative," Canilang said.

Among other presentations, participants listened to best-selling Myanmar author Sayama Ju, whose novels and writings often focus on ecological themes. They heard from Caritas Myanmar about its work with ethnic populations and small farmers in encouraging sustainable crops and agricultural methods, as well as the organization's continued recovery for the thousands affected by a 2008 tropical cyclone.

They visited a government-run agricultural research center that focuses in part on the development and use of organic fertilizers and seeds.

In his homily during closing Mass, Bo said participants should not fear taking on corporate giants and governments that would harm the environment.

"You are like David," he said. "You face the Goliath of governments, cronies, business interests who would like to mutilate our Earth, our mother, our sister. But be armed with conviction."

In a follow-up interview with GSR, Bo said in urging religious women and men to take on corporate and government interests, the needs of people who live in poverty and ethnic communities caught in the middle of conflicts over natural resources have to be a key concern.

He hoped the AMOR conference would serve as inspiration for women and men religious to "be more outspoken regarding ecological issues and destruction of natural resources and deforestation, especially connected with armed groups and ethnic groups and military armed groups," he said. "More and more, we are trying to speak out, especially the religious as well as some of the bishops, for ecological justice and economic justice. These two things are linked together."
Yet amid the need for strategic planning, fundraising and other aspects of undertaking missions, he cautioned religious communities about losing their spiritual dimension and encouraged them to focus on people who live in poverty.

"Our biggest temptation today is to become an NGO," he said in his homily, underlining Francis' message for all religious "to return to simplicity."

Many participants took heart particularly that the conference was in Myanmar, itself a country emerging from 60 years of military rule and isolation.

"We are coming from the area where we had war for many years and always feeling like we were the people who suffered," said Sr. Christa Mariathas of the Holy Family province in Sri Lanka, a country that endured a 25-year civil war that ended in 2009. "Sometimes we become furious because we didn't have opportunities, but [Myanmar] is opening once again to be with other countries. We feel that we are the same and we can come out of our boundaries just to embrace all nature."

Several sisters told GSR that they were going to adopt practical means of furthering the recycling and ecological efforts of their communities.

Sr. Angelina Ng, a contemplative Carmelite nun from Singapore, said her community has been doing a renovation project, and workers have strewn trash around the worksite. She said she would get recycling bins and start recycling materials from the site.

Others mentioned expanding gardens, using more organic fertilizers and undertaking more awareness-building at parishes and schools on the need to reduce, reuse and recycle.

Many say the meeting was important not only for the ecological message but for the opportunity to connect with women religious from other countries.

"I love AMOR," said Sr. Maria Vianney Hoang Thi Diep, an Our Lady of the Missions sister in Vietnam. "I love the way we put energy together to find ways to become ecological citizens. That is new for me, to become an ecological citizen."

She said she plans to tell her sisters to be more aware of ecological sensitivities and raise awareness with those they work with.

"I also like the connection between contemplation, communion and mission," which was a focus of the meeting, she said.

"When you contemplate, you are one with God, and you feel God's love for oneself, and you can see the love of God is present in nature," she said. "When you have deeper communion with God, you can have deeper communion with self, with another and with nature. And then it links to mission to do something to care for others and do something to care for our Earth."
AMOR began in 1972 as a forum for women religious in Asia to meet every two to four years to focus on particular themes. This year, men for the first time were invited to attend, as a recognition of the broadness of the topic. Women religious will continue to organize AMOR, but men will continue to be invited to participate in future sessions. The next gathering will be in Indonesia or Bangladesh in 2021.

Sisters from different congregations and countries networked during meals and tea breaks. During an evening of entertainment, some performed impromptu songs from their countries, and all sang a united rendition of "Lord, We Thank You" in English.

The event and the participation pleased AMOR organizers.

"We became close with each other and shared how we are doing with our ministries, to share resources, share materials and whatever we come across in congregations," Maung told GSR.

Sr. Eden Panganiban, one of the event's facilitators, said she hadn't participated in previous AMOR gatherings and said she found the networking and interaction valuable. Yet follow-through is important so connections continue, she said.

"Part of the reawakening or rebirth would be that AMOR is to really take up a mission for Asia-Pacific on how consecrated women with the support of men could be a voice in the region," she said. "AMOR would have its own particular mission for that and become even a prophetic voice within the church structure."

A statement summarizing the theme and goals of the meeting was drafted and discussed. Participants received this version March 5:


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March 10, 2017

Native Americans march to the White House in spiritual battle against pipeline

By Lilly Fowler
Religion News Service

Washington - On a cold rainy morning, members of the American Indian tribes shouted "Water is sacred" and "Keep it in the soil; can’t drink oil" as they marched toward the White House.
The March 10 protest against the Dakota Access pipeline included hundreds of Native Americans, some dressed in traditional feather headbands and ponchos.

They beat drums and danced as they made their way through the streets.

The march came after a federal judge on Tuesday denied a request by the Standing Rock Sioux and Cheyenne River tribes to halt construction of the pipeline.

American Indian tribes have long argued that the $3.8 billion underground pipeline — which would run nearly 1,200 miles from oil fields in North Dakota to an existing pipeline in Illinois — endangers cultural sites and drinking water that comes from the Missouri River. The pipeline's path would come within a half-mile of the Sioux reservation.

The government had intended to further study the environmental effects of the Dakota Access pipeline, but President Trump directed an expedited approval process after assuming office.

The protest, which began at the Army Corps of Engineers office, included a stop in front of Trump International Hotel in downtown D.C.

Faith leaders and members of various religious denominations featured prominently among protesters.

Colin Douglas, 32, a pastor of Nixa Christian Church in Springfield, Mo., said eight Disciples of Christ ministers traveled to participate in the event, dubbed "Native Nations Rise."

"This is a personal fight for me," Douglas said, noting that his family has Native American roots. "I also believe water is a gift from God. Whenever we endanger it, we sin."

Muslims, too, stood alongside the American Indian tribes.

Yasmin Rizvi, 52, a retired schoolteacher, and her daughter Hena Rizvi, 25, a sales representative, traveled from Pennsylvania. As Shiite Muslims, they said, they could identify with the threat Native Americans face because history tells them other Muslims have confronted similar obstacles.

"Water is the basic need of life," Yasmin said.

The Rev. Jakob Thibault of Providence, R.I., said he believes "there’s kind of a blindness to indigenous issues" in much of the country.

But he said Christianity teaches him "that we don’t accept the status quo."

March 10, 2017

Pope receives electric car, as studies for an all-renewables Vatican underway

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

El Papa's got a brand new car. And it's electric.

In December, Pope Francis received a Nissan Leaf electric car as a birthday present from Jochen Wermuth of Wermuth Asset Management, a German investment firm focused on sustainability. The gift was made public in late February.

Later this year, the firm itself plans to make an additional 10 electric vehicles accessible for a three-month period as part of a Vatican electricity mobility pilot project.

In addition, Wermuth Asset Management has pledged to prepare for the pope four studies that aim to make the Holy See one of the first nation-states in the world to be completely emissions-free and run entirely on renewable energy. Specifically, the studies will examine how the Vatican can:

- run on 100-percent renewable power;
- move to 100-percent emissions-free mobility;
- use electric vehicle batteries for power storage;
- align its capital with the goals of Francis' encyclical on the environment and human ecology "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home."

Taken together, the studies hope to show that such sustainable steps are not just good for the environment but can be done by any group today in a way that's ultimately profitable, said Wermuth, the firm's chief investment officer, in a press release.

As for Francis' new ride, he said that the pope using an all-electric car "is great news for the world" and sets an example for other heads of state, and all people, to follow.

"Today it is no longer just morally right, it is also cheaper to own an electric car compared to a combustion engine car," Wermuth said. "The Pope is moving from sharing his views on the world via his encyclical Laudato Si’ … to implementing the Laudato Si'."

In his June 2015 encyclical, Francis said, "There is an urgent need to develop policies so that, in the next few years, the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced, for example, substituting for fossil fuels and developing sources of renewable energy."

The pope later in the document stressed "the use of high polluting fossil fuels … needs to be progressively replaced without delay," but also recognized that there currently is minimal access in the world to clean and renewable energy. While some countries have made progress, Francis
said, "There is still a need to develop adequate storage technologies" for renewable energy more widely.

"Investments have also been made," he noted, "in means of production and transportation which consume less energy and require fewer raw materials, as well as in methods of construction and renovating buildings which improve their energy efficiency. But these good practices are still far from widespread."

A global effort, Francis said, is essential to addressing environmental and social problems. "Interdependence obliges us to think of one world with a common plan," he wrote in the encyclical.

The pope reiterated that message ahead of the two United Nations climate summits that followed the encyclical's release.

Before COP 21 — which resulted in the Paris Agreement among 195 nations to hold average global temperature rise between 1.5 degrees and 2 degrees Celsius — Francis said at a U.N. office in Nairobi that the meeting must develop a new global energy system based on minimal fossil fuel use, energy efficiency and "use of energy sources with little or no carbon content."

Ahead of COP22, he stressed that individual or national action "is not enough" to address a complex issue like climate change, but, quoting Laudato Si', "instead it is necessary to implement a responsible collective response truly intended to 'work together in building our common home.'"

At COP22, held in November in Marrakech, Morocco, the Climate Vulnerable Forum — consisting of 48 developing countries most vulnerable to climate change — pledged to meet 100-percent domestic renewable production "as rapidly as possible," and by no later than 2050. Along with Germany and Mexico, the United States also submitted a long-term low-emissions strategy that sought to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent below 2005 levels by 2050. That plan, introduced under former President Barack Obama, was viewed as "somewhat wishful" at the time, and now is unlikely to be acted upon by the Trump administration, which has promised to increase fossil fuel production and cut environmental regulations.

Francis is not the first pope to drive electric. In 2012, French carmaker Renault donated two electric vehicles to Pope Benedict XVI, himself nicknamed the "green pope" for his own writings on ecology and creation care, as well as overseeing the installation of a solar array atop the Paul VI audience hall and plans for $660 million solar power plant. In 2011, an auto contest sought designs for an "eco-friendly" popemobile.

Before the Nissan Leaf, Francis was driven around Rome in a compact Ford Focus, which he swapped in lieu of a Mercedes limo. During his U.S. visit in September 2015, he was ushered around in a tiny Fiat 500L. According to the German newspaper Der Spiegel, Francis was first offered a Tesla Model S but declined, opting for the more modest Leaf.
"A car is necessary to do a lot of work, but please, choose a more humble one. If you like the fancy one, just think about how many children are dying of hunger in the world," Francis told a group of young priests in July 2013, adding "It hurts me when I see a priest or a nun with the latest model car."

A goal of the Wermuth EV pilot project is to show that electric mobility can be both good for the environment as well as profitable for the Vatican or any community when compared to combustion-engine cars.

During a conference in January on Laudato Si’, Catholic investing and clean energy, Wermuth argued that electric vehicles have reached a level where they're economical alternatives to combustion-engine cars, which he linked to a bevy of health conditions, beyond climate change, that are exacerbated by the burning of fossil fuels: among them, cancer, asthma and allergies.

"It is economic nonsense today, when a Nissan Leaf costs Euro 20,000 and consumes only one-third the energy," he said of combustion-engine vehicles.

Wermuth, who is Protestant, added later in an interview with NCR at the conference that "A green industrial revolution is under way because renewable power and electric cars are now competitive.

"This means that the goals of Laudato Si' can now be profitably implemented while serving the poor. Anyone staying invested in fossil fuels risks losing its capital in addition to causing cancer and climate change," he said.

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March 10, 2017

Strengthened by Standing Rock, Native Americans march on D.C. What's next for the movement?

By Elizabeth Flock and Iman Smith

PBS

Despite bitter cold, wind, rain and hail, hundreds of members of Native American tribes and supporters from around the country turned out Friday to march on the White House, in an effort to turn the momentum of the Standing Rock protests into a more sustained movement for native rights.
The march and a rally in Lafayette Square across from the White House came after four days of protest, prayer and lobbying on Capitol Hill, where Native communities called for the protection of natural resources and demanded the new administration honor treaties with indigenous peoples.

Those issues were drawn into sharp focus last year during the months-long fight over the Dakota Access Pipeline at the Standing Rock reservation. Oil is set to flow as early as next week through the pipeline, a $3.8 billion, 1,172-mile project running from North Dakota to Illinois.

“Since the very beginning, we understood that Dakota Access was just one part of a greater fight for indigenous rights and indigenous sovereignty,” said Dallas Goldtooth of the Indigenous Environmental Network, one of the more active groups behind the Dakota Access protests at Standing Rock.

Last July, the Standing Rock Sioux and Cheyenne River Sioux Tribes filed a lawsuit to stop the pipeline’s construction, sparking months of protests. In court filings, they said the pipeline “threatens the Tribe’s environmental and economic well-being and would damage and destroy sites of great historic, religious and cultural significance.”

On his fifth day in office, President Donald Trump gave the green light to the Dakota Access Pipeline, as well as the Keystone XL pipeline, which indigenous groups have also protested. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which issues permits for all water crossings, granted a final easement required to complete for the Dakota Access Pipeline last month.

The executive order and Army Corps decision was a blow for opponents of the pipeline. But Goldtooth said the momentum from the fight signaled the start of a larger movement.

“That resistance is growing,” he said. “The fire of Standing Rock burns brightly in countless communities across the country, native and non-native.”

On Friday, indigenous groups were joined by Democratic Rep. Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii, along with celebrities, environmental groups, peace activists, veterans, college students and nonprofits working on First Amendment and LGBT rights.

Logan Betts, a student at George Washington University, decided to come to the march after following the protests at Standing Rock — including reports of violent confrontations between law enforcement officials and protesters in November — for months in the news.

“Today, if they can stand out in the cold, then we can come out and support them,” Betts said.

Veterans for Peace, a nonprofit that promotes alternatives to war, said members of the group from Arizona, New York, Michigan, North Carolina and Mexico traveled to Washington to participate.
Douglas Ryder, 70, a veteran from Durham, N.C. who attended the march, said he was concerned that President Trump was too focused on strengthening the military instead of providing more federal funding for issues like environmental protection.

“I’m here to speak for those who have no voice: the water, the children, the seven generations coming down the road,” Ryder said. “Our policies are taking away resources from essential issues.”

Before taking office, Trump’s transition team met twice with tribal leaders from around the country, according to reports from Politico and the Indian Country Media Network. But the community remains wary. The White House did not respond to NewsHour’s request for comment on its relationship with the Native American community.

Four Arrows, an indigenous member of Veterans for Peace, said the country’s hawkish foreign policy and approach to energy development began negatively impacting indigenous people and the environment long before Trump got elected. Still, he said, he appreciated that people were becoming aware of the issues.

“When Trump was elected we had a lot of non-Indians supporting us, almost 15,000 people at Standing Rock, crying and mad, and the Indian people, we were all just sort of smiling,” said Four Arrows, a former dean of education at Oglala Lakota College. “And finally one Lakota woman went over to a lady … and said, ‘Honey welcome to our world.’ Because we’ve been living with this for 200 years.”

“This is in your face now. Americans are waking up.”

The good news, he added, “is this is in your face now. Americans are waking up, and starting to realize what we’ve done in killing the indigenous worldview [and] the biodiversity of the planet.”

Though the battle over the Dakota Access Pipeline may be lost, indigenous advocates on Friday said they are seeking to use that battle — and the tactics they learned there — as a segue to launch a broader fight over other pipelines.

One of the targets is the 148-mile Trans-Pecos Pipeline, which will carry natural gas to Mexico, passing through the Big Bend region’s Chihuahuan Desert, one of the most biologically diverse areas in the country. The Society of Native Nations has erected a camp there to help stop the pipeline, in collaboration with local communities.

The Trans-Pecos pipeline is being constructed by Texas-based Energy Transfer Partners — the same company building the Dakota Access Pipeline.

Vicki Granado, a spokeswoman for the company, wrote in an email that while “we respect that there are a number of opinions on our country’s need for more infrastructure,” domestic demand for oil, gas and other fossil fuel-based products “is only increasing, not decreasing.”
Trans-Pecos isn’t the only pipeline indigenous groups plan to protest this year. Others include the Bayou Bridge Pipeline, which would transport oil to refineries in Louisiana and cut across the Atchafalaya Basin, the country’s largest swamp and a natural heritage area; and the Sabal Trail Pipeline, which would carry natural gas from Alabama to central Florida. Environmentalists say the Sabal Trail Pipeline could damage the Floridan aquifer system, which provides drinking water to millions of people in the region. Protests over the Sabal Trail Pipeline have already led to dozens of arrests.

The march on Friday was about more than just pipelines, however.

Krissy White, 22, and Steven Thompson-Oakes, 26 — members of the Mohawk tribe who came to Friday’s event from Akwesasne, New York — said they opposed the continued contamination of water from old power plants near their reservation. According to NOAA, Alcoa and General Motors plants dumped toxic pollutants into the Grasse and St. Lawrence rivers around Akwesasne over several decades.

Thompson-Oakes said the showdown at Standing Rock encouraged him and White to fight back in their community.

“We’ve got cancer in our reservation in Akwesasne to this day, and our women can’t even breast feed because of the chemicals,” he said. “And so now, we’re just hoping we get the community support, to [say] to the government: This is your mess, you need to clean this up.”

In a speech near the White House on Friday, Standing Rock Sioux Chairman David Archambault II urged protesters to remain active even if they didn’t see immediate results.

“During the last year, people around the world have sacrificed and traveled and stood with us as Standing Rock,” Archambault said. “We face a lot of obstacles and we face a lot of setbacks, but we’re not defeated.”


March 14, 2017

Vatican investment conference explores clean energy 'for our common home'

By Marie Venner
National Catholic Reporter

Vatican City - In late January, I had the opportunity to attend a small conference at the Pontifical Lateran University on Catholic actions, financial and otherwise, to resolve the climate crisis.

The tagline for the Jan. 27 conference — titled “Laudato Si’ & Catholic Investing: Clean Energy for our Common Home” — came by way of the October 2015 statement issued by the heads of
Catholic continental bishops’ conferences ahead of the COP 21 international climate change summit in Paris: “Put an end to the fossil fuel era, phasing out fossil fuel emissions and providing affordable, reliable and safe renewable energy access for all.”

Among the leaders who spoke were Cardinal Peter Turkson, head of the Vatican’s new dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development, and Christina Figueres, the former executive secretary for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, along with:

- Mark Campanale, founder of the Carbon Tracker Initiative;
- Franciscan Sr. Sheila Kinsey, executive co-secretary for justice, peace and integrity of creation commission of the International Union of Superiors General;
- Lutheran Rev. Henrik Grape of Sweden from the World Council of Churches;
- Papua New Guinea Cardinal John Ribat, president of the Federation of Catholic Bishops’ Conferences of Oceania.

The experience of attending as a participant left me feeling surprised to see how far we have come in a few years, in our understanding and willingness to speak to the grave urgency of the climate crisis. Figueres was definitive on the need to ween the world off fossil fuels in the next few years. Though not often seen first as a Catholic, her call to metanoia was the sharpest and clearest of any of the speakers.

“This is a moral responsibility that we all share,” she said. “That moral responsibility, how are we going to ensure that it is achieved before it is too late for the most vulnerable? We need to align our moral compass … we need to be clear that fossil fuels kill.”

Other speakers were also compelling with their words.

Cardinal Ribat said those on Pacific islands are facing rising seas on all sides. They are helpless in the face of this challenge, so even while they switch to renewable energy sources in their own lands, this effort must be taken up by us all, without delay, to protect all life.

Some of us at the meeting spoke about what it would take to bring clean renewable energy to those still without electricity and truly take responsibility for our brothers and sisters.

The discussion reminded me of something Veerabhadran Ramanathan, a climate scientist at the University of California-San Diego and member of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, said during a Global Catholic Climate Movement webinar last summer marking the Laudato Si’ one-year anniversary. Ramanathan argued that if the top 1 billion people in the world each paid $150, those funds would cover the electricity needs of those who lack it (1 to 1.2 billion) or have intermittent energy (about 800 million).

Closer to home, one idea we came up with was advocating our local energy systems to quickly shift toward renewables sources. That level of engagement can often offer more impact than contacting state or federal representatives. A friend of mine who’s worked in this area said that just 15 minutes a week can make a real difference. I’ve contemplated making this a Lenten practice.
The work of Campanale and the Carbon Tracker Initiative has been critical in comprehending the situation. In his presentation, he said that while fossil fuel companies are projecting increases in fossil fuel usage in the next two decades, those forecasts don’t align with current energy demand, the increasing role of renewables and looming changes in energy. Studies show that to keep global warming below 2 degrees Celsius, only a third of existing fossil fuel reserves can be burned — and even less to keep average global temperature rise below 1.5 degrees, which was deemed necessary to protect those people on Pacific islands from losing their homes entirely to rising seas.

Campanale added that fossil fuel companies “need to wind down or be wound down in an orderly fashion,” but that we shouldn’t wait for them to talk about the future.

It became apparent that we need to turn off the spigot to avoid surpassing what our atmosphere and oceans can absorb. Roughly 20 percent of carbon dioxide remains in the atmosphere for 1,000 years, so what we put in the atmosphere now will remain there for generations to come. And every year we wait makes the year-on-year reductions sharper, deeper and more difficult — but it doesn’t have to be that way. The difficulty comes with continuing to delay.

Cardinal Turkson called attention to paragraph 165 of Pope Francis’ encyclical “Laudato Si’, on Care for Our Common Home,” in which the pope stated “We know that technology based on the use of highly polluting fossil fuels – especially coal, but also oil and, to a lesser degree, gas – needs to be progressively replaced without delay.”

The message was clear — it’s a moral issue — and was reinforced recently after German sustainable investment firm Wermuth Asset Management announced it would provide the Vatican a series of studies on how it can shift toward the use of 100-percent renewable energy — and along with it, zero emissions.

Rev. Grape of the Church of Sweden reminded us: “Our action must be driven by our belief that another world is possible … We must have a vision, that is fed and nurtured by faith communities, transforming to a low-carbon society as an earth community, beyond borders.”

He continued: “Justice and equity are part of the spiritual vision that faith communities can bring, along with hope. Hope is a first step in walking the path of transformation. Hope has two beautiful daughters: anger and courage. Courage to start the transformation is so needed.”

Figueres, who recently launched the Mission 2020 project focusing on global development in response to climate change, said that “Laudato Si’ must be put starkly into numbers. We must bend the curve [of fossil fuel emissions and carbon in the atmosphere] by 2020.” She pointed out that "temperatures are on a rapid upward curve,” with average global temperatures now having broken the roof on records the past three years.

Figueres focused her remarks through the church’s and Francis’ mission to assist refugees. The number of refugees and displaced people eclipsed 60 million for the first time in 2015, the highest point since the agency began record-keeping. Figueres estimated as many as 100 million to 300 million people displaced in some way if the world doesn’t address climate change.
Further, she said, we’ll be “condemning the 1 billion still in extreme poverty to perpetual, extreme poverty. The impacts of climate change will grow exponentially both in intensity and in frequency, and that requires investing very scarce resources into rebuilding very basic, scarce infrastructure that then won’t get to devote that to health, education and well-being.” By directing investments away from fossil fuels and toward renewables would also allow those poorest people energy access while also improving health, increasing food security and creating new jobs.

In closing, Figueres said, “We must achieve the bending of emissions — work together, act together, decide together, show that the arc of compassion, the arc of solidarity, the arc of love is not broken. We have to keep our own moral call awake.”

Asked often what keeps her up at night, she said there are seven little pairs of brown eyes, which she understands now represent seven generations in the future. “They are asking, ‘What did you do? What did you decide and what action did you take to prevent disaster?’ We must answer: ‘We collectively did not what we thought was possible but what was necessary.’”

I couldn’t agree more.

[Marie Venner is chair of the National Academies’ Transportation Research Board subcommittee on Climate Change, Energy, and Sustainability and former co-chair of the Risk and Resilience Planning and Analysis subcommittee. She is also on the Steering Committee of the Global Catholic Climate Movement.]


March 15, 2017

Have faith in religion’s ability to bridge the political divide

By Robyn Purchia
SF Examiner

Since the George H.W. Bush administration, Mustafa Ali has worked to reduce the violence that pollution and climate change wreak on marginalized, struggling communities. But last week, after 24 years at the Environmental Protection Agency’s Office on Environmental Justice, he resigned. Ali said proposed deep budget cuts to EPA programs would dismantle his office, eliminate key grant programs and harm the people he serves.

“Each new administration has an opportunity to share what their priorities and values are,” Ali told Mother Jones. If the proposed cuts are an indication, the Trump administration and GOP-led Congress don’t value the safety of minority, poor and indigenous neighborhoods.
It feels hypocritical. Republican leaders tout their pro-life values, but want to kill off the Clean Water Rule that keeps children healthy. They call themselves Christians while attacking climate programs that attempt to reduce risks vulnerable populations face from extreme heat, flooding and air pollution. They prioritize pipelines above our water, our history and our livelihoods.

It’s hard to imagine Jesus putting the profits of a few above the needs of many. Why isn’t Ali’s work valued universally? How can environmentalism breach the political divide?

“I think conservation has largely failed to really capture the public imagination and to get underneath politics to something deeper,” said David Kurz, a Christian and Ph.D. student at UC Berkeley, to an audience at the Religion and Ecology Summit last Friday in San Francisco.

Kurz later told me he feels like he lives in two worlds: a world of academia and a world of faith. Some of his environmental friends won’t set foot in church. Some of his Christian friends don’t understand his environmental work. There’s very little overlap in the things they discuss.

“I just rub against these broader, national political gridlock things,” he told me.

Kurz believes rooting environmentalism in Christian traditions can help breach this divide. He described the gospel’s power to transform movements. Christian social leaders, like William Wilberforce and Martin Luther King Jr., invoked this power to abolish the United Kingdom’s participation in the slave trade and promote civil rights in the United States. Linking the environmental movement to Christian tradition might give it wings.

But Christian groups and religious leaders, like Pope Francis, already advocate for climate change policies, clean air and water. Almost two decades ago, Rev. Sally Bingham founded what would become the environmental nonprofit Interfaith Power and Light in San Francisco. Catholics and evangelicals strongly opposed the Dakota Access pipeline. If rooting environmentalism in Christian traditions were the only answer, Ali would still be at the EPA.

Dr. Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, a theological and social ethics professor, presented another idea at the summit. Speaking specifically about climate change, she also proposed reframing public discourse. But instead of tailoring the issue to specific groups, she advocated exposing the brutal realities of social inequality.

“The race and class dimensions are stark,” Moe-Lobeda told the audience. “Caused overwhelmingly by the world’s high-consuming people, climate change is wreaking death and destruction first and foremost on impoverished people who are, disproportionately, people of color.”

Moe-Lobeda urged us all — Trump supporters and liberal activists — to look at the way our consumption, choices and climate mitigation schemes hurt communities. She pointed to the crucial role religion plays in both exposing this truth and “igniting and sustaining hope in the face of unbearable realities that truth telling may reveal.” We need a slap in the face and a soft pillow to cry on.
But the slap doesn’t need to be hard or delivered by someone in the religious community. Simply by walking away, Ali conveyed a broader message underlying both Kurz and Moe-Lobeda’s talks. Environmentalism isn’t only about the science and burdensome regulations many Republicans distrust and hate. It’s also about children, families and neighborhoods.

Religion can certainly help the movement capture a wider audience. But environmentalists should emphasize this simple, unifying message again and again: We want to empower people.

Robyn Purchia is an environmental attorney, environmental blogger and environmental activist who hikes, gardens and tree hugs in her spare time. Check her out at robynpurchia.com.

http://www.sfexaminer.com/faith-religions-ability-bridge-political-divide/

March 16, 2017

New Zealand river granted same legal rights as human being

By Eleanor Ainge Roy
The Guardian

In a world-first a New Zealand river has been granted the same legal rights as a human being.

The local Māori tribe of Whanganui in the North Island has fought for the recognition of their river – the third-largest in New Zealand – as an ancestor for 140 years.

On Wednesday, hundreds of tribal representatives wept with joy when their bid to have their kin awarded legal status as a living entity was passed into law.

“The reason we have taken this approach is because we consider the river an ancestor and always have,” said Gerrard Albert, the lead negotiator for the Whanganui iwi [tribe].

“We have fought to find an approximation in law so that all others can understand that from our perspective treating the river as a living entity is the correct way to approach it, as in indivisible whole, instead of the traditional model for the last 100 years of treating it from a perspective of ownership and management.”

The new status of the river means if someone abused or harmed it the law now sees no differentiation between harming the tribe or harming the river because they are one and the same.

Chris Finlayson, the minister for the treaty of Waitangi negotiations, said the decision brought the longest-running litigation in New Zealand’s history to an end. “Te Awa Tupua will have its own legal identity with all the corresponding rights, duties and liabilities of a legal person,” said Finlayson in a statement.
“The approach of granting legal personality to a river is unique ... it responds to the view of the iwi of the Whanganui river which has long recognised Te Awa Tupua through its traditions, customs and practice.”

Two guardians will be appointed to act on behalf of the Whanganui river, one from the crown and one from the Whanganui iwi.

Albert said all Māori tribes regarded themselves as part of the universe, at one with and equal to the mountains, the rivers and the seas.

The new law now honoured and reflected their worldview, he said, and could set a precedent for other Māori tribes in New Zealand to follow in Whanganui’s footsteps.

“We can trace our genealogy to the origins of the universe,” said Albert. “And therefore rather than us being masters of the natural world, we are part of it. We want to live like that as our starting point. And that is not an anti-development, or anti-economic use of the river but to begin with the view that it is a living being, and then consider its future from that central belief.”

Financial redress of NZ$80m is included in the settlement, as well as an additional NZ$1m contribution towards establishing the legal framework for the river.


March 16, 2017

Tribes March in DC for Water and for Mother Earth

By Ethan Goffman
E – The Environmental Magazine

On February 22, police removed Native American protestors outside the Standing Rock Sioux reservation. The protestors were trying to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline, which crosses sacred tribal ground and threatens to pollute their drinking water. With final approval at the onset of the Donald Trump presidency, the pipeline seemed inevitable.

“A lot of people were sad to see us forcibly removed at gunpoint,” says Kandi Mosset of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara nations. “We wanted to make sure fight didn’t end [so] we said we’ll go to DC,” adds Mosset, a spokeswoman for the Indigenous Environmental Network. Thus was born the Native Nations March on Washington.

The march itself took place on March 10 beneath an eerie snow that turned to water at our feet, like some deity weeping frozen tears. Following a beautiful spring day, this weird weather seemed part of a changing climate.
Beginning at the Army Corps of Engineers, which gave the pipeline’s final go-ahead, the march encompassed a vast column, snaking through the heart of DC. There was much whooping and beating of drums, punctuated by chants of “Water is life,” “Honor treaty rights,” and “You can’t eat oil / keep it in the soil.” Banners of various tribes, of Mother Earth, and proclaiming “I stand with Standing Rock,” punctuated the scene.

The Dakota Access Pipeline is one of a host of issues highlighted by the march, although it has been in the public eye since August 2016. That was the start of an unprecedented gathering to block the pipeline, eventually swelling to over a hundred tribes, as well as supporters including U.S. military veterans. Such a gathering “hadn’t been seen in living memory,” says Dallas Goldtooth, an organizer for the Indigenous Environmental Network.

The Dakota Access Pipeline is essentially complete and could be in operation “as early as next week,” says Mosset. However, she adds that “Standing Rock is still in court.” Therefore, “even if oil is flowing through the pipeline” it will stop if the tribe wins a motion for summary judgment.

The Dakota Access Pipeline has come to represent environmental encroachment on tribal land that has gone on for decades. Goldtooth explains, “Standing Rock is only the tip of spear.” The protests will “elevate issues beyond Standing Rock.”

The overarching issue is tribal sovereignty. Environmental projects that affect tribes often pay only lip service to consultation. The tribal goal is embodied in the slogan “consent, not consultation.” Full tribal participation, as well as environmental review, is needed for every pipeline or coal mine that will affect indigenous territory.

The legacy of exclusion and broken promises stretches through 500 years of European contact with the Americas. Mosset points out that, of over 450 treaties signed between different tribes and the United States, “out of all, not one has been upheld. Right now the U.S. is in violation of its own constitution.” In the case of the Standing Rock Sioux, this applies to a pair of treaties signed at Fort Laramie in 1851 and 1868.

Native nations continue to oppose fracking, drilling, and mining on a slew of fronts, particularly in the west, including the Bakken formation, Choctaw Canyon, and the Powder River Basin. “Native communities are fighting the extrajudicial leasing of federal lands to oil and gas interests,” says Goldtooth.

Climate change is also at the forefront of the united tribes’ consensus. The protests are “about the fossil fuel industry all over the world, the regime that really controls government,” says Mosset.

An array of speeches in front of the White House to conclude the march hammered home respect for the environment and the dangers of corporate greed. “At the beginning of time, the creator called a special and strong people to Turtle Island, the four corners of this nation,” proclaimed Fawn Sharp, President of the Quinault Indian Nation before a cheering, fist-pumping crowd. “They instructed, protect Mother Earth as you would protect your birth mother.”
The speakers extolled a special duty both to one’s ancestors and to future generations, held together by environmental stewardship. “All are bound in the great web of life” said Tulsi Gabbard, representative of Hawaii and of Samoan heritage, heralding “the fight for clean water, the life blood of the planet.”

Gabbard added that “Native American governance . . . was there from the beginning of Western democracy.” Indeed, some historians credit the Iroquois Confederation as the root of U.S. democracy. Gabbard explained that “before beginning deliberations” a tribal council would “express gratitude to cousins, the earth, pools, lakes, medicinal herbs, trees, the great creator.”

The Native Nations March, however, is occurring amid gloom regarding democracy and environmental stewardship. While the Obama administration handed native activists key victories on the Keystone XL and Dakota Access pipelines, the Trump administration has reversed these. The Environmental Protection Agency, under the leadership of Scott Pruitt, is on the verge of disbanding rules protecting against climate change and ensuring clean air and water.

In the face of this, says Goldtooth, it is important to “mobilize the masses to apply political pressure,” including through nonviolent civil disobedience. The Native Nations March is just one part of a long struggle.

The resurgent native coalition is not acting alone. The Women’s March was just a month ago, and April will see the March for Science and the People’s Climate March in protest of Trump policies. “The struggle for women’s rights is directly connected to our struggle to protect Mother Earth,” exclaims Goldtooth. “You have to have native people involved.” Decrying corporate greed, materialism, and environmental exploitation, he emphasizes that “the same ideologies perpetuate violence upon women and upon the Earth.”

https://emagazine.com/native-nations-march/

March 21, 2017

India court gives sacred Ganges and Yamuna rivers human status

BBC News

A court in northern Indian has given the Ganges and Yamuna rivers the status of "living human entities".

The high court in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand said this would help in the "preservation and conservation" of the highly polluted rivers.

It added that the "legal status" ensures that polluting the rivers would now amount to harming a human being.
Both rivers are considered sacred in India and are considered goddesses by the majority Hindu population.

The ruling comes a week after the Whanganui River in New Zealand became the first in the world to be granted the same legal rights as a person.

- NZ river given legal human status
- India's dying mother Ganges
- Indian Ganges floods break records
- India offers holy water by post

The court said in its ruling that Hindus had "deep faith" in the two rivers and they "collectively connect with them".

"The rivers are central to the existence of half of the Indian population and their health and well being. They have provided both physical and spiritual sustenance to all of us from time immemorial," it added.

It went on to add that both rivers had become heavily polluted due to industrialisation and rapid urbanisation.

Two top state officials have been appointed as the "legal guardians" of the rivers and will represent their rights.

Activists say the order is likely to fast track efforts to clean the rivers.


March 21, 2017

Ganges and Yamuna rivers granted same legal rights as human beings

By Michael Safi
The Guardian

The Ganges river, considered sacred by more than 1 billion Indians, has become the first non-human entity in India to be granted the same legal rights as people.

A court in the northern Indian state of Uttarakhand ordered on Monday that the Ganges and its main tributary, the Yamuna, be accorded the status of living human entities.

The decision, which was welcomed by environmentalists, means that polluting or damaging the rivers will be legally equivalent to harming a person.
Ambitious scheme to channel water from regions with a surplus to drought-prone areas could begin in days, but Bangladesh has raised concerns

The judges cited the example of the Whanganui river, revered by the indigenous Māori people, which was declared a living entity with full legal rights by the New Zealand government last week.

Judges Rajeev Sharma and Alok Singh said the Ganges and Yamuna rivers and their tributaries would be “legal and living entities having the status of a legal person with all corresponding rights, duties and liabilities”.

The court in the Himalayan resort town of Nainital appointed three officials to act as legal custodians responsible for conserving and protecting the rivers and their tributaries. It ordered that a management board be established within three months.

After 140 years of negotiation, Māori tribe wins recognition for Whanganui river, meaning it must be treated as a living entity

The case arose after officials complained that the state governments of Uttarakhand and neighbouring Uttar Pradesh were not cooperating with federal government efforts to set up a panel to protect the Ganges.

Himanshu Thakkar, an engineer who coordinates the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People, said the practical implications of the decision were not clear.

“There are already 1.5bn litres of untreated sewage entering the river each day, and 500m litres of industrial waste,” he said.

“All of this will become illegal with immediate effect, but you can’t stop the discharge immediately. So how this decision pans out in terms of practical reality is very unclear.”

Indian courts have been critical of three decades of government efforts to clean up the Ganges, a 2,500km waterway named after the Hindu goddess Ganga. The latest cleanup initiative has set 2018 as its deadline, one that water ministry officials have reportedly conceded is unlikely to be met.

Thakkar said Monday’s decision could be an effort by courts to broaden their scope for intervention in the river’s management. “[The] government has been trying to clean up the river by spending a lot of money, putting in a lot of infrastructure and technology, but they aren’t looking at the governance of the river,” he said.

He gave the example of the Yamuna, which is monitored by 22 sewage treatment plants in Delhi. “But none of them are functioning according to their design in terms of quantity and quality, and we don’t know the reason,” he said.
“You need a simple management system for each of the plants and give independent people the mandate to inspect them, question the officials and have them write daily and quarterly reports so that lessons are actually learned.”

Environmental activists say many rivers in India have become dirtier as the economy has developed, with city sewage, farming pesticides and industrial effluents freely flowing into waterways despite laws against polluting.

The Yamuna is the main tributary of the Ganges that officials say is tainted with sewage and industrial pollution. In some places, the river has stagnated to the point that it no longer supports life. Water from the Yamuna is treated chemically before being supplied to Delhi’s nearly 19 million residents as drinking water.

In New Zealand, the local Māori iwi, or tribe, of Whanganui in the North Island had fought for the recognition of their river – the third largest in New Zealand – as an ancestor for 140 years.

Last Wednesday, hundreds of tribal representatives wept with joy when their attempt to have their kin awarded legal status as a living entity was passed into law.

“We have fought to find an approximation in law so that all others can understand that, from our perspective, treating the river as a living entity is the correct way to approach it, as an indivisible whole, instead of the traditional model for the last 100 years of treating it from a perspective of ownership and management,” said Gerrard Albert, the lead negotiator for the iwi.


March 22, 2017

On World Water Day, African church leaders highlight shortages

By Fredrick Nzwili
Religion News Service

NAIROBI, Kenya (RNS) As she drives her family’s donkeys to a new borehole at the base of the Uuni Hills in eastern Kenya, Eunice Wambua says the water it provides is much cleaner than what she used to get from a dam several miles away.

“It was dirty water and we believed it colored our teeth brown,” she recalled.

Wambua, 17, used to have to skip church services to walk to the dam, where in the dry season, many from her village would scoop the sand on a nearby riverbed to get water because the level had dropped so much.
The borehole, which community leaders said was drilled with help from World Vision, also helped her recover part of her life.

“This water is clean. It’s a blessing,” she said. “Now I have more time for schoolwork and church activities.”

On a continent where people spend long hours trekking and queuing for water that is not always clean, such projects, initiated by church groups and NGOs, improve the livelihoods of women and children.

But they don’t solve the problem of water shortages, and amid drought conditions the aquifers that the boreholes tap are also under threat.

The World Health Organization has designated March 22 as World Water Day. The U.N. agency estimates that there are more than 663 million people “living without a safe water supply close to home, spending countless hours queuing or trekking to distant sources, and coping with the health impacts of using contaminated water.”

This year’s theme is “Why waste water?,” with an emphasis on reducing, treating and reusing wastewater.

The drought in the Sahel — a region that forms a dry belt across northern Africa — has left millions without any water to drink and is being linked to three deaths in recent days in Kenya due to consumption of unsafe water.

“There are no drops to reduce, recycle or reuse,” said professor Jesse Mugambi of the University of Nairobi, who added that many in the region are spending World Water Day “praying for drops of rain to quench their thirst and that of their livestock.”

In Machakos, a county about 40 miles southeast of Nairobi, Anglican Bishop Joseph Mutie Kanuku said people in his diocese walk as many as 10 miles or more to find water.

“The people — many women and children — are suffering serious shortages. The journey they take also slows down development and church work,” he said.

Evangelical pastor Mutua Munyaka of the nearby Kavunyu Africa Inland Church said his church can only do so much.

“We have drilled boreholes, built community dams and surface dams across streams, but still the demand is much higher,” Kanuku said. “The church’s help can go far, but the government must shoulder the bigger responsibility.”

Kanuku blamed climate change for much of the problem and said more trees and sand dams are needed to keep water from flowing out to the Indian Ocean.
He fears that drilling more boreholes — a common practice at the moment — will worsen the water crisis in regions.

“By drilling, we are not adding water to the ground. Within a few years, the water table will sink further,” he said.

(Fredrick Nzwili is an RNS correspondent based in Nairobi)

http://religionnews.com/2017/03/22/on-world-water-day-african-church-leaders-highlight-shortages/

March 23, 2017

A wall in their river: Flooded Ngäbe communities continue to fight dam

By Tracy L. Barnett
Global Sisters Report

**Kiad, Ngäbe-Buglé Comarca, Panama** - "Bulu Bagama is my positive name. Luis Jiménez, my negative one," the Ngäbe elder began, standing on an expanse of cracked mud that covered what for generations was his family patrimony. A tumbledown shell of a house lay in ruins, and a few dead leaves clinging to one remaining tree provided scant shade from the sweltering midday sun.

The words, referring to his indigenous name and the one imposed by the dominant Spanish culture, summed up the feelings of betrayal from a people that has fought bitterly for nearly two decades to stop the Barro Blanco dam, a hydroelectric project that to local communities and environmentalists has become a symbol of everything that's wrong with the current model of development in Panama.

Bulu and his wife, Adelaida González, stood in the mud and recalled that terrible night last August when they awoke to find the waters of their sacred Tabasará River seeping into their home. They scrambled to collect their children and as many of their possessions as possible. Neighbors weren't so lucky; their houses were completely washed downstream. A child narrowly escaped drowning in those harrowing hours.

They had been given no warning, he said, and since negotiations with the government and dam builder were ongoing, the family had thought they were safe. The affected communities of Kiad, Nuevo Palomar, Quebrada de Caña and Quebrada de Plata weren't consulted about the flooding of their lands, they say, which directly affects around 500 people but also has an important impact on the entire Ngäbe-Buglé Comarca, an autonomous territory that is home to more than 150,000 individuals of the Ngäbe and Buglé indigenous groups. The Tabasará River in itself is sacred for them, as is the ceremonial site that is now submerged.
Despite the years of fierce resistance, the dam was built downstream, and last May the reservoir began to fill. Now the residents of the flooded communities are just asking that the water level be brought down to the boundary of their territory, consistent with the law.

Kiad is an important cultural and ceremonial center for the Ngäbe; there along the river lay two sets of ancient petroglyphs that contain the clues to the wisdom of their ancestors. The boulders are now completely submerged, cutting off their connection to their past.

The Honduras-based company Genisa said it was conducting a "test flooding" of an area that, according to its environmental impact statement, was uninhabited. Just another deception, opponents claim, in a long line of them, including carbon-credit certification under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), a program designed under the Kyoto Protocols to allow industrialized countries to "offset" their greenhouse gas emissions by supporting sustainable development projects in less-developed countries.

International human rights and environmental groups have maintained that Barro Blanco was anything but sustainable, and that the history of human rights violations associated with the dam project should make it ineligible. Finally, the Panamanian government withdrew the CDM registration last November — a first for the CDM program.

"The tactics this company used were pretty much what all companies have used — falsifying studies, not doing interviews or doing them far from the affected communities," said Fr. Joe Fitzgerald, a member of the Vincentian community of Soloy who has ministered to the Ngäbe people in the region for 12 years.

"Genisa has been horrible in their whole treatment of the situation."

The project was temporarily suspended in part for noncompliance with the environmental impact assessment, but the suspension was eventually withdrawn and the project continued.

Genisa, contacted by telephone and Twitter, has not responded to requests for an interview.

The flooding was a bitter anticlimax to a battle that has incited thousands across the country to take to the streets, and the government to go to extreme measures to ensure the dam's completion.

Barro Blanco is just one of more than 30 dams that have been built, with dozens more proposed or underway in Panama, and it is far from the largest, at a generating capacity of just 28 kilowatts and an affected territory of fewer than 18 hectares. Severe police repression against the mostly indigenous protesters has drawn fire from the international community, and on March 17 the case was one of several heard by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in Washington, D.C. (See related story.)

"They know it's a minor project," said Osvaldo Jordán, executive director of the Panamanian nonprofit Alianza para Conservación y Desarrollo (Alliance for Conservation and Development), one of the groups that requested the hearing. "If there was a functioning rule of law in this
country, it would have been canceled long ago. However, there is a symbolic element that the government did not want to allow to happen ... which is that a group of people would take a firm position without major resources and make a project like this go down."

A sister’s role

At its peak in 2011, and again in 2012, the battle to stop the dam effectively shut down commerce in the western part of the country, as thousands of Ngäbe protestors and their allies blocked the Pan-American Highway. Mercy Sr. Edia López was among them.

"I came into the area just to ask for a service job as a missionary with the poorest population of the country, without realizing that they were facing a very big problem with land and water," said López, known as "Hermana Tita" throughout Chiriquí province. A native of Chiriquí, she has been working in the comarca since 2010, when she moved from another district near the Costa Rica border. A small, animated woman with an easy laugh and a quick wit, she has witnessed the severe police repression that has occurred. She was moved to tears as she recalled seeing several indigenous activists injured in clashes.

Long before Pope Francis released "Laudato Sí, on Care for Our Common Home," López was focused on land and water issues. "I was always interested in the struggle before the pope's call and had a passion for the matter of caring for the common home, and I became involved in the mining struggle of the indigenous population and the local leaders," she said. "It was a tremendous struggle."

In the beginning, the fights against the mining and against the hydroelectric dams were linked, she said. The movement won a victory with a law to stop international investment in the mining industry in 2011 and with a new law to prohibit mining in the comarca in 2012. But a growing number of hydroelectric dams were still underway, including Barro Blanco, and the fight went on.

"I honestly didn't know what to do, but there we were in the streets, in the protests, and in meetings with the leaders, the coordinators, the grassroots leaders," López said. She found herself helping with logistics, with mediation with government leaders and police — roles that were beyond anything she’d imagined, but it was what needed to be done, and so she did it.

"I was just a witness, a logistical support, a moral support, a spiritual support, a friend of the leaders. I supported in any way I could."

Dead forest

The Jiménez family lost everything they owned in that flood. Bulu's anguish turned to rage as he recounted all that his family has lost, and then related the way the government first denied his people's existence, and then tried to buy them off.

Just upstream, the Miranda family also struggles with the loss of their river and their farmland, and continue what looks to be a losing battle to maintain their homes and way of life.
Göejet Miranda's face was grim as he dipped the paddle into the cloudy, foul-smelling waters of the Barro Blanco dam reservoir through a corridor of death — grand old trees that once shaded a clear, free-flowing river now gray skeletons against a dry blue sky. The trees had provided essential food for a wide variety of fish and freshwater shrimp that were a big source of people's livelihood, said Miranda; most of the fish species have died out since the dam began operating, and the shrimp as well.

He docked the boat and clambered out onto the mud alongside the dead remains of what modern agroforesters would have called a diverse food forest, which the community had cultivated for generations. Once, it had produced a life of abundance — mangos, bananas, papayas, quince, oranges, pineapple, cacao, coffee, yams, beans, corn and much more were their main source of income as well as food. More than 40 types of medicinal herbs that served as a natural pharmacopoeia now lay under a thick layer of mud.

The Miranda family compound is on higher ground than the Jiménez's, so water has not yet reached their homes. At the heart of their land is the cultural and educational center where their father, Manolo Miranda, developed the written form of Ngäbere, the language of the Ngäbe people. The reservoir now cuts off the village of Kiad and the educational center from the rest of the world — what was once less than an hour's walk to the closest town is now two hours.

Miranda's sister Weni Bagama is a leader of the April 10 Movement — the first of two different Ngäbe movements aimed at stopping the dam — and a deputy of the Ngäbe-Buglé General Congress, as is Miranda. She struggles to cope with the loss of their spring-fed river, where they bathed three times a day and washed their clothes and played — now a stinking mosquito breeding ground surrounded by acres of mud. She trudged uphill to their only source of clean water, a trickle from a spring uphill. As of early March, the waters had dropped enough to reveal the devastation of what had been their food forest. Now they were enduring a dry season hotter than any they remember, fearful of a rainy season and a rise in the waters that may spell the end of their lives in Kiad.

At the encampment

López is a frequent visitor to the encampment of the September 22 Movement, which lies along the Panamerican Highway, next to the entrance to the office of Genisa. She arrived just in time for the sunset prayer service and headed down the embankment into a rough-hewed settlement among the sparse trees. Some 30 practitioners of the Mama Tatda religion, practiced by a majority of Ngäbe, gathered under the palm-roofed shelter that serves as the encampment's church. Their haunting voices rose in the falling light as they sang and prayed in their native Ngäbere.

Their leader is Clementina Pérez Jiménez, a fiercely spiritual woman who paints her face before she goes into battle. Besides being a local chief, Clementina is national coordinator of the September 22 spiritual protest movement, named for the date in 1962 when their prophet, a woman named Besiko, had a vision that exhorts them to leave behind the modern materialist lifestyle and to protect the Earth and their cultural traditions.
"The Blessed Virgin said clearly that if the Barro Blanco project is not canceled, there will be disaster in the world," warned Clementina, 43, who was just 15 when she joined the student movement. She was the leader of the encampment in front of the entrance to the dam last May when police sent riot squads to forcibly remove them. She has laminated copies of the newspaper articles dated May 25, 2016, that show a cluster of police surrounding and grabbing her as she lay in front of the machinery, prone in her traditional white nagua dress.

"We have to respect the life of nature, in order to have the peace of God, because if we do not respect the legal norms of the life of God on Earth, then we cannot exist in the world," she told me earnestly. "It is clearly stated, 'If the indigenous peoples are beaten, the water will dry up or it will become blood.' We do not want that to happen with the peoples of America or any other people."

Police repression reached a climax under former President Ricardo Martinelli, 2009-2014, when hundreds of indigenous protesters were injured and several were killed. Current President Juan Carlos Varela sought a softer image and initially promised to cancel the dam, and began 12 months of negotiations with the Ngäbe leaders.

Eventually, however, he switched sides and persuaded the current chief of the comarca, Silvia Carrera, to sign an agreement last August allowing the nearly finished dam to proceed in exchange for certain goods and services for the comarca.

A celebration soured

Llano Tugrí, the capital of the comarca, is a remote, wind-beaten outpost among the peaks of the Cordillera Central, reached in a more-than-two-hour, white-knuckled ride in a pickup with 15 people in the back, sitting on wooden benches.

Among them was the dignified Ngäbe deputy and dam opponent Weni Bagama. The group was heading to the capital to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the comarca. They arrived at midnight and slept a few hours in a rustic shelter. Despite the buffeting winds and cold temperatures, Weni awoke early to bathe in the river, a treasured ritual no longer possible in her own beloved Tabasará. She emerged glowing and resplendent in her bright blue nagua dress, ready to face the day.

She had waited for today to do her interview, in the capital of the comarca on its 20th anniversary, to emphasize her point. The creation of the comarca was gained after years of struggle, giving the Ngäbe people authority over their own lands. Barro Blanco is in clear violation of that law, Weni said, as well as a number of others, national and international, which she enumerated, and its presence threatens the integrity of the comarca.

"The government makes it seem like this is a great thing, without taking into account the human rights that are being violated, without seeing that our homes are being flooded," she told me. "What we want to clarify to the public is that this wall was imposed upon us. When they began this project, it began with the intervention of the police. The public forum was held with police.
When they built the walls, it was with the police. Every step of the process was imposed by the police.”

What the April 10 Movement is asking for now, she said, is that the reservoir levels be lowered to below the limits of the Ngäbe territory. It's not enough to repair the damage or even the river, but it's a solution they can live with.

On a day dedicated to celebration, many present were in no mood to celebrate — partly because of Barro Blanco.

Carrera, the current cacica, or chief, surveyed the crowd from the back, serious and tired-looking under her broad-brimmed white hat. The Ngäbes' first woman cacique, she had been a strong voice at the forefront of the marches and the roadblocks. But something changed last August, when she signed the agreement with Varela there in the capital of Llano Tugrí. She was nearly thrown out of office afterward by her own people, who were furious about the agreement.

She continues to oppose the dam, she told GSR, and any other extractive project in the comarca. She only signed the agreement because the dam was done, and she felt it fell to her to negotiate some benefits for the comarca in exchange for their lost territory and ruined river: jobs for the people, a certain percentage of profits, goods and services. She ended up feeling bitter as her people opposed the agreement, the dam was finished and the comarca ended up with nothing but conflict.

"We learned when the Spaniards came and took our gold for mirrors," she said sadly. "The resources are our Mother Earth and they are ours to care for."

López is among those witnessing the potential of an even greater threat. One of the harshest impacts of the continuous pressure on Ngäbe authorities to open their resource-rich lands has been to intensify the fissures that open among the communities as deals are cut without community support. Ultimately, the interference has affected governability among the Ngäbe, she said.

Evidelio Adames, a biology professor at the University of Panama who grew up with the Ngäbe and has served as an investigator, witness and mediator throughout the conflict, agreed.

"They have their own wisdom, and they have the capacity to prevent such problems, but the government and the corporations are entangling them," he said. He traces the roots of the conflict to 2007, when the government opened bids to companies interested in building a hydroelectric plant on the Tabasará. "That auction was without consultation, and that was the first capital sin," he said. "Now cultural patterns have been affected, a watershed fragmented, and that impacts everything."

Back in Kiad, Manolo Miranda, brother of Weni and Göejet, sat on a hammock in the open-air schoolhouse and gently rocked back and forth, creating his own breeze as he reflected on the irony of a village without electricity being submerged by a hydroelectric dam. Kiad counts on one solar panel to charge its cellphones and computers; they have no need for hydro power.
It's been a tough fight, he said, and it's not over yet. But no matter what happens, he said, the battle against Barro Blanco has won more than it has lost.

He pointed to the success pressuring the Panamanian government to take away the company's capacity to issue carbon credits — thus far, it's the only case in the world where this has happened — and the embarrassing lobbying efforts against the Dutch and German development banks that helped to fund the project.

"We know that this struggle for justice has won. And we know that even if the project ends up operating in the end, it will do so with shame. What we've done, we've done with dignity and fairness.

"The eyes of the world are still on Barro Blanco. It has been an experience not only for the government, and for Panama, but it's been an experience for the corporations, and also for the financial institutions. And the resistance hasn't ended. The banks will see what happened at Barro Blanco and will apply this experience in other examples. This experience is absolutely not just for Panama, it's for the world."

[Tracy L. Barnett is an independent writer, editor and photographer specializing in environmental issues, indigenous rights and sustainable travel.]

http://globalsistersreport.org/news/environment/wall-their-river-flooded-ng%C3%A4be-communities-continue-fight-dam-45661

March 24, 2017

Legal challenges await Keystone XL pipeline after Trump grants permit

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

The Keystone XL transnational pipeline received a long-sought presidential permit Friday as the Trump administration granted a green light to the $8 billion Canadian tar sands oil project. But hurdles still remain before construction can begin — starting with route approval in Nebraska, and promises from opponents to fight the pipeline on the ground and in the courts, specifically the legality of relying on a 2014 environmental review.

The permit allowing construction at the U.S.-Canada border in Montana was issued Friday, March 24, by Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Thomas Shannon Jr. An executive order from President Donald Trump four days after taking office directed the department to conduct an expedited review of the project.

Once completed, Keystone XL would carry up to 830,000 barrels of tar sands oil 1,179 miles from Alberta, Canada, through Montana and South Dakota, to Steele City, Nebraska, where it
would then connect with already constructed Keystone pipelines that would move the oil to Gulf Coast refineries in Texas.

In a statement, Russ Girling, TransCanada president and CEO, said the permit approval was "a significant milestone," and added "We greatly appreciate President Trump's Administration for reviewing and approving this important initiative."

At the White House Friday morning, Trump said the permit approval "is part of a new era of American energy policy," and Keystone is "just the first of many energy and infrastructure projects that my administration will approve," promising additional announcements soon. Under his direction, the Army granted in February a final easement for the Dakota Access Pipeline, which could begin carrying oil within days.

As for Keystone XL, Trump said, "It's going to be an incredible pipeline, greatest technology known to man or woman. And frankly, we're very proud of it." Despite Trump's repeated insistence that Keystone and new pipelines would be built with American steel, the White House confirmed earlier this month that Keystone will not, since it was considered already under construction.

TransCanada has pursued the presidential permit — required since it crosses an international border — since September 2008. Since then, the controversial project had undergone a series of reviews, environmental impact statements and a political gauntlet that led former President Barack Obama to refer to the pipeline as a "campaign cudgel" in rejecting the permit in November 2015.

Patrick Carolan, executive director of Franciscan Action Network, told NCR he was "very disappointed" but not surprised that Trump granted the permit, and took it as further indication that the president doesn't care about climate change or the environment.

"This pipeline is detrimental to the earth and our water and will not create the abundance of jobs it claims … As people of faith, we will not stop fighting for climate justice and access to clean water for all," Franciscan Action Network said in a statement.

Rallies against the decision were expected to take place Friday evening outside the White House in New York City.

Advocates for the pipeline have argued it would create jobs and further American energy security. The latest State Department report estimated the project would create 42,100 temporary construction jobs, but once operational would require just 50 employees, only 35 of which would be permanent positions.

Beyond miniscule long-term jobs prospects, Keystone opponents have said the project will exacerbate climate change, in that tar sands oil emits greater amounts of greenhouse gases than crude oil, and sends a signal of continued fossil fuel reliance at a time when the global energy systems need to shift toward renewable sources.
In addition, they raise concerns about the threats the pipeline poses to indigenous communities along its route, and the effects a spill could have on the Ogallala Aquifer, one of the country's largest underground freshwater deposits that rests beneath eight states.

Dallas Goldtooth of the Indigenous Environmental Network told journalists on a teleconference March 24 that the route comes within 200 yards of the Rosebud Sioux tribal land and crosses water systems for multiple Sioux tribes and 15,000 non-native people in South Dakota.

The pipeline has yet to have a route approved through Nebraska, where a five-member public service commission hold jurisdiction. Jane Kleeb, president of the anti-Keystone Bold Alliance, said she anticipates numerous legal challenges ahead from ranchers and landowners, and that the process could take two to three years to play out.

The Nebraska pathway was among the "significant legal and regulatory barriers" identified by other environmental leaders on the call; another regarded the State Department's reliance on a 2014 environmental impact statement in issuing the permit.

Anthony Swift, director of the Canada project of the National Resources Defense Council, said the 1970 National Environmental Policy Act requires decision-makers to act on the best information available and to give the public opportunity to engage in the process.

"The world has changed dramatically since the January 2014 review was published," he said. The '14 environmental report Swift said didn't factor in oil prices falling below $100 a barrel (currently under $50 a barrel) and couldn't take into account new findings, such as a 2015 report from the National Academy of Sciences that indicated current spill response inadequate for dealing with sludgy tar sands oil.

Michael Brune, executive director of the Sierra Club, said their lawyers are reviewing the State Department report and could challenge it in court within days.

"We will defeat this pipeline in the courts and in the court of public opinion," Brune said during the press call.

A February Quinnipiac survey found 51 percent of American voters opposing a restart of both the Keystone XL and Dakota Access pipelines, with 38 percent supporting them.

When Obama denied the permit in November 2015, he said did so in part because approving the tar sands oil pipeline would "undercut" U.S. leadership on climate change as it headed into the Paris climate negotiations a few weeks later.

As a result of the rejection, TransCanada brought a $15 billion trade lawsuit against the U.S. under the North American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA. (It suspended the suit Feb. 28.) Chloe Schwarbe, the faith economy ecology program director for the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, said that suit is a sign of the "fingerprints of corporate influence" on the permit approval.
"This case is emblematic of the other kinds of cases that we see around the world," she said, where corporations use trade agreements to bypass environmental protections and concerns of local communities to move projects like Keystone forward.

"The Trump Administration is putting corporate profits over the rights of people and the environment on both sides of the U.S.-Canada border," Schwarbe told NCR. Carolan of Franciscan Action Network said he expected Keystone to take a central role in the People's Climate March on Washington, set for April 29, Trump's 100th day in office. The march will be the third environmentally focused rally in two months, with the Native Nations March occurring on March 10, and a scientists' march in D.C. scheduled for Earth Day (April 22).

[Brian Roewe is an NCR staff writer. His email address is broewe@ncronline.org. Follow him on Twitter: @BrianRoewe.]


March 25, 2017

Holy See calls for 'intergenerational solidarity' to deal with climate change

Independent Catholic News

The Holy See has called on the United Nations to promote "responsibility for those who come after us", in the areas of climate change and justice for the poor. Archbishop Bernardito Auza's words came in an address to a high-level discussion at the UN on "Climate Change and the Sustainable Development Agenda".

The Holy See's Apostolic Nuncio and Permanent Observer to the UN cited Pope Francis' Encyclical Laudato Si': "how inseparable the bonds are between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and our own interior peace".

He also repeated the Pope's exhortation not to separate human existence from nature.

"The Holy Father thus urges us to consider that nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it."

Archbishop Auza concluded with a call for "intergenerational solidarity" ... "My Delegation urges generosity, solidarity and selflessness as we implement both the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement, in order not to leave future generations pay the extremely high price of environmental deterioration."

The full text of the address follows:
Mr President, The Holy See wishes to thank you for gathering together the various stakeholders to explore the connections between climate change and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in view of invigorating both the momentum and the will to propose and implement concrete solutions for the benefit of all the people of the world and the "common home" that we share.

Pope Francis reminds us that "the urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development." [1] In the same manner, world leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda that represents the most ambitious universal development agenda ever. The Paris Agreement on Climate Change is similarly ambitious. Together they reflect the reality that global consensus is essential for confronting the deeper problems, which cannot be resolved by unilateral actions on the part of individual countries. As this gathering seeks to pursue these two ambitious plans together, we are reminded that without a commitment to specific, coordinated, quantifiable and meaningful steps forward, these plans will fail to live up to their potential and remain mere rhetoric. As specific solutions are sought, we should also be mindful of "how inseparable the bonds are between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and our own interior peace". [2]

Our concern to take greater care for nature should also arouse in us an empathy with those left behind, those who are affected by environmental degradation, and those who are excluded from economic and political processes. Pope Francis warns that "to seek only a technical remedy to each environmental problem which comes up is to separate what is in reality interconnected and to mask the true and deepest problems of the global system."[3]

The Holy Father thus urges us to consider that nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it. This symbiosis implies that a crisis of the environment necessarily means a crisis for us. We are not faced with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather one complex crisis that is both social and environmental. Thus, "strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded and protecting nature". [4]

The same principle of interconnectedness binds together the three biggest United Nations processes in 2015, namely, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. There are not three separate challenges of financing development needs, agreeing on new development goals and tackling climate change, but one overarching challenge of how to orient our politics, economies, technology, businesses and personal behavior -- indeed, all our efforts -- toward a sustainable, integral and authentic development in harmony with nature. "It cannot be emphasized enough how everything is interconnected." [5]

Mr President, My Delegation welcomes the way in which both the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement acknowledge the central importance of the human person. The 2030 Agenda rightly
begins by noting that "the dignity of the human person is fundamental." In the same vein, Pope Francis has urged that all environmental and development initiatives focus on the innate dignity that we all share in equal measure. This dignity must remain at the center of our debates. In particular, those who are weak and marginalized, those who are poor and ill, the unborn and the elderly alike, the refugees and victims of war and violence, and those disproportionately impacted by greed and indifference must have a special place in the initiatives we pursue. Their sufferings and anxieties, their fears and hopes should not fail to raise an echo in our hearts. The 2030 Agenda's "determin[ation] to end poverty and hunger... and to ensure that all human beings live in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment"[6] should lie at the heart of our efforts.

My Delegation would also like to underline our responsibility for those who come after us. As Pope Francis affirms, "Intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us". [7] We cannot speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity. My Delegation urges generosity, solidarity and selflessness as we implement both the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement, in order not to leave future generations pay the extremely high price of environmental deterioration.

Mr President, The implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement separately and in harmony with each other involves complex technical, economic, social, political, and legal aspects. Goals and targets will be thoroughly evaluated using indicators and all sorts of measures to gauge success or failure. At the end of the day, their positive impact on the human person, particularly on those left behind, will be the true measure of our success.

Thank you, Mr. President.

1 Pope Francis, Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home, n.13 [hereafter "LS"].
2 LS, n.10.
3 LS, n.111.
4 LS, n.139.
5 LS, n.138.
6 The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Preamble.
7 LS, n.159

Source: VIS


March 29, 2017

Father James Martin: Why is climate change a moral issue?

By James Martin, S.J.
America Magazine: The Jesuit Review
President Donald J. Trump has just signed measures rolling back significant parts of President Obama’s moves to protect the environment. Among other things, President Trump wants to withdraw and rewrite the Clean Power Plan, the centerpiece of Mr. Obama’s policies to fight global warming. These may seem like political questions, but they are also moral ones. Pope Francis made that clear in his encyclical “Laudato Si’” in 2015. There he called for a conversion in the way we think about what the pope calls “our common home.”

Let’s consider three reasons why caring for the environment is a moral issue and why policies that fail to protect our planet are not only against Catholic teaching but are also immoral.

1. Creation is a gift from God.

All creation is a holy and precious gift from God, to be reverenced by all men and women. The call to care for our planet extends as far back as the Book of Genesis, when humankind was called to “till and keep” the earth. But we have done too much tilling and not enough keeping.

The theme of loving creation runs through both the Old and the New Testaments. In Jesus Christ, God not only became human but also lived in the natural world. Jesus himself appreciated the natural world, as you can see in the Gospel passages where he praises creation and speaks about the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. Basically, the world is not only holy—it is also not ours, much as we would like it to be. It is God’s.

2. The poor are disproportionately affected by climate change.

The disproportionate effect of environmental change on the poor and on the developing world is well documented. This is not simply because the rich often make economic decisions that don’t take the poor into account but because the poor have fewer financial resources to help them adapt to climate change. They cannot move, protect their houses or switch jobs as easily as the rich can.

The Gospels, Catholic social teaching and the statements of recent popes all critique the exclusion of anyone from the benefits of the earth’s goods. And in decisions regarding the environment and the use of the earth’s common resources, we are called to appreciate of needs and dignity of the poor. Remember, Jesus said that we would be judged on how we treat the poor. That includes how our decisions on climate change affect them.

3. Greed is not good.

In “Laudato Si’” Pope Francis reserves his strongest criticism for the wealthy who ignore the problem of climate change and especially its disproportionate effect on the poor. Why do so many wealthy people turn their backs on the poor? Not only because some view themselves as more “worthy,” but because frequently decision-makers are far removed from the poor, with no real contact with their brothers and sisters.

Selfishness also leads to the evisceration of the notion of the common good. This affects not simply those in the developing world but also those living on the margins in more developed
countries—in the inner cities, for example. But in the Christian worldview, there is no room for selfishness or indifference. You cannot care for creation if your heart lacks compassion for your fellow human beings.

So the next time you speak to your legislator or vote about climate change, think not only about you but about the other person. Think not only about your own city but about the cities, towns and villages in the developing world. Think not only about the wealthy but the poor. In other words, think not only about your wallet but your soul.

James Martin, S.J., is editor at large at America and the author of Jesus: A Pilgrimage.


March 30, 2017

Keystone XL: Environmental and Native Groups Sue to Halt Pipeline

Native American groups as well as environmental advocates are challenging the State Department's approval, based on its about-face on the environmental impact.

By Phil McKenna
Inside Climate News

Several environmental and Native American advocacy groups have filed two separate lawsuits against the State Department over its approval of the Keystone XL pipeline.

The Sierra Club, Northern Plains Resource Council, Bold Alliance, Center for Biological Diversity, Friends of the Earth and the Natural Resources Defense Council filed a federal lawsuit in Montana on Thursday, challenging the State Department's border-crossing permit and related environmental reviews and approvals.

The suit came on the heels of a related suit against the State Department and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service filed by the Indigenous Environmental Network and North Coast Rivers Alliance in the same court on Monday.

The State Department issued a permit for the project, a pipeline that would carry tar sands crude oil from Canada to Nebraska, on March 24. Regulators in Nebraska must still review the proposed route there.

The State Department and TransCanada, the company proposing to build the pipeline, declined to comment.

The suit filed by the environmental groups argues that the State Department relied solely on an outdated and incomplete environmental impact statement completed in January 2014. That
assessment, the groups argue, failed to properly account for the pipeline's threats to the climate, water resources, wildlife and communities along the pipeline route.

"In their haste to issue a cross-border permit requested by TransCanada Keystone Pipeline L.P. (TransCanada), Keystone XL's proponent, Defendants United States Department of State (State Department) and Under Secretary of State Shannon have violated the National Environmental Policy Act and other law and ignored significant new information that bears on the project's threats to the people, environment, and national interests of the United States," the suit states. "They have relied on an arbitrary, stale, and incomplete environmental review completed over three years ago, for a process that ended with the State Department's denial of a crossborder permit."

"The Keystone XL pipeline is nothing more than a dirty and dangerous proposal that's time has passed," the Sierra Club's executive director, Michael Brune, said in a statement. "It was rightfully rejected by the court of public opinion and President Obama, and now it will be rejected in the court system."

The suit filed by the Native American groups also challenges the State Department's environmental impact statement. They argue it fails to adequately justify the project and analyze reasonable alternatives, adverse impacts and mitigation measures. The suit claims the assessment was "irredeemably tainted" because it was prepared by Environmental Management, a company with a "substantial conflict of interest."

"President Trump is breaking established environmental laws and treaties in his efforts to force through the Keystone XL Pipeline, that would bring carbon-intensive, toxic, and corrosive crude oil from the Canadian tar sands, but we are filing suit to fight back," Tom Goldtooth, executive director of the Indigenous Environmental Network said in a statement. "For too long, the U.S. Government has pushed around Indigenous peoples and undervalued our inherent rights, sovereignty, culture, and our responsibilities as guardians of Mother Earth and all life while fueling catastrophic extreme weather and climate change with an addiction to fossil fuels."


April 4, 2017

Religion is important in protecting the environment - interfaith groups

Astro Awani

Kuala Lumpur: Religion plays a significant role in ensuring environmental sustainability and mankind, as God's steward on Earth, has the responsibility to protect it.

This was the message conveyed by interfaith groups dedicated to tackle issues relating to climate change through a religious perspective.
During the dialogue session themed 'Inter-Religious Harmony and Sustainability, representatives from all faiths shared a common ground on the environment.

One of the panelists, Datuk Dr Azizan Baharuddin of Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM) said in Islam the term 'caliphate' or stewardship was a calling by God for all humans to look after this planet He created. "We are all entrusted by God to look after the environment, the world which He created for us.

"Religion can give ethical values on environmental care, which is a responsibility of all despite the differences of faith.

"In Islam, we have a concept relating to the environment called 'green jihad' or an exerted effort to take care of the environment," said Azizan, who is also IKIM director-general, to a crowd of university students during the dialogue held at Tunku Abdul Rahman University College, here today.

Azizan's view was shared by University Malaysia lecturer Dr Esther Sarojini Daniel who said the word stewardship was also mentioned in the Bible as a call for Christians to look after the environment created by God.

Azizan's view was shared by Universiti Malaya lecturer Dr Esther Sarojini Daniel who said the word stewardship was also mentioned in the Bible as a call for Christians to look after the environment created by God.

Representing the Hindu faith, Malaysian Hindu Sangam Cooperative Society director Dr M Bala Thamalingam said there was the 'karma' effect which befell each man based on their good or bad deeds on the environment.

The final panelist, a Buddhist from the International Network of Engage Buddhist Vidyananda K.V Soon said there needs to be an awareness for society to recognise the power of religious institutions to highlight the importance on environmental sustainability.

"The problem is that we are not playing the role on protecting the environment during religious sermons, there is almost zero talk on environmental sustainability," he said.

The dialogue was held to explain the religious perspective each religion shared on sustainable development for future generation and build awareness among organisations and individuals to ensure environmental sustainability.

The event was jointly organised by IKIM and TAR UC and was attended by some 1,000 university students from TAR UC, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and University Kuala Lumpur (UniKL). -- Bernama

April 4, 2017

St. Francis Alliance proclaims protection of all God's creatures

By Sharon Abercrombie  
National Catholic Reporter

Just before Lent, about two dozen people gathered for three days at the San Damiano Spiritual Life Retreat Center in White Post, Virginia, to reflect on their various faith calls to protect all of God's creation — and creatures.

Led by Dominican Fr. Hyacinth Cordell, chaplain of the Washington, D.C., Archdiocese's Care for Creation Committee, the participants reflected on Catholic teaching about animals and examined them from the Dominican and Franciscan traditions, as well as what other Abrahamic traditions have said.

What prompted the retreat, though, was a desire to engage the whole message of Pope Francis' environmental encyclical, "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home," particularly the interconnected relationship among humans and other animals.

The retreat, possibly one of the first devoted to Laudato Si' and animal protection since the encyclical's June 2015 release, was hosted by the St. Francis Alliance: Faithful Voices for Animals, a newly formed nationwide group intent on proclaiming the Catholic Church's teachings on God's creatures.

Formed shortly after the encyclical's debut to honor its critter protection message, the St. Francis Alliance is open to "Catholics and other people of good will committed to seeking a just and compassionate world for all creatures," its website states. Its members hope to foster dialogue, educate and, ultimately, inspire others "to act faithfully in our daily choices to promote the inherent value of animals who share our common home."

Even with the far-reaching impacts already seen in just under two years since Laudato Si' was published, what has largely gone unnoticed has been the papal letter's reflections on the care and protection of animals, said Sarah Spengeman, one of the founders of the St. Francis Alliance.

Francis addresses animals and creatures in more than three dozen of his encyclical's 246 paragraphs, and includes them within the first three lines of the two prayers he offered at its conclusion:

All-powerful God,  
you are present in the whole universe  
and in the smallest of your creatures.  
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. …  
(A prayer for our earth, Laudato Si' no. 246)
Father, we praise you with all your creatures.
They came forth from your all-powerful hand;
they are yours, filled with your presence and your tender love.
Praise be to you!

(A Christian prayer in union with creation, Laudato Si’ no. 246)

Throughout Laudato Si’, Francis points to animals' roles as reflections of God's love, the inherent value they possess, the interconnectedness humans have with all of God's creatures and humankind's misunderstanding of "dominion" as described in the Book of Genesis.

"Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another," Francis wrote, later adding that God giving humans dominion over the Earth doesn't justify "absolute domination over other creatures." At one point, the pope lamented development projects that do not consider the impact on biodiversity, "as if the loss of species or animals and plant groups were of little importance."

"Each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species which we will never know, which our children will never see, because they have been lost forever," Francis said. "The great majority become extinct for reasons related to human activity. Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right."

In Laudato Si’, the pope states, "The ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us. Rather, all creatures are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things."

Members of the St. Francis Alliance surmised theirs may be among the first Catholic animal concerns group to emerge in the U.S. in response to Laudato Si’. Another group, Catholic Action for Animals, similarly formed in the United Kingdom, which is also home to perhaps one of the older Catholic animal-focused organizations — Catholic Concern for Animals, which held its first meeting in November 1929. Since then, that organization, which has as its president Liverpool Archbishop Malcolm McMahon, has since expanded to form branches in more than a dozen countries, including the U.S.

Chris Fegan, chief executive of Catholic Concern for Animals, also attended and presented at the February retreat.

On its website, the St. Francis Alliance offers Catholic resources beyond Laudato Si’ regarding compassionate care for animals. Among them is Franciscan Fr. Jack Wintz's book Will I See My Dog in Heaven? on whether or not animals go to heaven (he says yes). Other recommended reads are books on animal compassion from various faith traditions, and a collection of Pope Benedict XVI's statements on environmental justice.
The alliance has also compiled recipes for people interested in exploring a vegan diet, and updates its blog with the latest regarding animal activism and legislation. It plans to add soon a pocket-sized brochure with all of Francis’ quotes about animals.

The diverse collection of readings make it clear that *Laudato Si’* is far from the first church document to address compassion for animals.

From Genesis through the New Testament, the Bible describes the value of animals and humans' role in tending to them. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in the section on the Seventh Commandment (You shall not steal) states, "Animals are God's creatures. He surrounds them with his providential care. By their mere existence they bless him and give him glory. Thus men owe them kindness."

The writings and spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi led him to be named the patron saint of animals and ecology. More recently, Popes John Paul II and Benedict also emphasized the care of animals, but even with Francis continuing that message, the topic has yet to gain widespread consciousness at the parish level, said Heather Young, another alliance founder.

A lawyer who at one point studied vegetarianism in 19th-century American Christianity while completing graduate work in religious studies at George Washington University, Young didn't find much support within her Catholic tradition as she made the switch herself to a vegetarian and ultimately vegan lifestyle.

About five years ago, she finally connected with a group of Catholics in D.C. who shared her animal beliefs. Among them were Spengeman and three animal protection attorneys for various humane organizations: Akisha Townsend Eaton, Jessica Almy and Elizabeth Holtz. The women are now all part of the St. Francis Alliance team, which formed in the wake of their excitement with the encyclical.

During a 2014 trip to Europe — which included stops in Assisi and Rome, Italy, and in Oxford, England, to meet with local animal protection groups — Eaton and her husband, Jack, both lifelong animal advocates who live in Kentucky, heard rumors that a papal encyclical on the environment would be released within the next year.

Akisha Eaton remembers the two waking up at the crack of dawn on June 18, 2015, the day the encyclical was released, "thinking we'd need to strain our eyes to see one mention of 'animal' buried as a footnote in the middle of a massive document. But what we actually encountered was beyond our wildest expectations."

"We had to do a double and a triple take," she said. "The encyclical not only gave mention to animals, but covered what our relationships with them should look like in tremendous breadth and depth throughout the entire document."

One passage that immediately jumped out at Eaton was where Francis quoted from the catechism: "It is contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly." That the
excerpt was among those tweeted by the pope on the day the encyclical published emphasized its importance, Eaton said.

Unable to stop talking about Laudato Si’, the Eatons created a Facebook page and hosted small group teleconferences on specific themes the encyclical raised about animals. They reached out to Catholic creation care activists in Baltimore and D.C., and slowly grew from a two-person ministry to a larger membership, eventually naming themselves officially over a vegan potluck at a farm animal sanctuary in Maryland.

"Our hope was to continue the conversation on what a Christ-modeled relationship with animals should look like in today's world, using Laudato Si' as our initial conversation-starter," Eaton said.

Since then, the St. Francis Alliance has hosted several international teleconferences, as well as the pre-Lenten retreat in February.

During the retreat, Cordell shared how after watching Al Gore's documentary "An Inconvenient Truth" in 2006 he began delving into the issue of climate change more, from religious and scientific perspectives. The process prompted Cordell in the past year to become totally vegan.

The 39-year-old priest also announced a 10-week summer series titled "Faith and Earth" that he has organized for his parish, St. Dominic Church in Washington.

At other points of the weekend, the 21 participants — Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and Muslim — shared their own stories, spent time studying Scripture and church teachings, and made commitments to act to protect all God's creatures. They also watched the documentary "Peaceable Kingdom: The Journey Home" about farmers examining their long-held beliefs about the morality of meat-eating.

For Akisha Eaton, the link that connects all people, regardless of their background is this: "I believe that when we improve our relationships with God's creation, we improve our relationships with God."

"It falls upon us as people to do our best to protect creation, because God's creation is so abundant and good," added Jack Eaton in an email. "In doing so, I believe that we bring about aspects of our highest good when we show mercy to animals in the same manner that God shows mercy upon us."


April 6, 2017

Climate change is the prophetic call to repentance of our time
In biblical times, repentance manifested itself in external signs such as fasting, public lamentations, loud cries and in the wearing of sackcloth and ashes. These external signs indicated a change of heart, a radical turning about. Repentance signified a turning in direction, not a minor one, but a 180-degree turning away from one's previous path.

When an individual person or an entire civilization is headed full speed toward a precipice, the smartest and holiest thing to do is to repent, to make a total change in direction. What kind of turning is required of humanity in our 21st century?

We are approaching a planetary precipice. We are increasingly aware of climate change, or what is more accurately called catastrophic climate disruption. Forests are disappearing, water tables are falling, soils are eroding, fisheries are collapsing, rivers are running dry, glaciers and ice caps are melting, the ocean is becoming more acidic, plant and animal species are going extinct, and the children of all species are increasingly being born sick.

All of this casts a dark shadow over our lives and has become the overarching issue of our time.

This climate issue is the context within which all of our future efforts to nurture greater justice and more authentic relationships will become increasingly difficult. By mid-century, our children and grandchildren likely will be living on a severely compromised planet. Later in the century, they will possibly be facing more serious and catastrophic disruptions within Earth's web of life.

For some of us, this reality is too fearsome to face and so we move into denial or paralysis. This fear is understandable because we are the first humans ever called to face such a planetary precipice, such an ultimacy. No previous humans could even have imagined it. Even our genetic endowment does not seem that helpful in helping us to act.

Things, however, are not hopeless. Our hope is to be found in a present-day radical 180-degree turning in our consciousness and actions — a repentance. Never before has such a change of heart has been required of us. It is a change that is difficult to fully imagine. It is the prophetic call of our time.

Our turning will require that we reinvent ourselves. For example, we will have to move out of the illusion of human separateness into the truth that we are integral members of Earth's web of life. We will have to experience ourselves not as being on Earth but as being of Earth. We will have to nurture our awareness that we have a role to play in the sacred drama of Earth's evolutionary unfolding.

The challenge before us is soul-sized. Some questions for our Lenten observance, in its final days this year, as individuals and as a human community are: Do we want to repent? Do we have the courage to make that 180-degree turn? What will we humans choose to do?
Our children, grandchildren and their children are awaiting our answer.

[Fr. John Surette is a member of the Jesuit New England province, and for the past 26 years he has been giving retreats on eco-spiritual themes.]


April 8, 2017

Animal Ethics Centre Fellows Exceed One Hundred

EIN Presswire

The appointment of eight new Fellows of the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics takes the total number of Fellows to over one hundred international academics.

“The Centre’s Fellowship is a prestigious academy that pioneers ethical perspectives on animals through academic research, teaching and publication”, said its Director, the Revd Professor Andrew Linzey. “We started ten years ago with just a handful of academics, and now we have exceeded one hundred from ten different countries”.

The Fellowship is international and multidisciplinary, drawing together academics from both the humanities and the sciences, including subjects as diverse as philosophy, theology, law, biology, the social sciences, environmental science, criminology, history, cultural studies, literature, and politics.

“We use a variety of insights from many disciplines to illuminate the moral dimension to our treatment of animals”. Research by Fellows is published in the Journal of Animal Ethics published with the University of Illinois Press, and in the Animal Ethics Book Series by Palgrave Macmillan.

Under the rules, appointment is offered only once to successful individuals within their lifetime, and appointment is by invitation or nomination only. Only a small proportion of those nominated are eventually selected. The process of selection is rigorous, painstaking, and frequently lengthy, and individuals appointed have to have made (or be capable of making) an outstanding contribution to the field.

The eight new Fellows are:

• Professor Boris Bakota (Josip Juraj Strossmayer University in Osijek, Croatia), Fellow
• Sidney Blankenship (Independent Scholar), Associate Fellow
• The Revd Dr Susan Bubbers (Center for Anglican Theology in Orlando, Florida), Fellow
• Professor Alice Crary (New School for Social Research, New York), Fellow

• Professor Keri Cronin (Brock University, Canada), Fellow

• Professor Kumju Hwang (Chung-Ang University, Seoul, Korea), Fellow

• Dr Violette Pouillard (University of Oxford), Associate Fellow

• Steven M. Wise (Nonhuman Rights Project), Fellow

• Also Dr Natalie Thomas (Evans) (University of Guelph and the University of Guelph-Humber, Ontario, Canada) Fellow transfer from Associate Fellow

“All these individuals are pioneering new work in Animal Ethics – helping to press the envelope in terms of new thinking”, said Linzey. “The Centre extends its warmest congratulations to the successful individuals”. Their biographies can be viewed here.

ends

Notes to editors

• The Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics is an independent centre, founded in 2006.

• Its Director, the Revd Professor Andrew Linzey is a member of the Faculty of Theology in the University of Oxford. He is author of Why Suffering Matters (Oxford University Press) and editor of The Global Guide to Animal Protection published by the University of Illinois Press.

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April 10, 2017

Greenhouses open doors for sisters who farm difficult land

By Rose Achiego
Global Sisters Report

In the dry season, Juja is hot, windy and dusty. Vegetation is completely brown, and the sun beats down overhead during the annual drought from December to March. But step inside the Dominican Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart's greenhouses and life is very different. The
fresh smell of vegetables replaces the dust outside. Mouthwatering tomatoes, healthy and red, hang on the branches, while outside, plants wither and die. It is so green and cool in the greenhouses that you quickly forget about the scorching sun.

In Kenya, farmers have traditionally chosen not to farm arid and semiarid lands like those in Juja, a town in the Nairobi metropolitan area, due to the difficulties in raising crops. But religious sisters are proving that, with some initial financial support, the nation can be fed by farming the less popular land.

The key is the greenhouse, where sisters can control a harsh environment to grow high-yield crops on a small footprint of land.

These sisters are using innovative farming methods to combat poverty and to create jobs for struggling youth, by planting vegetables atop land previously considered dry and infertile. The sisters prefer using the greenhouses because they can reduce the sharp variation of outdoor temperatures, control rainfall and keep the plants safe from the devastation of insects, rodents and other animals in the wild.

By using greenhouses, the Dimesse Sisters (Daughters of Mary Immaculate) in a Nairobi suburb and the Dominican Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart in Juja are now able to produce vegetables for both income generation and food consumption in their communities. They share this farming knowledge and skill with the children in their care, the novices who will become future leaders, and the community members surrounding their convents.

Dominica Mwila, a Dominican Missionary Sister of the Sacred Heart, learned farming at her home in Zambia, where her father was a district agricultural officer in the federal government. Upon her 2014 appointment to direct St. Dominic's Technical and Agricultural Training Institute in Juja, less than 20 miles north of Nairobi, she decided to replicate what she had learned from her father.

St. Dominic's, known as TATI, is a project the Dominican sisters started in 2013. They live in a convent in St. Augustine Parish, about 2 miles from the school and greenhouses.

Few people in Juja practice farming, due to poor soil fertility, irregular rainfall patterns and inadequate water. Traditionally, the people around Juja occasionally have grown sisal (a plant that produces long, green leaves with natural fiber used for making rope and twine) because it is drought-resistant, or maize for their own consumption. They are forced to purchase the rest of their vegetables.

The training institute is a school for older students who have difficulty paying for secondary school and younger students who are orphans and refugees. When the sisters first built six greenhouses there, nothing was growing, due to bacteria that caused wilt disease, a common problem in Kenyan greenhouses that is traced to high humidity. When Mwila took over management in 2014, she decided to research what could grow well on their farm and how to improve the soil fertility.
"Nothing was doing well in the greenhouses so we decided to contract some people to bring us [uninfected] red soil and manure from the locality," she said. "After this, we planted tomatoes but before the fruits could mature, they started wilting again due to bacterial infection."

Because the problem was so persistent, Mwila decided to consult with the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, situated a couple miles from St. Dominic's institute. She also engaged other specialists in horticulture, who introduced the sisters to grafted tomatoes that are disease-resistant.

"We were given the seedlings, and we are happy that we can now produce healthy tomatoes in our greenhouses and share the knowledge with the community members by inviting them to our greenhouses to see the farm progress and borrow our ideas, since they had the same soil problem," she said.

By selling milk, eggs and chickens produced on other parts of the institute's farm, Mwila raised $6,480 to buy 54 tons of wilt-free red soil to fill in the six greenhouses. She is hopeful that the pepper and tomato plants will help them recoup their investment in the future.

"Now we are doing selective harvesting, whereby we do not pick all the ripe tomatoes at once," said Mwila.

Generally, commercial farms harvest everything from a greenhouse at the same time to minimize labor costs and maximize profit, but the sisters are not using that tactic. "We want the community members to come and see how the mature tomatoes are and learn from us. We do not want to be selfish," she said.

The soil hasn't been the only challenge, said Mwila. They also suffered from strong winds that ripped off one of the greenhouse roofs, but through a Rotary Club in Germany and a local flower company known as Selecta, the roof was repaired. They had no running water for two and a half years due to scanty rains that could not fill the borehole the institute had dug. Even though today the borehole has water, some of the drip irrigation to the greenhouses and garden is blocked and needs to be replaced, she said.

Three years after Mwila took over at Juja, the sisters now sell to the local community and the supermarkets in the area because they produce more than they can consume. This surplus pays the salaries of the farmworkers and tutors at the training institute. The tomatoes are selling at a dollar per kilogram, and they harvested more than 700 kilograms in January alone. The neighbors happily buy from the sisters because this represents a new market for Juja. Previously, the nearest market was a 2-mile walk away.

The sisters also use the farm produce to feed the 80-100 children coming from a nearby slum who live full-time at the institute's dormitory.

However, Mwila believes that, in order to break even on their investment, the sisters need an additional five greenhouses, at a cost of $2,500 to $3,000 each, to increase vegetable production. They will also need to fill the greenhouses with new soil.
Apart from growing tomatoes and peppers in the greenhouses, the sisters have also planted maize, onions and cabbages. They have 20 dairy cows for milk, more than 4,000 chickens for eggs and meat, and plan to open a fishpond and goat shed soon.

**Growing their way to feed and employ those made poor**

The Dimesse Sisters in Karen, a suburb of Nairobi, are another example of how sisters who began farming for domestic consumption have now gone commercial.

Farm project manager Sr. Eva Atieno said the sisters began the farming project two years ago with dairy farming. Later, they did an extensive market survey, and found that since they are located in the city, the demand for pepper, tomatoes, broccoli and eggplants is high. The Pontifical Missionary Society of the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops gave them a $36,000 grant, and the Dimesse Sisters decided to venture into greenhouse farming.

Atieno's congregation started the farm in order to create job opportunities for the impoverished residents living near the convent. Additionally, they wanted to empower the novices in the congregation so that they may be able to go and evangelize among the poor by providing job opportunities.

"The best knowledge you can give to the poor is to teach them work in order to get food for themselves, and these young sisters will be able to do just that," she said.

Atieno also said that the sisters realized they should put their available land to work, to address issues of food insecurity and malnutrition in the communities around their convent.

At their orphanage in Laikipia, 125 miles from Nairobi, the Dimesse Sisters care for 86 orphans, as young as 1 year old, "infected and affected" by HIV/AIDS and the rejection that goes with it, Atieno said. "They depend on us entirely in terms of food, shelter, medication and education until they become adults. So we saw the great need to have an income-generating activity since the support we get from well-wishers is not enough."

Atieno said the farm also helps orphaned and vulnerable children integrate back into the society after they graduate from secondary school. Because they are equipped with skills and knowledge in farming and other courses, they have a foundation to start their own projects. The income from the greenhouses pays for the young adults to pursue other fields, she added, "because not everyone is interested in farming."

In addition to the center for people with HIV/AIDS, the Dimesse Sisters also run a retreat center, where they host 300-350 guests every week. The center has cut its expenditure on food by 65 percent since they started growing their own vegetables in the greenhouses.

Most of the workers at the Dimesse Sisters' farm come from a nearby slum called Kalinde. The sisters are committed to training them in innovative farming, even though the students cannot pay for the education, said Atieno. The sisters hope the new skills will enable them to support their families, avoid the lure of criminal activity and spread their new knowledge to others. And,
with a new steady income, many of the workers have been able to move away from their shanty houses in the slums, where there is poor sanitation, lack of water and poor lighting.

Atieno said that, by sharing farming knowledge with the local youth, the sisters have helped them to be self-reliant and to replicate this attitude within their communities.

The sisters' main challenge is to find the right people for the right job, because farmers need passion in order to succeed, Atieno said, adding that employing unskilled people from impoverished urban conditions can be difficult in the beginning.

Both the Dimesse Sisters in Nairobi and Dominican Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart in Juja encourage the trainees to take the knowledge and skills they acquire in greenhouse farming and start their own projects. "Self-sustainability is a tough and challenging affair, but venturing into greenhouse farming is one way to ensure we have food and money," said Mwila.

As she gives a tour of the greenhouses, she can't hide her joy as she picks tomatoes and full-grown peppers to show visitors. Though the greenhouses seem small, the vegetables inside take up every available inch. Tomato and pepper plants reach up toward the ceiling, requiring support from extra strings to contain their overwhelming bounty.

Mwila said the farmers, government agricultural workers and experts from Jomo Kenyatta University who witnessed the sisters' frustrations now rejoice with them. "They said, sisters, you have worked miracles from here; this place was absolutely dry like a desert," Mwila recalled.

"It is just incredible to see this because we have seen this place from the beginning — it was dry and there was not even a single tree here," she said. "Even me, I stand in the garden and marvel that it is possible that this place can be productive."

[Rose Achieng is a freelance writer and radio program producer based in Nairobi, Kenya.]


April 11, 2017

Cynthia Moe-Lobeda & Scott Thalacker on Access Utah

By Tom Williams
Utah Public Radio

This interview links climate change to economic and racial injustice, and addresses it all through a theological lens.

Listen to the interview here:

The central tenet of Dr. Moe-Lobeda’s work is that the increasingly pressing situation of Planet Earth poses urgent ethical questions. In her view, the earth crisis cannot be understood apart from the larger human crisis – economic equity, racial justice, social values, and human purpose are bound up with the planet’s survival. With climate change, humankind hovers on a precipice. Dr. Moe-Lobeda argues that a “great work” is now before us: To forge ways of living together that allow Earth’s life-systems to flourish and that diminish the soul-shattering gap between those who have too much and those who have too little. For this – the testing point of human history – all forms of human knowledge have a role to play.

Dr. Moe-Lobeda has lectured or consulted in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and many parts of North America in theology and matters of climate justice, economic justice, environmental racism, economic globalization, moral agency, public church, and eco-feminist theology. She currently holds a joint appointment at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary and the Church Divinity School of the Pacific. Previously, she taught Christian ethics at Seattle University’s School of Theology and Ministry and in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies. She is the author of Healing a Broken World (Fortress Press, 2002) and, most recently, Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation (Fortress Press, 2013).

April 14, 2017

Easter and the environment

Catholic Church Head Archbishop Peter Loy Chong
The Fiji Times

Peace — Shalom! (May you have fullness of life). Peace is the first word uttered by Jesus to his disciples after he rose from the dead. Jesus greets the disciples who were still traumatised by his humiliating and brutal death.

Easter celebrates the most important event of the Christian tradition, namely the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, the writings of the New Testament have no record of Jesus' actual rising from the tomb. Instead it only has accounts of the appearances of Jesus to the disciples. This means that the disciples' knowledge and experience of the Risen Jesus was given to them. In other words revelation is a gift from God. Therefore, to understand what happened on
that original Easter and to reinterpret its meaning for Fiji today we turn to the disciples' experiences of the risen Jesus.

The Easter-experience took place in the context of Jewish peoples' suffering and hope for liberation. Ever since the Babylonian exile around 587BC, the Jews have always looked forward to their liberation when God will send a messiah. One of the earliest records of Easter is found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (1Cor.15:3-5); “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.” The New Testament Easter narratives taken as a whole hold the following structure:

* Jesus revealed God to the disciples,
* The disciples had to overcome a certain doubt or disbelief,
* The Risen Lord charged them with a mission.

Easter began with an experience. Jesus' life, teachings, miracles, suffering and death gave new meaning and purpose to the disciples. They experienced liberation, truth and hope. In other words they came to know Jesus as the Christ, the anointed one, the messiah. In Jesus they found the truth that was worth living and dying for. Easter and Jesus' resurrection is not only about the dead body of Jesus coming back to life, rather it was more about how the spirit and life of Jesus lifted up the lives of believers. Easter charged them with a mission for the whole world. This is the Easter Good News.

What is the Easter mission for Fijian Christians? In this reflection I want to focus on our Easter mission in the context of climate change and caring for our environment or in the word's of Pope Francis I, Our Common Home.

Today the message regarding the vulnerability and destruction of our common home, the earth, has been made clear. Pope Francis' letter addressed to all the peoples of the world, "Laudato Si: Encyclical Letter on Care for our Common Home" states that the earth, our sister, now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her." (Laudato Si no.2) He adds that "The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth." (Laudato Si’nno. 66) Human beings are responsible for the cry of the earth, our sister and mother.

Pope Francis raises important questions that challenge our Easter mission to protect and raise our fallen home and all that live in it.

- "What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?"
- "This question does not have to do with the environment alone and in isolation; the issue cannot be approached piecemeal."
- This leads us to ask ourselves about the meaning of existence and its values as the basis of social life: "What is the purpose of our life in this world? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the earth have of us?"

- "Unless we struggle with these deeper questions I do not believe that our concern for ecology will produce significant results."

Last week I came to know of a quarry operating near Natadradave, Dawasamu that intends to crush all the stones and rocks it can find in the river alongside the village and sell the crushed stones locally and overseas. They have carried out an Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) and hence given a licence to operate a quarry. I am deeply concerned how the extraction of stones from the river will affect the environment in the nearby villages of Natadadrave and Delakado. What impact will it have on the fishes, prawns and other creatures that depend on the river including human beings? What will happen if there is heavy rain and flooding?

The people of Natadradave are not the only victims of some so-called development projects. We already have bauxite mining in Bua. There is mining interest in Wainunu, Bua. A mining company has been carrying intensive mining explorations in Namosi for the last 40 years. Some reliable sources state that their licence for Deep Sea Mining in Fiji’s ocean has been issued. Along with the extractive industries we have to take into account the logging industry and any industry that exploits our natural resources. All these projects carried out in the name of development must be evaluated and questioned in regard to social and ecological justice. How do they develop and protect human beings, creatures and the environment?

Easter brings the message of hope to the Jews and early Christians who have been oppressed for years. Easter message therefore speaks against the destruction of peoples, the environment and the planet. May the Easter services and prayers give us the strength to follow the Risen Lord courageously in his suffering, death and resurrection. Alleluia!


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April 15, 2017

Bishop ask Christians to be guardians of the environment

News Ghana

The Most Reverend Joseph Osei-Bonsu, the immediate past President of the Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference, in his Easter message has asked Ghanaians to take care of God’s creation in view of the many threats to the environment.

He noted that sanitation menace, rapid rate of deforestation, bush fires, the clearing of natural habitats for mining, especially surface mining or “galamsey” were threats that could have socio-economic consequences on the nation if not stopped immediately.
Most Rev. Osei-Bonsu, who is also the Catholic Bishop of Konongo-Mampong Diocese, in a telephone interview with the Ghana News Agency, on Friday, condemned the widespread use of agro-chemicals and harmful weedicides and pesticides.

He said these chemicals would harm the soil, plants, animals, human beings, lakes, underground water and rivers and advised Ghanaians to exercise extreme precaution when using those chemicals.

He also advised Ghanaians to avoid littering the environment with plastic waste like; sachet water bags and non-organic substances since they would have environmental consequences.

Commenting on Easter and the essence of Christ’s death, he asked Christians not to take Christ’s salvation for granted but should work out their own salvation “with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12).

He said Christians’ acceptance of Christ as their saviour must show good works and lead Christ-like lives worthy of the calling.

This, he said, implied that Christians must obey God’s commandments and lead morally upright lives in view of the judgment after death.

He urged Christians to celebrate Easter by reflecting on Christ’s victory over death, instead of engaging in social vices.

“Easter is not for excessive drinking, eating, adultery, fornication and engaging in all sorts of social vices that defeat the purpose of Christ’s death,” he added.

Easter Sunday is a festival and holiday celebrated by millions of Christians and people around the world who honour the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

It is described in the New Testament as having occurred three days after Jesus Christ crucifixion at Calvary.

Easter is Christianity’s most important holiday and has been called a moveable feast because it doesn’t fall on a set date every year, as most holidays do.


April 17, 2017

The mystery at the intersection of science and religion

By Michele Morek
Global Sisters Report
Meditating on the daily liturgical readings sometime during Lent, a daydream about Moses and his staff distracted me. He held it out over the Red Sea and got rid of the water. He hit the rock with it and found water. Wow, a magic wand worthy of a Harry Potter story!

Now, I know that it's probably heresy to refer to what he did as "magic" since God was involved, but remember, this was just a daydream. However, it got me thinking about my own experience of using a different "magic wand" to find water.

If you live in a big city, you may not be familiar with the work of a water dowser. Some folks who want to dig a well in a rural area might hire a dowser, or "water witch," to find the best place to dig.

Dowsing is considered a special talent. The dowser might use a forked branch as a "divining rod," holding it by the two branches. When the rod passes over a place where water is near the surface, the free end of it supposedly is pulled down.

On a summer visit to my uncle's cattle ranch, I was talked into trying out his new "modern, scientifically proven" divining rods: two L-shaped copper rods set into hollow handles that allowed them to swing freely. Now, even at the tender age of 12, I had a healthy skepticism but set out to employ the scientific method to test the rods.

I walked down the road toward the barn, rods sticking straight out in front. As I crossed over a particular spot, the rods swung toward each other and crossed. "I didn't do anything to them," I protested.

I walked back and forth, testing my first observation. Every time, the rods crossed over the same spot — which, I learned later, was right over a water pipe that drained water into a nearby pond from an old buried cistern.

My uncle maintained that it was something about the electricity in my body and the copper and some hypothetical attraction the water generated. I always wondered if it could be a reaction to metal in the pipe.

The U.S. Geological Survey remains skeptical about whether dowsing works, but something observable had happened. My experience remained a mystery. But I was willing to accept the title of Local Dowser/Water Witch, especially since my competitive cousin could not get the rods to work for him.

Many theses and dissertations have been written on the topic of the intersection of magic and/or science and/or religion, so I know my particular daydream does not break new ground.

Leaving magic out of it — magic is basically a way to explain and control unexplainable physical or biological phenomena — the intersection of theology and science holds more promise for rich exploration. Thanks to the writings of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Fr. Thomas Berry, and Global Sisters Report's own contributor Sr. Ilia Delio, we have seen the boundaries between science and religion become more permeable.
Science and religion do not contradict each other. Both science and religion deal with truth, and truth cannot contradict itself. My dowsing rods led me into mystery, and mystery is a good place to start if you are exploring the land that lies in the intersection of science and religion.

[Ursuline Sr. Michele Morek is Global Sisters Report's liaison to U.S. sisters. Her email address is mmorek@ncronline.org.]

http://globalsistersreport.org/blog/gsr-today/spirituality/mystery-intersection-science-and-religion-46061

April 17, 2017

Nichiren Buddhist club advocates for environmentalism, peace and personal revolution

By Parker Shea
State Press

*The Soka Gakkai International-affiliated club seeks to promote individual change through Nichiren Buddhism*

Buddhists for Peace is an on-campus club dedicated to educating people on the tenets of Nichiren Buddhism and advocating for peace and environmentalism.

The club is an affiliate of Soka Gakkai International, or SGI, an organization committed to "Buddhism in Action for Peace," according to its website.

ASU alumnus Siddhanth Paralkar graduated from the School of Sustainability last May and is currently the president of Buddhists for Peace. He has been a practitioner of Nichiren Buddhism through SGI since he was in high school in India, and he said his practice has been an important motivating force in his life. He chose his major for graduate studies: sustainability, based on his own Buddhist beliefs.

"Through reading Buddhist literature that we have, I was able to really find this coherence between Buddhism and sustainability," Paralkar said.

Paralkar said he thinks Nichiren Buddhism's value for society can be found in its ability to revolutionize each individual's life.

"One of the things that we do I wouldn't term as the usual form of activism that you see," he said. "We try to create events where people can conduct dialogues, and that's the main tool that we use in Buddhism. So the main goal of Buddhism is to work towards the happiness of ourselves and others, and the best means is to create platforms of dialogue. Through dialogue, we are able to break stereotypes and the negativity within people."
Paralkar said Nichiren Buddhism is an environmentalist philosophy, but at the same time, it is fundamentally a philosophy for individual change.

In a world in which people are often concerned with sweeping changes to industries and institutions, many don't consider individual change the fastest way to a healthy environment. That is where Paralkar and many other Buddhists think Buddhism can be a powerful force for change.

"In general, the main focus of our practice of Buddhism is human revolution, which is not like any political revolution or coup or any kind of physical revolution," he said. "It's basically a focus on how we can transform our own lives, and there's this concept (in) Buddhism that says 'oneness of life and its environment.' So the moment you create a change in your own life, it reflects in your environment and vice versa."

This idea is not confined to Nichiren Buddhism. Many traditions hold that individual change is the path to a better society and a healthier environment.

For example, the 14th Dalai Lama, who practices Tibetan Buddhism, penned a similar thought: "As far as the individual is concerned, the problems resulting from our neglect of our natural environment are a powerful reminder that we all have a contribution to make. And while one person's actions may not have a significant impact, the combined effect of millions of individuals' actions certainly does."

Nichiren Buddhism does not exclude practitioners from having other religious beliefs. As such, Buddhists for Peace has members of varying religious backgrounds and persuasions.

For example, religious studies sophomore Rachel Sondgeroth is a member of Buddhists for Peace. Coming from a Christian background, she originally found Buddhism through the club. She has not distanced herself from her Christian beliefs, though, saying she works to reconcile them without being untrue to herself or either spiritual philosophy.

"It was a really hard — and it continues to be kind of confusing — journey of just wondering, 'How does this practice fit in with the concept of appreciating and loving a god?'" Sondgeroth said. "It might be too blasphemous, for lack of a better phrase, but at the end of the day, I have a really strong sense that I'm in the right places for the right reasons."

Nikhil Sonawane graduated from ASU with a master's in mechanical engineering in December 2016. He also holds religious beliefs outside of Buddhism, namely Hinduism.

Sonawane said he realized the value in studying with Buddhists for Life when he reconnected with a friend after she started attending the club meetings.

"She started practicing, and I saw her transform over that period of seven to ten months," Sonawane said. "And it really got me interested. How can a person change from within? I decided to (start) going to the meetings."
Buddhists for Peace meets every Monday at 5 p.m. in the Memorial Union on the Tempe campus.


April 18, 2017

Can a renewal of inner space help heal the Earth?

By Ilia Delio
Global Sisters Report

At a recent workshop on "Laudato Si’: On care of our common home," a professor from the engineering department laid out the numbers on global warming, indicating that in the next 10 years the warming trend will dramatically increase. Despite all the information available and the seemingly infinite number of workshops and conferences on the environment, our impending ecological crisis is getting worse instead of better. Fifty years ago, the historian Lynn White claimed that the roots of the ecological crisis are religious in nature. The primacy of spiritual reality over material reality has led to a mood of indifference with regard to the natural world. Because the roots of the problem are religious, he said, the remedy must be religious as well.

What does he mean by the "religious roots" of the environmental crisis? For White, it meant that Christianity, by emphasizing spiritual reality over material, has rendered us other-worldly and somewhat indifferent about creation. With all but humans excluded from grace, Christians are decidedly anthropocentric. Surprisingly, he named St. Francis of Assisi the patron saint of ecology. Francis was a materialist who rejected the intellectual emphasis of his time (Neoplatonism) and focused on concrete reality. He found the otherness of God in the nearness of the leper; the splendor of divinity in the humility of a flower. Francis’ world was charged, as Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote, with the grandeur of God. His world was a spiritual reality at the heart of the physical world, and this reality held a place for his soul to ascend to God.

In her book The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace, science writer Margaret Wertheim offers an insightful discussion on the paradigm shifts of space. She suggests that the medieval Christian world picture had both a physical and spiritual realm. It incorporated a space for the body and a space for the soul. The physical and the spiritual mirrored one another, and the link between the two resided in the human person as the cosmic center. While the Earth was physically at the center of the cosmos, surrounded by the heavens and the firmament of stars, humanity was the center of an invisible spiritual order.

The whole of the universe and everything in it was linked by a great spiritual hierarchy, the Great Chain of Being that descended from God. Humans stood halfway between the ethereal beings of the heavens and the material things of Earth. As material beings with spiritual souls, humans were the linchpin of the whole cosmic system. The human person as the center of the universe meant not an astronomical position, but the center of the spiritual and material orders.
Within this finite physical universe one could imagine room beyond physical space, since the cosmos was governed by the Primum Mobile, the outermost sphere of a series of concentric "celestial spheres" that formed the universe. Beyond the Primum Mobile and literally outside the universe was the Empyrean Heaven of God which was beyond space and time. Both Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure wrote their theological works in light of this cosmology of medieval space, and both insisted on the reality of an immaterial, nonphysical domain.

The rise of modern science brought with it the conquering of space. Between Aristotle and Einstein, a truly revolutionary shift occurred in our conception of space. For Aristotle, space was but a minor and rather unimportant category of reality. By the 17th century, space meant the "whole of reality," leaving no room for any other kind of space to exist. The concept gave rise to a bold new mechanistic philosophy that saw the world not as a great spiritual hierarchy but as a vast machine. Newton made space the formal background of the universe, the absolute frame of all action. Yet Newtonian space possessed no intrinsic qualities of its own; space played a secondary, subservient role — a backdrop for the action of matter.

Modern mastery of the physical world is shown in our scientific understanding of physical space. In the last five centuries, we have mapped the whole of terrestrial space, as continents, ice caps and ocean floors have yielded their secrets to science. Our understanding of physical space now extends beyond our Earth, to the moon and other planets. On the micro level, particle physics has been mapping subatomic space; neuroscientists are now mapping the space of our brains. While we have been mapping and mastering physical space, we have lost sight of any kind of spiritual place in which spirits or souls might reside. It is a modern cosmological fact that the whole of our reality is taken up by physical space, and there is literally no place within this scheme for anything like spirit or soul to rise above the physical world.

Wertheim sees the conquering of space by modern science and the eviction of the spirit — both the divine Spirit of God and the transcendent human spirit — as the impetus behind the exponential rise of cyberspace. Just as medieval Christians believed in a physical space described by their science (natural philosophy) and a nonphysical space that existed outside the material domain, so too the advent of cyberspace returns us to a dualistic world view. Once again, we have a material realm described by science and an immaterial realm that operates on a different plane of the real. Cyberspace offers the space of infinite possibilities where the human spirit can soar. It is the new space of transcendence, the realm of the new empyrean heavens, now readily accessible by a touch of a button.

Wertheim's thesis is compelling, since the discoveries of modern science have centered on cosmological shifts and new understandings of space. Cyberspace is the new frontier of the spiritual transcendence that eludes the grasp of modern science. It is interesting that White wrote his famous article on "The Historic Roots of our Ecological Crisis in 1967" around the same time Gordon Moore of Intel predicted that computing power would rise exponentially. Indeed, his prediction has come true. Computer technology has changed the landscape of modern culture while the ecological crisis continues to deepen.

The truth is we need a spiritual outlet, a place to transcend ourselves through imagination and creativity. Institutional religions offer old cosmologies of closed space. On the positive side, the
church offers a place for the soul to ascend to God; on the negative side, this space is closed and bounded by the Dionysian hierarchies: the ecclesiastical and celestial hierarchies. The space of the institutional church is a patriarchal space with no room for democracy, mutuality or shared power, all of which can be found in cyberspace. The church portrays heaven as the place of spiritual perfection; computer life sees the space of unlimited possibilities as virtual heaven. Cyberspace is an open "ecclesia" where gender, race, color or creed make no difference whatsoever. One can join a networked community without having to argue or defend gender or patriarchy. In the infinite landscape of cyberspace, we can transcend our prosaic lives defined by gender, race and creed.

Technology has taken over the space of religion, and the trend will not reverse any time soon. We long to transcend ourselves, to strive for the more, to become different persons. Technology is no longer a tool; it is an existential reality. We in the Global North are computer-dependent in just about every facet of our daily lives. We created the tools of technology, but now the tools are creating us. The term "cyborg" symbolizes the new hybrid of human and machine organized by a new configuration of networked information.

Despite the lure of cyber transcendence, our souls are not at rest; we cannot find the peace we long for. Loneliness has increased in our cyberworld; we are more wired together than ever before and yet more lonely. The human brain is literally changing with constant computer use. Studies show that constant computer use is enhancing the narrow left brain of logic and analysis, to the exclusion of the capacious right brain, which is connected to the body and the wider world. The brain is a "use it or lose it" organ. By spending the majority of our waking hours in Googeland, we are becoming more forgetful, impatient and narcissistic; even worse, our capacity to think is diminishing (due to a "thinning out" of the frontal cortices).

Yet the space of cyberspace, like the medieval heavens, is transcendent, alluring and spiritually seductive. We can find or become anything we dream or imagine online. Just as the saints of old imagined and undertook heroic sacrifices for the greater glory of God, we, too, long to become something different — but without sacrifice. The computer circumvents the arduous process of conversion by creating a "wormhole," a bending of space-time that enables ready access to other worlds. Our alternate lives are a mere click away, keeping us tethered to our devices. This cyber soul-space is much more enticing than planet Earth because the infinite possibilities of cyber space keep the flames of human desire enkindled 24/7.

In a sense, Lynn White was correct. Our ecological problems will continue to deepen unless we recognize the heart of the problem is the existential need for spiritual space. Our institutional religions do not provide a breathtaking openness for the human soul to soar. Teilhard de Chardin saw the problem early on. He spoke of Christianity as passive, resigned and consigned to a cosmos that no longer exists. Because spiritual energy is vital to the evolution of life, Teilhard thought that we must reinvent ourselves religiously, and he set about his life's work toward this goal.

We have yet to realize, however, a new synthesis between science and religion, a type of religion that is at home in an unfinished universe. But this is the key to a renewed sustainable Earth. By conquering physical space, science has unwittingly shown our deep, felt need for religion. Our
souls need a place apart from the physical world of everyday stuff, a place to stretch toward the infinite and wonder about things that do not physically exist. How we reconceive religion in a scientific age is the basis of a healing Earth. Pope Francis is right to take the lead in this regard, but his spiritual wisdom is not enough. We need a complete religious revolution — to liberate God from the grip of Greek metaphysics, to liberate divine revelation from the institution of religion; to reimagine a new heaven and a new Earth. The Christian tradition has all that it takes to make this revolution possible. In a sense Jesus initiated a new big bang: "I have come to cast fire on earth and how I wish it were ablaze already" (Luke 12:49).

Computer technology should inspire us to rediscover religion, a technology of the spirit that deepens love, widens compassion, expands forgiveness and radiates beauty; a democracy of the spirit open to healing and wholeness, where neither male nor female, gender or power determine relationships, only love. A new church for a new world.

But the power of newness comes from within. Science has conquered space but it has not conquered the soul. The inner universe is still a vast expanse of infinite love and life. The religious imagination must be set free to realize that all that we seek in the outer life can be found in the inner universe, what the poet Rainer Maria Rilke called the "outer space within" where "through us the birds fly silently … [where] in me grows the tree."

The heart is the space of unlimited love and thus unlimited power because at the center of the heart is the pure glory of God. Etty Hillesum discovered this inner treasure in the midst of war, violence and human destruction. If our souls cannot find a renewed spiritual space on Earth, then we too will face destruction, but this great suffering will be our gift. For in the fires of suffering, love is purified, and only a pure love can open our eyes once more to the gift of life. Then and only then, will we remember the future because memory is not of the past alone. Rather it is our ability to re-connect with our birthright of belonging to the cosmos. Memory is to be membered — to the whole of reality: past, present, and future. Without memory there is no future.

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http://globalsistersreport.org/column/spirituality-environment/can-renewal-inner-space-help-heal-earth-46041

April 18, 2017

Detail University Seeks to Turn Pope Francis' Encyclical Message into a Climate Action Plan

By Liz Harman
University of San Diego News Center
The University of San Diego has unveiled a Climate Action Plan that calls for reducing USD's greenhouse gases on campus by at least 50 percent by the year 2035.

The centerpiece of the University of San Diego's celebration of Earth Month in April is a new Climate Action Plan that calls for reducing the university's greenhouse gases on campus by at least 50 percent by the year 2035.

Inspired by Pope Francis' encyclical entitled “Laudato Si” or "On Care for Our Common Home," the plan calls for reducing electricity and natural gas use by 35 percent and increasing the use of clean, renewable energy by 40 percent by 2035.

"Environmental degradation and its disproportionate impact on the poor and most vulnerable represents one of humanity's urgent challenges, and USD has developed a bold and comprehensive plan to turn the Pope's call for dialogue into action," said USD President James T. Harris III, DEd.

Activities on and off campus include an April 18 faculty panel discussion about climate change and the environment in the Humanities Center, Serra Hall 200, from 4-5:30 p.m.; A look at Conscious and Creative Consumption: Five Years of Fair Trade on April 19, 5-9 p.m. at the USD Electronics Recycling Center lot; the USD Earth Day Fair on Thursday, April 20, from noon to 2 p.m. in the plaza of the Student Life Pavilion; an Outdoor Adventure Service Trip on Saturday, April 22, and participation in the San Diego Earth Fair 2017 at Balboa Park on Sunday, April 23. And, on April 26 from 8-9 p.m., all USD residence halls are being asked to turn their lights off for this hour to support and raise awareness of climate change.

"As a contemporary Catholic university committed to its rich Catholic intellectual and social justice traditions, the University of San Diego prepares students to be enlightened, engaged and ecological citizens," Harris added.

The Climate Action Plan outlines how the university will reduce harmful greenhouse gas emissions in energy, transportation, waste diversion, water and other areas. Efforts to reduce emissions will take place through a variety of ways including reducing energy and water use and alternative energy and transportation options.

"The plan is a living document that will change over time as new opportunities to improve sustainability unfold," said Michael Catanzaro, Director of the Office of Sustainability.

The plan also highlights progress the university already has made including reducing energy use on campus by 20 percent and diverting more than 2.7 million pounds of electronics from the San Diego waste stream since opening an Electronics Recycling Center on campus in 2011. In 2016, the university had its lowest water usage in more than 25 years.

http://www.sandiego.edu/news/detail.php?_focus=59289
April 19, 2017

The religious case for caring about climate change

By Nesima Aberra
Vox

Talk about values, not just data: how this minister wants to inspire people to take action on protecting the environment.

What makes a person decide if they want to take action on climate change? According to a Pew survey, Americans say they are most influenced by education, the media, and personal experiences. One factor that barely plays a role: religious beliefs. Just 6 percent of American adults said their religious views were the most influential factor in deciding whether they think there should be stronger laws on the environment.

Reverend Brooks Berndt wants to change that — he wants to bring religion into the debate over climate change and the environment. As a pastor in Vancouver, Washington, he started a chapter of the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal campaign and worked to transition away from the state’s coal plant.

In his current position as the minister of environmental justice at the United Church of Christ in Cleveland, Ohio, he has led efforts to divest from fossil fuels, support renewable energy, raise awareness of the Flint water crisis, mobilize at Standing Rock, and work on other environmental issues that particularly affect communities of color and working-class families. Brooks and his church are official partners of the People’s Climate March on April 29 in DC.

“Grief over climate change is real,” he said. “Being in it for the long haul is knowing how to wrestle with things like grief. One of the best ways to deal with challenging issues … is to not be alone but to be in a community of support.”

I spoke with Berndt about why religious people should prioritize the climate and how faith can be way to influence people on this issue.

Nesima Aberra

Religious people are less likely to believe in climate change and less likely to mobilize around environmental justice causes. Why do you think that is?

Brooks Berndt

When you talk about the Christian faith in the US, you’re talking about a huge group of people with lots of diversity. A lot of Christians are not going to identify with that. At the same time, I think there is a sense that we need to own up with what’s going on in our own bigger house — that climate denialism is a problem. And there has been a history of Christians not coming down on the right side on the environment with harmful views.
At the same time, when you look at, okay, who’s moved the needle the most on climate opinion? The pope! He moved the needle in the right direction on climate issues. There’s persuadability and openness. Some good segments of people are persuadable if you present things in a moral framework and relates to their faith and values.

One of the sad realities is that climate became this ideologically polarized issue like marriage equality and other issues. As a denomination, we’re not strangers to that. We were the first denomination to come out for marriage equality. We’re used to entering into polarizing issues, trying to take a firm public stance and at the same time realizing in our denomination, there is tremendous diversity on any one issue. That’s also where we have the most to offer and is our greatest strength.

Nesima Aberra

Why is it necessary to have a religious response to climate change?

Brooks Berndt

As faith communities, we’re possessors of a rich language about what fundamentally motivates people to address environmental injustices and address the climate. When I look at what motivates activists, often what gets circulated in some venues is science reports.

But what actually motivates people is what I have found are the three great loves. Love of neighbor: You’re aware of the real and present suffering climate or pollution are causing right now, so you’re motivated once you have that awareness. Another is love of creation, concern for how our natural world is being decimated, extinction of animals, the acidification of the ocean and deforestation. The number one motive I’ve come across — although it’s not for everyone — is love of children.

Nesima Aberra

How do you make a case for the environment scripturally?

Brooks Berndt

Early on in the history of faith communities addressing environmental issues, a lot of emphasis was particularly on Genesis — that our role as humans is to be stewards of God’s creation. I wouldn’t detract from that, but I think we’re in a time where there are other scriptures and messages that are more relevant.

The whole Christian faith is basically about a vision of community that is in utter opposition to the Roman Empire. We come from a tradition that was very much against structures of power, structures of military might, and very critical of greed in relation to wealth. So I think we have to relate our environmental challenges to those scriptures.
It also relates to Pope Francis. One of his articulations is if you come from a faith where God
sides with the poor and stands with the poor, then that’s a part of environmental issues today
because it’s poor people being harmed.

**Nesima Aberra**

Have you encountered any resistance from your community for the work that you do or the
positions you take?

**Brooks Berndt**

I’ve had members who would express to me strong opinions that were oppositional or might be
categorized as climate denialism, but they also stayed in the community. With trying to transition
away from [a coal plant in the state of Washington], I had members of my church who had at
some point worked or had family members in that coal plant. I made plans to have a lunch with
one of them and talked about it. It wasn’t that difficult once you sit down and have lunch with
somebody.

Not too many people are for polluting the water or air but there’s a lot to be found in common
ground and for people to be able to connect to an issue in a way that goes beyond the ideological
or things one is fed in the media. When you can connect it to real life, people can get out of those
ideological straightjackets.

**Nesima Aberra**

A lot of climate activists are concerned about the new administration’s approach to the
environment. Looking ahead, are you optimistic or worried about climate change?

**Brooks Berndt**

If you’re a pastor, a lot of what you’re dealing with on a weekly basis is people caught in grief.
Grief over climate change is real and has a significant impact on people. And being in it for the
long haul is knowing how to wrestle with things like grief. One of the best ways to deal with
challenging issues and things like grief is to not be alone but to be in a community of support and
point people to resources around them.

I’m a big fan of the Exodus story. At times we find ourselves with our back against the wall or
the sea, but at some point the waters do part and we’re able to walk through. Being able to have
those stories and connect to what we’re going through right now is powerful. So whether it’s the
Exodus story or the story of crucifixion and resurrection, these have helped us make our way
through life, through the climate, and issue after issue over so many years.

April 21, 2017

Toward a Contemplative Ecology: A Conversation with Douglas Christie and Andrew Zolli

By Garrison Institute

In the past two centuries, human health and wealth have advanced as never before. While inequalities still bedevil us, on the whole, the current generation of human beings are living longer, more abundant, and more prosperous lives than any in our history. The product (and propulsion) of this prosperity has been an explosion in human knowledge and capability, unrivaled since the Enlightenment. We know more, enjoy more, and can do more than our forebears could have imagined just a generation or two ago.

Yet this civilizational triumph has come at a profound cost. For ours is also an age of environmental brutality on a global scale—marked by mass extinction, the overfishing and “plastification” of our oceans, and the ever-more catastrophic consequences of climate change, among much other malevolence. Humanity is now not merely influencing the planet, but altering its basic, life-giving systems—and in the process, imperiling ourselves, and countless other living things.

We tend to measure the perverse progress of these environmental catastrophes in the abstract language of accountancy—in hectares lost to deforestation, or metric tons of carbon dioxide pumped into the atmosphere.

But the ecological crisis also reflects something deeper and more intimate: a spiritual crisis—one of perspective, meaning, solidarity, and practice. And therein, perhaps, lies not only our indictment, but our hope.

Douglas Christie is a Christian theologian, professor at Loyola Marymount University, and the author, most recently, of *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind: Notes for a Contemplative Ecology*. In the book, Christie interweaves concepts from early Christian contemplatives, the American transcendental tradition, and the contemporary ecological crisis. In so doing, he ties together ancient practices and modern concerns, and provides signposts on the contemplative’s journey to a new relationship with both the self and the world. In this Earth Day dialogue, he explores these ideas with Andrew Zolli, the Garrison Institute’s President.

Andrew Zolli: In *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind*, you introduce concepts from the practices of early Christian contemplatives and explore their resonance in a modern world marked by a deepening ecological crisis.

I was struck, throughout, by a kind of dual meaning of the subtitle of the book. A “Contemplative Ecology” might be understood as ecology in the traditional, biological “web of life” sense, as filtered through a contemplative’s perspective. It might also be understood as an “ecology” of inner contemplative practices that draw us toward an ever-more deeply-lived life. There is a kind of metonymic relationship between the two.
With that in mind, let’s start with the first concept you introduce, **penthos**, which you frame as a profound experience of loss and grief.

**Douglas Christie:** *Penthos* is about the gift of tears. We get close to understanding *penthos* in the Christian tradition when we speak of “repentance,” even though that’s one of those words that has a really bad reputation. As soon as you bring up repentance, you start feeling terrible about yourself and everything you’ve ever done. In fact, repentance is a beautiful idea that has to do with practicing a kind of honesty with yourself about the whole of who you are—all of your longings and aspirations for what monks would call “purity of heart,” as well as all the habits and dispositions that have prevented you from opening up to the world.

In the Christian monastic tradition, tears were understood to be a kind of signal or indicator that the heart was breaking open. For the monks, the meaning of these tears was often very ambiguous. There was sadness and regret around the awareness of your complicity in having caused suffering for yourself and others, but there was also something close to joy. The relief of tears signified a dam bursting, an opening up of the soul to stand more honestly in relation to reality.

These kinds of tears are sometimes seen in our contemporary world when people reflect on our relationship with the natural world. Of course, some might disagree and say that we’re simply in denial about the whole situation on a cultural level. But in that case, our inability to mourn and our repression of tears seems like something worth addressing.

**Andrew Zolli:** Indeed, an honest encounter with the climate crisis often brings deep tears, which can move us from impassivity into either action or despair. I’m sure that at least some climate denialism, and much climate apathy, is rooted in an instinctive repression of those tears—an inability to look at facts that seem too painful to process, and too challenging to the status-quo of our self-constructed lives. It’s hardly surprising that a culture of endless distraction and of ecological repudiation emerged at the same time; sometimes it seems to me that in American culture we either recoil from honest tears or drown in false ones.

But, as you’ve suggested, tears can serve a deep spiritual purpose—to demonstrate an understanding of the mirrored brokenness between the heart inside and world outside.

**Douglas Christie:** It’s worth noting that, in the Christian monastic tradition, tears were bound up and connected with practice. For the monks it was a question of, *How might I turn this poignant moment of self-awareness back into my already seriously considered practice?* And the second thing is that these tears were connected to community. In traditional literature, tears often show up during a conversation between an elder and disciple as the result of some kind of probing of a moral or spiritual question that is of great significance to the one who is seeking help.

What do you do with those tears? Well, inevitably, there was a communal response to this question. You turn your attention back to the community with clearer eyes, with a deeper sense of commitment, and a greater sense of openness. I’m not saying that this simple analogy will tell us how to not feel overwhelmed at the crisis we’re facing, but there is a lesson to be learned, I
think, in reflecting on how an opening up of the soul or the heart can lead people back to their existing communities. In many ways, that’s where an opening wants to be realized.

**Andrew Zolli:** In these days of polarized, sorted-out communities, that turning back to community can sometimes seem daunting. It can be hard to know where to engage. But in my own work on community resilience, I often see an analogue of the experience you’re describing. In the wake of a major disaster, the marks of ordinary time and identity are lost, and the experience of radical loss drives some people to a place that is primal and communal. Connections to people and place intensify. The unimportant stuff falls away, and something deeper takes its place. After devastating tornados rampaged through one town, I observed a man rubbing soil on his arms and face, almost practicing a form of communion with the place. Another began replanting a garden even before her house was mucked out. And it doesn’t just occur in disaster-zones: after 9/11, anthropologists working for the National Parks Service found hundreds of makeshift shrines erected in forests and wildernesses throughout the United States.

That all speaks to the critical element of *topos*, which you define as a deep sense of place. Yet I find myself contrasting that idea with our more everyday experience of place in the modern world, which seems increasingly fragmented. Thanks to technology, we often occupy more than one place, space, and community simultaneously: I’m here in my office, on the phone, on social media, sometimes all at once. I can be situated in more than once place—socially, psychologically—from moment to moment. There’s a paradox there: on the one hand, I have more places where I might experience meaning, more places to find community; but I can also more easily be dislocated from the place I’m really “in” at the moment. And this seems closely related to the next term you introduce, *prosochē*, which concerns the the nature of attention.

**Douglas Christie:** Well, it seems clear to me that at least part of what the growth of mindfulness in our culture is about is a longing to find a meaningful response to sense of the unbearable complexity of our lives. In our spiritual traditions—whether Christian, Buddhist, or otherwise—there are historical precedents for both individuals and communities who practice some form of retreat or withdrawal. They remove themselves and they give shape to a form of life that narrows down the range of what people are attending to.

In the monastic world, there is a certain amount of time for silence, a certain amount of time for manual labor, and, when the bell rings, you stop what you’re doing and go recite or chant the psalms or other sacred texts. Even if that monastic model isn’t viable for many of us, I think there’s a reason why people are looking to these traditions for help. They point to the possibility that you can strip away some of the extraneous things that are always calling for your attention and be intentional about paying attention to fewer things with greater awareness and greater heart.

In our culture, there’s always a danger of turning these practices into individualistic activities, but I think practices of attention can lead us back to a place that roots us in one another’s company and allows us to be present with each other in our joys and suffering. It’s a way of being present instead of absent.
Andrew Zolli: That presence is, for me, one of the central promises of a contemplative ecology—that by calming our minds and settling our attention, we can amplify our ability to be fully alive to the beauty, inherent strangeness, and interconnectedness of the world as a living system. By reducing our distractions, we’re able to discern the interrelationships across this pulsing, creative, dynamic whole, and to commune more deeply with the world as it is.

I think this naturally brings us to logos, which is an intrinsic, deep, and creative principle. How does logos relate to this larger discussion about attention and place?

Douglas Christie: In the Christian tradition, it seems that the language of creation is often the standard point of reference for how we might revere and respond to the natural world. The world was created by God and is seen as good, and therefore we have an obligation to respect it and respond to it.

Of course, that’s a beautiful and valuable principle. But I think it’s worth noting that it hardly scratches the surface of how the Christian tradition has always understood the created world, which is that God is pulsing through every living thing. If you take this basic theological idea in Christianity—that everything that exists came into being through the Word of God—then that invites you to really listen to the world itself in a different way. Every living being gives voice to this profound, sacred reality.

If you do this, you’re listening to the voice of the beloved in and through everything. You’re not flattening everything out, as if the cry of the hawk is the same as the sound the wind makes when it rustles through the trees or the sound of a pinecone that hits the earth. No, they’re all manifesting different and distinct tonal qualities. This is religiously important.

Andrew Zolli: This reverence for the symphony of creation sets up the context for love, for eros, which you frame as a healing force. How do you distinguish between that kind of love and other ways people talk about love?

Douglas Christie: There are Christian theologians whose theology is informed by the ancient Greek idea of eros, which, when it’s connected with the understanding of the divine, is the yearning of God for the world. It becomes the source of our own yearning for connection with one another, God, and all of reality.

When eros becomes part of a spiritual practice, it’s the capacity that we have to open ourselves up to places on the edge. It can foster an experience of being drawn into the life of the other. It’s often about surrender, vulnerability, tenderness, and receptivity to the other, who is beckoning to us. We both do and don’t want to let ourselves become this vulnerable, but the language of eros invites us to consider how enlivening and enthralling these exchanges are.

It’s also complicated, of course, as we can see in our ambiguous, often-conflicted responses to the possibility of intimacy in human relationships. Instead of practicing simple openness, too often we project our own anxieties onto the other. We do this out of fear, insecurity, or a kind of uncertainty about whether letting go in love is really possible—or whether we are capable of
such release. In the mystical tradition, this manifests itself as an apprehension about letting go to experience the infinite other.

Can we really open ourselves to the life of the other, without the ego closing off this very possibility? Can we inhabit a place of receptivity? Can we allow the life of the other to flow into us and inform and shape us? If so, then we also begin to develop another way of understanding community and our own sense of belonging.

**Andrew Zolli:** I am reminded of the ecological concept of the *ecotone*, the place where two biomes meet—like a marshland between a river and the riverbank. These can be places of tremendous genetic richness, biodiversity, and flourishing.

Yet there is a hard-edged transactionalism in contemporary society that seems to work against this kind exchange, in which we open ourselves to being deeply influenced by the other. In every respect—in our psyches, institutions, relationships, and use and stewardship of resources—our culture seem to encourage zero-sum thinking by default.

Here in the West, that’s especially true in terms of the climate. Narratives of power, dominance, and a kind of manifest destiny pervade—civilization is seen as a victory over nature, and any other response is framed as radicalism or capitulation. But there are interesting signals appearing from the East. In the last few years, China has put forth a different, aspirational model of development—to become an “ecological civilization,” rooted in Confucian concepts of harmonious environmental, material, social, and spiritual development. Of course, nobody fully knows yet what that means in practice, but it’s an important narrative opening.

I must say that it was a bit jarring when your book moves from *eros* to the following concept of *kenosis*. What is *kenosis* and how does it fit alongside *eros*?

**Douglas Christie:** Yes. Well, the idea of *kenosis* was haunting me the whole time I was writing the book. In the Christian spiritual tradition, it refers to the experience of radical self-emptying and the sense of being emptied out completely. *Kenosis* in the context of this book evokes the sense of emptiness and loss that we sometimes feel in the presence of suffering and death, when we sense that the world is not always benevolently oriented toward us. We know this. At least from our limited perspective, the world doesn’t always seem to have our best interests at heart. When we reflect on this fact, we sometimes experience an emptying out of meaning from our lives and from the world itself. It takes integrity to stand in that condition of uncertainty without making up some meaning where there isn’t one.

For me, the idea of *kenosis* connects deeply with the attitude Pope Francis calls for in *Laudato Si*. As we turn our gaze toward the suffering world, he suggests that we are being called to a deeper, more painful awareness: “Our goal is . . . to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it.” The joy we feel at our deep erotic intimacy with the living world calls forth from us a painful awareness of all that is being lost, and an ethical call to engage in the work of healing.
Andrew Zolli: I’m struck here by the distinction between empathy, *feeling the pain* of others, and compassion, *feeling a motivating, active concern and solidarity* for the pain of others. In the face of the enormity of others’ suffering—and the world’s—there is more pain than we can internalize. In an effort to do so, we run the risk of empathy fatigue and burnout. It’s critical to transform empathy into compassion and compassion into action—to keep it productive. I was listening to an activist the other day, who said her mantra in the current political climate has become to “turn her pain into political capital”—relentlessly refocusing on purposeful action.

That brings us naturally to *telos*, which is about how we come to embrace a purpose which carries us out back into the world. We start to think about how to re-inhabit the world after we’ve reconfigured our attention and come into communion with our place. Can you reflect for a moment on *telos* and purpose?

Douglas Christie: Well, it’s worth acknowledging that many of our spiritual traditions give careful attention to the idea of purposelessness, a letting things be what they are for their own sake. It is an expression of non-attachment that reminds us that we should take care to avoid turning everything into our own play things that only serve our agendas. Also, it reminds us that not everything has to be understood as having utility or purpose, which is another way that we visit our obsessions on the world.

I think at their deepest levels our spiritual traditions invite us to recognize that we have a capacity to experience freedom. That freedom alone can be the source of tremendous healing in the world. And, actually, *telos* challenges us to undo our sense of purpose-driven existence that often confuses what is essential for what is peripheral or secondary. It opens up some part of our own awareness to the gift of existence. With that awareness, we can respond to the world.

Andrew Zolli: I think one of the things that’s interesting about a contemplative ecology in this time of crisis is that there is this balance to strike between detachment and radical engagement. It’s often true that people on the forefront of social action sometimes need to detach. They need to come up for air. They’re swimming very deeply in dark water—on behalf of all of us—but, as you say, there’s something perfectly divine about experiencing purposelessness—the gift of undirected being—before they dive back in.

Douglas Christie: You’re right that there is a sense of urgency to our current situation and contemplative practice can’t be allowed to be a kind of vacation from attending to what’s happening in the world. Even in our practice we have to be fully alive, alert, aware, and responsive to the realities of the world, including suffering and brokenness. But I’m also convinced that there has to be room in our collective reality for stillness, emptiness, and spaces that aren’t filled up. It’s just critical to our well-being. Our capacity to make a meaningful response to the fragmentation and alienation we are experience will depend on it.

Whatever new sense of wholeness we’re groping our way toward, it needs to include contemplation *and* active engagement. The early Ignatian contemplative tradition has a wonderful phrase: *simul in actione contemplivus*, which can be roughly translated as contemplative even while engaging in action. A rich simultaneity in which contemplation and action are understood as profoundly woven together in our lives.
April 22, 2017

These Native American Scholars Marched For Indigenous Science

“There are numerous contemporary indigenous sciences based on a long tradition and history. They need to be validated as such — not as folklore.”

By Nidhi Subbaraman
BuzzFeed

WASHINGTON— From Sydney to San Francisco, indigenous scientists and scholars celebrated traditional knowledge on Saturday, as thousands across the world demonstrated at March For Science events.

Indigenous knowledge and practices are often dismissed as mythology or “quaint stories,” Melissa Nelson, associate professor of American Indian Studies at San Francisco State University, told BuzzFeed News.

“There are numerous contemporary indigenous sciences based on a long tradition and history. They need to be validated as such — not as folklore,” said Nelson, who is Anishinaabe.

With the global March For Science events being held on Saturday, Nelson was part of a group that wrote a declaration arguing that indigenous science, including ancient practices of conservation and healing, could complement dominant “Western science” and be useful at a time when people are looking for ways to tackle problems, such as climate change and issues of sustainability.

More than 1,700 people, including members of more than 40 indigenous groups, and allies, signed the statement.

“It seemed incomplete to me that as we celebrate science, we don’t celebrate the other sciences,” Robin Kimmerer, director of the Center for Native Peoples and the Environment at State University of New York, who is Citizen Potawatomi, told BuzzFeed News.

Kimmerer began drafting the petition and looking for collaborators when she saw the movement to make a public show of support for science gather momentum online.

“People often think about indigenous science as a historical example, as a museum piece,” she said. “It’s a very contemporary problem-solving ability because of the principles it’s based on.”

For example, ecology, biology, and tribal practices are at work restoring salmon and sturgeon in the Columbia River basin. In Arizona, the Tohono O’odham Nation is turning to traditional grains and diets to combat diabetes.
Though the pursuit of “Western science” has sometimes antagonized indigenous groups, the March For Science is an opportunity to collaborate, and raise awareness that these alternate libraries of knowledge exist, Rosalyn LaPier, a visiting professor at Harvard Divinity School who co-wrote the statement, told BuzzFeed News.

Indigenous communities in the US, from Louisiana to Alaska to Montana, are already feeling the effects of climate change and preparing to survive despite it, sometimes tapping into indigenous knowledge system.

“Let us remember that long before Western science came to these shores there were indigenous scientists here — native astronomers, geneticists, botanists, engineers — and we are still here,” Kimmerer said, during a speech at the March For Science event in DC.

“There are a lot of people who say when climate change comes to us we’ll just go,” Kimmerer said. “[But] many indigenous peoples are extremely vulnerable to climate change and are in homelands that they cannot leave.”

https://www.buzzfeed.com/nidhisubbaraman/these-native-american-scholars-marched-for-science

April 22, 2017

Christian Earth Day lessons: worship by protecting creation

By Paul Douglas
The Guardian

*Climate change is a global pro-life issue*

Readers of this column know that I tend to focus on breaking science in the climate and energy areas. Sometimes, I stray into politics and other times, I venture further afield. Today, on Earth Day, I was reflecting on best ways to move real action forward and it is clear to me, and almost everyone in this industry, that building bridges between like-minded groups is key.

Frankly, it isn’t just scientists that are concerned about climate change. Our concerns are shared by business leaders, the insurance industry, defense industries, people who enjoy the outdoors, farmers, and many more. Recently, there has been a movement amongst persons of faith as well. In fact, for some people of faith, taking care of the Earth is a mandate from a higher authority. In this light, and to celebrate a very different voice form my own, the following is a guest post by a well-known meteorologist in the USA, Paul Douglas. It turns out he is also a man of faith as well as a business leader. Thanks Paul.

-John Abraham
Christians just celebrated the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I’m a Christian, husband, father, businessman and scientist; a Penn State meteorologist by training. It’s true that all knowledge is relative; science is never “settled” and one never quite reaches solid bedrock. There’s always a new observation, a new discovery, a radical theory, more testing to do. We look at the universe through a pinhole as God gradually reveals himself to us.

Regardless of how you pray or how you vote, we can all agree that fewer toxic chemicals in our air and water is a good thing. But today, more Americans die prematurely from air pollution than traffic accidents. More than 5 million premature deaths result from dirty air every year, worldwide. Air pollution disproportionately impacts minority and low-income communities across the USA. And statistically, America’s poor are much more likely to live near toxic waste sites.

These numbers betray the ugly truth that the poor pay the steepest price for America’s toxic reliance on fossil fuels. This is not the world Jesus teaches us to create. “He will reply, truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me,” Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 24:45.

The Trump administration’s misguided efforts to roll back protections for public health and the environment puts every one of us at risk, especially those with the fewest resources. Increasingly, America the Beautiful is under siege, as the interests of polluting industries take priority over the safety and welfare of our children.

Science is not a substitute for faith; the two are not mutually exclusive. Science has no answer for the miracle of consciousness, the power of love and the promise of eternal life to come. We are here to worship our Creator and enjoy the fruits of his Creation. We are caretakers of a precious gift. We don’t own anything—everything around us is on loan. “My home is in Heaven. I’m just traveling through this world,” Billy Graham preached.

Science doesn’t have all the answers, but we would be well advised to listen to the 97% of climate scientists who tell us Earth is warming, and the rapid burning of fossil fuels is responsible. Because the symptoms of a warming planet are becoming harder to deny and dismiss.

I just co-authored Caring for Creation: The Evangelical’s Guide to Climate Change and a Healthy Environment with Mitch Hescox, a former coal industry employee and a Methodist Minister. He is now leading the Evangelical Environmental Network, made up of conservatives focused on conserving the very thing that sustains us: a healthy, vibrant planet.

I’m proud of the many Christians who will march on April 29th in the People’s Climate March. Around the world people of faith will speak with one voice about the dangers of climate change, and the opportunities for good, renewable, clean-energy energy jobs. Environmental justice and economic justice go hand in hand. Clean energy is rapidly outpacing fossil fuels in creating jobs—the solar industry already employs twice as many people as coal.
We are called to be stewards, tending what’s left of Eden. “Man has been appointed as a steward for the management of God’s property, and ultimately, he will give account for his stewardship” says Luke 16:2.

How are we doing?

More than 150 million people around the world live within three feet of sea level, so warming, rising seas are quickly becoming more than an inconvenience. Climate change is already making storms, droughts and heat waves more intense, impacting where crops grow and who has access to water. Climate change is emerging as the global human rights struggle of the 21st century.

A rapidly-changing climate affects the health and welfare of our kids, and their kids. Respect for life must extend to future generations of unborn. Climate change is a global pro-life issue.

There’s no time for gloom and doom. We already have solutions that will power sustainable abundance. Dirty fossil fuels will fade as we dial up clean, renewable energy sources. The revolution is here: solar costs have fallen more than 80 percent since 2008, onshore wind is down 40 percent, and grid-scale batteries cost 70 percent less. We can have everything we want and need, with less stress on Earth’s Operating System - less lasting damage to God’s Creation.

What would Jesus do? We can’t know the mind of God, but based on Christ’s own words, actions and ministry he might have two simple questions. “Did you protect my Father’s home? Did you defend his children?”

What will we tell him?

Republican meteorologist Paul Douglas is a serial entrepreneur, co-founder of AerisWeather and Praedictix; currently on the board of EEN, The Evangelical Environmental Network


April 25, 2017

A Guatemalan indigenous land rights activist wins the Goldman Environmental Prize

Rodrigo Tot, born in central Guatemala during the mining boom of the 1960s, spent much of his 59 years in a tenacious battle against the mining industry in the Lake Izabal region.

Al Dia News

A Guatemalan Indian who was born in central Guatemala during the mining boom of the 1960s and has spent much of his 59 years in a tenacious battle against the mining industry in the Lake Izabal region, has been awarded the Goldman Environmental Prize (link is external) for his conviction that the fight to save the Earth is the most important.
Indigenous leader Rodrigo Tot told EFE in an interview that "I feel happy as a leader of my community because I know that through our struggle we will achieve our goal," adding that despite the threats against his family, seemingly a permanent part of his life, he will never be intimidated.

He lost his parents when still a child, so at age 12 he went to live with relatives in Agua Caliente. That small village was his home, the place he grew up to be the leader he is, and in 2002 the Q'eqchi, descendants of the Maya, elected him to be their leader.

From that moment he guided his community to a court decision that set a historic precedent: it ordered the government to issue property titles to the Q'eqchi people and kept the environmentally destructive nickel industry from expanding into their community.

A man of few words but sharp and to the point in his speech, Tot, who never received a formal education and who learned to speak Spanish listening to others, recalled how government officials and executives of Hudbay Minerals, the company that operates the Fenix nickel mine, never spoke with the indigenous community.

They came and got down to business. The Q'eqchi only found out about it when the miners came and went to work. The Indians saw the lands they lived off of threatened and were afraid.

But with the help of the Indigenous Law Resource Center and O'eqchi Ombud, a small humanrights organization, they achieved the seemingly impossible.

The Guatemalan Constitutional Court confirmed the people's right to collective ownership - between 1985-2002 they had paid 32,350 quetzals (some $4,000) for more than 1,300 hectares (3,200 acres) - and ordered the government to replace the "missing" pages in the property registry (they had been torn out) and to issue the corresponding property titles.

Despite the court's decision, the government never enforced that ruling.

And the price paid by Tot was steep. Without lifting his eyes from the ground, he recalled how on Oct. 1, 2012, the eldest of his five sons was slain, leaving behind four little orphans.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) ruled preventive measures against the mining operation in his favor, but they were also ignored. The only thing that kept him going was his close-knit family and certain positive results: "We got a lot of support. You start with you family and from there you start seeing an expansion of positive results."

An ardent believer in the Bible and a preacher for more than 37 years, Tot has no fear of what might happen to him and is perfectly aware that, from one moment to the next, "they'll make me disappear." Even so, he said the struggle must be continued by the next generation.

His attorney, Carlos Antonio POP, was most emphatic in his resentment. The "Russians," he said, are dead set on getting the uranium in the area, and so much money could be involved that
all the rest - the court sentence, the murder of Tot's son and everything else could end up in limbo. **The race for uranium is not even being investigated.**

Meanwhile local water resources are dwindling and the Indians' crops seem almost irrevocably damaged.

But Tot is still a fighter, and the Goldman Environmental Prize (link is external), he said, is an acknowledgment not only of his but also of the community's engagement in "the biggest fight in the world, for the Earth."

The campaign for justice has not come without great personal risk. Previous Goldman prize winners such as Berta Cáceres have been killed in Latin America, which rights groups say is the most dangerous region to be an environmentalist.  


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**April 27, 2017**

Science and faith a natural fit for climate change marchers  

By Elizabeth Eisenstadt Evans  
Global Sisters Report

When you think about women religious, the word "science" may not be the first to spring to mind. After all, faith and science are often portrayed as opposites, allegiance to one suggesting a betrayal of the other.

But for many if not most Catholic sisters, the calculations, experiments and observations that have shaped climate study and other scientific disciplines are facts that bolster their conviction that all life on Earth is interdependent, and that the time to intervene on behalf of a struggling planet is now.

That explains why, in part, women religious, volunteers and other community associates are traveling to Washington, D.C., for the People's Climate March on April 29 or already took part in the March for Science there a week earlier. Many are participating in local marches, too.

"Science helps us understand the world around us," says Sr. Barbara Battista, a member of the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana. "Faith in general can help us understand that there is so much we'll never understand about this journey in life. Science helps us get little glimpses of … the immensity and therefore the potential for life. We are all connected. … What happens to one happens to all of us."

Long before Pope Francis embraced the science behind climate change in his 2015 encyclical "Laudato Si": On care for Our Common Home," Catholic sisters were blazing trails in the hard
Four nuns in the late 19th century worked with astronomers to help map the stars. In 1965, the late Sr. Mary Kenneth Keller, a Sister of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Dubuque, Iowa, is recognized as the first American woman to earn a doctorate in computer science. Sr. Mary Celine Fasenmyer, a Sister of Mercy, was a mathematician famed for her work on hypergeometric functions.

Before a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis mandated a change of calling in 1971, Sr. Margaret Knoeber, a member of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ in Wichita, Kansas, had earned a doctorate in organic chemistry at Notre Dame University, and founded the chemistry department at Sacred Heart College (now Newman University).

"I believe in science and the study of science, the teaching of science, because science is a significant aspect of our lives," says Knoeber, who went on to have a long and fruitful career with the university and as a leader in her own order. "I'm not aware that Catholics I know have any difficulty with science."

Battista, who participated in one of the satellite versions of the March for Science on April 22, says that she has been inspired by an unlikely role model: a man imprisoned by the Catholic Church for his outspoken, persistent defense of the Copernican hypothesis that the Earth circles the sun.

"Galileo has been my hero within the Catholic Church for as long as I can remember. He stood his ground against some pretty short-sighted teachings of the church that ultimately were corrected," says Battista, who helped organize the Wabash, Indiana, version of the science march. "The Catholic Church has yet to recognize the full humanity of women. To me, that's a breakdown of biological science — to me there should be no distinction."

Sr. Joan Baustian, a member of the Adrian Dominican Sisters based in Adrian, Michigan, is part of a group of eight community members planning to attend the 2017 People's Climate March in Washington.

As a child, she says, she grew up on a farm. But for 27 years she lived in Detroit, where part of her work was helping residents create and tend a community garden. Spurred by her concern over proposed severe cuts to the Environmental Protection Agency's budget and other Trump administration proposals, Baustian says that she hopes that the groups gathering in Washington and around the country on April 29 will influence decisions being made by lawmakers.

"The climate was made by God, and we're destroying it," she says. "If you believe what's in the Bible, we were made stewards of this wonderful Earth, of all these resources, and we're poisoning it."

Baustian's order, which has made a commitment to "live simply and sustainably for the sake of the whole Earth community." has a long history of environmental activism that includes alternative investing, interfaith alliances and physical changes to their campus and community life.
These measures include the establishment of a permaculture site on their campus. Using social and ecological principles, permaculture is designed to imitate the relationships found in the natural world.

The focus of the permaculture philosophy is "working with nature instead of against it," says Dominican volunteer program member Holly Sammons. Currently working with the Adrian Dominicans Peace Justice and Care of Creation Office, the 2014 college graduate is part of the group traveling to Washington for the Climate March.

"This is a way for me to add my voice to people calling for positive change to environmental policies and to learn from more experienced activists," says Sammons. She's also impelled to march, she says, by her concern for "climate refugees" — those forced out of their regions by droughts, rising sea levels or temperatures. "It's only going to get worse if we continue down the path we have been going," she says.

Sammons, who is Catholic, says she has been inspired both by the pope's encyclical and by the deliberate ways in which the Dominican Sisters are trying to mitigate their own environmental footprint.

Permaculture specialist Elaine Johnson, a staff member in the Adrian Dominican community, says she wasn't raised in any particular faith community. Describing herself as "having a reverence for life, and being pro-life in all life forms," Johnson says that she hopes to tap into the power of the network of activists descending on Washington April 29. "It is a protest march, but I like to think of it as an action march. You can protest and resist … and come back and do local action."

Kathy Quick, a Sister of Mercy associate, is planning to travel to the D.C. march from her home in Clifton Park, New York, in the company of a sister and two other associates. "I'm trying to be optimistic, that [the march] will bring to the forefront that this is a real issue; it's not going to go away. People are very concerned. We're demanding action," says Quick, a U.S. Air Force veteran, whose professional interest in climate change derives from her past career as a weather forecaster.

In partnership with the Global Catholic Climate Movement, the Sisters of Mercy have been public advocates for an assertive approach to redressing the effects of climate change as part of their approach to the care of the Earth.

The Friday before the climate march, Sr. Maryann Agnes Mueller, Justice and Peace Coordinator for the Felician Sisters of North America, planned to be part of a lobbying group organized by the Global Catholic Climate Movement, though as a Connecticut resident, she says that her senators are both already involved in legislation to cope with the effects of climate change. The next day she planned to march with the Franciscan Action Network.

As a Franciscan, she believes that everything is interconnected, and says, "How we treat the environment is a barrier to peace in the world." Recalling a New York march in 2014 before the U.N. Climate Summit, Mueller says that she felt more hopeful then. "It's just different this time.
There is an urgency. We need to be out in the streets and show up because of the new political climate [and] to make people aware that this is affecting the poor, refugees, everything. We're going backwards.

While several women religious are attending marches because of concern about the global effects of climate change and the impact of national policy decisions, Sr. Kathleen Storms, a School Sister of Notre Dame*, brings the conversation back to local concerns. As a staff member at Our Lady of the Prairie Retreat, the ministry that the Congregation of the Humility of Mary operates in the countryside of east central Iowa, Storms runs the 200-acre farm. At the retreat center, they raise vegetables in a garden and a greenhouse, use a bank of solar panels, and have put almost half of their acreage in a conservation reserve program to take the land out of production, she says.

In the Quad Cities area, where a local march will take place on April 29, one of the chief concerns is water quality and availability, she says. "Much of our water is polluted by runoff from the fields, and the rivers end up in the Mississippi, so water has ended up being one of our main issues," she says. Both the Congregation of the Humility of Mary and her own congregation are passionate about climate care, she says.

Storms, who hopes for a good turnout on Saturday (she and a local Benedictine sister are going to be handing out chocolate spheres covered with a foil image of the Earth), says that science is an ally, backing up their faith with facts.

"I don't see what science is telling us as any different from what our faith is telling us. We need to care for the Earth."

[Elizabeth Eisenstadt Evans is a religion columnist for Lancaster Newspapers, Inc., as well as a freelance writer.]


April 28, 2017

The Minister of Environment and Climate Change recognizes Canadian churches as earth-care partners

Press Release

Ottawa – The Honourable Catherine McKenna will be present at the Green Churches Forum to show her support for Canadian churches of all denominations as spiritual and moral leaders in their efforts to reduce their ecological footprint. In conjunction with the celebrations taking place throughout the National Capital for Canada’s 150th anniversary, the Forum will be held on May 11th at St. Paul University in Ottawa. Anyone interested in taking better care of our planet is
welcome to attend. After offering some words of welcome, Minister McKenna will be on hand to meet and exchange with participants.

Although churchgoers are not the first to spring to mind in caring for the environment, they are actually deeply involved in community gardens, recycling, efficient water and energy conservation, reuse (rather than disposal) of tools, clothing, toys and other items as well as in numerous other varied and often original “green initiatives”. Christians are doubly energized in this quest through their faith that God has entrusted the care (not the domination) of his creation to humanity and we have the responsibility to respect and look after it.

Keynote speaker and the Anglican Church of Canada’s first National Indigenous Bishop, Right Rev. Mark MacDonald, will share his unique insights on caring for creation. The introductory presentation by this spiritual and ecological leader will be followed by workshops on topics related to environmental education and action. During the break for a “green” lunch, it will be possible to visit the kiosks of various ecological organizations. More workshops will occur in the afternoon and an ecumenical celebration will close the day.

This fourth Forum organized by the Green Churches Network follows those held in Montreal (2010), Drummondville (2012) and Quebec City (2015). Started in 2006 in Montreal, the Network currently numbers more than 60 churches of various denominations across the country.

For more information visit http://forum.greenchurches.ca

or contact us at 1-844-490-6464 (toll free).

For more information on this press release, contact:

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May 1, 2017

Indigenous Youth Took Center Stage at People's Climate March

By Cherri Foytlin
AlterNet

Washington D.C.—On Saturday, over 200,000 people marched through the streets of Washington, D.C. in response to the Trump administration’s recent environmental policies and their possible effects upon climate change. That number included hundreds of indigenous youth who felt it was their responsibility to be present and heard.

“I’ve come to the march so I can stand up and show people that the youth have a voice to protect our water and the world we live in,” explained 22-year-old Morgan Brings Plenty of the Cheyenne River Sioux Nation. “We only have one earth. We should make her better, not worse. Our world is showing that she is sick. We should protect her.”

“If we protect the mni (water), it’s a start,” she added.

The youth began the day by gathering with their elders near the reflecting pool, just as the sun began to rise above the Capitol Building. With ceremonial sage burning, attendees began to speak and sing a greeting to the day, while offering prayers of protection for water and earth.

The ceremony, which welcomed the spirits from the four directions, officially opened the People’s Climate March, a massive show of resistance on a day that also marked Trump’s 100th day in office. Within a few hours, the youth would be braving record heat, to take the lead of the 1.5 mile march, which covered eight city blocks and ended near the Washington monument.

As participants made their way along the route, gigantic banners, puppets and signs could be seen above the crowd. “Water is Life,” “Native Nations Rise,” “Defend the Sacred,” and “Respect the Rights of Mother Earth,” were some of the messages.

As the convoy reached the White House, the crowd sang and native drum lines took to the front.

Merlejohn Lone Eagle, from Bridger, South Dakota, was among them. Although he is only 13, Merlejohn is already an experienced pipeline fighter. He said he worked with youth in his community to send videos to President Obama showing their opposition to the Keystone XL pipeline. He was overjoyed in the fall of 2015 when Obama rejected the pipeline.

But he couldn’t celebrate for long.

“We thought we were done until we heard about DAPL,” said Merlejohn. He and his family spent several months going back and forth to Standing Rock and he spent part of last school year going to the Oceti Sakowin Camp School while working with other water protectors to defeat the pipeline.
Then in January, President Trump not only approved the Dakota Access pipeline, but overturned President Obama’s directive, moving forward with the KXL as well.

James Hansen has called the Keystone XL pipeline “a fuse to the largest carbon bomb on the planet,” regarding its role in unleashing the carbon stored in the Canadian tar sands region. He said it would mean “game over” for the human race and the planet.

Meanwhile, DAPL runs under the Missouri River and the KXL will go through the Ogallala Aquifer. Together, they threaten drinking water for millions of people and endanger more than 30 percent of the nation’s irrigation water. Merlejohn said a spill could be devastating. “It’ll kill the water, and people drink that water.”

Merlejohn said he plans to continue to fight the pipelines and to protect the water for future generations.

“When my kids are my age I want the world to be healthy, good and protected,” he said.

Jaime Butler, a 16-year-old from the Navaho reservation in Arizona, knows what it’s like not to have clean drinking water. She said uranium mining has contaminated her community’s water, which has been undrinkable since before she was born.

“I think anything that has to do with saving our environment for our future—and not just for the humans—I think just in general saving the environment is very important,” she said.

Jaime is one of 21 youth plaintiffs from across the country who have filed a lawsuit against the federal government for not doing enough to protect their constitutional rights to “life, liberty, and property,” from the effects of climate change. The young plaintiffs, who range in age from 9 to 20, allege that while U.S. administrations and agencies have known of climate change for more than 50 years, they have done little to curb the effects and protect their families and their futures.

Seventeen-year-old Mani Wanji "Journey" Zephier, of the Yankton Sioux Nation and a plaintiff in the suit, agrees, and has seen first-hand the effects of climate change in his Hawaiian community.

"In Hawaii, I see the impacts of climate change every day,” Journey said. “Our beaches are shrinking with sea level rise, our reefs are dying, half the time our island—which used to be one of the wettest places on Earth—is in a drought, then storms come and we are flooding. Everything is more extreme.”

He said his small town of Kapaa, on the island of Kauai, will be mostly underwater by the end of this century unless the world makes immediate changes.

“I am at the climate march to send a message to our government that our generation is here, we are awake, we know what they did and have been doing to destroy our planet and we are rising in solidarity to stop them. I am also here to send a message to Hawaii and the world, to please, wake up to the truth, science and facts, before it's too late,” said Journey.
Issues such as those affecting Journey were front and center for tribal youth who attended the march, while they also included talking points around tribal sovereignty, water rights and environmental justice.

All of these issues will continue to directly affect indigenous youth as they age, according to a 2008 UN report titled "Climate Change and Indigenous Peoples."

“Indigenous peoples are among the first to face the direct consequences of climate change, owing to their dependence upon, and close relationship with the environment and its resources. Climate change exacerbates the difficulties already faced by vulnerable indigenous communities, including political and economic marginalization, loss of land and resources, human rights violations, discrimination and unemployment,” it reads.

Tom Goldtooth, executive director of the Indigenous Environmental Network, says it is natural that native youth would be at the march and take the lead on these issues to protect the planet.

“As indigenous peoples we feel the pain Mother Earth and Father Sky have to endure due to pollution and rising temperatures. We march to elevate the indigenous voices that have the solutions to climate crisis.”

Ozawa Bineshi Albert, also an IEN board member, agrees. “I think young people bring new ideas and new approaches to the work,” she said. "We have been in this battle for a long time and will likely be in it for a long time. In this case, young people are not 'the future'—they are being affected today and have ideas about how to address it today.

“They have to be at the table when solutions are being discussed because they are the ones who are going to have to hold people accountable to see those solutions manifested. They are our wildest dreams right now.”

“As long as Mother Earth is in danger, the youth of our Nations will continue to rise,” adds Morgan Brings Plenty. “We won’t stop, because we can’t stop.”

Cherri Foytin is the state director for Bold Louisiana, a signer to the Indigenous Women's Treaty to Defend Mother Earth and a mother of six living in South Louisiana. Follow her on Twitter @CherriFoytin1.

http://www.alternet.org/environment/indigenous-youth-took-center-stage-peoples-climate-march

May 1, 2017

Catholics bring Pope Francis’ call to protect creation to climate march

By Dennis Sadowski
National Catholic Reporter
Washington - Carrying banners and signs with quotes from Pope Francis' encyclical "Laudato Si,' hundreds of Catholics joined the People's Climate March to call for moral and prayerful action to protect creation.

On a sweltering day that reinforced the message about the need to respond to climate change — the 91-degree temperature at 3 p.m. April 29 tied a 43-year-old Washington record for the date — many in the Catholic contingent said they felt they had a moral obligation to witness in the streets.

"We march for our grandchildren. Stop global warming," read one sign propped up in the back of St. Dominic Church in Washington, where about 300 people gathered before the march for Mass celebrated by Dominican Fr. Hyacinth Marie Cordell, the parish's parochial vicar.

"The Vatican is solar. What about US?" read another. "We resist, we build, we rise," read a sign from St. Francis and Therese Catholic Worker Community in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Underlying the messages on the signs and banners were people who shared a heartfelt concern to carry out Francis' call in his 2015 encyclical to live responsibly with the planet, remember the needs of others around the world and to reduce consumption and energy usage for the sake of God's creation.

They also wanted to send a message to President Donald Trump that his policies on the environment and energy development do not follow the pontiff's call to protect Earth.

For Manny and Mary Hotchkiss, the march was their second in two weeks. Both scientists, the couple from Portland, Oregon, joined a regional March for Science in New Orleans April 22 as they made their way on a cross-country trip to a meeting of Maryknoll affiliates in Ossining, New York.

After the Mass, Mary Hotchkiss, 72, a chemist, said the couple's involvement was required by their Catholic faith. Manny Hotchkiss, 74, a mechanical engineer, expressed dismay about the president's policies.

"The most important thing I see with this political scene, and it brings a tear to my eye to think about it, is that everything I tried to teach our kids growing up (about science) is fully rejected by the current administration," he said.

The 300 people at the Mass heard Cordell call for an "ecological conversion" during his homily. He said each person must act in any way possible to protect God's creation: reducing energy usage; limiting waste; choosing carpooling or biking and walking more; and buying less.

"We can learn increasingly to act not only with our own good and convenience in mind, but above all to think and choose according to what is best for all, especially for the poor and for future generations," the Dominican said. "This ecological conversion calls us to self-examination, to make an inventory of our lives and habits so that we can learn to be better stewards of our common home and its resources, which are meant for the good of all."
He said such steps require a revolution of the heart, as Francis has called each person to undertake. He described it as a "change toward responsibility and virtue, a transition to thinking about the common good, future generations, the poor, other living beings, God's glory and the environment in all of our decisions instead of thinking only in terms of a short-term, fleeting and superficial good or convenience for ourselves."

Sr. Kathy Sherman, a member of the Congregation of St. Joseph in LaGrange Park, Illinois, was pleased to hear Cordell stress the encyclical's themes.

"I feel like I'm marching for the children, for the future," she told Catholic News Service. "Earth is getting bad for us. If we don't do something there's not going to be anything like we've known for the future generations, and it breaks my heart."

Other members of Sherman's congregation joined a satellite march in Chicago, but she made the trek to Washington on her own because she said she felt it was important to take a message directly to administration officials.

"I think it's so essential that we connect climate degradation with economic and racial justice," Sherman added. "It's just the whole sense of the oneness."

A large banner mounted on a 12-foot bamboo pole carried by Malcolm Byrnes, 57, a member of St. Camillus Parish in Silver Spring, Maryland, was one of several that quoted the pope's encyclical. It read: "We need to reject a magical conception of the market."

"We have to bring things back into focus and see climate change as a human issue involving all of humanity, especially the poor," Byrnes said as he waited for the Mass-goers to begin walking to the assembly point for faith communities near the U.S. Capitol.

Byrnes explained that Francis' words had inspired him to consider his own actions in response to the divisive language the president and members of his administration have used during the first 100 days in office.

"We have to be activist," he said. "We have to continue to put the pressure on and to be active. Doing it as a Catholic is ever more poignant for me."

March organizers said the event had been planned as a follow-up to the September 2014 People's Climate March in New York City before Trump's election in November. The April 29 march was led by indigenous people who already are facing disrupted lives as the climate warms and causes drought and rising ocean levels.

The march kicked off less than 48 hours after the Environmental Protection Agency began to revamp its website, taking down pages devoted to climate science. The agency said in a statement late April 28 that the information was "under review."
Some of the Catholic marchers, a multicultural mix of young and old, families, and clergy, religious and laity, said they never had been involved in such a massive event, but that it was time to put their faith into action.

Rosio Ramirez, 58, a member of St. Jerome Church in New York City, said as she waited for the march to start that she decided to travel to Washington "for our rights."

"This president does not believe in science, so I'm trying to raise my voice for my grandson, his future," said the native of Mexico City.

Along the march route on Pennsylvania Avenue from the Capitol to the White House, Nancy Lorence, a member of St. Francis Xavier Parish in New York City, said personal actions are crucial if people of faith are going to make a difference. She carried a colorful cardboard sunflower on a short stick that read, "Catholics 4 the EPA," one of 45 similar signs that she and others making the trip had made.

"We feel like 'Laudato Si'' calls us to be in the streets, as Pope Francis says, and be active on the social justice issues and climate change," Lorence told CNS.

"I've read enough to really think that this is an emergency," Lorence continued. "It might not affect us directly right now. But I think we are all called to think about the common good. We're all called to think about the least of these, and the people who are the least of these are being affected by climate change."


May 2, 2017

Could making climate change a 'pro-life' issue bring conservatives on board?

By Ben Rosen
The Christian Science Monitor

The terms "pro-life" and "pro-environment" are not normally linked, but a growing number of Christian leaders insist they should be.

Pope Francis said so in his 2015 encyclical on the environment and human ecology. Now, the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN), a nondenominational organization committed to “creation care,” is promoting the argument that if you value life from its conception, you should value a clean Earth for the rest of a child’s life and for future children.

“When we talk about creation care in pro-life terms, in caring for our children, both born and unborn, 97 to 98 percent of people get it,” says Rev. Mitch Hescox, president and chief executive of the Pennsylvania-based Evangelical Environmental Network. “That’s one of the reasons that I
believe our community is growing to take more action, to protect God’s creations and to protect children.”

Associating "pro-life" with "pro-environment" is just one branch of religious environmentalism, a movement that frames conservation in religious terms. The idea has been around for decades, but has only started to gain traction among evangelicals recently, especially among Millennials. Still, most Americans do not yet associate climate change with religion and morality, according to the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication.

Groups like the Evangelical Environmentalism Network hope to change that. If they are successful, it could have a major impact on the way much of America views the issue, as evangelicals are estimated to make up nearly a third of the population. But some sociologists and historians doubt that reframing climate change as a moral responsibility can reverse deep-seated skepticism among some conservative Christians about environmentalism, especially among older generations of evangelicals who have associated it with the culture wars over abortion and same-sex rights.

“[The religious environmental movement] doesn’t appear to have gained a lot of traction,” says Stephen Ellingson, a sociologist at Hamilton College in Clinton, N.Y., and author of “To Care for Creation: The Emergence of the Religious Environmental Movement.” “For a small number, it is primarily a moral and religious issue, but for many it’s not seen that way. It’s not seen as important, I think, because the environment is so highly politicized ... in some ways, it’s framed really technically, as lobbying, litigation, and legislation.”

The Evangelical Environmental Network and other faith-based organizations do not try to separate climate change from politics. Both EEN and the San Francisco-based Interfaith Power & Light, which encourages environmental stewardship among religious groups, were on Capitol Hill the past two weeks. But the groups try to downplay partisanship by emphasizing a moral obligation for action.

For Mr. Hescox, religion provides the “biblical imperative” to act, while so-called market-based solutions are the answer on how to achieve results. Since EEN is anti-abortion, he says, it believes all lives must be cared for from the moment of conception. But the only way he believes he and other conservative Republicans can get on board is through solutions such as cap-and-trade programs or a carbon fee and fee dividend.

“It’s the only way we’re going to breach the chasm to conservatives,” he says.

Anti-abortionists have been highlighting the threats that pollution is thought to pose to unborn children for a dozen or so years, says Hescox. Rev. Jim Ball, the past president of the network, tied the rights of the unborn to the fight against mercury pollution.

Pope Francis also integrated environmentalism and abortion in his second encyclical, “Laudato si’,” when he wrote that environmental stewardship is simply “incompatible with the justification of abortion.” But the pope seemed to argue that people who care about endangered species and the melting of polar ice caps could not also support abortion, as Crux reported. The Evangelical
Environmental Network’s argument appears to fit more into the religious environmental movement, linking morality to the environment, not the other way around.

Many Christian denominations have long supported the modern environmental movement, in the 1960s and 1970s. Not evangelicals, however, writes Mark Stoll, a historian at Texas Tech University who specializes on religion and environmentalism.

“In the late 1970s they seized on the notion of the ‘culture wars’ and lumped environmentalism together with abortion, feminism, gay and lesbian people’s rights, and secular humanism as contrary to Christianity,” he writes. “Hostile to environmentalism ever since, evangelicals cast even the solid science on global warming as a conspiracy against freedom and faith promulgated in schools and universities.”

This skepticism has continued until the present day. In 2014, The Pew Research Center found only 28 percent of white evangelicals said “climate change is occurring mostly because of human activity such as burning of fossil fuels,” the lowest of any religious group Pew surveyed.

Those attitudes have softened among some millennial evangelicals, led by the likes of Jonathan Merritt, author of “Green Like God: Unlocking the Divine Plan for Our Planet.”

A pro-life, pro-environment association, then, is about gaining a foothold among mainstream evangelicals and older generations, says Dr. Ellingson at Hamilton College.

“It’s almost like reasoning by analogy. ‘It’s like one of those issues for us. Then I can go ahead and support it,’” he tells The Christian Science Monitor in a phone interview.

Katharine Hayhoe, an atmospheric scientist and political science professor at Texas Tech University in Lubbock and an evangelical Christian, says EEN’s argument makes more sense than the “cognitive dissonance” she describes among some conservatives.

“So often it seems like pro-life stops when you’re born. If you’re really pro-life, you should be pro-life from conception to death,” she says, mentioning United Nations efforts to calculate the human costs of climate change.

This strategy is being used in other conservative circles as well. Susan Bratton, an environmental science professor at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, says many conservative Protestants emphasize a humanitarian need to stop climate change. This includes helping communities under threat from natural disasters and food shortages. Rev. Canon Sally Bingham, president and founder of Interfaith Power & Light, says that when she visits conservative congregations in the South, she does not mention climate change. Instead, she focuses her message on clean air, clean water, and a clean environment.

Two years ago, in 2015, this moral framing of climate change had not yet resonated with most Americans, according to the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication. In the spring of that year, 10 percent of Americans viewed global warming as a religious issue, 13 percent viewed it as a spiritual issue, and about 36 percent viewed it as a moral issue. But if this
reframing does take hold, it could have a widespread impact, according to the study’s authors. Americans tend to be more religious than citizens in many other industrialized nations, they write.


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May 5, 2017

Earth Charter Affiliate speaks in UN General Assembly Dialogue on Harmony with Nature

Earth Charter Initiative

The Seventh Interactive Dialogue of the United Nations General Assembly on Harmony with Nature took place on Friday, 21 April 2017 under the Theme: Earth Jurisprudence.

The event counted with the participation of Professor Klaus Bosselmann, ECI Affiliate from New Zealand and Director, New Zealand Centre for Environmental Law, University of Auckland, who, as an Earth Jurisprudence expert, made a presentation on “The Next Step: Earth trusteeship”.

In Professor Bosselmann’s speech he made a proposal to “accompany the current SDG process with high-level ethical dialogue and promote the idea of nation-states as trustees for the Earth and that the UN should provide a forum for achieving that.”

Below you can find Professor Bosselmann’s intervention:

**Interactive Dialogue of the General Assembly on Harmony With Nature**

*Friday, 21 Apr 2017*

*Trusteeship Council, UN Secretariat Building, New York*

**Theme: Earth Jurisprudence**

“An Earth-centred worldview recognizes the intrinsic value of Nature; understands humans as fundamentally part of the natural world, that is, one life-form among many evolved from the same natural processes. It further recognizes that there are biophysical limits to human activity and that our socioeconomic systems are embedded in natural systems. In this worldview, human-Earth relationships are based on a symbiotic connection, are interconnected and are subject to the natural laws of the Universe.

Indigenous peoples’ philosophies, spiritualities and traditional forms of knowledge worldwide express the understanding that human governance systems must be derived from the laws of the Earth and comply with them.
Experts from around the world working in the natural and social sciences similarly recognize the need for an evolved, holistic worldview that must be rooted in respect for Nature and in the interdependence of the well-being of humankind and of the Earth.

In order to forge a balanced, healthy relationship between human activity and the Earth, there is an urgent need for society to reconsider how it perceives and interacts with the natural world.

Earth Jurisprudence recognizes that the Earth is the source of laws that govern life. It provides a cohesive framework reflecting the integrated nature of the world in which we live. And, as the source of laws that govern the community of life, Earth Jurisprudence also provides a cohesive framework underpinning many disciplines, weaving them together to create a more effective, holistic governance approach, one that reflects the integrated nature of the world in which we live.

In 2009, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 22 April as International Mother Earth Day. In so doing, Member States acknowledged that the Earth and its ecosystems are our common home, and expressed their conviction that it is necessary to promote Harmony with Nature in order to achieve a just balance among the economic, social and environmental needs of present and future generations. The same year, the General Assembly adopted its first resolution on Harmony with Nature.

Click here for more information.


May 9, 2017

Vatican conference unites science and religion's search for truth

By Junno Arocho Esteves
Catholic News Service

Vatican City - Science and religion are not at odds but are united in the continuing search for truth in unlocking the mysteries of the cosmos.

The scientific conference titled "Black Holes, Gravitational Waves and Space-Time Singularities" is an opportunity to show that "the church supports good science," said Jesuit Br. Guy Consolmagno, director of the Vatican Observatory.

"We are hoping that this meeting will also be an encounter of people with very different opinions but very close friendships that come from having the same common desire to understand the truth of the universe and how we can understand that truth," he told journalists May 8.
Renowned experts from around the world were to meet at Vatican Observatory in Castel Gandolfo for the May 9-12 conference, which seeks to bring together science and religion in the continuing search for truth in understanding the mysteries of the universe, he said.

The 2016 discovery of the existence of gravitational waves, predicted nearly 100 years ago by Albert Einstein in his general theory of relativity, was to be one of the topics of discussion. The discovery could open a new chapter in understanding celestial events and black hole regions in the universe, something that previously could only be hypothesized.

The conference also will celebrate the scientific legacy of Msgr. George Lemaitre, one of the fathers of the theory that the expanding universe could be traced to an origin point, also known as the "Big Bang theory."

As historic as Lemaitre's theory was, Consolmagno said, the Belgian priest was also mindful that the God's creation of the universe wasn't just a one-time occurrence but an event "that occurs continually."

"If you look at God as merely the thing that started the Big Bang, you reduce God to a nature god, like Jupiter throwing lightning bolts," he said. "That is not the God we as Christians believe in. We must believe in a God who is supernatural and we then recognize God is who is responsible for the existence of the universe and our science tells us how he did it."

Alfio Bonanno, an Italian cosmologist at the National Institute for Astrophysics, told journalists that the conference also aims to dispel the "myth" that religion fears science, because the search for truth "will bring us to God."

"We should not be afraid. Fear is not from God. Rather, we should go in search of this truth because truth — if we have this attitude of humility which was Lemaitre's attitude — we can also change our ideological preconceptions," he said.

"The search for truth is what unites us," Consolmagno added. "Those of us who are religious will recognize in the truth the presence of God, but you don't have to make that theological leap to have a desire to know truth."

"The first step in recognizing the truth is that you don't already have it," he said, adding that people cannot consider themselves good scientists nor good religious people "if we think that our work is done."

Regarding intelligent design, Consolmagno said that its original intention as a way of looking at the universe and seeing "the design of a good God" has been misused.

"If you mean that you can use our scientific ignorance as a way proving the existence of God, that would not be a God I would want to believe in," he said.

God, he continued, is not something one arrives to at the end of scientific research, but rather its starting point. In that way, "we then can see the hand of God in how we observe the universe."
"I am afraid of a God that could be proved by science because I know my science well enough to not trust it," the director of the Vatican Observatory said.

Consolmagno said it was important for scientists who are believers to make their science known to their fellow parishioners and remind them that "science was an invention of the medieval universities that the church founded."

"The logic of science comes out of the logic of theology and if there is a rivalry, it's a sibling rivalry," he said. "We need to know that it's a crime against science to say, 'only atheists can do it' because that would eliminate so many wonderful people from so many different religions who could contribute so much to science."


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May 9, 2017

A morning in Chile, after the forest fires

By María de Lourdes López Munguía
Global Sisters Report

This morning I look and enjoy the sunrise from the mountain … but also I can smell the smoke from the forest fire.

I am sitting next to Eleuterio, a man who knows the heart of the trees, a man who has heard in his 80 years the sound of the wind embracing the hills and reaching the sea.

Sitting under an almond tree, the tree of solidarity (as poet Gabriela Mistral called it), we silently observed the destruction left behind by the forest fires in Chile earlier this year, the largest in the country's history, according to the authorities. The fires left 11 dead — including two policemen and four firefighters — destroyed about 3,000 homes, and devastated about 400,000 hectares (more than 1,500 square miles).

In his heart Eleuterio sees the house of his parents, where he himself was born; the memories of his childhood playing in the middle of the forest and his youthful dreams of having a family and a simple wooden house. He remembers, too, his daily work in the forest, hoping it would allow the wood necessary to provide food and a dignified life for his children.

Today, all that has been destroyed. Although there is speculation about the causes of the fires, what touches my heart is what God has allowed me to share with people who were stripped of everything overnight: their homes, their clothes, their everyday lives — and even their dreams.
We were invited to share with them during a weekend in the region of El Maule, through a service of listening in the town of Santa Olga. We also visited people living in little villages in the woods.

I certainly did not do much, simply lent my heart and my ear to the cry of each person who, in the midst of tears, experienced a strong moment of unexpected and inexplicable mourning and loss. Their safe space, their home, their lands, had become a nightmare. Many families tried to save their homes by putting water in them, until the closeness of the fire and smoke drove them away.

Today, a month after the fires, the smoke is still perceptible in the air, and many people still sleep in tents. I see the pain in their eyes, I can feel the tears in their hearts for the suffering of this land and for the hopes that were lost.

In the midst of all this, two people gave me a sacrament of God’s presence.

Eleuterio, looking at the horizon and recalling stories of his life, told me about his knowledge of the trees, his relationship with them and how, in the silence of the forest, he can feel their pain and their joy.

Each tree has a history, he told me. It is the story of when it was planted and how it turned itself to the sun, growing and standing witness to each season — but also to the story of the families. And Eleuterio let me see with his wisdom that life begins to rise in the midst of the ashes.

Antonia, an elderly woman who cares for her son with special needs, is really grateful for the presence of the God who saved them. She shows this with a beautiful smile.

When I was leaving her home, which was nearly destroyed, she embraced me and gave me a little plant that was beginning to grow again. I received it as a sacrament of life. Even in the midst of the damage, Antonia catches her breath before the life around her. Life is a beautiful journey because, finally, God does not take the pain from us; God is with us through it. Antonia reminded me of this.

Maybe sitting here under the almond tree, I can at least understand the love these people have for their hometown, and the power of fire as both a destructive and life-sustaining force. (For the indigenous Mapuche people here, fire is a place where families gather around and where they cook.)

But I also see the power of community, a solidarity that the almond tree has come to represent. People told me that the morning after the fire has passed, families and neighbors came together and began to clean up what seemed like a battlefield. Young people came from all over Chile to help and start rebuilding.

Yes, the almond tree is not just an image Gabriela Mistral used, it is the power and love the Chilean people have for each other in their shared history of earthquakes and tsunamis. If they know something, it is this: the power of being together and getting on their feet again.
I was so touched with a symbol that I saw. In every place where there had been a house, and now there was debris, you could see a Chilean flag. This is a sign of struggle and an expression of the internal strength of the Chilean people. Perhaps we could call it resilience, the strength that leads the people to say:

*Death does not overcome us, despair does not eliminate us, because we believe that together we can rebuild our houses, our towns and our lives.*

That is a message for me, at the heart of this Lenten season, about how to live my own life in keeping with this town's powerful sign of the Resurrection.

[María de Lourdes López Munguía is a Franciscan Missionary of Mary from Mexico who now lives in Chile.]

http://globalsistersreport.org/column/gsr-today/environment/morning-chile-after-forest-fires-46536

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**May 10, 2017**

Italian archdiocese, five religious orders to divest from fossil fuels

By Dennis Sadowski
Catholic News Service

*Washington* - Nine Catholic organizations, including five religious orders and an archdiocese in Italy, plan to divest from fossil fuel corporations in an action timed to send a message to the upcoming G7 summit.

Representatives of the groups said May 10 that they were inspired to act by Pope Francis' two-year-old encyclical, *Laudato Si’, on Care for Our Common Home.*

Joining the divestment movement were the Wheaton Franciscan Sisters and the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary of Wheaton, Illinois; MGR Foundation in New York City; the Mission Congregation of the Servants of the Holy Spirit; St. Joseph's Province of the Passionist order in the United Kingdom; and in Italy, the Archdiocese of Pescara-Penne, Il Dialogo magazine, the Society of Jesus, Interdiocesan Network New Lifestyles and the Siloe Monastic Community.

The announcement came as part of a broader global divestment campaign running May 5-13 that finds organizations pulling funds from companies involved in the extraction of coal, oil and natural gas, and turning to firms developing renewable energy instead.

Up to 97 percent of climate scientists have attributed climate change to human activity, at least in part.
The announcement also comes as the G-7 nations prepared to meet in southern Italy May 26-27 and a meeting of representatives of nearly 200 countries underway in Bonn, Germany, through May 18 for negotiations on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

"This announcement is stressing the urgency of the climate crisis. It's a reminder that the world needs to transition extremely quickly away from fossil fuel to clean energy," said Tomas Insua, executive director of the Global Catholic Climate Movement, a coalition of more than 100 organizations. "It's about responding to Pope Francis' appeal in 'Laudato Si' to care for our common home and care for the poor and our children who will suffer the worst consequences of climate change."

Each organization pledged to begin divesting as soon as possible. It is expected to take up to several years before full divestment occurs.

In announcing the action, the Global Catholic Climate Movement released statements by representatives of the organizations involved.

Sr. Sheila Kinsey of the Wheaton Franciscans said her religious order has long considered the "root causes of violence" in society and that it became necessary to end all investments in fossil fuels. "Through our study and discernment we compassionately respond both to compelling immediate and systemic needs at the local and global levels," she said. "We find that it is imperative that we move away from fossil fuels because of the impact they have on the environment."

In Italy, Fr. Mario Parente, prior of the Siloe Monastic Community, said: "Strongly committed on the issues of caring and safeguarding the creation, we consider it is important to be part of an initiative that is in very deep harmony with the value in which we believe and that gives a concrete answer to Pope Francis' call in his encyclical 'Laudato Si' asking for a real ecological conversion and a new way to inhabit the earth."

Archbishop Tomasso Valentinetti of Pescara-Penne, Italy, supported divestment and a turn toward clean energy. "This statement aims to be the a first concrete commitment in the logic of the integral ecology and the care of the common home, which Pope Francis called us to in the encyclical letter 'Laudato Si', with a view of a progressive and effective process of divestment," he said.

With the announcement, 27 Catholic entities have divested from fossil fuel corporations, according to the Global Catholic Climate Movement.


May 11, 2017

Returning to a Place of Belonging: An interview with Sufi mystic Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee
By Sam Mowe  
Garrison Institute  

When you pay attention to what’s happening to the world—the destruction of our air, soil, and water—it is common to want to do something to help the situation. But what if part of the reason that we’re in this perilous ecological situation is our tendency to treat the world as if it’s a problem to be solved?

In his book Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth, Sufi mystic Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee writes that much of our understanding of the ecological crisis belongs to “the mindset that has caused the imbalance.” To restore balance we need a shift in consciousness and then action that embodies this shift. In answer to the question, “What can we do?” Vaughan-Lee has recently written a follow-up book, Spiritual Ecology: 10 Practices to Reawaken the Sacred in Everyday Life, which explores practices that can help us to experience a deep, lived connection with the planet. And while this is an urgently important task, it will not be achieved by a quick fix of technology and policy, but rather through multigenerational spiritual work.

Vaughan-Lee is a lineage holder in the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya Sufi Order and the founder of The Golden Sufi Center. In addition to Spiritual Ecology, he is the author of Fragments of a Love Story, Darkening of the Light, and other books. We corresponded with him recently about the challenge of bringing humanity back into harmony with the life-systems that support us.

In Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth, many of the contributors suggest that ecological crisis is rooted in urgent spiritual and moral questions. Can you give me some examples of these spiritual questions?

Today we are faced with an ecological crisis of rising sea levels, polluted air, toxic oceans, and a mass extinction of species. One response to this crisis is “greening the economy,” which looks to technological innovation to ensure sustainable development without further degrading the environment. But in recent years there has been a deeper questioning that suggests that the ecological crisis requires a spiritual and moral response. This has been forcefully articulated in Pope Francis’s encyclical, Laudato Si’: On Care for our Common Home, which asks us to look at the spiritual and moral issues underlying the unprecedented destruction of ecosystems we are inflicting upon the Earth.

Native American Faithkeeper Chief Oren Lyons offers another example of a spiritual response to our ecological crisis when he describes the spiritual laws of nature and the need for thanksgiving. The Zen monk Thich Nhat Hanh sees our present ecological crisis as “bells of mindfulness” to wake up and change our consciousness in order to be aware of what is happening to the Earth. He says that we have to “fall in love” with the Earth, echoing the poet Wendell Berry who says that the world “can only be redeemed by love.” While the Buddhist activist Joanna Macy speaks of how our hearts can be cracked open by the grief at what we are doing the world and says, “as your heart breaks open there will be room for the world to heal.”
All these voices speak to the need to search beyond a merely physical or technological response to the present crisis and ask the deeper spiritual questions, which they believe are at the root of our present imbalance.

These examples suggest that spiritual responses to the ecological crisis have an important role to play in healing the Earth moving forward, but *Spiritual Ecology* also suggests that it was a spiritual crisis that has led us to our current situation. Can you comment on this?

There is an argument that the origin of our present ecological crisis can be traced back to the Age of Enlightenment, when the emerging Newtonian model saw the physical world as unfeeling matter, a clockwork mechanism that we should understand and control. This consciousness may have given us the fruits of science and technology, but its cost was to create a mindset of separation that cut off humanity from the awareness of our natural interrelatedness with our world.

But perhaps we can look even deeper: How have we lost and entirely forgotten any spiritual relationship to life and the planet, a central reality to other cultures for millennia? For indigenous peoples the world is a sacred, interconnected living whole that cares for us and, therefore, we need to revere and care for it. Instead, in our Western culture it has become a “resource” to exploit. The question then is whether we can correct our present imbalance through returning to an awareness of the sacred nature of creation, the Earth, as a living being which needs our love and attention. As I have written previously, “The Earth is not a problem to be solved; it is a living being to which we belong. The Earth is part of our own self and we are part of its suffering wholeness. Until we go to the root of our image of separateness, there can be no healing. And the deepest part of our separateness from creation lies in our forgetfulness of its sacred nature, which is also our own sacred nature.”

**Do you see evidence that we are currently up to the task of answering the spiritual and moral questions at the root of our ecological crisis?**

The last decades have seen the globalization of our Western materialistic values. Driven by greed and endless desires we have attacked and destroyed the fragile web of life that physically supports us. But we have also created a soulless wasteland that no longer nourishes us with any connection to the sacred nature of creation, a connection that has spiritually sustained humanity for millennia. Thomas Berry, one of the earliest voices to articulate a spiritual ecology, writes, “We are not talking to the rivers, we are not listening to the wind and stars. We have broken the great conversation… all the disasters that are happening now are a consequence of that spiritual ‘autism.’” If we are to cease this destruction and desecration, if we are to no longer pollute the soul as well as the soil, we need to regain a connection to the sacred nature of the Earth. How to reestablish this connection, rejoin this conversation, is a fundamental question we should be asking.

Are we prepared to embrace a new story of life and civilization, one that is radically different to our present story of a consumer-driven culture based upon exploitation and the myth of continual economic progress? Many people today long for such a new story, one that recognizes the Earth as a single interconnected living whole to which we belong. This is a story that nourishes our
deeper selves with a sense of connection to the sacred and to the wonder and joy of life that is our heritage.

But collectively we are still caught in the dream, or nightmare, of materialism, which the Earth can no longer support. Indeed it could be argued that the root of the present collective anger, or deep dissatisfaction we are witnessing, comes from a primal knowing that this dream has passed its sell-by date, that its promises of prosperity are empty. And yet because our culture does not ask the right questions, there is no possibility for a real answer.

The ecological issues we face today require solutions urgently. Is telling new stories about our relationship with the Earth really going to bring about the solutions we need right now? What you’re describing strikes me as a slow process.

Although the environmental crisis has accelerated in recent years, it is the result of a mindset that the West has embraced for centuries. And it may take centuries for a new story to unfold.

It can be asserted that our present ecological problems are too dire to be answered by a “new story,” an idealistic vision of recognizing the unity of life and reconnecting to the sacred within creation. And yes, there are critical issues that need to be addressed at the present moment: reducing carbon emissions, the loss of species, acidification of the oceans, and the widespread pollution of our “throw-away culture.” But can science and technology take us to the root of our present predicament, can “greening the economy” be a real answer to ecocide, or do we need a more radical response? Science and technology are born from the reasoning that we are separate from the Earth, a mindset that is at the foundation of a culture where the exploitation of the natural world is now global and catastrophic.

Our present scientific responses may offer valuable short-term fixes, but do not begin to address the deeper issues. What will it take to change our pathological behavior towards our common home? To quote James Gustave Speth, former U.S. Advisor on climate change: “I used to think that top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change… I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed, and apathy, and to deal with these we need a cultural and spiritual transformation.”

The first step is to recognize our present predicament and to become aware that materialism is in fact just a story we have been sold, which has us in its grip even as it is destroying our own ecosystem. There is actually no rationale that more “stuff” will make us happy and fulfilled, but rather it appears to have the opposite effect of empty promises that leave us emotionally and spiritually starved. Recognizing the power of stories or myth we come to understand the need for a new story—a story that includes a sustainable relationship to the Earth. Real sustainability does not mean the ability to continue our present energy-intensive consumer-driven culture, but sustainability for all of creation, for the living Earth to which we belong.

But before we can fully articulate—or live—such a new story, we need to reconnect with the sacred nature of creation, rejoin the great conversation that was central to the way of life of our ancestors. This “work that reconnects,” as Joanna Macy calls it, has many forms, but a central
theme is empowering the individual, opening our eyes and ears to the mystery and wonder of creation in all of its diversity, and returning each of us to our real place of belonging within life.

https://www.garrisoninstitute.org/blog/spiritual-ecology/

May 15, 2017

EcoJesuit Newsletter

Our editorial shares the press release from the Global Catholic Climate Movement that announced on 10 May 2017 the largest joint Catholic fossil fuel divestment to date. The Italian Jesuits joined other Catholic organizations from around the world and announced their decision to divest their portfolios from coal, oil, and gas companies. In October last year, the Jesuits in English Canada joined other Catholic institutions around the world and announced their divestment from fossil fuel extraction, immediately stopping all future investments in fossil fuels and working to divest such holdings from the current portfolio within five years. It was the largest faith-based divestment announcement then.

In a recent radio interview in Chicago, Pedro Walpole, SJ briefly shares his thoughts and reflections in a conversation with Worldview host Jerome McDonnell on climate change and responses, community and social justice, youth and hope, and the need to come together and build a stronger sense of human society and care and reconciliation. Pedro is Research Director at the Environmental Science for Social Change, a Jesuit research and training organization in the Philippines. He serves as Coordinator for both the Reconciliation with Creation program of the Jesuit Conference Asia Pacific and the Global Ignatian Advocacy Network-Ecology.

Sergio Coronado Delgado, a researcher at the Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (CINEP, Center for Research and Popular Education) in Bogotá, Colombia, writes about how Jesuits and their institutions contribute to the responses to environmental issues in Latin America, focusing on the work of Jesuit social centers in the region, especially on mining-related concerns. The article is an excerpt from Sergio’s full paper “Latin American Jesuit Social Centers and Environmental Justice: Advocacy and Support to Local Communities and Knowledge-Building from below” published in a special issue of the Journal of Jesuit Studies.

Emilio Travieso, SJ, a PhD student at the Oxford Department of International Development, shares his field report from Chiapas, Mexico where the Misión de Bachajón assists in the redesigning of food systems, sharing the engagement with the Tzeltal community in the production of organic coffee with partner Yomol A’tel, a group of cooperatives and social businesses.

Thank you for the continued support and we are happy to hear from you at ecojesuit(at)gmail.com for your comments and for stories you may want to share.

The Ecojesuit team
May 15, 2017

Mountains and Sacred Landscapes Conference Report

By Sarah M. Pike

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the ISSRNC, I want to convey our thanks to all of you who attended our conference on “Mountains and Sacred Landscapes”! A special thanks to those who served as presiders and discussants. We had 225 attendees from over 25 countries (every continent was represented), 39 sessions of panels, papers, roundtables, and alternative formats, six keynote or plenary sessions, and other special events.

For those of you who were unable to join us, some of the conference highlights included our banquet, during which we celebrated Bron Taylor’s Lifetime Achievement Award, with a moving talk by Taylor about his career and the early roots of the ISSRNC, and launched our first student paper award, which went to Lily Zeng for her paper, Problematizing Ideas of "Purity" and "Timelessness" in the Conservation Narratives of Sacred Groves; a field trip to the Rubin Museum for presentations by curators on “Sacred Landscapes in the Himalayas”; a book launch featuring three new books (monographs by James Miller and Georgina Drew and a collection of essays edited by ICI Fellows Jayanta Bandyopadhyay, Sanjay Chaturvedi, and Dong Shikui); and six keynotes, performances, or plenary sessions featuring Kareena Gore, Edwin Bernbaum, David Rothenberg, Gregory Cajete, and Steve Paulson, as well as the India China Institute’s Sacred Himalaya Initiative.

Read the full report here:


May 15, 2017
US Bank to Stop Funding Pipelines as Divestment Movement Expands Worldwide

By Nika Knight
Common Dreams

As a nearly ten-days-long global mobilization calling for divestment from fossil fuels comes to an end, climate campaigners are celebrating a major victory stateside: U.S. Bank has announced that it will no longer finance fossil fuel pipeline construction.

The announcement came during the company's April shareholder meeting, reported MN350, a state arm of international climate justice group 350.org, on Monday.

As a result of the new policy, MN350 observes that the bank will no longer provide "project financing for the construction of oil or natural gas pipelines," and will also apply "enhanced due diligence processes" to oil and gas industry clients.

"U.S. Bank's new policy is an important step in protecting the environment and moving towards a fossil free future," said Wichahpi Otto, a MN350 volunteer, who attended the shareholder meeting in Nashville. "We applaud them for responding to the community and contributing to worldwide efforts to address climate change."

The group writes:

This move comes after ongoing pressure on U.S. Bank locally from MN350 and from the Minnesotans for a Fair Economy coalition, and on banks nationally from indigenous groups including Honor the Earth, the Indigenous Environmental Network, and the Dakota Access resistance movement.

Beginning in 2015, a regional partnership of climate, labor, and indigenous rights advocates has urged that U.S. Bank divest from fossil fuels, in particular from Enbridge Energy, and move its financing into the clean energy economy. Local actions have included letter-writing, account closures, and social media campaigns. In response, in May 2016 the bank made changes to their Environmental Policy restricting lending to coal.

"We applaud this progressive decision from U.S. Bank," said Tara Houska, National Campaigns Director of Honor the Earth. "A strong message is being sent to the fossil fuel industry: we are consumers, we have agency and the right to know how our money is being invested. Move to a green economy and a future that does not profit off the destruction of Mother Earth and our communities."

Meanwhile, 260 events in 45 countries saw people worldwide campaign for banks to divest from fossil fuel projects. The Global Divestment Mobilization (GDM) ran from May 5 to May 13, and included events in Europe, Africa, Australia, Asia, and South America.
"Divestment is a powerful act of solidarity and justice for the world's most vulnerable people, a defense of nature and our planet," said Lidy Nacpil of the Asian Peoples Movement on Debt and Development (APMDD) in a statement.

"We urgently need a transformation in the global energy system, away from the fossil fuel dependence that drives climate change, and challenge fossil fuel corporations that oppose progress in climate action and prioritize profits over people and planet," Nacpil continued. "Divestment has proven to be one of the most effective ways to push for this much needed transformation."

"During the GDM citizens and respected institutions across the world were able to enact an immediate and a much needed transformational form of climate leadership," wrote 350.org. "This included the announcement from nine Catholic organizations from around the world about their decision to divest their portfolios from fossil fuels in the largest joint Catholic divestment to date. A total of 27 Catholic institutions have now divested. Meanwhile in Brazil over 3000 people participated in prayers in a vigil outside the Umuarama Cathedral, to voice their hopes for a fossil fuel free future."

The organization went on to describe the varied actions in far-flung locations around the world:

Across Europe, the links between municipalities and fossil fuel companies came under scrutiny. Over 1,000 people marched in Munich, Germany and demonstrations took place across the UK including rallies at 14 Town Halls across London demanding divestment. Campaigners also put pressure on universities pension funds, faith, health and cultural institutions such as the Louvre in Paris, the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam and the British Museum.

The battle to safeguard people and planet is linked worldwide, the money in one part of the world is linked to infrastructure projects being built elsewhere. Hundreds gathered in Jakarta to listen to community representatives from Indramayu recount the struggles they encounter living in the shadow of a coal power plant. During an event in Japan case studies of Japanese banks financing coal power plants in Indonesia and oil pipelines in the United States were highlighted to put pressure on Japanese banks to pull out of fossil fuels.

In New Zealand and Australia campaigners targeted Australian coal-giant Adani by calling on the banks that invest in it, including CommBank to stop its funding. Australia's Great Barrier Reef has suffered a large bleaching for the second year in a row. Any mining expansion would jeopardise it even further.

Meanwhile in New York 150 activists rallied inside Trump Tower, to call on New York City officials to cut their ties with the dirty oil and gas companies that control the White House. In the face of federal government climate denial and the possibility of the U.S. leaving the Paris Agreement, demonstrating that local leaders can show impactful climate leadership, while other parts of the country are suffering from severe flooding.

"There is no question we are currently in a state of emergency on climate change. Day in day out people are dying from the effects of climate change," said author and 350.org co-founder Bill
McKibben in a statement. "There are many ways to confront this emergency and divestment allows us to get in the way of the money financing the fossil fuel projects behind this crisis. The fact that the fossil fuel divestment movement has grown exponentially in the last few years is the best news ever."

"From the Pacific Islands to South Africa, from the United States to Germany, people are standing up and challenging the power of the fossil fuel industry," McKibben added.


May 23, 2017

Hoping for more in sustainable energy goals

By Donna Schaper
National Catholic Reporter

Pragmatists set small goals and achieve them. Utopians set large goals and often fail. People of faith often help the pragmatists to shake hands with the utopians, while living by hope, realistically.

How big should our goals for addressing climate change be, given what we know about how much serious trouble faces the planet? How big can they be, given what we know about human nature?

Back in 2015, Stanford University engineering professor Mark Jacobson and other researchers calculated how each U.S. state could meet its power needs entirely on the backs of clean renewable energy — specifically, solar, wind, water and geothermal.

Jacobson and others involved in the Solutions Project, as it is known, believe that all 50 states can generate 80 percent of needed energy from renewable sources by 2030 and achieve a 100-percent transition to clean energy by 2050. Backing up those beliefs are state-by-state breakdowns of a new energy mix for each, along with the health and economic benefits projected to accompany such a full shift from fossil fuels.

Others are equally optimistic.

At the beginning of 2016, the Sierra Club launched its "Ready for 100" campaign aimed at convincing mayors across the country to commit their cities to their own 100-percent renewable goals. As of May, seven cities in the campaign, including Burlington, Vermont, are powered entirely by renewable energy, 20 cities have established timelines to do so, and efforts by environmental advocates in another 40 towns hope to add their communities in this utopian and hopeful pipeline.
Andrew Cuomo, the governor of my home state of New York, has mandated that we in the Empire State achieve 50 percent of our electricity from renewables by 2030, arguing that this is a pragmatically optimistic goal. But perhaps New York is being way too realistic, when so much hope is available elsewhere.

People of faith are often accused of having too much hope. We wonder if hoping for too much denies our other more interesting theologies about sin's originality or human fallibility.

I hear St. Paul in both ears: in one, "All have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), and in the other, "For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want" (Romans 7:19). Pragmatists at least have reasonable understandings of the human ability to reach our best goals or best selves.

Then I hear St. Paul argue for salvation as though it were a possibility — we are to "imitate" God (Ephesians 5:1). With this faith, I side with Stanford and the Sierra Club against New York in the fight about achievable goals. Why not hope against hope for perfection? New York is a great state; it can do better.

Even the White House is in a fight about article 4.11 of the Paris Agreement, the piece of the international climate accord that states a nation can adjust its climate goals "with a view to enhancing its level of ambition." Can the target for our commitment to the global deal only go up, or can it also go down? Can we renegotiate the climate pact without withdrawing from it? Can we be realists without withdrawing from our faith?

Because of these more theological concerns about possible justice and eschatological justice, pragmatic justice to the Earth and beautiful justice for the Earth, I have come to really like my state electric bill.

My Central Hudson Gas & Electric bill is broken down into a delivery cost listed at the top and a supply cost just below it. Both list a total cost independent of one another, then are added together to present your "TOTAL ELECTRIC CHARGES" bolded at the end of the numeric tally. It is a privilege to pay for energy, even if the price can be confusing, if not too high. What some think as high, people of faith might think of as low. It is a privilege to have energy and to pay for it.

St. Paul might understand my dilemma. Why would I want a bargain at the cost of the planet? I wonder if we can get him on the phone from Rome or Ephesus.

Even more, I wonder if more theologizing would help governors and activists and solar engineers. When will we be able to declare victory? Do we need to put a tax on each gallon of gasoline in order to add more carrots to the renewables transition effort, or are there other ways that we can gracefully punish ourselves?

Are we happy if we make progress even if it is not enough progress? Doesn't it matter that human beings are doing the best they can?
But what if our best is not good enough?

[Donna Schaper is senior minister of Judson Memorial Church in New York City.]

https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/hoping-more-sustainable-energy-goals

May 24, 2017

Pope Francis Gave President Trump a Copy of His Encyclical on Climate Change

By Katie Reilly

Time

Pope Francis gave President Donald Trump a copy of his landmark 2015 encyclical on climate change when the two leaders met at the Vatican on Wednesday.

The climate encyclical — titled "Laudato Si" or "Praise Be to You" — called for strong action on climate change, which Pope Francis warned would disproportionately impact developing countries. His meeting with Trump on Wednesday comes as the White House considers whether the U.S. should leave the Paris Agreement on climate change.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said a Vatican official on Wednesday encouraged the U.S. to remain in the Paris Agreement, according to White House pool reports. Tillerson called the discussion a "good exchange."

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, meanwhile, urged Trump to pay attention to the encyclical's message. "If President Trump reads the Pope's writings, I'm confident he'll not withdraw the agreement," Schumer said Wednesday. "We gotta get him to read it."

Trump has proposed significant cuts to the Environmental Protection Agency and has begun to roll back environmental regulations implemented under former President Barack Obama.

"Regrettably, many efforts to seek concrete solutions to the environmental crisis have proved ineffective, not only because of powerful opposition but also because of a more general lack of interest," Francis wrote in the 2015 encyclical. "Obstructionist attitudes, even on the part of believers, can range from denial of the problem to indifference, nonchalant resignation or blind confidence in technical solutions. We require a new and universal solidarity."

Pope Francis gave Trump the encyclical along with a few other documents, including his 2017 World Day of Peace message, which he told Trump he had signed personally for him, according to White House pool reports.

May 24, 2017

Paying respect to Whidbey’s nature the Tibetan Buddhist way

By Kyle Jensen
South Whidbey Record

A Tibetan Buddhist religious community will circumnavigate Whidbey Island next Tuesday in a not-so-usual boat trip aimed at honoring the island’s natural life.

The group will be pouring “positive energy” into Puget Sound with prayers and Buddhist mantras.

“The purpose of the offering is for us to pay respect to this beautiful natural environment,” Tibetan Buddhist spiritual leader Kilung Rinpoche said. “In particular, at this time we are going to be sending heartfelt healing prayers and energy back to the great oceans and to all beings living there in order to repair distorted energy.”

Rinpoche, his students, followers and friends will circle the entire island to perform a tradition that may be a first for Whidbey Island. The ceremony, called a Naga Treasure Offering, will involve a full boat of people praying and honoring the land, the sea, the animals, the plants and everything in between on Whidbey. Rinpoche has only performed this once before during a circumnavigation of Taiwan, where he frequently teaches.

The group aims to project “healing energy” to the environment, as per Buddhist practice. Mystic Sea Charters, the whale watching tour company, will accommodate the religious community on their 12-hour trip around the island.

Although the vessel is fully booked for the circumnavigation with 60 people, Rinpoche is inviting island residents to follow the trip and meet the boat on shores and docks for a collective prayer “of any form” to bless the island and pay homage to the natural environment. The boat departs from Anacortes at 8 a.m. May 30 and is slated to return between 6 and 8 p.m. Residents can follow the trip by purchasing the “MarineTraffic – Ship Tracking” app on their smartphones or by searching “Mystic Sea” on www.vesselfinder.com.

“If people resonate with the voyage and want to witness it, they’re free to meet us at the beaches and docks,” said student Mully Mullaly, Langley resident. “If they want to do something at home that honors that, we encourage that also.”

Rinpoche says he felt it was the right time to honor Whidbey Island’s environment. The Tibetan Buddhist teacher has called the island his part-time home for nearly 20 years, splitting time between Whidbey and his native Tibet when he’s not traveling the world to teach. He’s found solitude on Whidbey despite being a significant figure and lineage holder in the world of Tibetan Buddhism. His branch, Longchen Nyingtik, is the first Tibetan Buddhist school. At a young age, he was named the fifth reincarnation of a prominent Tibetan Buddhist teacher who built Kilung Monastery in Tibet, which Rinpoche heads.
Environmentalism is an important aspect of Tibetan Buddhism. Buddhist teachings preach the interconnectedness of all things, and for followers to respect everything outside of humanity — trees, plants, water, etc. Respect should also be paid to the Whidbey Island of the past as per the Buddhist belief of life’s nonlinear nature, so the group has invited members of the Samish Nation for the trip. With respect for the past and all living things, harmony can be achieved, Rinpoche said. To learn more about Rinpoche, visit www.kilung.org/about-kilung-rinpoche/.

“All these things need some consideration to know the inter-relations of the world,” Rinpoche said. “That’s so important for me, being raised in Tibet with a tremendous respect for that tradition. Buddha taught that every living being — trees, plants, insects — they all have independent characteristics, energy and power.”

Rinpoche and his students hope island residents resonate with this message and “use this kind of mindfulness in everyday life.” For him, it’s not about preaching his Tibetan culture or ways, rather using his beliefs to encourage people on Whidbey to respect the natural environment.

“Our hope is that everyone will join us on the island, not just the Buddhist people” student Jeanne Lepisto said. “We want people to see the message, and we think it has the ability to resonate with a wide group of people.”


May 24, 2017

VW's 'dieselgate' poses ethical challenge for German Protestants

By Tom Heneghan
National Catholic Reporter

The Volkswagen emissions scandal, which began when its "clean diesel" cars were found to be rigged to cheat on pollution tests, has created an environmental, commercial and public relations crisis for the German automaker in the United States.

It has been all that and worse back home in Germany. VW is a national symbol with contacts and influence far beyond just cars and drivers — and that is now posing an unexpected ethical challenge for the country's Protestant churches.

Starting on May 24, the Protestant Church Assembly, held every two years, will draw about 140,000 people to Berlin for a long weekend of religious services, political discussions and concerts. Some 200,000 are expected at the final service on Sunday in Wittenberg, where Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses in 1517.
At issue is whether the assembly, where concern for the environment and sustainable development are widely held values, should be ferrying speakers and participants around in the 239 Volkswagen cars, vans and trucks provided by its corporate sponsor.

Since this year is the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, one leading critic has come up with a slogan resonant with Martin Luther's own pithy way of speaking.

"Kein Ablass für Abgas!" (No indulgences for exhaust fumes), Hamburg pastor Matthias Kaiser wrote in an article asking whether having VW provide the assembly's official vehicle fleet was compatible with Christian values.

"I would not want to know what Martin Luther would say today," he said, referring to Luther's famous condemnation of the indulgences the Roman Catholic Church of his day was selling to help finance the construction of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican.

The assembly, known even abroad by its German name "Kirchentag," traditionally includes high-level debates on Christians' role in public affairs and regularly gets wide media coverage.

One of its main events will come on Thursday, when former U.S. President Obama and German Chancellor Angela Merkel will discuss democracy and responsibility at Berlin's Brandenburg Gate, moderated by Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, chairman of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), an umbrella group of Protestant churches.

The "dieselgate" issue has been like an oil stain that the Kirchentag, a lay-organized event launched after the Second World War to explore the forms of Christian witness both within and beyond the churches, has not been able to remove.

The Kirchentag and its opposite number, the Roman Catholic "Katholikentag," have long had Volkswagen as a main sponsor. Having its vehicles on show there is so important for the carmaker that it has its own "church representative" dealing with religious communities.

When the scandal broke in 2015, the churches consulted with Volkswagen but decided to keep the relationship because the carmaker pledged to clean up the emissions scandal promptly.

But the scandal flared up again in Germany in February when a massive car callback to fix the emission problem backfired. Embarrassed company officials had to admit it was not that easy to retool the cars to bring their toxic exhaust down to legal levels.

"We counted on their promises to totally clear up this whole story," said Ellen Ueberschär, general secretary of the Kirchentag. "Of course, now we see that this is taking longer than expected and the whole problem is larger than we originally thought.

"What is just and sustainable work these days, how do we deal with raw materials — these have always been classic questions for the church and the Kirchentag, and they should remain so," she said.
"That makes it all the more important that we take these sponsors aside and make sure they clearly support these standards in word and deed," she explained.

Ueberschär said the Kirchentag was not against sponsoring, although certain companies — arms manufacturers or obvious polluters, for example — were excluded. "Our sponsoring contracts have the condition that companies respect the basic rules of the Kirchentag," she said.

In several interviews, she has also given pragmatic arguments for maintaining the sponsorship, for example that the Reformation anniversary program was already underway and that boycotting Volkswagen would also affect Christians who work for the carmaker.

Kaiser was not convinced. He said having vehicles with "Volkswagen" written on their sides meant "an enormous loss in credibility that is much greater than the profit it makes for using this fleet for free."

In a report, West German Radio (WDR) estimated the loan of free vehicles was worth several million euros.

Reinhard Benhöfer, environmental representative for the Lutheran Church in Hannover, also thought the Kirchentag's explanations weren't convincing. But he said churches had to raise funds and would inevitably have to make some kind of compromise.

"We're part of a society that is not clean at all — we're right in the middle of it," he said. Since all car companies seem to have cheated on emissions standards, he added, "at least for a certain period of time, we shouldn't take any gifts from them. Let's take a short break."

Kaiser said he got wide support from colleagues for the article he wrote in a Protestant magazine earlier this year pointing out the ethical challenge the sponsoring presented.

"There's a lot of resentment among them that the Kirchentag is so close to Volkswagen," he said. "The problem is not going away."


May 24, 2017

Removed from the land before, Ponca nation vows to protect the Earth from Keystone XL

By Kevin Hardy
USA Today

While their reasons may differ, the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska found local farmers and ranchers on their side when the two groups raised their opposition to the Keystone XL pipeline that would carry oil from Canada to the Gulf shore. Brian Powers/The Register
NELIGH, Neb. — Under a boundless canopy of clear blue skies painted with wispy white clouds, Mekasi Camp Horinek blows a whistle as he turns and prays to the four sacred directions.

He looks up to the creator as the high sun delivers welcome relief to battering prairie winds. He kneels, clutches a few strands of ryegrass and prays to Mother Earth.

Horinek leads this corn planting ceremony at the edge of a crop field that could be mistaken for thousands of others like it across the fertile heartland.

But his feet are planted at the site of two monumental crossings — one widely perceived as a historic injustice when his Ponca tribe was forcibly marched off this land 140 years ago; the other feared as a modern one, marking the proposed route for the controversial Keystone XL pipeline.

The ancient strand of blue corn that members of the Ponca tribe and others will plant here is a modest show of resistance to the pipeline, a project President Donald Trump resurrected in January after the Obama administration had buried it.

Keystone XL has been one of the nation’s most divisive environmental issues over the last two presidential election cycles.

Many Republicans argue that it will create construction jobs, safely move energy and lessen U.S. dependence on Middle Eastern oil. Democrats see it as furthering America's reliance on fossil fuels that will worsen climate change.

The fate of the $8 billion project likely lies with Nebraska, the only state that hasn't approved the route.

American Indian tribes such as the Ponca have pledged to take a leading role in the fight, bolstered by the months-long standoff over the Dakota Access pipeline near the Standing Rock Sioux reservation in North Dakota.

Some contend that the gathering birthed a spiritual awakening among Native Americans, bringing together hundreds of tribes for one of the few times in modern history.

The heated fight over Keystone XL has proven personal for members of the once-exiled Ponca Tribe of Nebraska. Now largely landless, the tribe has lined up to protect the pastures and crop fields of white farmers and ranchers who worry about the possible environmental threat of TransCanada's Keystone XL.

"I still belong to this land. This land sustained life for my people for thousands of generations," said Horinek, a 44-year-old member of the Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma. "And though they may have removed us from this land, they could never take it away from us, because it lives in our hearts."
'Keystone is on notice'

TransCanada's 36-inch crude oil pipeline would essentially be an extension of the original Keystone pipeline.

Both come south from Canada. But the KXL would jut diagonally across Montana, South Dakota and Nebraska, rather than taking the longer L-shaped route of the original line.

The pipeline company maintains that its pipeline will be built with state-of-the-art technology and operate under "an unparalleled maintenance regime."

Much of the debate in Nebraska plays out like déjà vu. Activists on both sides acknowledge that the controversy over Energy Transfer's Dakota Access pipeline will shade the next round of Keystone XL arguments.

At the height of the occupation in North Dakota in December, thousands of veterans marched in blizzard conditions to stand alongside natives. The same week, Obama halted the Dakota Access line for further review — a tangible, but short-lived, win for the protesters.

Since then, some big banks have pledged to be more cautious about funding future energy development projects. U.S. Bank even announced this year that it would not fund oil and gas pipelines.

"I think that Keystone is on notice that they’re not going to face an easy road," said Carolyn Raffensperger, the Ames, Ia.,-based executive director of the Science and Environmental Health Network, who volunteered legal services at the North Dakota anti-pipeline encampment. "The game really shifted with Standing Rock."

In North Dakota, the so-called water protectors chanted "Mni Wiconi," a Lakota translation of "water is life."

The tribe there argued that Dakota Access' path under the Missouri River could threaten its drinking water supply, as well as that of millions of people downstream.

In Nebraska, water will again play an integral role in the debate: Much of the state sits atop the Ogallala Aquifer, also known as the High Plains aquifer, one of the world's largest freshwater sources.

The underground reservoir, which spans parts of eight states, has made Nebraska's soil viable for corn and soybeans. And wells help sustain the nearly 2 million head of cattle across Nebraska, the nation's second-leading beef producer.

Opponents say any leaked or spilled oil would run through the state's sandy soil like water in a sieve, forever contaminating the aquifer for crops or livestock.
They also worry about the chemicals infused in the thick Canadian oil sands to make them viscous enough to send through pipes.

TransCanada spokesman Matthew John said five independent environmental impact reviews and a 10-month public review from the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality dispute such claims. He also pointed to a University of Nebraska researcher who says a leak or spill into the aquifer would remain localized.

"The suggestion that a pipeline leak could threaten the Ogallala Aquifer is not supported by volumes of environmental study conducted on this project," he said.

Critics rail against the idea of a foreign company using the state's eminent domain authority to forcibly win easements on private land. They push for more sources of renewable energy, like the wind farms that have popped up within sight of the pipeline's proposed path.

Business and labor groups, conversely, tout the economic windfall of the pipeline. It would boost property tax revenues along the route, strengthen the continent's energy security and provide thousands of jobs during construction.

"It's not like we don’t care about the environment," said Ron Kaminski, the political director at the Laborers International Union of North America Local 1140 in Omaha, whose members could earn as much as $100,000 per year working on the line.

"This is our backyard. We do these projects like it was running through our own personal backyards."

'For us, it's not for sale'

The cows start ambling toward Ron Crumly's Ford flatbed pickup as soon as it crests the horizon.

"They know we're coming," he said as cattle moo in anticipation.

During his daily ritual of checking on newborn calves and laying out hay bales, Crumly explains the improvements that he's made on his family's land.

He's worked to protect native grasses on his rolling pastures, and he's shifted to no-till farming to stave off nutrient runoff on his 1,800 acres of corn and soybean fields near Page, Neb.

His mother's family homesteaded on a quarter section here in 1887, and his father's family settled just down a dirt road in the early 1900s.

Now, TransCanada wants to bury its 36-inch pipeline across two quarter-sections of his farm.
He operates 16 center pivot irrigation heads that sustain his crops from underground wells. If oil were to spill in his sandy soil, it would drop right into the aquifer, he said, and get pumped right back onto his corn and beans, forever ruining the water supply.

"I'm done farming," he said. "It's worthless."

In some places, the aquifer is hundreds of feet below the surface, Crumly said. But on some parts of the farm, he can dig a small hole and hit water.

At 68, he's preparing to hand off the farm to his son, slowly relinquishing land and equipment the same way his father did with him. His 18-year-old grandson has expressed interest in eventually joining the family business.

Seven years ago, when TransCanada first called about burying its pipeline here, he leaned over to his wife, Jeanne, and told her: "It's not about the money, it's about the grandkids."

To them, the land is not a commodity. It's an inheritance that must be protected and passed on.

"God gave us this land to take care of it," Ron Crumly said. "For us, it's not for sale."

**Lessons from Standing Rock**

The last time Nebraskans debated Keystone, the fight was heated and impassioned, but it was local, said Mike Flood, the former Republican speaker of the unicameral Legislature.

He worries about predictions that the massive gathering in North Dakota to fight Dakota Access could spill over into the Keystone debate in Nebraska.

He fears that a flood of outside activists could cause violent confrontations with police.

"Honestly, I wouldn’t have even thought of this if North Dakota hadn’t happened," said Flood, who operates television and radio stations across Nebraska. "Obviously, we’re going to see national attention. I wish Nebraska wasn’t the last step."

But Jane Kleeb, president and founder of Bold Nebraska, which has led the pipeline opposition here, dismisses such concerns.

"Do you really think that I would let a whole bunch of tree-huggers come on somebody’s farm and ranch land that we’ve just spent the last seven year protecting and tear it up?" she said. "There's no question that we would put up a very strong resistance fight, but it will not look the same as Standing Rock. No place ever will look like Standing Rock."

In North Dakota, the resistance was led mostly by tribes, Kleeb said. With Keystone XL, the opposition will center on landowners and their private property rights, with tribes and environmentalists standing in solidarity.
Several years ago, Kleeb and environmental activists across the state joined about 100 landowners who refused to sign easement agreements with TransCanada, a coalition that remains largely intact today.

"Honestly for us, the lesson at Standing Rock was to not only make it about one constituency," she said, "because it's easier for the other side to divide and conquer."

'I am a man. God made us both'

Looking over the rusty chalk bluffs at Niobrara State Park near Nebraska's border with South Dakota, a maze of grass and sand-covered tongues weave in and out of the Missouri River.

It's this confluence of the Missouri and the Niobrara rivers that the Ponca people called home for generations.

The tribe, believed to have split off from the nearby Omaha tribe, were forced from these rolling acres in 1877 and marched down to Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma.

Along the route, at least 11 deaths were documented. In Oklahoma, more than a third of the tribe died, mostly from malaria.

The bones of an 18-month-old girl who died on the journey rest in the Laurel Hill Cemetery near Neligh, Neb. Her father asked that the locals care for the grave of White Buffalo Girl as they would their own.

Today, teddy bears, plastic flowers and child's toys surround the small headstone, the only one allowed to be decorated year-round.

Once in Indian Territory, Chief Standing Bear led a small group back north. He fled the miserable conditions in Oklahoma to honor a deathbed promise to his son, who asked that his bones be buried in the sacred hills near the two rivers.

With no food or water, they survived on the kindness of strangers, though the natives were ultimately captured by the U.S. military. The chief is best known for the landmark trial after his arrest and detainment near Omaha.

After filing suit for a writ of habeas corpus, he gave an impassioned plea to the court. He faced the audience and held up his right hand. Though his hand was of a different shade from theirs, he said, his and theirs would equally feel pain if pierced.

"The blood that will flow from mine will be of the same color as yours," Standing Bear said. "I am a man. God made us both."

The judge ruled that American Indians were people and entitled to protection under the law — a landmark decision at the time.
'We know what it's like to have land taken away'

Though Standing Bear won his freedom, the tribe never fully recovered from the removal, said Larry Wright Jr., chairman of the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska.

While the Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma has a reservation, the Nebraska tribe has never won back their land. Wright's people are spread across the state, along with a few tribal offices that provide social, medical and cultural services.

Without a base, the Ponca language, culture and traditional spirituality have waned, Wright said. The tribe now holds about 600 acres in northeast Nebraska, where it tends a buffalo herd, an educational trail system and powwow grounds.

"We know what it's like to have land taken away from us by a foreign entity," he said. "Our people were willing to die to come back to Nebraska. That's how much this land means to us."

While the tribe maintains that the pipeline would desecrate sacred sites and burial grounds, TransCanada's spokesman said the company has a strong track record of preserving important historical and cultural locations, sacred landmarks and ancient indigenous artifacts. He also cited a seven-year review of the project that examined historic sites in each state, as required under the National Historic Preservation Act.

Still, the Ponca people will prove a "powerful political unit" in the upcoming August hearings on Keystone XL, said Joe Starita, a journalism professor at the University of Nebraska who authored a book on Standing Bear and the Ponca removal.

In recent years, the chief's story and the Ponca Trail of Tears have received heightened attention from historians and the local media, Starita said. And the Ponca are more organized this time.

Like all native peoples, the most sacred thing to the Ponca, he said, is the land where their ancestors lie.

"It's not an economic value, it's a sacred value. When the Lakota saw the Black Hills, they saw god. When white Europeans saw the Black Hills, they saw gold," Starita said. "That's one letter of the alphabet different, but it's the difference of the Grand Canyon."

'I was taught you can't own the land'

To members of the Ponca tribes, maize is more than food or animal feed. It's revered as one of four gifts given to the clan from the creator, along with the sacred pipe, a bowl and a dog.

But the corn, like other traditions, was largely stripped from the Ponca over time.

This line of blue corn was revived a few years ago after kernels were found in medicine bags of Native Americans that had gone unopened for over 100 years, Mekasi Camp Horinek says.
He recently led about 90 native people, environmentalists and landowners along the Keystone route. They buried an acre's worth of the blue kernels for the fourth year in a row. Last spring's planting was an act of celebration. This time, it was an act of civil disobedience.

The 15 rows of maize confront the proposed path of Keystone XL through Art and Helen Tanderup's 160-acre farm, which has been in the family for a century. Years before, natives marched across this land during their forced removal from Nebraska.

Horinek, of the Ponca tribe in Oklahoma, said his great grandfather was among those to walk the 600-mile Ponca Trail of Tears. Though the removal split the Ponca into two separate tribes, he says every trip to Nebraska is a homecoming.

"I was taught you can't own the land," he said, "you only belong to it."

He brushes off questions about the unlikely alliance forged between the Native Americans whose ancestors grew corn, hunted buffalo and were buried here and the farmers and ranchers who now forge a living from the land.

"They buried their grandmothers and grandfathers in this land. And they have that same connection," Horinek said. "They care for this land. It's sustained their life for generations now."

View photos here:


May 29, 2017

Sisters in Ontario blend ecology and spirituality in retreat center ministry

By Dana Wachter
Global Sisters Report

With master's degrees and doctorates in eco-theology and eco-ethics, St. Joseph Srs. Linda Gregg and Mary Rowell run the Villa St. Joseph Ecology and Spirituality Centre in Cobourg, Ontario. The two teach university eco-theology courses from the center, which also houses a large community garden, and offer retreats and reflection for all faiths focused on the interconnectedness of spirituality and the Earth.

The building that has become Villa St. Joseph started as a home built around 1836 for a prominent local merchant, Winkworth Tremaine, Gregg said. The sisters' archivist is researching the exact story of the home, but Gregg said historians believe stagecoach and steamship executives later owned the home.
Cobourg became a summer destination for wealthy American families in the late 1800s, and as Gregg described, "many large houses were bought by both sides of the Civil War as 'boltholes' if their side didn't win." The home was eventually owned by the daughter of Gen. Ulysses S. Grant (who later became a U.S. president), Nellie Grant.

When she died, her second husband sold the home and 10 acres to the Sisters of St. Joseph in 1921 to be used as a girls' orphanage. Rowell said they have been in touch with women who were raised in the orphanage who had happy memories of their time at the house and grounds.

By the 1950s, it served as a seasonal retreat center for sisters and, later, was broadened into a year-round space for novitiate training, retreats for Catholics and, eventually, spiritual retreats for any faith.

When she arrived at Villa St. Joseph in 1994, Gregg expected to spend only a couple of years helping the effort. She hadn't imagined how her personal passion for the Earth and nature would develop into a thriving ecological and spirituality center for people from many faith backgrounds.

Gregg grew up on Cordova Bay in British Columbia in an isolated, rural setting by the sea. She describes learning to garden at just 3 years old from a neighbor who often babysat her.

As she reflected on the transition into her community, Gregg used a journal entry from the time she professed first vows to remember a crisis she faced.

"How can I live my dedication and commitment to God and not live my dedication and commitment to the Earth?" she said. "I prayed very profoundly about that, because at that time, sisters weren't into ecology. It was just some little thing that kept me happy, and they were delighted to have the flower garden. A tomato plant might appear here and there; it was nice, but it wasn't mission. I really felt God saying to me, 'This is what you need to do now, Linda. Follow this path. Make your first vows. Keep your love for your Earth in your heart, and I'll show you the way,' and God did."

Rowell credits her love for gardening to her childhood spent in England surrounded by "generations of English country gardens, rambling flowers and fruits in the gardens." She entered the Sisters of St. Joseph around 2005 after spending her discernment period ministering and writing her doctorate at Villa St. Joseph. She had already traveled the world as a nurse and nurse educator, experiencing heartbreaking images of poverty and the breakdown of cohesion between the environment and humans. After her novitiate, Rowell was assigned elsewhere before returning to Villa St. Joseph about five years ago.

"I realized that we can never separate out the suffering of humans and the suffering of the environment. It's like a vicious cycle," Rowell said. "Where there is human suffering, we have increasing environmental degradation. Where there's environmental degradation, we have increasing human suffering."
When a community garden in the region lost its land, the sisters were approached to use part of the retreat center's 10 acres for new gardening plots. Gregg was thrilled to put her market garden background into spiritual use through expanding the ministry at Villa St. Joseph. What started as six plots for groups and individuals of varying socioeconomic backgrounds to create a community garden overlooking Lake Ontario has turned into 80 plots.

In an effort to expand its outreach, the center brought on St. Joseph Sr. Christine Carbotte, who recently professed first vows, as an IT and computer expert. She helps with technology at the center and updates the center's website and social media pages so sisters, community members and others interested can learn more about the center's ecological efforts.

When Carbotte got excited about a new way to save surplus organic carrots over the winter, she shared it on Facebook. She plans to use the platform to offer food sustainability and conservation advice to the public.

In the future, Rowell anticipates creating new youth-focused programming "to get them very conscious of their relationship with the Earth and understanding it in the light of their faith traditions, too."

[Dana Wachter is a freelance journalist and digital storyteller based in London, Ontario.]

May 30, 2017

Greed biggest issue of the environment, Tibet’s Karmapa Lama says: Cohn

By Martin Regg Cohn, Ontario Politics Columnist
Toronto Star

It is not his destiny to be the next Dalai Lama. For he is already reincarnated as the 17th Karmapa Lama.

Yet he may one day succeed his 81-year-old teacher and protector.

Revered since age 7 as spiritual leader of a 1,000-year-old branch of Tibetan Buddhism, Ogyen Trinley Dorje is making his first trip to Canada this week at the age of 31.

Meeting Ontario politicians Tuesday before sitting down for an interview, the Karmapa padded around Queen’s Park in a pair of brown hiking shoes peeking out from under his simple maroon robes. A picture of youthful wisdom with his direct gaze, towering above other monks at six feet tall, he may yet emerge as the public face of Tibetan Buddhism
Worshipped as a living god and the Buddha of Compassion, will he also inherit the Dalai Lama’s imagery of divinity and celebrity?

“It is almost impossible to take on the role of the Dalai Lama,” the Karmapa tells me cautiously, modestly, in our interview.

The politics of religion is a delicate subject, not least for the world’s most suffocated and yet idealized faith. The Karmapa — which translates roughly as the embodiment of Buddha activity — is accompanied by bodyguards to safeguard him from physical threats, but also an entourage of aides to protect him from political missteps.

“I will try to do as much as I can do, but this issue about future leadership, this is not something that I alone can decide. I think this is up to the people of Tibet,” he answers diplomatically.

His intonations and mannerisms are reminiscent of the Dalai Lama, whom I interviewed at his residence-in-exile in the Indian redoubt of Dharamsala more than a decade ago, after my own trip to Tibet. Like the Dalai Lama, he barrels ahead in blunt English on familiar topics, but deftly reverts to an interpreter for the stickier subjects.

In years past, the Karmapa skirted the succession question by saying he had his hands full in his current role. Now older and wiser (and bolder), he maps out another route that stresses the propitious over the ambitious.

“Maybe things need more time to resolve this problem,” he concludes.

More time. In the meantime, he worries about political positions hardening on both sides, blocking the way to an eventual settlement.

The Tibet he left behind as a 14-year-old — escaping his Chinese minders in the dead of night to cross the Himalayas and reach neighbouring India — is in even more desperate circumstances today. Hundreds of monks have immolated themselves to protest Chinese repression, which has become only worse since violence erupted in the Tibetan capital of Lhasa in 2008.

In late 2003, the Dalai Lama told me about his diplomatic dialogue with Beijing, which had just resumed. All these years later, it has reached a dead end, the Karmapa acknowledges.

Despite the frustration and radicalization of younger Tibetans, he still believes the middle path is the only route to a political settlement. And he may be well placed to find a way, never having been denounced by China’s rulers, who continue to demonize the Dalai Lama as a “splittist.”

“Dialogue between Tibet and China needs to continue,” he answers in Tibetan, throwing in the English words “common sense” and “mutual understanding” to make his point.

“Far too much time is spent on discussing policy and political issues outside, when the real attention needs to be paid to the daily experiences of the Tibetan people inside Tibet,” he continues. “It’s very easy on the outside to get lost in this policy discussion.”
In the same vein, he frets about the people’s propensity to lose their way on environmental threats and the spectre of global warming, which are no less forbidding for the people of Tibet and the world. Like political obstacles, environmental challenges can seen insoluble if addressed in their entirety, rather than individually.

“I think the biggest issue is also related to humans’ motivations — human greed is the biggest issue of the environment, because of consumerism,” he muses. “The sad thing is, until something happens, people don’t want to change.”

As the Karmapa ponders the future problems of environmental depredation and the liberation of his own people, what about his own personal journey until now?

At age 7 he was discovered by a group of travelling lamas and plucked from his family to be tutored in monasteries and groomed for his reincarnated role. In later years he was watched over by the Chinese minders and spies. After his escape as a teenager, he was suspected by the Indian security services of being a Chinese plant, and largely confined to lodgings supplied by the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala. Only recently has he been given greater freedom to travel (a yellow ID document issued by India governs his movements).

Yet even when travelling he remains in a bubble, ensconced by his entourage. At home he dare not go for a walk lest he be engulfed by devotees.

I ask, teasingly, about an exercise machine in his monastery.

“But no place to put,” he deadpans.

Does he miss his personal freedom of movement?

“Yes of course,” he shoots back. “I don’t have much choice . . . sometimes it’s too much.”


June 2, 2017

Church leaders express regret over US climate change decision

Anglican Communion News Service

Church leaders have expressed their regret over the decision by US President Donald Trump to withdraw from the Paris Agreement on climate change. The agreement, reached after years of negotiations culminating in the COP21 talks in Paris in December 2015, committed world leaders to work towards reducing global temperature increases.
A significant number of Anglican leaders, headed by the Archbishop of Cape Town, Thabo Makgoba, were in Paris for the talks to push the political leaders towards an agreement. Yesterday, in the Whitehouse Rose Garden, President Trump confirmed the long-signalled decision to withdraw the US from the agreement, saying it was “unfair” on the United States.

“This agreement is less about the climate and more about other countries gaining a financial advantage over the United States,” President Trump said. “The rest of the world applauded when we signed the Paris Agreement – they went wild; they were so happy – for the simple reason that it put our country, the United States of America, which we all love, at a very, very big economic disadvantage.

“A cynic would say the obvious reason for economic competitors and their wish to see us remain in the agreement is so that we continue to suffer this self-inflicted major economic wound. We would find it very hard to compete with other countries from other parts of the world.”

He continued: “We have among the most abundant energy reserves on the planet, sufficient to lift millions of America’s poorest workers out of poverty. Yet, under this agreement, we are effectively putting these reserves under lock and key, taking away the great wealth of our nation. It’s great wealth. It’s phenomenal wealth. Not so long ago, we had no idea we had such wealth and [were] leaving millions and millions of families trapped in poverty and joblessness.”

President Trump confirmed that new coal mines would be opening shortly in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia.

Church leaders were quick to respond to the announcement.

The message of the Presiding Bishop of the US-based Episcopal Church, Bishop Michael Curry, was that: “we’re still in” – as he said that the Episcopal Church would “continue to take bold action to address the climate crisis.”

In a statement, Bishop Curry said that human beings “have been charged with being trustees, caretakers, stewards of God’s creation.”

He continued: “The United States has been a global leader in caring for God’s creation through efforts over the years on climate change. President Trump’s announcement changes the US’s leadership role in the international sphere.

“Despite this announcement, many US businesses, states, cities, regions, non-governmental organisations and faith bodies like the Episcopal Church can continue to take bold action to address the climate crisis.

“The phrase, ‘We’re still in,’ became a statement of commitment for many of us who regardless of this decision by our President are still committed to the principles of the Paris Agreement.”

He said that faith groups occupied “a unique space in the worldwide climate movement” and he highlighted the position of the Episcopal Church as an international body representing 17
countries with provisional observer status empowered to send accredited observers to UN climate change meetings.

“Furthermore, the Episcopal Church is a member of the worldwide Anglican Communion, the third-largest Christian tradition, and we remain committed to ensuring that Anglicans everywhere are empowered to undertake bold action on climate change mitigation and adaptation,” he said.

“We know that caring for God’s creation by engaging climate change is not only good for the environment, but also good for the health and welfare of our people. The US is currently creating more clean jobs faster than job creation in nearly every other sector of the economy, and unprecedented acceleration in the clean energy sector is also evident in many other major economies.

“My prayer is that we in the Episcopal Church will, in this and all things, follow the way, the teachings and the Spirit of Jesus by cultivating a loving, liberating and life-giving relationship with God, all others in the human family, and with all of God's good creation.

“In spite of hardships and setbacks, the work goes on. This is God’s world. And we are all his children.”

Across the Atlantic, the Church of England’s lead bishop on the environment, the Bishop of Salisbury Nick Holtam, went much further with an outright condemnation of President Trump’s decision, which he described as an “abject failure of leadership.”

“I am, frankly, very disturbed by President Trump’s decision to revoke the United States’ commitment to the Paris Agreement, which was a global commitment made in good faith,” he said.

“Climate change is one of the great challenges of our times. There is a moral and spiritual dimension with a strong consensus built among the faith communities about the care of our common home. The scientific, economic and political arguments point in the same direction.

“How can President Trump look in the eye the people most affected, including the world’s poorest in the places most affected by climate change now, and those affected by increasingly frequent extreme weather in parts of the USA? The leader of what used to be called ‘the new world’ is trapped in old world thought and action.”

He continued: “President Trump has not recognised the economic potential of renewable energy which represents a paradigm shift capable of generating sustainable prosperity. What will our children and grandchildren say to us about the way we respond to this extreme carelessness?

“Our is the first generation which cannot say we did not know about the human impact on climate change.
“For the US government to withdraw from taking responsible action in keeping with the Paris agreement is an abject failure of leadership. The USA emits nearly a fifth of global CO2 emissions. This step is particularly disappointing at a time when China, the world's other mega-emitter of CO2, has committed to deep and sustained cuts in emissions to protect its own citizens as well as the rest of the world.

“In challenging President Trump’s decision, ‘We the people’, including churches and other faith leaders, must speak clearly: this decision is wrong for the USA and for the world. I commend those American churches and faith leaders who are speaking out and organising against this decision.

“How out of touch President Trump is with many of his own people was shown yesterday, when the Church of England helped lead a consortium of shareholders with $5 trillion [USD] of assets under management at the ExxonMobil AGM. A motion was passed overwhelmingly forcing the company to undertake and disclose analysis of what limiting climate change to two degrees Celsius would mean for its business.

“Shareholders can make a difference. So can citizens and electors.”

The decision was also condemned by leaders of other Christian traditions and ecumenical bodies.

“This is a tragedy, missing an opportunity to show real, accountable leadership for the future of humanity and our common home,” the general secretary of the World Council of Churches, the Revd Olav Fykse Tveit, said. “This is a decision that is not morally sustainable; and not economically sustainable either. The struggle for climate justice has to continue.”

Rudelmar Bueno De Faria, the general secretary of the Act Alliance, an organisation which includes a number of Anglican development agencies, said: “Only 18 months ago global leaders welcomed the landmark Paris Climate Agreement for taking into account the immediate needs of countries most severely affected by the impacts of climate change. The move by the President of the United States today flies in the face of ethics and Christian values.”

Last month, Pope Francis presented President Trump with a copy of his encyclical on the environment, Laudato Si’ during a visit to the Vatican. The chair of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops international justice and peace committee, Bishop Oscar Cantú of Las Cruces, described President Trump’s decision as “deeply troubling.”

“The Scriptures affirm the value of caring for creation and caring for each other in solidarity. The Paris agreement is an international accord that promotes these values. President Trump’s decision will harm the people of the United States and the world, especially the poorest, most vulnerable communities.

“The impacts of climate change are already being experienced in sea level rise, glacial melts, intensified storms, and more frequent droughts. I can only hope that the President will propose concrete ways to address global climate change and promote environmental stewardship.”
June 5, 2017

Sisters join chorus denouncing Trump’s climate move

By Dawn Araujo-Hawkins and Chris Herlinger
Global Sisters Report

Women religious added their voices to the chorus of sharp disapproval and disappointment following President Donald Trump's announcement June 1, that he was pulling the United States from the historic Paris Agreement on climate change.

A number of Catholic organizations have condemned Trump's move as being catastrophic, as National Catholic Reporter cited in an article. Women religious are also expressing their concerns about the world’s No. 2 polluter reneging on its commitment to the pact, which committed 195 countries to keeping global warming below the level at which scientists believe irreversible damage could occur.

In an email to Global Sisters Report, Franciscan Sr. Joan Brown, executive director of New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light and a Franciscans International delegate at the 2015 conference at which the Paris Agreement was adopted, called the move a “mortal sin.”

"This decision disregards our basic human purpose on the planet to love and care for the garden and one another," she said. "As I hold the predictable, yet dark decision of the U.S. administration in my prayer and work, the warning statement of Pope Francis re-echoes in my soul, 'Every year the problems are more grave. ... We are at the limit. We are at the limit of a suicide, to say a strong word.'"

In a statement released Friday, the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas — the largest single congregation of women religious in the U.S. — said the decision was "by far the most concerning among a number of actions taken by the Trump Administration to weaken the country's commitment to address climate change and to protect those most at risk from its effects."

They also called on Congress to take leadership in reducing the nation's carbon emissions and moving the country into the renewable energy economy.

The Dominican Sisters of Peace and Benedictines of Erie, Pennsylvania, have also released statements decrying U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement.

Sr. Anne Curtis, a member of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas' leadership team, told Global Sisters Report that the U.S. pulling out of the Paris Agreement was bad, but offered some
optimism: "I think the resolve that will come out of this is an even deeper commitment to the work we've already been doing."

The Mercy Sisters began their explicit commitment to "reverence Earth" in 1995 at the encouragement of their sisters in the Philippines who were witnessing, firsthand, the effects of climate change. "We also have sisters in Latin America, Guam and Jamaica," Curtis said, "and they've been on the frontlines of seeing some serious issues."

At the United Nations, where the Paris Agreement has wide support among Catholic sisters who represent their congregations, reaction to Trump's announcement was also negative.

"It is an unacceptable decision while the rest of the world is moving forward," Sr. Teresa Kotturan, the U.N. representative for the Sisters of Charity Federation, told GSR. She said it will be up to individuals and other countries and states to adhere to the pact.

"Let us remain committed to implement Paris Climate Change Agreement through our individual and collective action, to ensure 'no one is left behind,' " she said.

On her Facebook page, Kotturan posted a quote from Marshall Islands President Hilda Heine, who said, "Today's decision is not only disappointing, but also highly concerning for those of us that live on the frontline of climate change."

Noting the threat that climate change poses for small island states like the Marshall Islands, Kotturan told GSR, "Think of our brothers and sisters who live on small islands with an uncertain future. What do we want to leave for the next generation?"

Sr. Margaret O'Dwyer, who represents the Company of the Daughters of Charity at the U.N., told GSR, "It is profoundly sad that there is a loss of a sense of the common good." O'Dwyer also noted that Trump's action "countervenes the message of [Francis' environmental encyclical] Laudato Si' that Earth's inhabitants are interconnected."

She also expressed worry about "the potential for chaos when world leaders agree and then rescind agreements at will."

Sr. Celine Paramunda, the Medical Mission Sisters' representative at the U.N., said she had feelings of disappointment in the short-term but hope for the long-term. Paramunda and other members of her congregation were in Paris when an agreement on the accord was reached and, she recalls, "we, the [members of civil society], rejoiced after tirelessly working for it for years."

Now, the situation is dire, she told GSR. "It is very unfortunate that even after meeting with Pope Francis — who tried to convince Trump not to back out of the global pact — President Trump took this decision."

"I feel this act is of dire consequences not only to the people of the USA but more particularly to the less privileged people living in more dangerous places like the small island states and the
least developed countries, " she said, citing Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, two south Asian countries dealing now with, respectively, the effects of a cyclone and deadly flooding.

What gives Paramunda hope, she said, "is that countries like China, Germany and India are ready to take the lead in implementing it [the Paris Agreement] as they realize the global responsibility in dealing with this global problem."

Paramunda notes, too, that a number of U.S. governors, mayors and corporate leaders disagree with Trump's decision and that polls show that "a majority of the people in the United States are committed to implementing the Paris agreement."

"When it comes to actions, it is the committed people who matter," she said, noting that world leaders, including former U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, have said the Paris agreement was the result of agreement by many nations and that it cannot be undone by a single country.

"Let this challenge unite the world to do more for a better world," Paramunda said. "The good news is that there are more good people in the world who care for the common good — our Mother Earth."

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June 6, 2017

'Cancer Alley' residents say industry is hurting town: 'We're collateral damage'

By Lauren Zanolli
The Guardian

“‘We’re sick of being sick, we’re tired of being tired,’” said Pastor Harry Joseph of Mount Triumph Baptist Church, which serves this sleepy riverside town of about 1,000 residents, mostly poor and African American. Once a bucolic village of pasturelands and sugarcane fields on the banks of the Mississippi, St James, Louisiana, is now a densely packed industrial zone in the heart of Louisiana’s petrochemical corridor, commonly referred to as “Cancer Alley”.

A special prosecutor, the FBI and various congressional committees are all involved in inquiries associated with the US president

It’s only anecdotal evidence of what life is like here, but Joseph says he has buried five residents in the last six months, all victims of cancer.
After a $1.9bn methanol plant recently broke ground and with another $1.3bn methanol plant and a controversial new oil pipeline planned for the area, Joseph’s one-room church has become a staging ground for an environmental justice fight – albeit one with tempered hopes under Donald Trump, even before he served notice on the Paris accord on climate change last week.

Joseph has emerged as the de facto leader of a group of local residents demanding residential buyouts – for those who say they have had enough and struggle to sell their homes – and pressuring state and federal agencies to halt further development. With regulation that critics say is loose and incentives-rich, even by Louisiana standards, St James offers a glimpse into the type of unchecked development that Trump has hailed as a precondition for American jobs and economic growth.

The town’s location on the Mississippi river and accessibility to cheap oil and gas feedstock make St James what Louisiana Economic Development, a state agency, described to the Guardian as an “ideal” site for large industrial projects. About ten years ago, the town was rezoned from residential to industrial, paving the way for the highly concentrated development seen today. Fifteen large industrial sites – mainly oil storage facilities, pipelines and petrochemical plants – now fill the 13-mile stretch of road that defines the town of St James, also known as the fifth ward of St James parish.

Yet residents here say they’ve seen little economic benefit – either in jobs or tax revenues – from the industry that has taken over the town. Instead, they say, they’ve been saddled with a myriad of health issues, medical bills and environmental degradation.

“They put [the plants] here and the other parishes are the ones that get the jobs,” claimed Joseph. “We’re like the lamb that was sacrificed.”

The rise of the oil and petrochemical industry at their doorstep has thrust residents into a financial trap. They can’t afford to leave without selling their houses, but the predominance of industrial plants and pipelines has slashed home values and scared off buyers. Many here see only one ticket out: a residential buyout by industrial companies operating here.

“We’re going to make sure they get compensated right and they are able to move on with their life,” said Joseph of the significant population here that wants to leave, many of them elderly. “They have dedicated themselves to St James. And right now they are saying, ‘I can live in St. James, but I can’t die in St. James.’”

**Industrial ailments**

Geraldine Mayho is one of those residents determined not to die in St James. A large suitcase and stack of boxes fill one corner of her modest home, which is bordered on both sides by the huge cylindrical oil storage tanks that dominate the local landscape. She walks through the house to point out the crooked doorways and window frames and cracked walls – an effect of the near-constant industrial activity at nearby loading docks that has shifted the house foundation.
She says she can’t afford to rent an apartment on her monthly pension of about $700 from her days as a janitor at the local high school. Her best option is to move in with her grandchildren in Mobile, Alabama, until someone – local industry, she hopes – compensates her for her home.

“Whether or not they buy me out, I’ve got to get out of here,” said Mayho. “I’m so tired of being sick.”

She says that since moving here in 1965, when the area was still mostly agricultural, she has suffered a range of ailments, from headaches to stomachaches and heart problems, that doctors could never fully explain. But several years ago, she says one doctor gave her a letter stating her conditions were the result of exposure to “toxic substances”.

Her family’s health, too, has been shaped by the town’s air pollution. She rattles off a list of six female relatives, all residents, recently diagnosed with or deceased from breast cancer. One son has had a persistent cough; another is infertile. Her daughter died in her 30s, but she says doctors couldn’t identify the exact cause.

“She was sick like I was sick,” Mayho said. Asked if she thought her daughter’s death had been caused by industrial pollution, she fought back tears: “I know it was.”

The Louisiana Tumor Registry, a state cancer tracker, only releases data on a regional level, so localized cancer rates are hard to come by. But many residents who speak to the Guardian seem to have some ailment or an affected family member, from cancer to asthma to multiple sclerosis and skin conditions, and they all trace it back to the air pollution from the chemical plants that surround them.

Isle de Jean Charles has lost 98% of its land and most of its population to rising sea levels – but as remaining residents consider relocation, what happens next is a test case to address resettlement needs.

However, according to the Louisiana department of environmental quality (LDEQ), the state regulator, emissions from the collection of plants that surround St James are compliant with state and federal regulations. LDEQ representatives point to improvements in air quality over the years as a sign of regulatory success.

“It’s very clear that air quality has greatly improved over time,” Bryan Johnston, who works in the air permits division of the LDEQ, said. “Over the last 20 years and even more recently, in just the last several years, there has been dramatic declines in air emissions in St James parish.”

Johnston said the LDEQ would release its long-term emissions data for St James with its forthcoming final permitting decision for the YCI plant. Publicly available EPA data is inconclusive and often averaged across the entire county. One data set from the EPA’s Toxic Release Inventory for “core chemicals” – which does not include chemicals added since 1988 – shows wide year-over-year fluctuations in total air emissions for St James Parish since the late 1980s. In 2015, total core chemicals emissions were 501,150 pounds, scarcely below the 516,088 reported in 1988.
But few here would agree with Johnston’s assessment. Some say they simply stopped reporting strong chemical smells that regularly waft across the town because, they say, local authorities don’t do anything.

“Back in the day, you knew when you smelled it,” said Breitaine Celestin, 66, describing unusual emissions events. She grew up in the area and lives alone in a small trailer that borders an industrial railroad and oil storage terminals. “But now, it’s like a part of your life.”

Local people say wild lemon and orange trees have stopped bearing fruit, there are no more butterflies or crickets, and new flooding issues have plagued the town since their industrial neighbors began to use the agricultural ditches that once let rainwater flow through for plant drainage use.

“[We feel] totally unprotected, forgotten about,” added Eve Butler, 60, a resident and local advocate.

Despite the constant refrain from politicians and companies touting job opportunities, few here of working age are employed in the local oil and petrochemical plants. Any boom in construction jobs is brief and the far fewer permanent jobs tend to go to contractors outside the parish or the state. There are some local residents employed by the nearby plants, but, according to residents, many people work outside of the town or parish, mainly in professional services positions or at other industrial plants.

“Our quality of life has deteriorated and nobody takes responsibility for that. Because you’re told: it’s private industry, it’s going to be good for the community. But the community has not benefitted,” said Butler. “We are kind of, like, collateral damage.”

A state of deregulation

With two new methanol plants, plus the terminus of the Bayou Bridge pipeline – which would carry crude oil from the controversial Dakota Access pipeline – planned for the area, local and state activists see an opportunity to fight back. But Trump’s dual aims of handcuffing the EPA with budget cuts while also accelerating industrial deregulation have tempered hopes for change here.

In January, Yuhuang Chemical Inc (YCI), a subsidiary of China’s Shandong Yuhuang Chemical Co, broke ground on the first phase of its $1.9bn methanol plant. When the project was announced in 2014, it was the largest greenfield investment by a Chinese firm in the United States. The plant will eventually produce 3m metric tons of methanol per year, 40-60% of which could be shipped abroad, according to YCI’s general counsel, Jerry Jones.

South Louisiana Methanol’s (SLM) $1.3bn plant, to produce 5,300 metric tons per day, is planned nearby. The Bayou Bridge pipeline, another project drawing the ire of environmentalists, would, once built, cross 163 miles of delicate Louisiana wetlands, including eight watersheds, and terminate at oil storage terminals in St James. Both projects are expected to receive permits to move forward soon.
In this largely African American town that grew out of former slave plantations, people are concerned with a certain kind of environmental injustice. Two environmental groups have pushed the EPA to declare civil rights violations because the cumulative air pollution of existing and new plants disproportionately impacts a community of color.

“We felt it was a perfect example of environmental injustices happening at a community that has already got too much to be there,” said Darryl Malek-Wiley, environmental justice organizer at the Sierra Club, which, along with the local not-for-profit Louisiana Environmental Action Network, filed the EPA petitions against YCI and SLM.

The EPA did not respond to the SLM petition, but in August, the agency agreed with some parts of the group’s petition addressing the YCI plant and kicked the question of the air emissions permit back to LDEQ. The state agency floated a revised permit for public comment late last year; the same environmental groups again petitioned in March, saying the new version still failed to comply with Clean Air Act standards. But another EPA ruling in their favor is an unlikely prospect, the advocacy group fears, as the agency prepares for major cuts under Trump, including the elimination of its environmental justice program. The LDEQ says it expects to issue final approval for the new emissions permit this month.

For environmentalists in Louisiana, where the LDEQ is widely viewed as an accessory of industrial corporations, Trump’s attempts to unravel the EPA are especially worrying.

“[LDEQ] feels that it’s their goal to issue permits … not to protect citizens of Louisiana, not to protect the environment,” said Malek-Wiley. He says that while the EPA’s Region 6 office, which covers Louisiana, has been among the weakest on enforcement, the agency has still stepped in at times when the state has not. One of the first environmental justice cases tried by the EPA put a stop to a proposed PVC plant in 1998 in Convent, Louisiana, directly across the river from St James.

Johnston, of the LDEQ, strongly rejected claims the office served as a rubber stamp for industry, citing what he said were long-term air quality improvements in the state.

Louisiana has developed an outsized role in the country’s energy and petrochemical industry, thanks in part to generous tax breaks that are largely borne at the local level. The state’s Industrial Tax Exemption Program (ITEP), which dates back to the 1930s, offers a 10-year local property tax exemption for industrial developers. Between 2008 and 2015, the state estimates it lost nearly $10bn in revenue under the ITEP. It expects to forego an additional $7bn from 2016 to 2020.

St James has been one of the top parishes for the ITEP over the past decade, giving out an average of $36.5m in tax breaks every year. That’s compared to a total of $61.8m in taxes actually collected in the parish in 2015.

Nearly 50 farm workers experienced nausea and vomiting apparently caused by a pesticide whose scheduled ban was overturned by the Trump administration.
Crawfish broil

As the latest high-profile company to enter the town, in April, YCI hosted a crawfish boil with company representatives on hand to answer questions about the plant. The event turned contentious, as Joseph and a group of upset citizens peppered the company president and CEO, Charlie Yao, with questions, unsatisfied with his assertion that the plant would be built to the highest environmental and safety standards.

“No one can get 100% support of anything you do,” Yao told the Guardian. “That’s my mission, to work with people.” He said the meeting was the start of a community engagement process that would include job and vendor fairs this summer. The company plans to hire 90-100 people on a permanent basis once the first phase of the plant comes online, by October of 2019.

“We’re going to try to do the best we can to be a good community neighbor,” Jones, YCI’s general counsel, told the Guardian. When asked if the company would participate in any residential buyouts, Jones said: “I don’t feel it’s appropriate [for YCI] to bear the burden of solving that problem for the community. If the industrial complex wants to figure out a way to solve that problem, then we will be a part of that.”

Still, many here remain skeptical.

“What you are looking at is a dying community,” said Butler. “Not because of the residents, but because of the way industry is allowed to come in. And they call it progress.” Years ago, she encouraged her children, who grew up in St James, to move out of Louisiana because of the health risks. Within the next ten years or so, she expects the entire town will be nothing but plants and pipelines.

“We’ve got a president now that looks at money and not people,” said Joseph. “Our fight is just beginning, because if it’s not going to be this [plant], it’s going to be another one.” Nevertheless, he says his hope is that public pressure on YCI will force the company – and others looking at St James – to eventually pull out.

“We might not win all the battles,” he said. “But I think we are going to win the war.”


June 8, 2017

Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Receives Prestigious Award + $1 Million Investment to Transition Away From Fossil Fuels

By Wallace Global Fund
EcoWatch
The Wallace Global Fund awarded the inaugural Henry A. Wallace Award and a $250,000 prize to the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe for its unyielding courage in the fight against the Dakota Access Pipeline, and its dedication to transitioning to renewable energy. In addition to the $250,000 prize, the tribe will receive up to a $1 million investment from the Wallace Global Fund to support its transition toward fossil fuel independence.

The award was presented to Tribal Chairman David Archambault II at an award ceremony in New York on Thursday; a donor and investor lunch briefing followed the ceremony to highlight solar and wind energy projects underway at the Standing Rock Reservation.

The Henry A. Wallace Award was established in 2017 by the Wallace Global Fund to lift up the extraordinary courage and will it takes to stand up to oppressive corporate and political power. Henry A. Wallace was a visionary and progressive advocate who served as the 33rd vice president of the U.S. under President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

"Our foundation is guided by my grandfather's framing of a mighty struggle that continues to this day: protecting the interests of what he called the 'common man'—ordinary people—against the oppressive combination of corporate and governmental power. Democracy, he said, 'must put human beings first and dollars second,'" said Scott Wallace, co-chair of the Wallace Global Fund.

"This award in his honor is intended to recognize the type of extraordinary courage that ordinary people can summon to fight such abuses of power. No one represents such courage better than the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. And never has such courage been more essential to the health of our democracy than right now."

"We hold the Standing Rock community in high regard for their care for human and ecological well-being. By resisting the dysfunctional narrative imposed by the fossil-fuel industry, Standing Rock has demonstrated what it looks like to prioritize well-being over profit for the few," said Scott Fitzmorris, co-chair of the Wallace Global Fund and great grandson of Henry A. Wallace.

Over the past year, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe fought to protect its clean water, sacred lands and indigenous rights by resisting the Dakota Access Pipeline in a series of peaceful protests against Energy Transfer Partners' plans to build the pipeline along a route violating Treaty law. The protests drew international attention and support—running from approximately April 2016 through February 2017, attracting thousands of people and resulting in hundreds of arrests and injuries. The Standing Rock Sioux tribe and its supporters who protested in solidarity stood their ground for higher principles at grave personal risk, igniting a movement.

President Trump's executive order that gave the green light for the Dakota Access Pipeline was yet another transgression against Native Americans. Although oil began flowing through the Dakota Access Pipeline on June 1, 2017, the danger to the tribe's water supply continues and the Standing Rock Sioux are not giving up the fight. They are pursuing legal action against the pipeline, while moving toward fossil fuel independence through expansion in renewable energy.
"This is not over. We continue to fight the pipeline in court and await a decision that adequately reflects the rule of law established in this country—one so often flouted by this administration. However, we will never stop fighting for our planet and future generations; this resiliency is part of who we are as a tribe," said Archambault.

"We are grateful and honored to accept the inaugural Henry A. Wallace Award and a grant from the Wallace Global Fund that will help us continue our resistance against the pipeline and transition to clean energy technologies like wind and solar."


June 9, 2017

Guardians of Creation

BBC

Faith communities say these are critical times for the environment. Their driving force comes from the belief that they are guardians of creation - protectors of the earth. While people of faith the world over are working for change, Ritula Shah asks what special dynamic they bring to the environmental movement and whether they can harness religious conviction to effect global policy.

Pope Francis has joined the voices of Islamic, Jewish, Sikh and Hindu leaders, amongst others, in calling for action on climate change, imbuing the debate with a moral and spiritual imperative. And it is not just religious leaders. People of faith across the religious spectrum and around the world are actively involved in practical projects to protect the environment and raise awareness.

We visit some of these projects and meet the people running them. We attend an environmental workshop for imams, we talk to worshippers in the Punjab celebrating Sikh Environment Day, workers at an Eco Village in Tanzania run by Islamic Help and we have tea with volunteers at a Christian run community allotment in England. What difference can they make?

Dr Mary Evelyn Tucker, expert on Religion and Ecology says there are roughly a billion Hindus, a billion and a half Muslims, a billion Confucians and two billion Christians alone, making quite a moral force.

Dr Rajwant Singh from Eco Sikh says these vast faith communities have to work together and if they do, they are better placed than anyone else to influence governments.

Listen to the recording here:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p054nkxf
June 9, 2017

Politics, culture or theology? Why evangelicals back Trump on global warming

By David Gibson
Religion News Service

(RNS) President Trump’s decision to pull out of the landmark Paris agreement sparked a global outcry and provided yet another flashpoint to illuminate the nation’s stark political divide on climate change: The U.S. right largely rallied to his side while those on the left gnashed their teeth over what seemed like a planet-threatening move.

But the controversial move earlier this month was also another indicator of the sharp contrast between conservative Christians and the rest of the American religious scene, as predominantly white evangelical Protestants often hailed the president’s action while Catholics, mainline Protestants and leaders of other faiths decried it.

“Climate change is real. Failing to protect the earth is not just a failure of leadership. It is a moral failure,” Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich wrote in a tweetstorm of criticism that was echoed by Catholic officials from Washington to the Vatican, where Pope Francis has made environmental protection a priority.

On the other side, however, conservative Christians such as the popular commentator – and theology student – Erick Erickson were having none of it.

“I worship Jesus, not Mother Earth,” Erickson tweeted. “He calls us all to be good stewards of the planet, but doesn’t mean I have to care about global warming.”

Speaking at a town hall meeting in Coldwater, Mich., GOP Rep. Tim Walberg – a graduate of evangelical schools – made a similar point: “As a Christian, I believe that there is a creator in God who is much bigger than us. And I’m confident that, if there’s a real problem, he can take care of it.”

Yet the question of just why white evangelicals are such outliers on this issue remains a matter of intense debate.

The simplest, and most common, explanation is that conservative Christians are simply putting their political preferences first, like most people do; indeed, surveys show that white evangelicals remain stalwart Trump supporters and backers of GOP economic and other policies, and that pattern seems to hold on this issue as well.

“Reports @realDonaldTrump withdrawing from Paris Accord are good news,” tweeted Ralph Reed, a veteran of the religious right and chairman of the Faith and Freedom Coalition. “Hurts US economy, kills jobs, goes easy on China & India. Bad deal.”

But several other factors complicate the straightforward, politics-based answer.
For example, new research indicates that on environmental issues, at least, conservative Christian theology may be the driving force behind the sharply divergent views of evangelicals.

That’s the upshot of a new study by Nebraska sociologist Philip Schwadel and Washington State University sociologist Erik Johnson, published in the April edition of the Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion. The study uses almost three decades of repeated cross-sectional data to show that the opinions of conservative evangelicals on environmental policies are informed by theology more than ideology.

“Even in the 21st century, when politics seem to be of utmost importance, differences in support for environmental spending among different religious groups have nothing to do with political perspectives,” Schwadel said. “Theological views seem to be the biggest factor explaining differences between evangelicals and other Americans.”

In an interview with RNS, Schwadel explained that on environmental concerns, party affiliation played as large a role in influencing the views of Americans overall as did their religious beliefs, and both those factors outstripped every other variable, such as education, sex, income, race and geography.

But when comparing evangelicals to some other religious groups, the evidence indicated that religious views were far more important for evangelicals than for other Christians.

The chief theological marker of their beliefs, he said, is that evangelicals tend to have a literal view of the Bible – they believe that in Genesis the “earth was given to them to do as humans will” and that the prophecy at the end of the New Testament that Jesus will return in glory to rapture his followers is soon to be fulfilled.

Basically, if you believe that God created the world in six actual days, and that it will end in the twinkling of an eye, then you might be more prone to short-term thinking about the environment.

At the same time, other scholars caution that there’s more to the story.

Molly Worthen, an assistant professor of history at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and author of “Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism,” agreed that it is important to push beyond “this tendency among many pundits and political scientists to simply read theology as a pious varnish on political opinions.”

But Worthen argues that even scriptural literalists have a cultural context to their views of the Bible, and in the case of conservative evangelicals that context has been strongly affected by their deep and long-simmering suspicion of science and professional experts as promoting an anti-religion agenda.

That attitude gained steam in the 19th century with the rise of scientific approaches to biblical interpretation and the reaction against Darwin’s theory of evolution.
In the wake of the ridicule directed toward fundamentalists after the famous 1925 Scopes trial in Tennessee – in which a teacher was found guilty of teaching about evolution – conservative Christian resentment toward powerful elites and intellectuals grew even more intense.

Evangelicals, Worthen said, were trained “to see the Bible as a code book that, properly interpreted, could reveal the true meaning of current events no matter what the fancy scientists and political elites would tell you.”

In contemporary terms, that has engendered a penchant for conspiracy theories and an appetite for “fake news,” and it encourages many evangelicals to view experts – such as climate scientists, who hold a broad and deep consensus on global warming and humanity’s role in it – as “either dupes or servants of the devil’s cause,” she said.

Conservative Christians have also developed a network of institutions to provide alternative theories that seem to rebut the “secular” experts using their own tools of science and reason against them. So what may once have been theology has become its own self-affirming culture dedicated to providing an alternate answer to whatever “facts” the world provides.

Whether the effects of climate change in the coming years will change evangelical minds isn’t clear; surveys show the rest of the country is increasingly concerned, and 6 in 10 disagreed with Trump’s decision to withdraw from the Paris agreement.

For now, however, conservative Christians like Erickson seem to be doubling down on their biblical worldview.

“The truth is we are all going to die. But it won’t be because of global warming,” Erickson wrote in an epic response that threw the Book of Revelation back in the face of liberals and scientists. “I have read the end of the book. There will be famine. There will be drought. There will be flood. And there will be war. Then there will be a last day where we stand before our Maker and are called to account.

“Worrying about global warming and social justice won’t get you past the pearly gates,” Erickson continued. “Saving souls will. But it is hard to save souls when you don’t believe in the God of creation because you are too busy worshipping that creation.”


June 10, 2017

Religious Liberals Sat Out of Politics for 40 Years. Now They Want in the Game.

By Laurie Goodstein
New York Times
“We’re in a real battle for the soul of faith, of Christianity, of this nation,” said the Rev. Troy Jackson, executive director of the Amos Project, a multifaith social-justice coalition in Cincinnati.

The last time the religious left made this much noise was in protesting the Vietnam War, when the members of the clergy were mostly white men. Now, those in the forefront include blacks and Latinos, women and gays, along with a new wave of activist Catholics inspired by Pope Francis. And they include large contingents of Jews, Muslims and also Sikhs, Hindus and Buddhists in some cities — a reflection of the country’s religious diversity.

Most surprising of all, perhaps, is that religious progressives are being joined at the ramparts by a noticeable number of energized young evangelicals.

Such a loose alliance of people of many faiths, many causes — and no small number of intractable disagreements — may never rival the religious right in its cohesion, passion or political influence. And its mutually standoffish relationship with the Democratic Party, dating to the 1970s, stands in stark contrast to Christian conservatives’ sway over the Republican Party.

But those on the left say that they do not need to mirror the Christian right’s strategic alliance with the Republican Party to gain a healthy measure of political influence — and that they are undaunted by how long it might take.

A Fight for the ‘Moral Center’

Late on a Friday three weeks into the Trump administration, the Rev. William J. Barber II was in a Raleigh, N.C., hotel room, talking through his speech for the next day with advisers, including fellow ministers, a Muslim activist and a couple who had marched with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. All confessed they remained demoralized since the election. But they also marveled at the surge in political protests, fueled in part by Christian, Jewish and Muslim activists working together.

Dr. Barber, fighting a flu, smiled broadly. “Rosa Parks didn’t just decide to sit down one day,” he said. “We can’t choose the moment that the flame bursts out, but we can be the kindling.”

He has been piling up sticks for years.

As president of the North Carolina N.A.A.C.P. and pastor of a small Disciples of Christ church in Goldsboro, Dr. Barber began staging “Moral Monday” protests in Raleigh in 2013 to oppose voting-rights restrictions and other policies of the Republican-led state government. The demonstrations attracted thousands of participants and helped defeat the governor in 2016.

Last year, he branched out. Along with the Rev. Traci Blackmon, a well-known supporter of the Black Lives Matter movement, and other clergy members, Dr. Barber trained thousands of activists in 32 states, an effort that continues.
“If we’re going to change the country,” he says, “we’ve got to nationalize state movements. It’s not from D.C. down. It’s from the states up.”

To his admirers, Dr. Barber, a gifted preacher with a big-tent vision, is the strongest contender for King’s mantle. And he invites the comparison. In April, to mark the 50th anniversary of the landmark sermon at Riverside Church in Manhattan in which King denounced the Vietnam War, saying, “I cannot be silent,” Dr. Barber preached against Mr. Trump from the same pulpit and denounced what he saw as pervasive racism across the political right.

“When we see signs of a rising fascism,” he said, “we know that we cannot be silent.” In May, he stepped down from his N.A.A.C.P. post to announce a latter-day version of King’s 1968 Poor People’s Campaign.

“If you think this is just a left-versus-right movement, you’re missing the point,” Dr. Barber said in Raleigh. “This is about the moral center. This is about our humanity.”

Loath to be labeled left-leaning or liberal, Dr. Barber cites the Constitution and the common good as freely as the Bible. “We use the words that progressives have thrown away — morality, welfare, poor, faith — because those are soul words,” he says.

He calls himself an evangelical “who takes seriously the Old Testament and Jesus.” Yet he has fully embraced gay and transgender rights — and in North Carolina, home of the law restricting bathroom use by transgender people. The Bible, he notes, says far more about caring for the needy than it does about homosexuality or abortion.

“How do you take two or three Scriptures and make a theology out of it, and claim it is the moral perspective, and leave 2,000 on the table?” he said. “That is a form of theological malpractice.”

This stance has cost Dr. Barber some allies, including in black churches, but has won him others. Imam Abdullah Antepli of Duke University said he had hesitated to march alongside gay pastors until he realized their struggles were linked.

“We can’t have only Jews cry for anti-Semitism, and Muslims cry for Islamophobia,” Imam Antepli said. “We can only win this if we see it as one big fight.”

The fervor powering that fight could be seen in Raleigh the next day. Behind Dr. Barber, Imam Antepli, two rabbis and a lesbian bishop were some 80,000 people.

Hunched over a cane he has used since his 20s, when he was struck with debilitating arthritis, Dr. Barber took the first step.

“Forward together!” he bellowed, calling for a response.

The crowd supplied it: “Not one step back!”
Tense Ties to Democrats

Just how much ground the religious left must cover before it amounts to a meaningful counterweight to the Christian right was evident last November, when, despite deep concerns, white evangelical conservatives rallied behind Mr. Trump in overwhelming numbers.

Muscle memory alone could have played a part: For nearly four decades, Christian conservatives have coalesced around the Republican presidential nominee, reaching right into the pews to mobilize voters.

Relations between Democrats and religious progressives have been more difficult since 1980, when evangelicals deserted Jimmy Carter — one of their own, whom they had supported in 1976 — for Ronald Reagan.

As Republicans cemented the Christian right as a cornerstone of the party’s base, Democrats moved in the opposite direction, so intent on separating church and state that they recoiled from courting religious blocs of voters, recalled Gary Hart, the former senator, who grew up in the Church of the Nazarene and graduated from divinity school.

During his ill-fated 1988 presidential campaign, Mr. Hart said, he was often asked, “Why don’t you talk about your religious background more?” And the answer was, “I don’t want to be seen as pandering for votes.”

Issues on which the religious left is at odds with Democratic doctrine include military spending and the death penalty, though the most polarizing is abortion — the main barrier, for many liberal evangelicals and Catholics, to voting as Democrats — as could be seen when the party split recently over whether to endorse an anti-abortion Democrat running for mayor of Omaha.

Setting abortion aside, political appeals based on religious beliefs continue to carry risk for Democrats, given the growing numbers of Americans who claim no religion: Secular voters overwhelmingly vote Democratic, and younger voters are far more secular than older voters.

Still, Hillary Clinton’s snub of even moderate evangelicals in the 2016 presidential race squandered many opportunities to cut into Mr. Trump’s support. Where Barack Obama had worked hard in 2008 to show he would at least listen to evangelicals, Mrs. Clinton rebuffed interview requests from evangelical media outlets and signaled leftward moves on abortion rights that helped many conservative voters overcome their doubts about Mr. Trump.

“The fact that one party has strategically used and abused religion, while the other has had a habitually allergic and negative response to religion per se, puts our side in a more difficult position in regard to political influence,” said the Rev. Jim Wallis, the evangelical social justice advocate who founded the Sojourners community and magazine in 1971.

“Most progressive religious leaders I talk to, almost all of them, feel dissed by the left,” he said. “The left is really controlled by a lot of secular fundamentalists.”
If Dr. Barber works from the outside in, Mr. Wallis is the consummate inside player. His Capitol Hill operation is on an upswing, its big new offices bustling with interns plotting social media campaigns like a “Matthew 25 Pledge,” to “protect and defend vulnerable people in the name of Jesus.”

Mr. Wallis counsels lawmakers on applying faith to public policy — as when Representative Joseph P. Kennedy III scolded the House speaker, Paul D. Ryan, a fellow Catholic, for saying it would be an “act of mercy” to repeal the Affordable Care Act. “He and I must have read different Scripture,” Mr. Kennedy, a Democrat, said in a well-watched floor speech.

Others on the religious left are eyeing more direct forays into politics. The PICO National Network, a faith-based community organizing group active in 22 states, is recruiting clergy and lay leaders to run for office next year, said its political director, Bishop Dwayne D. Royster, a former Norristown, Pa., councilman. And not necessarily as Democrats, he added: “We have to make the parties work for us, not us work for the parties.”

Those rooting for a progressive religious revival, mindful of past failures, harbor few illusions that it will be easy.

“The movement never does arrive,” the Rev. Daniel Schultz, who pastors a United Church of Christ congregation in Wisconsin, wrote in a piece on the Religion Dispatches website. “It never arrives because the left (or at least the Democratic Party) is too diverse and its priorities too different for anything like a mirror image of the religious right to coalesce.”

Sister Simone Campbell, a liberal Catholic lobbyist who also barnstormed with Dr. Barber, said the movement’s diversity could be an obstacle, as she discovered in a room full of white Catholics, black Baptists and agnostic Unitarians.

“People are trying to figure out: How do we get traction? But it has not yet jelled,” she said. “So I yell at the Holy Spirit, ‘Hurry up!’”

Responding to a Threat

Religious conservatives have taken notice of the stirrings among liberals. The Rev. Franklin Graham, a Trump supporter, has told audiences in North Carolina to beware of preachers like Dr. Barber who “call themselves progressive,” warning: “It’s just another word for ‘I’m an atheist.’”

And Gary L. Bauer, the social conservative leader, said he worried more about nonbelievers than about the religious left, citing what he called its affinity for government solutions to social problems.

Yet opposition to Mr. Trump is plainly catalyzing new alliances of religious progressives — and no other cause has united them more than protecting immigrants and refugees, especially those in their flocks.
In Cincinnati alone, 21 churches have joined a sanctuary coalition, forming teams to respond when immigrants are detained, as one group of ministers did recently when a Guatemalan man seeking asylum was held at a nearby jail.

“I think a big part of why this is happening now is every group feels threatened,” said the Rev. Alan Dicken, a young coalition organizer.

Among the most intriguing participants in these coalitions are evangelical leaders like the Rev. Rich Nathan of Columbus, Ohio, pastor of the nation’s largest church in the evangelical Vineyard denomination, who joined a rabbi and an imam on talk radio to denounce Mr. Trump’s travel ban.

More and more, younger evangelicals are questioning their association with the religious right, Mr. Nathan said: “I don’t know almost any evangelical Christians who feel comfortable with the old evangelical guard. They’re certainly not in my orbit. Millennial Christians are really concerned about social justice.”

And they are keeping busy.

In Cincinnati recently, the sanctuary coalition held a vigil outside a Methodist church with a gay pastor after vandals scrawled anti-gay slurs on its sign. Then a priest sounded an alarm: One of his parishioners, a mother of four who had fled gang violence in Mexico, had been picked up by immigration agents and was about to be deported.

In the end, she was, despite the group’s vigils, petitions and a social media campaign. But Mr. Jackson of the Amos Project, a pastor with Independent Christian Churches, discerned a measure of progress.

“I wish we were not in this place,” he said, “but it’s one of the gifts of this moment. The energy is there, and there’s new, deep relationships that are being forged between clergy and congregations that never existed before.”


June 13, 2017

Growing Concern Over Climate Change Is Creating Interfaith Dialogue

By Justin Catanoso
Pacific Standard

Two years after Pope Francis launched Laudato Si, the Vatican's plea to save the Earth, Trump rejected its tenets and the Paris Agreement. But people of all faiths are unified globally to beat climate change.
On May 24th, a grim-faced Pope Francis handed a signed copy of *Laudato Si* to President Donald Trump during his visit to Rome. The United States president, who has called climate change "a hoax," promised to read the papal encyclical, a spiritual and secular plea to save the Earth from environmental destruction.

A week later, Trump announced plans to yank the U.S. out of the 2015 *Paris Agreement*, whose prologue was influenced by the principles embodied in *Laudato Si*. In doing so, Trump repudiated 195 nations' pledges to reduce their carbon footprint to mitigate the worst effects of climate change; he repudiated Pope Francis and his encyclical as well.

Two years after the release of *Laudato Si*—and long after its intense global attention has faded—it's worth asking: is the uncompromising and unprecedented Catholic teaching document fulfilling Vatican expectations by uniting leaders of all faiths, along with their billions of congregants, to take decisive climate action "in care for our common home"?

The answer is a qualified "yes"—based on evidence from interviews with a range of faith leaders, recent conferences, signed pledges, and a host a concrete actions, large and small, in congregations and seminaries around the world.

"There is an assumption that if religious leaders let the pope talk about [environmental protection], it will usher in rapid, large-scale change," said Fletcher Harper, executive director of GreenFaith, a U.S.-based interfaith environmental activism organization with an international reach.

"That's magical thinking. It's not how the world works. What matters is discipline in determining long-term work by faith groups. It's not happening as fast as I'd like it to, but it's underway," he said.

Harper offered up his own organization as an example of incremental progress. GreenFaith conducted a training session in Brazil in May with 55 "emerging faith leaders" from 17 countries. The goal: Promote environmental awareness and identify realistic renewable energy and sustainability projects that can be achieved in each country. But harvesting the fruits of the seeds planted at that international meeting will take considerable energy and time.

**Push and Pull Among Catholics**

The Catholic church in the U.S. has been slow to embrace the encyclical and its call for action. The pope's popularity there dropped with the encyclical's release on June 18th, 2015; too few pastors are preaching environmental protection from the pulpit, Catholic insiders say; and polls revealed that a majority of American Catholics voted for Trump.

Cardinal Peter Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, which oversaw the research and writing of *Laudato Si*, said in a 2016 interview: "We are not unaware of the tensions the encyclical has presented in some places." Noting that wealthy U.S. Catholic donors tend to be conservative politically, Turkson lamented, "You cannot bite the hand that feeds you, but we hope to change that."
Slowly, that change in coming.

On May 10th, nine large Catholic organizations—one global, five from Italy, two from the U.S., and one from the United Kingdom—announced their divestment from coal, oil, and gas stocks in what was deemed "the largest Catholic fossil fuel divestment to date," by the Global Catholic Climate Movement.

"This statement aims to be the first concrete commitment in the logic of the integral ecology and the care of our common home, which Pope Francis called us to," said Archbishop Tomasso Valentinetti of Pescara-Penne, Italy.

Sister Sheila Kinsey, who is based in Rome and is on the steering committee of the Global Catholic Climate Movement, added, "Laudato Si and its spirit are still alive, and more and more relevant, considering that climate action is a crucial issue on the international political agenda."

She noted that, on January 27th, more than 125 international organizations—including a host of Catholic congregations, universities, along with environmental groups such as Greenpeace and 350.org—gathered in Rome for a conference titled "Laudato Si and Catholic Investing."

Meanwhile, in Benin in East Africa, where each Catholic diocese maintains its own farm, sustainable agricultural training centers inspired by the encyclical are growing in number. And across Australia, a number of Catholic schools are heeding the Vatican call to invest in solar panels to cut carbon emissions and save energy costs.

**Interfaith Appeal**

"The pope doesn't expect this movement to just be a Catholic thing," said longtime Vatican observer Robert Mickens, English editor of La Croix International in Rome. "What is extraordinary about the encyclical is that it is a project that the whole human race can engage in together. What unites all of humanity? The environment. It's our common home; our common interest."

As if to underscore that point, 33 faith-based groups from around the world signed the Interfaith Statement to World Leaders at the 22nd United Nations Climate Summit in Marrakesh, Morocco (COP22), last November. They pledged their commitment to the goals of the Paris Agreement—and, by extension, Laudato Si.

Gopal Patel is director of the London and India-based Bhumi Project, launched in 2009. Among its goals, the project promotes ways for Hindu communities to jettison coal for renewable energy, and to improve waste management and reduce pollution around temples. He signed the interfaith statement at COP22.

"All religions have been doing environmental work for a long time," Patel said. "What *Laudato Si* did, and continues to do, is ensure that faith voices are heard in the broad climate space. It was the biggest kind of support that the faith movement could get to show that we have something to say about caring for the Earth."
Patel couldn't help but mention Pope Francis' gift to Trump: "The pope could have given him many things. A punch in the face? Whatever. But he gave Trump *Laudato Si*, right? That's another opportunity for the faith community to say, 'We're still relevant and so is this message.'"

Patel also believes that the document written by Catholic thought leaders aligns well with core Hindu beliefs: "Hinduism believes that there is a universal ecosystem, not only on this planet but in all of creation. There is a universal structure and order to the world. People are a part of that. So are the trees and mountains and birds and fish."

Echoing a persistent theme in *Laudato Si*, he added, "One of the primary responsibilities of human beings is to ensure the maintenance of that universal harmony and balance that is creation."

**Inspiration for Muslims**

Nana Firman, co-founder of the Global Muslim Climate Network, recalled that, in early 2015—before Pope Francis made known his intention to produce *Laudato Si*—Muslim environmental leaders were drafting a statement in support of the U.N. climate negotiations to occur in Paris at year's end.

"We were discussing how to bring our position to the forefront. Then the pope released *Laudato Si* [in June of 2015] and we were, like, perfect! It stimulated and inspired us," Firman said. "Two months later, we released the *Islamic Declaration on Climate Change*."

Since then, she stressed, "a lot has been going on, even if it hasn't received much media attention."

"We are launching a campaign of clean-energy mosques in the Middle East and North Africa," she said. "The government of Morocco committed to transforming its 15,000 mosques around the country to renewable energy by 2019. Jordan has the same commitment to transform to solar energy."

Firman described hardware (projects) and software (Muslim leaders) that are being mobilized to help the poor and those most vulnerable to climate change. She spoke of joining the battle to fight rampant deforestation in Indonesia, and of the need to take action in low-lying Bangladesh, which is threatened by sea-level rise. More challenges await in drought-prone sub-Saharan Africa, she acknowledged.

"We are training imams as environmental scholars to speak from the pulpit to the community and to the public," she said. "When people come to the mosque, they see solar panels and they learn about why they are important. All of this is connected to our faith. We are stewards upon this Earth."
Faith and the Pace of Change

For all the anecdotal evidence of progress, an undertone of impatience resonates in the faith-based community, just as it does among environmental leaders. Carbon emissions are still increasing; the Earth experiences record temperatures year after year; sea-level rise and extreme weather are the norm.

Almost everywhere, the scale of investment and the pace of social change trails the quickening march of climate change.

In the U.S., dozens of seminaries—mostly Protestant—are integrating environmental education into their theological training. A younger and bigger generation of clergy is being urged to ramp up the urgency in their parishes for local and governmental climate action.

But the hope and promise of Laudato Si could remain beyond human reach without even more aggressive and engaged faith leaders mobilizing the billions they represent in all corners of the globe to pressure their governmental leaders and to act on their own.

"My students are excited and they want to take this on, but the challenges are so big," said Tim Van Meter, an associate professor of ecology and justice at the Methodist Theological School in Ohio. "People are just tired. It seems inevitable that we will drive ourselves to collapse."

Then, in an instant, Van Meter shook off that gloomy perspective: "One of the core understandings of what it means to be a person of faith is that you can't give in to despair. You have to live out of hope. As tired as we might get, I know we are working toward a greater good. And we will continue in this work."

https://psmag.com/social-justice/growing-concern-over-climate-change-is-creating-interfaith-dialogue

June 13, 2017

Theologians blast Paris Agreement withdrawal, call for creation care

By Heidi Schlumpf
National Catholic Reporter

Albuquerque, N.M. - Catholic theologians expressed concern and dismay about President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement on climate change, with at least one theologian calling such action "objectively sinful." The president's announcement had come one week before a group of Catholic theologians met for their annual convention, which focused on the intersection of faith and care for the environment.

"By reneging on its commitments, the U.S. could well undermine the shared trust that keeps other nations committed to the accord, with potentially devastating consequences for the entire
planet," said Jesuit Fr. David Hollenbach, outgoing president of the Catholic Theological Society of America. "This suggests that Trump's decision to withdraw can be seen as objectively sinful."

Meanwhile, a group of Hispanic theologians took a public position expressing "deep regret and disappointment" in the president's withdrawal from the international agreement, noting that the decision "runs directly counter to the vision for care of creation presented by Pope Francis in his Encyclical Letter 'Laudato Si', among other ecclesial documents."

The statement from the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States was released at the conclusion of its June 5-8 meeting in Albuquerque and dated June 9. The Catholic Theological Society of America meeting followed on June 8-11, gathering more than 360 theologians from around the United States and the world.

"We stand with the international community of scientists, academics and citizens of the world, who recognize the impact of climate change on all of creation, particularly the world's most vulnerable citizens," said the Hispanic theologians' statement. "As such, we commit to stand with global and local leaders who act in a manner that promotes environmental stewardship that meets or surpasses the previously held commitment of the United States to the Paris Climate Agreement."

Hollenbach also praised mayors and governors who have pledged to continue the Paris Agreement commitments. His talk, titled "The Glory of God and the Common Good: Solidarity in a Turbulent World," argued that promoting the common good — such as through the Paris Agreement — and giving greater glory to God are deeply interconnected.

"Every Christian has a moral duty to make such contributions to the common good," Hollenbach said, adding that the church — as the single largest global institution in the world today — is in a position to be a key agent of the common good through its social ministry.

But Hollenbach said promoting the common good — in care for the environment and all its inhabitants — is not only a social duty but a religious one. Citing the example of St. Ignatius of Loyola, Hollenbach said it is clear that "the promotion of the common good is itself a way to show forth God's glory in the midst of history — part of the distinctively religious Christian vocation."

Such a commitment is essential when the tendency of populist and nationalist movements is "to replace collaboration for the international common good with pursuit of an illusory understanding of national self-interest," he said, noting that anti-globalist sentiment has both racist and anti-Islamic sentiment as well as roots in real suffering.

Yet he added that when St. Augustine and Luther described sin as being "turned in on oneself," "they could have been describing important currents in our politics."

Hollenbach said Francis' connection of the Eucharist with the work to protect our "common home" in "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home" is evidence of the link between the common good and the glorification of God in history.
Lauding *Laudato Si'*

The pope's encyclical was the topic of numerous presentations at the conference. One panel looked at the reception of the document in an age of polarization — and of Twitter. With more than 34 million followers and tweets in nine languages, Francis' Twitter accounts and other social networks are intentionally being engaged in the promulgation and reception of magisterial teaching, argued Stephen Okey of St. Leo University in Florida.

Okey pointed to the Vatican's "Twitterbomb" in the days following the release of the encyclical as evidence of social media use for promulgation, while the continuing use of the hashtag #LaudatoSi reflects attempts to understand, interpret and apply the teachings — or reception.

Drawing on survey data surrounding the awareness and support, or lack thereof, of *Laudato Si*, Annie Selak of Boston College noted that a majority of Catholics were not even aware of the encyclical, raising the question: "What does reception look like in an uninformed age?"

Those knowledgeable about the encyclical had divergent opinions about it, but Selak argued that such diversity was not a problem, unless it leads to ecclesial polarization. "Polarizing opinions shaped by the U.S. political system run the risk of ossifying as exclusiveness, resulting in church members being diametrically opposed to one another and failing to be in communion," she said.

Dialogue is the appropriate response to such polarization, argued Gregory Hillis of Bellarmine University in Kentucky, and the pope models and urges that dialogue in *Laudato Si*.

The pope "urges all within the church away from the selfish fragmentation that is at the root of environmental degradation and toward a conversion of openness to others, both human and non-human," said Hillis, adding that a dialogical church is "a countercultural one that rejects the dominant culture's prevailing individualism."

The church, which "too often operates under the logic of a world that it supposedly rejects," is in need of conversion, said Hillis, citing Francis. "For it is only through dialogue that the church truly can be a sign of contradiction," Hillis said.

Some speakers, while praising the encyclical, were also critical of parts of it. In her keynote address on the topic of water and an "ethic of aridity," Christiana Zenner Peppard of Fordham University said she would have liked Francis to have cited at least one of the many communities of women religious whose have long worked toward environmental justice.

Feminist theologian St. Joseph Sr. Anne Clifford of Iowa State University also raised questions about the encyclical's limited citation of women (only Mary, the mother of Jesus, and St. Thérèse of Lisieux, rather than any contemporary ecofeminists) and about its use of "mother" language when the pope quotes St. Francis of Assisi's Canticle at the beginning of the document. The "shadow side" of gendered language for nature is that it is "too weighed down by matter-spirit dualism."
The encyclical also "ignores the role societal gender patterns play in consumption of Earth's resources," said Clifford. For example, women are 14 times more likely to die in ecological disasters than men are, she said, as was the case in the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami in Bangladesh.

In his response to Clifford's talk, Daniel Castillo of Loyola University Maryland agreed that "we should be mindful of the manner in which even this seemingly benign term [Mother Earth] might be freighted with sexist and exploitative undercurrents characteristic of androcentric colonial power relations."

Castillo also urged ecofeminists — those who see connections between patriarchy's exploitation of women and of the Earth — to retrieve wisdom from Catholic tradition and from Jesus by "interpreting the book of nature by reading it in light of the book of Scripture."

**Environmental justice**

Another speaker, Andrew Prevot of Boston College, differentiated between "mere environmentalists" and proponents of environmental justice who prioritize the needs of the poor and oppressed. The latter, he said, "are natural conversation partners for liberation theology."

Prevot said he worried "that it may be easier for a Christian today to be attracted to the green turtle than to a darkly colored poor person who lives and dies amid the refuse of this world's racialized capitalist political economy."

Catholic Theological Society of America members also discussed divesting from fossil-fuel-producing companies, with the board gathering input from members to make a decision in the next year. "Our investment policies must not betray the social mission of the church, which includes promoting ecological responsibility," states a policy report created by an ad hoc committee that has been studying the issue since 2013.

More than 50 attendees also donated more than $700 in carbon footprint offsets, to compensate for emissions involved in traveling to the conference.

Jesuit Fr. Francis Xavier Clooney, an expert in Hinduism and the religions of South Asia, was honored for his pioneering work in modern comparative theology with the society's 2017 John Courtney Murray Award for distinguished theological achievement. Mercy Sr. Margaret Farley, a feminist ethicist, received the Ann O'Hara Graff Memorial Award for her scholarship and liberating action on behalf of women in the church and broader community.

The Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States, which met jointly with the Black Catholic Theological Symposium on the topics of incarceration and detention, also recognized Mercy Sr. Ana Maria Pineda, associate professor at Santa Clara University, for achievement in theological writing with its Virgilio Elizondo Award.

Next year's convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America will be held in Indianapolis. The theme is "Grace at Work in the World."
June 13, 2017

ExxonMobil shareholders push through climate resolution

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

When ExxonMobil shareholders overwhelmingly voted in late May in favor of a resolution aimed at shedding light on the impacts of addressing climate change on the oil company's long-term assets, Dominican Sr. Patricia Daly was among those beaming brightest.

"This was very sweet," said the director emeritus of the Tri-State Coalition for Responsible Investment, which spans Connecticut, New Jersey and New York.

Through investment groups like the coalition, which comprises 40 Catholic institutions, and the larger Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, she and other faith-based investors have been working for two decades to bring about change at Exxon in how it recognizes and responds to climate change.

At the annual ExxonMobil meeting in Dallas May 31, the shareholder resolution, co-filed by the New York Common Retirement Fund and the Church of England and joined by the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility and 50 other institutions representing $5 trillion in managed assets, received 62.3 percent of the shareholders' vote — the highest ever at Exxon for a climate-related measure.

The resolution, which Exxon opposed, seeks for the world's largest energy company to produce an annual report of the long-term impacts on its oil and gas reserves from global climate policies aimed at restricting average temperature rise well below 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) and as low as 1.5 degrees C — the primary goal of the Paris Agreement on climate change, which calls for drastic cuts in carbon emissions and a global shift toward a zero-carbon economy in order to meet the 2 C target and avert the worst climate impacts.

Tracey Rembert, assistant director of Catholic responsible investing for Christian Brothers Investment Services, said in a statement that while Exxon continues to bank "on an energy future that looks a lot like the past," i.e., highly reliant on oil and gas, "we want Exxon to be prepared and wide-eyed if a different market unfolds, and this proposal, we believe, jumpstarts that process."
Similar proposals also received majority shareholder support during votes last month at Occidental Petroleum (67 percent) and PPL Corporation (57.2 percent). Other resolutions at energy companies came up just short of majority support, The Washington Post reported.

A vote on a shareholder resolution above 50 percent is generally viewed as a mandate for a company and its board to act upon it, Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility said in a statement.

"You don't want to ignore a vote that high," Daly said.

The vote came amid widespread news reports that President Donald Trump intended to withdraw the U.S. from the Paris climate accord, an action he indeed announced the next day.

Daly, who attended the COP21 climate summit in December 2015 that culminated in the Paris Agreement, said she agreed with some assessments that the Exxon shareholder vote was of greater importance than Trump's decision — which cannot formally take effect until November 2020, though at the federal level the U.S. has signaled it will cease implementation of its Paris emissions-reducing pledge.

Part of the significance in the Exxon vote, Daly said, was that large investment firms, several of which supported the resolution, are more and more seeking disclosures from companies of the business risks posed by countries under the Paris accord taking policy steps to reduce carbon emissions, the primary source being the burning of fossil fuels.

"Even if the U.S. pulls out of the agreement, they still need to operate with integrity and in alliance with other country goals," Daly said.

Despite the political context of the president's pullout decision, the shareholder motion was a major achievement for Daly, Fr. Michael Crosby and others with the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility who have engaged ExxonMobil on climate change over the course of two-plus decades.

"This one's a long time coming," Daly said.

The interfaith investors' interactions predated the Exxon-Mobil merger in 1999. Two years earlier, Crosby, a Capuchin Franciscan friar, had introduced the first resolution asking for a report on the impacts of climate change on the company's policies and practices, including liabilities it may incur and what it could do to reduce carbon emissions from fossil fuels.

From there, the interfaith center's resolutions have sought for ExxonMobil to disclose its greenhouse gas emissions; to disclose funds it spent on lobbying and supporting organizations at the forefront of climate denial; to report climate risks to its business; and to report its investments in renewable energy.
Those efforts yielded some positive results. Exxon shared information on its renewables investments, which it continues to do annually, though at the time of the initial request most of the initiatives were still based in oil and gas.

Earlier this year, Crosby, who is executive director of the Seventh Generation Interfaith Coalition for Responsible Investment, withdrew a resolution — one first issued three years earlier that sought a person with climate change expertise be nominated to Exxon's board of directors — after climate scientist Susan Avery was appointed to the board.

Those successes, at Exxon and at other companies on issues such as human trafficking, reinforce for Daly the merits of shareholder advocacy in effecting positive change in companies, especially at a time when environmental groups, including numerous religious and Catholic efforts, have pushed for widespread divestment from fossil fuels.

So far, 27 Catholic institutions have divested from fossil fuels, among them more than a dozen religious communities. Twenty of the announcements have come in the past two years through a campaign of the Global Catholic Climate Movement. In addition, the University of Dayton and Georgetown University have both divested their endowments from fossil fuels in some capacity.

While Daly credits the divestment movement with educating about climate change, she doesn't endorse it, believing to shift the global economy away from reliance on greenhouse gas-emitting fuels requires more work: "You don't change companies and you don't change economic systems of this country or the world by deciding to lose your seat at the table."

"There are a lot of people who wash their hands of it and they call it a win and they can sleep at night, and you know what, they have done nothing to bring about a world free of greenhouse gas emissions," Daly added.

Instead, the four-decade veteran of corporate responsibility encourages people to become informed and active shareholders and be involved with investment groups like the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility that are advocating for socially responsible changes.

"Imagine what would happen if people started really actively engaging in the companies that they own. The management and board of directors don't own those companies — we do," she said.

While divestment is largely credited with helping end apartheid in South Africa, the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility at its forming in 1971 sought to use shareholder advocacy to pressure companies providing critical services to leave the country until the oppressive system was abolished.

Engaging with a company doesn't mean overlooking its faults and failings, Daly clarified.

The Exxon Knew reports — which detail how Exxon knew of the risks of climate change as far back as the late 1970s yet withheld the information from its stockholders and funded groups
sowing climate denial, allegations Exxon "completely rejects" — has been the source of "honest, tense conversations" and remains an ongoing concern, the Dominican sister said.

She added she was happy that lawsuits brought by the attorneys general of New York and Massachusetts and an investigation by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission continue to move forward. In Daly's view, the company's role in distorting and delaying action on climate change only "gives them a greater responsibility to take the lead on initiatives and different investing to turn climate change around."

Faith-based investors continue to watch how Exxon will change under its new CEO, Darren Woods, who succeeded Rex Tillerson after the latter's appointment as U.S. secretary of state. Daly organized a phone call for shareholders to thank the company for the letters it wrote, including one from Woods, to Trump urging him to keep the U.S. in the Paris Agreement.

That Tillerson, who also advocated for remaining in the deal, was absent in the White House Rose Garden during Trump's Paris pullout announcement signaled to her that he still understands the risks of climate change. The irony of a former oil man who has only offered tempered support of climate action is now considered something of an ally on the issue under the present political times is not lost on Daly, a sign she takes of how delightful life can be.

"I never would have dreamed of this scenario, but here we are," she said.

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https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/exxonmobil-shareholders-push-through-climate-resolution

June 14, 2017

How Standing Rock became a spiritual pilgrimage for activists

By Eileen Markey
America: The Jesuit Review

In December 2016, when thousands of Native Americans, environmental activists and their supporters were camped on the high plains of North Dakota hoping to stymie an oil pipeline mapped beneath the drinking water source of the Standing Rock Sioux reservation, Chief Arvol Looking Horse, a Lakota spiritual leader, addressed a massive interfaith prayer service. People from Native American nations across the United States had traveled to camp at Standing Rock and on nearby land, the most comprehensive gathering of native people since before the Indian wars of the 1870s. Indigenous people from Hawaii, Norway, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Mexico and Honduras arrived at the camps and hoisted their flags beside those of 300 American tribes.
Brayton Shanley, a Catholic peace and environmental activist who lives in an intentional community in rural Massachusetts, has a shock of white hair and the robust energy of someone who spends a great deal of time outdoors. At the end of November, he drove to North Dakota in a truck filled with straw bales, offered as insulation on the windswept, winter prairie. Joe Fortier, S.J., a former entomology professor at St. Louis University, who for the past 15 years has lived and ministered on the Colville Indian Reservation in Washington State, arrived the day before, changing out of his usual clothes and into a clerical collar, so people would know a Catholic priest was supporting the protest. Father Fortier, a self-effacing man whose gentleness belies the depth of his convictions, felt compelled to align himself with the people gathered at Standing Rock.

The camps had become a place to take a stand for the right to clean water and against its privatization, contamination and degradation. But they were also a site of pilgrimage, a place of profound prayer where Lakota women walked to the Cannonball River each morning to enact a water ceremony and where chants in the Lakota language, called to the rhythm of round drums, rose from the camp at dawn and Lakota elders tended a sacred fire all day and night. “Water is life,” they said. “Defend the sacred.”

On this biting cold December day, when fingers went numb if exposed to the air for more than a few minutes, more than 1,000 people gathered for a three-hour prayer service in which a rabbi, a Buddhist monk, various Protestant clergy and Father Fortier each offered prayers before the fire that Lakota elders had been tending throughout the protest. They spoke of their faiths’ common commitment to caring for the earth and their common belief in the sacredness of the physical world. Looking Horse spoke of the threat to clean water at Standing Rock as only one of millions of attacks on the integrity of the earth’s elements. Fighting back would take a particular kind of power, he said. “We will be victorious through tireless, prayer-filled and fearless nonviolent struggle. Standing Rock is everywhere.”

A few months into the Trump administration, oil is flowing through the pipeline and the historic encampment has been dispersed. The oil industry won. But Looking Horse may yet have been correct. The explicitly religious and imagination-grabbing protest at Standing Rock has inspired similar encampments and other forms of protest in defense of clean water across the country. From Pennsylvania to Texas, Florida to New Jersey and in South Dakota, Ohio, Massachusetts and Canada, newly emboldened “water protectors” have taken to the land in hopes of disrupting oil and natural gas pipelines they consider dangerous. For many of these protectors, defending access to clean water is a project rich in religious and spiritual meaning. They draw inspiration from “Laudato Si’” as well as indigenous religious practice.

The tribal leadership of the Lakota Sioux is pursuing lawsuits against Energy Transfer Partners, the Texas-based company behind the Dakota Access pipeline. Some of the Lakota and other indigenous people who were part of the Standing Rock protests have reconvened at a prayer camp on the Cheyenne River Reservation downriver in South Dakota.

A coordinated campaign
On May 9, the Treaty Alliance Against Tar Sands Expansion, a coalition of 121 indigenous groups from the United States and Canada, launched a coordinated divestment campaign against the banks funding the Dakota Access pipeline and crude oil pipelines snaking from Canada to Mexico. Religious congregations organized under the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility are engaged in shareholder activism, urging major banks to withdraw from financing the Dakota Access pipeline and demanding that corporations from Coca-Cola to Campbell Soup adopt specific policies respecting water and the rights of local communities to consultation. The Sisters of Charity of Halifax presented a shareholder resolution at the May 11 general shareholder meeting of Enbridge, an energy transportation company with a 27.5 percent share in the Dakota Access pipeline. The resolution called for the company to address social and environmental risks in its acquisition deals, particularly those involving indigenous people. The resolution was rejected by shareholders, but the company committed to broader disclosure in the sustainability report it produces each year. The Jesuit Committee on Investment Responsibility has been working with large agribusiness companies that trade on the New York Stock Exchange to convince them to adopt sustainable water management practices and join the United Nations’ CEO Water Mandate, an initiative to engage businesses in water stewardship and sustainable development goals.

Cities, counties, public employee pension funds and individuals have withdrawn $5 billion from companies invested in the Dakota Access pipeline in an echo of the divestment movement against South African apartheid in the 1980s. Major investment banks in Norway, the Netherlands and France have sold their shares of loans to Energy Transfer Partners. The Jesuits, women religious, Catholic Workers and others have joined or deepened their involvement in water protection efforts. They draw links between the environmental battles of indigenous people in the United States and those elsewhere—notably in Honduras and in the Amazon region, where several environmentalists have been killed by corporate security forces and assassins linked to the national military forces.

We are here

In Conestoga, Pa., a farm field along the route of a natural gas pipeline has been transformed into a quiet protest site. On weekends, area residents gather to sing, pray and make art. They have been pushing for three years for their municipal governments to ban the proposed pipeline, citing instances of natural gas explosions and tainted drinking water. They attempted legal maneuvers to escape eminent domain to no avail, explained Mark Clatterbuck, a Conestoga resident and professor of religion at Montclair State University. He and his wife, Melinda, a Mennonite pastor, have been central actors in the pipeline opposition. Out of options, in February, Lancaster Against Pipelines, an association of local citizens, launched the Lancaster Stand in this placid corner of the county famous for its gently undulating farmland and its Amish community. “If we’re not careful we could lose the countryside and then what would we have? That’s what’s at risk,” said Tim Spiese, the Lancaster Against Pipelines board president, as he stood in the unplanted corn field before a large whitewashed barn with the words “Welcome to the Stand” painted in block letters on its side.

On a Saturday in early April, two dozen people, most in their 50s and 60s, are gathered inside a large army tent. Seated on low benches made from cement blocks and long 2-by-8 boards, they
are shaking painted maracas and beating rhythm sticks as two women with guitars lead the group: **We are here standing strong in a ripe old place/ Solid as a tree/ silent as a rock/ We are here in a ripe old place.** The back wall of the tent is rolled up, open to the breeze, framing the Lancaster County hills in spring: budding trees and green fields. More than 300 people have completed training in nonviolent protest at the camp. Committees meet to plan civil disobedience, to sort food donations and devise a rainwater collection system.

In May, Regina Braveheart, a Lakota woman who survived the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1973 and was part of the prayer at Standing Rock, visited the Lancaster Stand to urge the activists on and share stories. For Kathleen Meade, a case manager in a brain trauma rehabilitation center, who like many of her neighbors relies on well water, participating in the Lancaster Stand has meant forming deep friendships and standing up for what she values. “We just so pride ourselves on the land here. It’s horse people and dairy farmers, outdoors people and Amish. What’s unique is that Lancaster County is Republican, and this unites a lot of us, the idea that the government can’t just come and take your land,” she said as she stood in the afternoon sun in the breezy field, gazing across the round hills. “It’s just amazing how the existing structure is set up for the corporations, not the people.... We realize that we’re up a creek and if we don’t do something soon, we’re out of luck.”

Mr. Clatterbuck and other Lancaster people visited the camps at Standing Rock in the fall and were struck by the prayerful attitude, the deeply spiritual stance of the Lakota leaders. They noticed how it affected other activists. “The language that’s used is the language of the sacred,” said Mr. Clatterbuck, who edited a volume on Native American and Christian interaction this year called *Crow Jesus: Personal Stories of Native Religious Belonging,* published by University of Oklahoma Press. “All of these kinds of religious streams are feeding in together. The way religious language is fueling the resistance right now, religion becomes relevant again.”

So many people in conservative and bucolic Lancaster County, hardly a hotbed of protest, have been drawn to the Stand because it represents something deeper than the defense of property values or landowner rights (important as those might be), Mr. Clatterbuck said. Instead, they see a moral imperative to protect the place they call home, to care for the their corner of creation.

Pope Francis instructed the same embrace of the integrity of creation in “Laudato Si’,” writing that access to clean drinking water is a fundamental human right and that humans need to live in concert with the earth.

**Saving a fragile system**

Cherri Foytlin is not Catholic, but she takes Pope Francis’ words to heart. “I couldn’t understand how people can pray to God, praising his creation, and then not do everything they can to care for it. It’s like saying Picasso is a great artist and then ripping up his paintings,” she said. The oil that moves through the Dakota Access pipeline will eventually finish its journey in Louisiana, where Ms. Foytlin lives. A former newspaper writer, she has been working for environmental justice in the Louisiana wetlands since BP’s Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010. While reporting on the spill, she saw that many bayou crawfishermen, who have made their living in the swamps of Louisiana since their ancestors were expelled from French Acadia, had their...
livelihoods destroyed, and she saw how the oil company lied about and covered up the extent of the damage. The miasmic grandeur of the sleepy bayou, with its ancient cypress trees, which began growing when Christ walked beside the Jordan, and its drooping moss, in whose humid tangle migrating birds seek rest, were under grave threat, she realized.

“These systems are quite fragile, really. I think how quickly we can lose that,” she said. Pipelines have criss-crossed the bayou country for a generation, ferrying oil and natural gas to refineries on the coast, a significant component of Louisiana’s economy. But Ms. Foytlin believes this latest one, the Bayou Bridge Pipeline, is too dangerous. And it only anticipates 12 permanent jobs. The proposed pipeline channels through bayous already damaged by previous infrastructure, which has chewed away at the swampland and degraded its ability to absorb storms. The loss of Louisiana wetlands was one of the reasons Hurricane Katrina and more recent flooding elsewhere in the state have been so devastating. The company constructing the Bayou Bridge Pipeline was fined in early May by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for spilling several million gallons of thick chemical-laced mud into Ohio wetlands, during drilling for a separate pipeline there. The slurry, which is used to make underground space for laying pipes, suffocated plants and aquatic life in the wetland that helps filter water for nearby farmland. Ohio’s environmental protection agency expects it will take years to restore the wetland.

With Bold Louisiana, a community organizing group she directs, and a network of environmental, homeowner, crawfishermen and indigenous groups, Ms. Foytlin is trying to inform Louisianans of the threat to their water and their wetlands. The groups are leafleting at New Orleans Jazzfest and protesting at the state capital. They are sending postcards to their elected officials and raising money through bake sales. Ms. Foytlin, who is a member of the Cherokee Nation and originally from Oklahoma, visited Standing Rock to show her support and be part of the historic gathering of indigenous people. More recently she traveled to the Two Rivers camp near Marfa, Tex., where protesters were trying to stop a pipeline that would flow under the Rio Grande, carrying U.S. natural gas for export. That camp was broken up in April and that arm of the pipeline, another Energy Transfer Partners project, was completed.

“I wanted to let them know that what they were doing was important,” Ms. Foytlin said, adding that the power of the Standing Rock prayer camps continues to reverberate. “People felt activated and connected spiritually in the water and the land,” she said. “Standing Rock continues. People are eager to put it to bed, but it’s not over. These little people are still together and that has power.” An amalgam of groups, Ms. Foytlin’s among them, plans to launch a protest camp deep in the bayous in late June, when they expect the state to give Energy Transfer Partners final approval permits for the pipeline. On rafts built from repurposed plastic bottles and water barrels, with art and music and a deep love for their unique southern Louisiana waterways, they’ll make a watery stand. The camp is called L’eau Est La Vie, or Water Is Life.

Our common home

On the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, people are still digesting the experience of Standing Rock—and carrying on the work, said Peter Klink, S.J., the vice president of mission and ministry and former president of the Jesuit Red Cloud Indian School on Pine Ridge. At the height of the protests, the girls basketball team at Red Cloud wore “Water Is Life” slogans on
their jerseys. Lakota people from Pine Ridge joined the encampment and some took central roles in promoting the divestment campaign. “What we need to continue to nurture is: How are we going to care for our common home, Mother Earth? I’m not sure we can close our eyes to what we are doing on a daily basis,” Father Klink said. A consumerist, acquisitive culture is ultimately driving the environmental crisis, he believes. “If we don’t check that machine, that sense that what we have is never enough, that becomes the motor of destruction of our common home.”

During the Standing Rock encampment, the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States issued a statement in support of the Lakota people’s right to sovereignty and clean water. Tashina Rama, who is executive director of development at the Red Cloud Indian School and daughter of Dennis Banks, co-founder of the American Indian Movement, testified on the Dakota Access pipeline threats to water at a February briefing for members of Congress organized by the Jesuit conference. Rama walked to a microphone in the briefing room and placed a few printed pages on the podium, then addressed the crowd in the Lakota language, identifying herself by way of her lineage and her ancestors. She named her parents, her grandmothers, her grandfathers. Switching to English, she spoke of the central need for access to clean water, invoking the sentiment found in “Laudato Si’” that indigenous people must be consulted on projects that affect them, and she mourned the destruction of the Standing Rock camps, including one she stayed in with the female members of her family.

Ms. Rama underscored the value of water by invoking the Sun Dance, a Lakota ceremony that spans four days in June, when select members of the community dance all day in the blazing Badlands of South Dakota. “There is little relief with no clouds or breeze. Our lips are cracked and our mouths dry because whatever water we had in our bodies was gone by the second day of dancing,” she told the congressional staff. “Our ancestors prayed in this way and they passed it down to us; we are taught that through this sacrifice the Great Spirit will hear our prayers. For four sacred days we give ourselves to the Sun. Our bodies are dying and we know that with that first drink of water when the Sun Dance is over, that water is life. I was raised to pray in this way, and I find it to be a humbling way to connect with the Great Spirit, our Creator God and to give of myself so my children and my family can be healthy. We owe it to ourselves and our descendants to protect what remaining lands we have, the lands where our ancestors roamed and the sacred sites where they are buried so they can have these ceremonies to pass on to their children and so on.”

**Forming right relationships**

The Canadian and U.S. Jesuits see a link between protecting water and the defense of human and cultural rights. “We see common environmental and human rights challenges from extractive industries facing indigenous people around the world,” explained Cecilia Calvo, the senior adviser on environmental justice to the Jesuit Conference. “And a common thread really is water.” Of particular concern is what Ms. Calvo terms the criminalization of environmental and human rights activists who stand up for their rights. In Honduras, 123 environmental activists, most of whom protested against energy or mining companies, have been killed since a U.S.-supported coup in 2009, according to Global Witness. Similarly, environmental activists in the Amazon region face death threats. The worldwide association of Jesuits has taken on the defense of the Amazon region as a congregation-wide priority, calling it the lungs of the planet.
On March 17, Zebelio Kayap Jempekit, a member of the Awajun Wampi indigenous people of Peru, walked into the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in Washington, D.C., carrying with him the pleas and alarm of thousands of Amazonian people. Part of a team representing a coalition of indigenous and church groups across nine Amazon countries, called Red Eclesial Panamazonia, Mr. Jempeki urged the commission to take action to preserve the rights of indigenous people to protect their ancestral lands and water. The delegation, which included Archbishop Pedro Ricardo Jimeno, S.J., of Huancayo, Peru, was hosted by the Jesuits, the Sisters of Mercy, the Maryknolls and other U.S. Catholic groups, and visited Georgetown University and Catholic University. Jempekit, speaking in Spanish and wearing a traditional headband of deep red and brilliant yellow flowers, told the commission that oil extraction had destroyed the drinking water and fishing in his home and spoke of a mining project that made water undrinkable and killed the fish in the river his people relied on. He has received death threats because of his work.

“We see that not only in our own backyard are people facing environmental degradation and struggling for access to clean water, but around the world this is multiplied,” said Ms. Calvo, who in early May attended the Pan-Amazonian Social Forum in Peru, which brought together people working on water and other environmental and social issues across the region. The threats to water “are a call to examine our own economy, our lifestyle and what path do we want to be on,” Ms. Calvo said. Those issues animate the Jesuit Conference’s work in the United States as well. In the past few months, they have signed on to letters urging the Trump administration not to weaken elements of the Clean Water Act that regulate surface mining rules, to commit to the Paris climate agreement and to continue the Green Climate Fund, which helps the developing countries most affected by climate change. “We recognize that water is a fundamental component of all life and that stewardship of water is part of our call to care for God’s creation,” they wrote in a letter opposing an executive order that directed the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to withdraw from an aspect of the Clean Water Act which protects waterways and fish habitats.

Religious work on water moves in many streams, from the Religious Organizations Along the River, a coalition of groups in New York’s Hudson Valley advocating against fracking and for Hudson River cleanup, to WaterSpirit, a retreat center on a bluff overlooking the Atlantic run by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace on the New Jersey shore. There, laypeople, Catholic and not, visit to deepen their connection to the most basic of elements, the water that flows through their bodies, washes the shore, bathes them in baptism and made possible the emergence of their earliest single-celled ancestors. WaterSpirit endeavors to link the spiritual aspect of water with the practical, corporeal concerns of caring for creation. The center has led group study workshops on “Laudato Si’” and brought high school students to the shore to pray and catalog the plastic debris they find on the beach. The message is a mystical one, with its feet planted in the sand: You are part of this water of life.

In Pennsylvania, the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, an order of sisters, have for several years been resisting the efforts of Williams Transco, a natural gas company that plans to drill through their land in West Hempfield Township in Lancaster County. In February, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission gave the company final approval to build on private land, including that of the Adorers. The sisters “vehemently denounce” the decision, said Sister Janet McCann, the
U.S. regional councilor for the order. The pipeline would be a violation of the congregation’s land ethic, explained Sister Sara Dwyer, peace and justice coordinator for the community. The land ethic, a statement of the sisters’ theological and ecological beliefs adopted several years ago after contemplation of the religious dimensions of environmental crisis, commits them to “respect the Earth as a sanctuary where all life is protected” and to “establish justice and right relationships so all creation might thrive,” explained Sister Dwyer. In the land ethic statement, the sisters vow to “seek collaborators to help implement land use policies and practices that are in harmony with our bioregions and ecosystems.”

It is in fealty to that statement that the Adorers have decided to put their prayers where their feet stand. Their neighbors at Lancaster Against Pipelines, the people praying and building community in Conestoga, asked to erect an open-air chapel on the Adorers’ field that the gas company covets. It will serve as a place of prayer for people of any faith, a physical mark linking spiritual and physical resistance to industry that threatens water and earth. The chapel will be dedicated at a ceremony July 9, attended by leadership of the Adorers, Lancaster Against Pipelines and supporters. It may not stand for long—the laws favor the energy company’s right to take what land it wants—but for Sister Dwyer and others, “tireless, prayer-filled and fearless nonviolent struggle” is worth standing for.


https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2017/06/14/how-standing-rock-became-spiritual-pilgrimage-activists

June 14, 2017

Unprecedented Meeting of World Faith Leaders to Take on Global Deforestation

Parliament of the World’s Religions

Unprecedented Meeting of World Faith Leaders to take on Global Deforestation Monday, June 19, at the Nobel Peace Center, Oslo, Norway

- Norway to host leaders from world’s spiritual and religious traditions, engaging faith communities to protect rainforests
- Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Daoist, Jewish leaders to join with indigenous forest guardians to express moral commitment, explore faith-based mobilization to end deforestation

For the first time, leaders from many of the world’s religions will meet to discuss the spiritual and ethical responsibility they share to protect rainforests, one of the planet’s most vital life-support systems. Besieged by growing global demand for commodities, tropical rainforests are being cleared at a perilous rate, with an area the size of Austria chopped down each year.
The meeting, which will take place in the presence of His Majesty King Harald V of Norway, will discuss how to activate the collective moral influence of religious communities across the planet. Based on sheer numbers, they could prove decisive in protecting the world’s last standing rainforests.

There is growing consensus among the world’s religions that environmental concerns are closely linked to social justice, a position reinforced by Pope Francis’ Laudato si and high-level declarations from many other faiths about the spiritual imperative of protecting the planet and its most vulnerable people.

The multi-faith summit marks the first significant engagement by the world’s religions with an issue that climate scientists and development experts argue is a lynchpin for global efforts to address climate change, poverty, food insecurity and violations of human rights. It also heralds the first time that religious leaders from a broad spectrum of faiths will work hand-in-hand with indigenous peoples, the historical guardians of rainforests, on an action agenda to end deforestation.

**Host:** His Excellency Vidar Helgesen, Minister of Climate and Environment (Norway)

**Partners:** The meeting is being convened by Norway’s International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI), Rainforest Foundation Norway (RFN) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in cooperation with the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University, GreenFaith, Parliament of the World’s Religions, Religions for Peace, REIL Network, and the World Council of Churches.

**Where:** Nobel Peace Center, Oslo, Norway

**When:** Monday, 19 June 2017 - *Detailed schedule to come*

**Who:**

**Indigenous Peoples Leaders**

- Sônia Guajajara, National Coordinator, Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil – APIB (Brazil)
- Joseph Itongwa, executive Committee Member, Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee – IPACC (Democratic Republic of Congo)
- Abdon Nababan, Vice Chairperson, National Council, Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago, AMAN (Indonesia)
- Vicky Tauli-Corpuz, U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

**Religious Leaders**

- H.E. Metropolitan Emmanuel, Exarch, Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (Christian)
- Dr. Nanditha Krishna, Founder, The C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation (Hinduism)
• Abbot Phra Paisal Vongvoravisit, Co-Founder, Sekiya Dhamma (Buddhism)
• Sir Rabbi David Rosen, International Director of Interreligious Affairs, American Jewish Committee and Director, Heilbrunn Institute for International Interreligious Understanding (Judaism)
• H.E. Monsignor Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, Chancellor, Pontifical Academy of Sciences and Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences (Catholic)
• Bishop Emeritus Gunnar Stålsett, Honorary President, Religions for Peace (Lutheran)
• Dr. Din Syamsuddin, Chairman, Center for Dialogue and Cooperation Among Civilizations (Islam)
• The Right Reverend Bishop Pierre W. Whalon, Bishop-In-Charge, Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe (Episcopal)

Interfaith Leaders

• Reverend Henrik Grape, Coordinator, Working Group on Climate Change, World Council of Churches
• Reverend Fletcher Harper: Executive Director, GreenFaith
• Dr. Kusumita Pedersen, Vice Chair, Parliament of the World’s Religions
• Dr. Mary Evelyn Tucker: Director, Forum on Religion and Ecology, Yale University
• Dr. William F. Vendley: Secretary General, Religions for Peace

Academics and Experts

• Lars Løvold, Director, Rainforest Foundation Norway
• Dr. Antonio Donato Nobre, Visiting Scientist at the National Institute for Space Research (INPE) and Senior Researcher at the National Institute of Amazonian Research (INPA)
• Frances Seymour, Distinguished Senior Fellow, World Resources Institute

Among the questions to be addressed at the event:

• How do religious and spiritual teachings support the care and protection of rainforests, and how do they relate to environmental, socio-cultural and economic justifications for ending deforestation?
• How can religious and spiritual communities contribute to the battle to protect rainforests and stop deforestation? What are the specific actions on the ground undertaken by spiritual groups and mainstream religions to protect forests?
• Where are forests most under threat and what do spiritual and religious leaders, and their communities and constituencies, propose to do to protect them?
• What can indigenous forest communities teach that can help influence a world that judges the value of forests through the lens of price, utility, or efficiency?
• How does this initiative complement and add to other interfaith efforts?
• Why are the Norwegian government and civil society convening this event? Why now?
• What are the planned next steps for this initiative?

About Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI)
Since its launch in 2007, the Government of Norway’s International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI) has cooperated with international partners, governments in forest and donor countries and a broad range of non-governmental organizations to reduce tropical deforestation and forest degradation.

**About Rainforest Foundation Norway**

Rainforest Foundation Norway (RFN) is one of the world's leading organizations in the field of rights-based rainforest protection. We support Indigenous Peoples and traditional populations in the three main rainforest regions of the world: the Amazon, the Congo basin and Southeast Asia. We work to counter drivers of deforestation, influence political, legal and economic framework conditions for rainforest management, and support rights-based sustainable forest management by forest-dependent local communities.

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**Learn more about the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative.**

**View the provisional agenda for the High-Level Segment on June 19, 2017.**

https://parliamentofreligions.org/blog/2017-06-14-1507/unprecedented-meeting-world-faith-leaders-take-global-deforestation

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**June 17, 2017**

'Laudato Si' Pledge seeks mass Catholic climate mobilization ahead of encyclical anniversary

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

Nearly two years after publication of Pope Francis' landmark encyclical *Laudato Si*, a global Catholic campaign hopes to recruit 1 million Catholics to keep its message alive and animated in the daily lives of Catholics, in particular around the issue of climate change.

The *Laudato Si* Pledge, created by the Global Catholic Climate Movement, seeks to rededicate Catholics to Francis' calls in the first papal encyclical on the environment and human ecology for all to do their part in protecting God's creation. It comes ahead of the two-year anniversary, June 18, of the release of "*Laudato Si*, on Care for Our Common Home."

The campaign has set a goal of mobilizing 1 million Catholics worldwide to commit to take steps like reducing energy use and adopting clean energy, and to push for such measures within their
communities and countries. Individuals, families, parishes and organizations can sign the pledge, which is currently available in four languages.

The pledge, accessible at LiveLaudatoSi.org, reads: "Answering Pope Francis' urgent call in Laudato Si', I pledge to: Pray for and with creation; Live more simply; Advocate to protect our common home."

Those who sign on will receive invitations to various Global Catholic Climate Movement programs, such as those planned around the Season of Creation (in September) and Earth Day, to turn their pledge into actions and lifestyle changes.

"Pope Francis helped transform the climate debate by reframing it as a moral issue. Now is the turn for the Church to 'walk the walk' and bring the encyclical's message to life," said Tomas Insua, executive director of Global Catholic Climate Movement, in a statement.

The international network of 400-plus Catholic organizations points to the sheer size of the global Catholic Church — 1.2 billion people, or roughly 16 percent of the world's population, along with its hundreds of thousands of parishes, schools and other institutions — and the accompanying carbon footprint not only as reason for Catholics to make the climate issue a priority but as potential for meaningful impact through collective action.

In his encyclical, Francis wrote, "The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all," adding later that for Christians, care for creation is "an essential part of their faith."

"It is good for humanity and the world at large when we believers better recognize the ecological commitments which stem from our convictions," the pope wrote.

"The gravity of the ecological crisis demands that we all look to the common good, embarking on a path of dialogue which requires patience, self-discipline and generosity, always keeping in mind that 'realities are greater than ideas,' " Francis said.

Franciscan Sr. Sheila Kinsey, executive co-secretary of the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission of the International Union of Superiors General, told NCR the pledge demonstrates "the common good matters for us."

"We are part of a global family and we realize that our actions affect the whole world," Kinsey said.

A key aspect of the campaign, she added, is that it is a community effort among Catholics across the world. Recognizing that others are doing their part "creates kind of a momentum," Kinsey said. "It creates a climate, in a sense, that things can change."

A kick-off event for the Laudato Si' Pledge was set for June 17 in the Philippines, the same locale where Global Catholic Climate Movement formed in January 2015 during the pope's visit to the Pacific archipelago.
The island nation has served a similar role for past GCCM programs, not only because of the enthusiasm there around environmental justice but also in its state as a global ground-zero for the impacts of climate change, including rising seas and more intense storms, such as 2013’s Super Typhoon Haiyan, which killed at least 6,300 people.

Insua, in Manila for the pledge kick-off, told NCR in an email that there is "extremely exciting momentum building up around the pledge, particularly with the bishops of the Philippines."

Both Cardinal Luis Tagle of Manila and Lingayen-Dagupan Archbishop Socrates Villegas, president of the Bishops Conference of the Philippines, were expected to attend the event.

The Laudato Si’ Pledge has drawn initial support from four additional cardinals, from climate vulnerable parts of the globe, as well as the United States.

"This is a crucial ministry to help the global church respond to the climate crisis," said Cardinal John Ribat of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, who also serves as president of the Federation of Catholic Bishops' Conferences of Oceania.

Ribat, elevated to a cardinal in October, was among the heads of six continental bishops' conferences who issued an appeal calling for a global deal to address climate change ahead of the 2015 United Nations climate summit that concluded in the Paris Agreement. He has been outspoken about the present-day impacts climate change has had on the people of the Pacific islands, where relocation due to rising seas has already begun for some communities, including in the Carteret Islands.

"On behalf of the vulnerable communities of Oceania, I urge all Catholics to join and support this important effort to bring Laudato Si’ to life," Ribat said.

Boston Cardinal Sean O'Malley, a member of Pope Francis' Council of Cardinals, said in a statement that through Laudato Si’ "Pope Francis provides an important contribution to the good of the world we live in by making clear that we have a responsibility to care for the extraordinary gift of God's creation," not only for all people today but for future generations, too.

Cardinal Blase Cupich of Chicago described the encyclical as "an unequivocal call to action to protect our common home."

"As we mark the second anniversary of this groundbreaking document, there is an even greater urgency to work together to honor the gift of our creator," he said.

Others endorsing the pledge so far were eco-theologian Columban Fr. Sean McDonagh; Pax Christi International president Marie Dennis; Franciscan Fr. Richard Rohr; May Boeve, executive director of the 350.org grassroots climate organization; and former U.N. climate executive secretary Christiana Figueres.

"Now more than ever, the world needs to heed the moral imperative of Laudato Si’, and step up to the bold and urgent action that is necessary," Figueres said.
Since its founding, Global Catholic Climate Movement has emphasized grassroots steps for Catholics to address climate change, whether as individuals or within their local communities. It has also partnered in large demonstrations and marches organized by 350.org and other climate action organizations.

The "local actions" sentiment was redoubled following the November U.S. election of President Donald Trump, who pledged to reverse the country's climate policies. Since assuming the presidency, he has ordered a review of the Clean Power Plan and has sought to overhaul the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, proposing major budget cuts and a simplified focus on clean air and water.

Most recently, Trump announced he intends to remove the U.S. from the Paris Agreement, which would effectively cease implementation of the nation's pledge at the federal level.

The Laudato Si’ Pledge comes as the second worldwide signature drive undertaken by Global Catholic Climate Movement, the first coming ahead of the COP21 climate negotiations and collecting 900,000 signatures to a petition seeking negotiators to reach a deal that sought to limit average global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

That threshold, included as a tertiary goal to the "well below" 2-degree mark in the Paris Agreement, was a priority for island nations, such as the Philippines, which provided more signatures than any of the 135 countries that participated.


June 17, 2017

World Faith Leaders to Protect Global Deforestation

Regional Interfaith Network

Norway will host an Unprecedented Meeting of World Faith Leaders to engage Global Deforestation on Monday, June 19, at the Nobel Peace Center, Oslo, Norway. Norway will host leaders from world’s spiritual and religious traditions, engaging faith communities to protect rainforests. Leaders from Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Pagan, Daois and, Jewish leaders will join with both indigenous forest guardians and leaders from International Interfaith Organisations to express moral commitment, explore faith-based mobilization to end deforestation.

For the first time, leaders from many of the world’s religions will meet to discuss the spiritual and ethical responsibility they share to protect rainforests, one of the planet’s most vital life-support systems. Besieged by growing global demand for commodities, tropical rainforests are being cleared at a perilous rate, with an area the size of Austria chopped down each year.
The meeting, which will take place in the presence of His Majesty King Harald V of Norway, will discuss how to activate the collective moral influence of religious communities across the planet. Based on sheer numbers, they could prove decisive in protecting the world’s last standing rainforests.

There is growing consensus among the world’s religions that environmental concerns are closely linked to social justice, a position reinforced by Pope Francis’ Laudato si and high-level declarations from many other faiths about the spiritual imperative of protecting the planet and its most vulnerable people.

The multi-faith summit marks the first significant engagement by the world’s religions with an issue that climate scientists and development experts argue is a lynchpin for global efforts to address climate change, poverty, food insecurity and violations of human rights. It also heralds the first time that religious leaders from a broad spectrum of faiths will work hand-in-hand with indigenous peoples, the historical guardians of rainforests, on an action agenda to end deforestation.

**Host:** His Excellency Vidar Helgesen, Minister of Climate and Environment (Norway)

**Partners:** The meeting is being convened by Norway’s International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI), Rainforest Foundation Norway (RFN) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in cooperation with the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University, GreenFaith, Parliament of the World’s Religions, Religions for Peace, REIL Network, and the World Council of Churches.

**Where:** Nobel Peace Center, Oslo, Norway

**When:** Monday, 19 June 2017 – *Detailed schedule to come*

**Who:**

**Indigenous Peoples Leaders**
- Sônia Guajajara, National Coordinator, Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil – APIB (Brazil)
- Joseph Itongwa, executive Committee Member, Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee – IPACC (Democratic Republic of Congo)
- Abdon Nababan, Vice Chairperson, National Council, Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago, AMAN (Indonesia)
- Vicky Tauli-Corpuz, U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

**Religious Leaders**
- H.E. Metropolitan Emmanuel, Exarch, Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (Christian)
- Dr. Nanditha Krishna, Founder, The C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation (Hinduism)
Abbot Phra Paisal Vongvoravisit, Co-Founder, Sekiya Dhamma (Buddhism)
Sir Rabbi David Rosen, International Director of Interreligious Affairs, American Jewish Committee and Director, Heilbrunn Institute for International Interreligious Understanding (Judaism)
H.E. Monsignor Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, Chancellor, Pontifical Academy of Sciences and Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences (Catholic)
Bishop Emeritus Gunnar Stålsett, Honorary President, Religions for Peace (Lutheran)
Dr. Din Syamsuddin, Chairman, Center for Dialogue and Cooperation Among Civilizations (Islam)
The Right Reverend Bishop Pierre W. Whalon, Bishop-In-Charge, Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe (Episcopal)

Interfaith Leaders

- Reverend Henrik Grape, Coordinator, Working Group on Climate Change, World Council of Churches
- Reverend Fletcher Harper: Executive Director, GreenFaith
- Dr. Kusumita Pedersen, Vice Chair, Parliament of the World’s Religions
- Dr. Mary Evelyn Tucker: Director, Forum on Religion and Ecology, Yale University
- Dr. William F. Vendley: Secretary General, Religions for Peace

Academics and Experts

- Lars Løvold, Director, Rainforest Foundation Norway
- Dr. Antonio Donato Nobre, Visiting Scientist at the National Institute for Space Research (INPE) and Senior Researcher at the National Institute of Amazonian Research (INPA)
- Frances Seymour, Distinguished Senior Fellow, World Resources Institute

Among the questions to be addressed at the event:

- How do religious and spiritual teachings support the care and protection of rainforests, and how do they relate to environmental, socio-cultural and economic justifications for ending deforestation?
- How can religious and spiritual communities contribute to the battle to protect rainforests and stop deforestation? What are the specific actions on the ground undertaken by spiritual groups and mainstream religions to protect forests?
- Where are forests most under threat and what do spiritual and religious leaders, and their communities and constituencies, propose to do to protect them?
- What can indigenous forest communities teach that can help influence a world that judges the value of forests through the lens of price, utility, or efficiency?
- How does this initiative complement and add to other interfaith efforts?
- Why are the Norwegian government and civil society convening this event? Why now?
- What are the planned next steps for this initiative?

About Norway’s International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI)
Since its launch in 2007, the Government of Norway’s International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI) has cooperated with international partners, governments in forest and donor countries and a broad range of non-governmental organizations to reduce tropical deforestation and forest degradation.

**About Rainforest Foundation Norway**

Rainforest Foundation Norway (RFN) is one of the world’s leading organizations in the field of rights-based rainforest protection. We support Indigenous Peoples and traditional populations in the three main rainforest regions of the world: the Amazon, the Congo basin and Southeast Asia. We work to counter drivers of deforestation, influence political, legal and economic framework conditions for rainforest management, and support rights-based sustainable forest management by forest-dependent local communities.

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Susan Tonassi at stonassi@burness.com or +49 160 9327 9327

**Learn more about the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative.**

**View the provisional agenda for the High-Level Segment on June 19, 2017.**

http://regionalinterfaith.org.au/?p=1766#more-1766

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**June 17, 2017**

**World Faith Leaders to Protect Global Deforestation**

**Religions for Peace Australia**

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When: Monday, 19 June 2017 – Detailed schedule to come

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Learn more about the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative.

View the provisional agenda for the High-Level Segment on June 19, 2017.


June 18, 2017

‘Laudato Si’ two years later: Parishes throughout diocese continue to answer pope’s call to environmental stewardship

By Lisa Dahm
The Catholic Sun

With the pull out of the United States from the Paris agreement, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a statement on June 1 regretting the withdrawal from the consortium created by the United Nations Framework Convention on climate change and signed by 197 parties in November 2016.

In the release, Bishop Oscar Cantú of Los Cruces said the USCCB, “along with Pope Francis and the entire Catholic Church, has consistently upheld the Paris agreement as an important international mechanism to promote environmental stewardship and encourage climate change mitigation.”
Bishop Cantú, who is the chairman of the USCCB Committee on Justice and Peace, called the president’s decision “deeply troubling.”

Despite the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris agreement, Catholics throughout Arizona and the world have been embracing ecological responsibility highlighted in Pope Francis’ encyclical on the environment, Laudato Si’: On Care for our Common Home, promulgated May 24, 2015.

Exactly two years later, during the pope’s visit with President Donald Trump at the Vatican on May 24, Pope Francis gave the president a copy of Laudato Si’ as well as a signed copy of his message from this year’s World Day of Peace and copies of his apostolic exhortations Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel) and Amoris Laetitia on the family.

Parishes make an environmental difference

Since the release of Laudato Si’, parishes across the diocese have formed reading groups, held lectures and offered daylong retreats to study the document. Their preparation is paying off as parishes put Pope Francis’ ideas into action.

For Melanie Cantua and members of the Care of Creation Ministry at St. Mary’s Basilica in Phoenix, living Pope Francis’ message has become their mission. After reading the encyclical together, they are now working to encourage the whole parish to protect the environment.

“What is most interesting (about the document) is the pope’s words really inspire people,” Cantua said. “As Catholics, we just can’t sit and wait for the work to be done.”

The parish bulletin includes a corner where ministry members offer simple tips on caring for God’s creation. Suggestions include planting one tree each, going meatless on Fridays to conserve energy and using hand towels rather than paper towels.

“We use those as opportunities to get the message out,” Cantua said. “It’s weekly education in our bulletin in what they can do every day. … What we are teaching is that it is the culmination of all of our little differences and behavior changes that makes a big difference.”

At the parish Earth Day event on April 23, they also partnered with Liberty Wildlife to bring in a peregrine falcon, a Harris hawk and a great horned owl to teach visitors the importance of wildlife and to show them how to make their yards more wildlife friendly.

A conversion through Laudato Si’

Julie Murphy Erfani, one of the Care for Creation ministry members, was not Catholic when she first learned of the pope’s encyclical.

Murphy Erfani, the director of the master’s program in Social Justice and Human Rights at Arizona State University, had a graduate student in her class who told her about Laudato Si’. The young Catholic student pointed her toward the Franciscan Renewal Center in Scottsdale for more information.
“I started to read it and I was so taken aback by everything it said,” Murphy Erfani said about the encyclical. “Not only is it erudite, it is hopeful. … I was inspired by *Laudato Si’*.”

She said she took “a spiritual interest in Franciscan Catholicism” motivated by the document. After a few classes with them, she decided to become Catholic and started RCIA classes at St. Mary’s. She was recently accepted into the Church at the Easter Vigil April 15, and she credits her journey to *Laudato Si’*.

“I found the encyclical inspiring because it is pretty lofty critical theory and it is very sophisticated, but written so it can be intelligible by most people,” Murphy Erfani said.

**Retrofitting a parish: both business savvy and moral mandate**

Almost five years ago, Sacred Heart Parish in Prescott took to heart Pope Francis’ message of “*Let us be the Protector of Creation*,” the theme of his inaugural Homily on March 19, 2013, in St. Peter’s Square.

Earlier, in October 2012, Sacred Heart Parish and School in Prescott commissioned a 160-kilowatt solar PV system. In its first three years, Sacred Heart’s solar plant contributed to a 69 percent reduction in energy costs, and the school derives 100 percent of its power from solar.

Smaller changes throughout the parish and school included retrofitting all of the lighting for LED lights for a cost savings of about $12,000 annually, committing to recycling and using organic cleaning supplies and switching to tankless water heaters and low-flow toilets.

“At first it was pragmatic, but it has multiplied our mission,” said Gene Murphy, parish business manager.

Murphy also partners with the Catholic Climate Covenant, and many Sacred Heart students and parishioners have already taken the Franciscan Pledge to pray, act and advocate regarding climate change.

“But because this is what he asked us to do,” Murphy said of Pope Francis. “All the popes have spoken on the protection of the environment — this is all information the popes have been saying for years. One thing about Pope Francis, he is building upon what has already been done, yet he is adding a whole other layer.”

The St. Francis Pledge

I/we pledge to pray, act, and advocate to solve climate change

Taking the St. Francis Pledge commits you or your organization to respond to the moral call for action on climate change. By pledging, you commit to praying, acting and advocating to solve climate change. How you fulfill those commitments is up to you. Here are a few ideas for how to fulfill the Pledge commitments:
Pray

- Set a time to pray for climate action.
- Pray as a family or as a church group.
- Keep a prayer journal.
- Publish prayers via a blog or newsletter.

Act

- Investigate solar and renewable options.
- Learn how climate affects the vulnerable.
- Calculate your carbon footprint.
- Take steps to reduce your footprint.

Advocate

- Connect with policy makers.
- Connect with your municipal council.
- Explore sustainable policies at work.
- Hear your pastor’s position on ecology.

http://www.catholicsun.org/2017/06/18/laudato-si-two-years-later/

June 19, 2017

Global religious and indigenous leaders warn against deforestation

By Alister Doyle, Reuters
The Christian Science Monitor

Representatives from around the world attended the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative in Oslo on June 19, calling for protections to forests for their cultural, environmental, and religious significance.

Oslo, Norway—Religious and indigenous leaders appealed on Monday for better protection of tropical forests from the Amazon to the Congo basin, with a Vatican bishop likening current losses to a collective suicide by humanity.

Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, and Daoist representatives met indigenous peoples in Oslo to explore moral and ethical arguments to shield forests that are under threat from logging and land clearance for farms.
Organizers said the Oslo Interfaith Rainforest Initiative from June 19-21 was the first to gather religious and indigenous peoples to seek out common ground to protect forests. They hope to organize a summit in 2018.

"Without the forests we don't have life," said Bishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, head of the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Sciences. "If we continue to do this deforestation it's like suicide."

Din Syamsuddin, an Indonesian Muslim leader, called for new technologies and changes of lifestyles to protect forests. "A true believer should maintain the balance with nature," he said.

Norwegian climate and environment minister Vidar Helgesen, a host of the talks, said forests were homes and a source of income to millions of people, as well as habitats for creatures from tigers to birds of paradise.

He said rainforests were also a giant natural store of carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas from burning fossil fuels. Trees release the gas when they rot or are burnt to make way for farms, such as for cattle or palm oil plantations.

"The Paris Agreement is doomed if deforestation continues," Mr. Helgesen said.

Many countries have reaffirmed support for the 2015 Paris pact to phase out greenhouse gas emissions after President Trump announced plans on June 1 to pull out, saying he wants to promote the United States fossil fuel industry.

Many speakers noted that a "tree of life" is a part of many religious traditions.

"Trees don't have only ecological value for us, but also cultural value for us. Every tree," said Joseph Itongwa of Democratic Republic of Congo, a representative of indigenous peoples in Africa.

The net extent of the world's forests shrank by 12,700 square miles a year from 2010-15, about the size of Belgium, the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization says.

The rate is about half that of the 1990s.

Mary Evelyn Tucker, director of Yale University's forum on religion and ecology, said religious groups such as the World Council of Churches were seeking ever more to restrict investments in areas that damage the environment.


June 19, 2017
King Of Norway To Host A Meeting Of Religious And Indigenous Leaders On Climate Change

By Antonia Blumberg
Huffington Post

*Attendees say this will be the first conference aimed at tackling deforestation from an interfaith perspective.*

King Harald V of Norway plans to host a meeting of religious and indigenous leaders, interfaith advocates and scientists this week to address the worldwide crisis of deforestation and its effects on climate change.

Religious and indigenous leaders from 21 countries convened at the Nobel Peace Center in Oslo on Monday for a three-day conference on rainforest protection. They are slated to meet with forest advocates, climate scientists and human rights experts to develop goals and actions for a rainforest initiative that blends science, faith and indigenous knowledge.

“The fact that the U.N. and a major government are open to hosting this and synergizing science and religion, ecology and ethics makes it an exciting moment,” said Mary Evelyn Tucker, director of Yale University’s Forum on Religion and Ecology, one of the co-sponsors of the event.

The conference participants include indigenous leaders from tropical forest nations like Indonesia, Brazil and the Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as religious leaders from Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions. Bishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, head of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Rabbi David Rosen, the director of interreligious affairs at the American Jewish Committee, and Dr. Din Syamsuddin, an Islamic scholar and head of the Center for Dialogue and Cooperation Among Civilizations, are listed among the attendees.

“A decade ago, Norway decided to make reducing tropical deforestation one of its top international priorities,” said Vidar Helgesen, the country’s minister of climate and environment, in a statement. “In that decade — the scientific case, the economic case, and the geopolitical case for ending deforestation has only grown.”

This week’s conference, convened by Norway’s International Climate and Forest Initiative, Rainforest Foundation Norway and the United Nations Development Programme, aims to investigate how religious and cultural values can bolster efforts to protect the world’s rainforests.

“This will be the first conference of its kind on the role of religions and indigenous peoples on forest conservation,” Tucker told HuffPost.

Attendees say they hope religious and indigenous leaders can help turn the tide on forest preservation by encouraging a cultural shift in how the world views climate efforts.
“A new norm is emerging against illegal deforestation,” said Frances Seymour, a senior fellow for the World Resources Institute, referring to the 2015 Paris climate agreement. “To have the faith community engaged in the issue could be quite significant.”

Rainforests are capable of storing billions of tons of carbon, and scientists consider them to be among the most important resources for mitigating climate change.

On a more immediate level, tropical rainforests provide food, water and income to some 1.6 billion people, according to the United Nations. (And of course, that’s to say nothing of the vital role they play for countless animal and plant species.) The humanitarian component of forest conservation is something Tucker said almost all of the world’s religions can get behind.

“Many of the religions have had values [of] justice for people — taking care of the poor, aiding the sick and the elderly,” she said. “On the other hand, you have environmentalists trying to preserve forests for their ecological complexity, but sometimes without an understanding of the people who live there.”

Rural communities in developing countries get over 20 percent of their household income from gathering wild products like bush meat and wood in the forest, Seymour said. These communities also benefit from “forest-based ecosystem services,” including water and resilience to extreme weather.

“When a forest is degraded through logging and converted to different land uses, the poor are made worse off, because they lose access to forest goods and services and don’t necessarily benefit from new employment opportunities,” she said.

Deforestation and illegal logging have had a devastating impact on indigenous communities around the world. Many of them lack legal rights to care for the land that is both essential to their livelihood and sacred in their belief systems.

Pope Francis wrote about the special bond between indigenous peoples and the land in his 2015 encyclical on the environment. “For them land is not a commodity,” he wrote, “but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values.”

Indigenous groups have historically found themselves confronted by third-party companies unlawfully encroaching on their land and cutting down forests without consent. In places like Brazil, the government has tried to establish legal protections to end the practice. But in a conflict that conservationists say resembles the “Wild West,” indigenous groups have often been driven to stage protests and even fight on the ground to protect their land.

“Forest communities around the world have put their lives on the line to care for the planet’s tropical forests,” Vicky Tauli-Corpuz, the U.N. special rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples and an attendee of the Oslo conference, said in a statement. “We are nothing without our forests. Our culture, our spirituality, our livelihoods, our incomes and our health are tied to them.”
Research has also shown that when indigenous communities have the rights to their land, rainforests in those regions are more likely to remain standing. Indigenous groups therefore need to be “part of the solution” in forest conservation, Seymour said.

Both she and Tucker said that conference attendees will work to draft immediate, concrete action plans, including coordinating a follow-up summit for 2018.

But interfaith and intercultural efforts can be challenging by nature, given their tendency to run into differing belief systems and traditions.

“Religions have their problems, and they have their promise,” Tucker said.

Their promise, Seymour said, lies in their ability to help bring about social change and a “shift in norms,” in which deforestation would go from being generally accepted to universally condemned. Such a shift in public opinion could in turn lead to new legislation to protect the world’s forests.

“I’m the daughter of a Baptist minister, and in my father’s lifetime the cause was civil rights,” Seymour said. “I saw how in a brief generation, attitudes, laws and practices regarding racial segregation could change with the help of religious leaders. My hope is that environmental justice issues could similarly witness that kind of sea change.”

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/norway-climate-conference_us_59384e8ede4b00610547ebe80?section=us_religion#

June 19, 2017

Interfaith Rainforest Initiative in Oslo Photos and Images

European Pressphoto Agency

See photos here:


June 19, 2017

Holy smoke: saving the rainforests

The Economist

Religious leaders gather in Oslo today along with indigenous peoples’ representatives and climate activists for a save-the-planet pow-wow convened by Norway’s International Climate
and Forest Initiative. The summit is the first to bring together faith leaders and native communities at such a high level. It also frames saving the rainforests—still disappearing at a rate of 6,000 acres per hour—as a moral imperative rather than just a climate or conservation worry. Though Norway is increasingly secular, environmentalism is on the rise. Its government has invested almost $3bn over the past decade to reduce deforestation. But this largesse is only made possible by Norway’s oil wealth. The environment minister, Vidar Helgesen, will today demand a “tectonic shift in values”. With a record number of wells being drilled in the Barents Sea this year he might also consider the morality of drilling in the fragile Arctic.

https://espresso.economist.com/1e79596878b2320cac26dd792a6c51c9?fsrc=scn/tw/te/bl/ed/holy_smokesavingtherainforests20170620espresso

June 19, 2017

Religious, indigenous leaders demand rainforests be saved

By Matti Huuhtanen, Associated Press
Island Packet

Religious and indigenous leaders on Monday called for an end to deforestation in the first international multi-faith, multi-cultural plea to reduce the emissions that fuel climate change.

Participants from 21 countries gathered at a conference in the Norwegian capital of Oslo, hoping that billions of people of faith worldwide will unite to protect the Earth's rainforests. Those forests are fundamental to human life but are suffering from agricultural and industrial exploitation in South America, sub-Saharan Africa and Asia.

Hosting the one-day meeting, Norwegian Climate and Environment Minister Vidar Helgesen said that halting deforestation requires "a global, tectonic shift in values."

The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative was launched by the Scandinavian country that has made reducing tropical deforestation one of its top international priorities, with investments of some $3 billion in the past decade.

"In that decade, the scientific case, the economic case, and the geopolitical case for ending deforestation has only grown. However, more is needed," Helgesen said. "It is not the realm of policy, commerce or science, but of spirit, faith and moral conviction."

Tropical rainforests contain most of the Earth's land-borne biodiversity, help regulate rainfall and temperature globally and regionally, and provide food, water and income to 1.6 billion people.

The conference the rapid decreased in tropical rainforests has been fueled by palm oil plantations, cattle, soy and crop production and "rapacious and often illegal mining and logging operations." It said the reduction of the rainforests amounted to an area the size of Austria, or nearly 84,000 square kilometers (33,600 square miles).
"Forest communities around the world have put their lives on the line to care for the planet's tropical forests," said Vicky Tauli-Corpuz, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. "We are nothing without our forests. Our culture, our spirituality, our livelihoods, our incomes and our health are tied to them."

Those at the meeting included representatives of Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim and Hindu faiths, and indigenous leaders, including ones from Indonesia and Brazil.


June 19, 2017

Religious, Indigenous Leaders Demand End to Tropical Rainforest Deforestation

Halting deforestation requires "a global, tectonic shift in values," the Norwegian climate and environment minister said

By Matti Huuhtanen
NBC Bay Area

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Tropical rainforests contain most of the Earth's land-borne biodiversity, help regulate rainfall and temperature globally and regionally, and provide food, water and income to 1.6 billion people.

The conference the rapid decreased in tropical rainforests has been fueled by palm oil plantations, cattle, soy and crop production and "rapacious and often illegal mining and logging
operations." It said the reduction of the rainforests amounted to an area the size of Austria, or nearly 33,600 square miles.

"Forest communities around the world have put their lives on the line to care for the planet's tropical forests," said Vicky Tauli-Corpuz, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. "We are nothing without our forests. Our culture, our spirituality, our livelihoods, our incomes and our health are tied to them."

Those at the meeting included representatives of Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim and Hindu faiths, and indigenous leaders, including ones from Indonesia and Brazil.


June 19, 2017

Religious, indigenous leaders demand rainforests be saved

The Associated Press
Yale Daily News

HELSINKI (AP) — Religious and indigenous leaders worldwide are calling for an end to deforestation in an international multi-faith, multi-cultural plea to reduce the emissions that fuel climate change, which is killing tropical rainforests.

Participants from 21 countries at a conference in the Norwegian capital of Oslo are hoping that billions of people of faith worldwide will unite to protect the Earth's rainforests. The rainforests are fundamental to human life but are suffering from agricultural and industrial exploitation in South America, sub-Saharan Africa and Asia.

Vidar Helgesen, Norway's environment minister, launched the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative and is hosting the one-day meeting. He says Monday that halting deforestation requires "a global, tectonic shift."

Among those at the meeting are representatives of Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim and Hindu faiths, and indigenous leaders, including ones from Indonesia and Brazil.


June 19, 2017

Religious leaders join interfaith rainforest initiative in Oslo today
New hope for world’s tropical forests arises as the Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Daoist leaders join indigenous forest guardians to launch global effort to end deforestation. Interfaith rainforest initiative, created by global coalition to fight escalating threats to endangered forests in Africa, Southeast Asia and Latin America is vital to slowing climate change.

Religious and indigenous leaders from all corners of the globe launched today an unprecedented initiative they say will bring needed moral attention and spiritual commitment to bear on global efforts to end deforestation and protect the tropical rainforests—forests that are fundamental to human life, the planet’s health and reducing the emissions fueling climate change. It marks the first time religious leaders from a broad spectrum of faiths will work hand-in-hand with Indigenous Peoples, the world’s leading rainforest guardians, to call upon and activate billions of people of faith worldwide to stand up for rainforests. The gathering was attended by His Majesty King Harald V of Norway.

Tropical rainforests in South America, sub-Saharan Africa and Asia are falling rapidly due to a range of forces, including palm oil plantations, cattle, soy and crop production, and rapacious and often illegal mining and logging operations. The losses amount to an area the size of Austria each year.

“The story of creation in the book of Genesis tells us of trees that are beautiful to behold and a source of sustenance. Rainforests are pivotal for life on earth, provisioning people’s needs, promoting biodiversity and protecting the climate”, said World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit. “Today when the rainforests are threatened by deforestation driven by a shortsighted, profit-oriented economy, we must use the knowledge of what is good and our faith-driven action to protect and care for the rainforests and therefore the earth and all life”.

With their capacity to store billions of tons of carbon, the preservation of tropical rainforests is widely viewed as fundamental to halting climate change. Many climate experts note that forests are the only proven approach for capturing and storing large amounts of carbon. Thus, staving off their destruction could keep carbon emissions at bay, buying time for the world to transition to a low carbon energy future, and also playing an indispensable role in reaching global carbon neutrality in the second half of this century.

Tropical rainforests also provide food, water and income to 1.6 billion people. They contain most of the planet’s land-borne biodiversity and help regulate rainfall and temperature globally, regionally and locally.

Religious and indigenous leaders from 21 countries will have discussions with forest advocates, climate scientists and human rights experts in Oslo on June 19-21 to develop goals and actions, along with milestones to mark their progress. They expect to follow up with an action plan and a global interfaith rainforest summit in 2018.
The group was convened by Norway’s International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI), Rainforest Foundation Norway (RFN) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in cooperation with the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University, GreenFaith, the Parliament of the World’s Religions, Religions for Peace, REIL Network and the WCC.

“Our goal—working in concert with the spiritual and indigenous leaders gathered here—is to define a shared action plan to create a popular movement for expanded political will and on-the-ground action to protect rainforests,” said Bishop Emeritus Gunnar Stålsett, honorary president of Religions for Peace. “The scope of this initiative is global. But we are also putting special focus on religious and indigenous leaders, networks and institutions in countries with the most significant tropical rainforests.”

The initiative is linked to a surge of grassroots action over the last few years in which environmental, climate and indigenous rights issues are being embraced as spiritual imperatives that strike a chord with multiple faiths and traditions. Other leaders of Evangelical Christian and Muslim organizations, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, have stressed the shared human responsibility to protect the planet. Lending crucial leadership and indispensable momentum to these efforts was the official letter or “encyclical” issued in 2015 by Pope Francis that called on all people of the world to take swift action, to bring, "the whole human family together to protect our common home." He also noted the unbreakable link between Indigenous Peoples and the environment: "For them land is not a commodity, but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values."

"The world’s rainforests are a stunning example of the life-sustaining beauty of the planet; they are spectacular, vital to life, and at grave risk”, said Rev. Fletcher Harper, executive director of GreenFaith. “This meeting represents a tremendously important first step forward for faith communities, who must join First Peoples and commit to rainforests’ health and restoration.”

Rev. Henrik Grape, coordinator of the WCC Working Group on Climate Change, represented WCC at the event.

“Learning from the ecumenical and interfaith activities on climate change, the action to protect the rainforests could gain a lot,” he said. “Actually, climate change and protection of the rainforests are very closely related, so this is natural way to go further in our common pilgrimage for justice and peace. Peace with earth. And the Indigenous People’s spirituality and understanding are indispensable to a more sustainable future.”

Citing the spiritual, environmental, social and economic benefits the world’s tropical rainforests provide, the partners of the multi-faith initiative emphasize humanity’s shared ethical and moral responsibility to protect them. They are committed to taking concrete, collective action to protect, restore and sustainably manage those forests. The world’s religious and spiritual communities have long sheltered and protected forests—from the rainforest-dwelling Ashaninka in Peru and Brazil to Buddhist monks ordaining trees in Thailand. Yet, this is the historical effort
for such a broad-scale and global mobilization of faith communities to protect the tropical forests so essential for the earth’s climate.

**WCC work on Care for Creation and Climate Justice**

**WCC encourages renewed climate efforts after US withdrawal**

**Rainforest Foundation Norway**


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**June 19, 2017**

Europe bishop represents Anglicans, Episcopalians at launch of Interfaith Rainforest Initiative in Norway

Episcopal News Service

Religious and indigenous leaders from across the globe launched an unprecedented initiative June 19 in Oslo, Norway, aimed at bringing “moral attention and spiritual commitment” to bear on global efforts to end deforestation and protect tropical rainforests—forests that are fundamental to human life, the planet’s health and reducing the emissions fueling climate change.

“The Norwegian government has made major investments in protecting the rainforest, but this is the first attempt to bring together religious leaders, scientists and indigenous peoples,” the Rt. Rev. Pierre Whalon, bishop of the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe, said from Oslo in a telephone interview with Episcopal News Service.

Whalon helped organize the conference and was scheduled to speak during a June 19 dinner. Indigenous people from across Africa, Brazil, Peru, Colombia and Indonesia have joined Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Daoist and Buddhist religious leaders for the June 19-21 launch of the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative aimed at framing rainforest protection in moral terms.

The conference is meant to “change minds and hearts and get people working together,” said Whalon. The urgency is clear, he added, from the stories shared by indigenous people living in the rainforest and from satellite images.

“Rainforest destruction is not just tearing down all the trees and turning into soy fields. It’s literally ethnic cleansing,” said Whalon. There’s a real moral and spiritual imperative to protecting the rainforest. Conference organizers made sure to give indigenous peoples a chance to share their stories from the front lines, and what they have to say will “curl your hair,” he said.
Palm oil plantations; cattle, soy and other crop production, and illegal mining and logging operations are destroying tropical rainforests in South America, sub-Saharan Africa and Asia at high rates. Rainforests are home to indigenous people; provide food, water and income to 1.6 billion people; contain most of the planet’s land-borne biodiversity; help regulate rainfall and temperature globally, regionally and locally, and store billions of tons of carbon, which is essential for curbing global warming.

“The world’s rainforests are a stunning example of the life-sustaining beauty of the planet; they are spectacular, vital to life and at grave risk. This meeting represents a tremendously important first step forward for faith communities, who must join First Peoples and commit to rainforests’ health and restoration,” said the Rev. Fletcher Harper, an Episcopal priest based in New Jersey and the executive director of GreenFaith, in a press release.

Religious and indigenous leaders from 21 countries will have discussions with forest advocates, climate scientists and human rights experts to develop goals and actions, along with milestones to mark their progress. They expect to follow up with an action plan and a global interfaith rainforest summit in 2018. The group was convened by Norway’s International Climate and Forest Initiative, Rainforest Foundation Norway and the United Nations Development Program in cooperation with the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University, GreenFaith, the Parliament of the World’s Religions, Religions for Peace, REIL Network and the World Council of Churches.

The rainforest initiative is linked to a surge of grassroots action over the last few years in which environmental, climate and indigenous rights issues are being embraced as spiritual imperatives that strike a chord with multiple faiths and traditions. Other leaders of Evangelical Christian and Muslim organizations, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, have stressed the shared human responsibility to protect the planet.

“Tropical rainforests occupy a sacred place in many faiths, religions and spiritual traditions,” said Mary Evelyn Tucker, director of the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University, in a press release. “Indeed, spiritual reverence for nature and all life can be found across the world’s religions, including among indigenous peoples and other residents of the world’s tropical rainforests. Given what we are hearing from religious and indigenous leaders worldwide, we believe we can create a global movement around this shared vision.”

Whalon became involved in the conference’s planning because of previous involvement in roundtable discussions related to the environment and communicating the message of Pope Francis’ encyclical on the environment and human ecology. He was invited into the roundtable discussions following the December 2015 U.N. climate negotiations in France, when he and American Cathedral in Paris Dean Lucinda Laird organized several events for conference attendees.

June 19, 2017

Religious and indigenous leaders seek to save rainforests

By Josephine McKenna, Religion News Service
National Catholic Reporter

Rome - Religious and indigenous leaders from 21 countries gathered in Norway on Monday to launch a new initiative aimed at saving the world's tropical rainforests from the impact of deforestation and climate change.

It was the first time leaders from Catholic, Protestant Jewish, Buddhist and other faiths joined indigenous leaders from Brazil, Peru, Indonesia, Colombia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to call for urgent action to protect the forests.

Inspired by Pope Francis' outspoken stance on global warming and overdevelopment in his 2015 "Laudato Si" encyclical, the groundbreaking event was held in Oslo and backed by Norway’s King Harald V.

"Without the forests we do not have life; we live thanks to the forests," Monsignor Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, who heads the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Sciences, told the conference.

"If we continue to do deforestation, it is like suicide. We need to act together to defend our common house."

The conference was told the size of tropical rainforests in South America, sub-Saharan Africa and Asia is falling rapidly due to palm oil, soy and crop production, and extensive mining and logging operations with annual losses equal to an area the size of Austria.

Vicky Tauli-Corpuz, an indigenous leader for the Kankana-ey Igorot people in the Philippines, is U.N. special rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples.

She said that forest communities had put their lives on the line to care for the planet's tropical forests and the conference was the first step towards critical collaboration.

"Many of these dominant religions have been linked to the colonization of our communities," she told RNS. "It is important that they come together to support the indigenous people who are the main guardians of the forest."

Tauli-Corpuz, who led community opposition to logging expansion under the late Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos, said deforestation and mining had taken their toll on her community of 1 million people in northern Luzon and others in the Philippines.

"We are nothing without our forests," she said. "Our culture, our spirituality, our livelihoods, our incomes and our health are tied to them."
Tauli-Corpuz said she hoped the Oslo talks would lead to more cooperation with indigenous people and stop the violation of their rights. "These are concrete things that can happen," she said.

Din Syamsuddin is a professor of Islamic thought who also heads a center for promoting dialogue between civilizations in Jakarta, Indonesia. He said respecting nature was included in the teachings of the Quran and it was time to educate a new generation about saving the forests.

"Conserving rainforests is timely; sustainability is the responsibility of all, before it is too late," he told the Oslo conference. "Why don't we start now?"

Rabbi David Rosen, international director of interreligious affairs at the American Jewish Committee, said the world is "a divine creation" and that he also believes there is a moral responsibility to protect it for future generations.

The Oslo conference was organized by Norway’s International Climate and Forest Initiative, Rainforest Foundation Norway and the U.N. Development Program, in cooperation with the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University, the World Council of Churches and others.

Participants hope to follow up with an action plan and a global interfaith rainforest summit in 2018.

"Tropical rainforests occupy a sacred place in many faiths, religions and spiritual traditions," said Mary Evelyn Tucker, co-director of Yale's Forum on Religion and Ecology.

"Given what we are hearing from religious and indigenous leaders worldwide, we believe we can create a global movement around this shared vision."


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**June 19, 2017**

Religious, indigenous leaders demand rainforests be saved

By Matti Huuhtanen, Associated Press
The Wichita Eagle

Religious and indigenous leaders on Monday called for an end to deforestation in the first international multi-faith, multi-cultural plea to reduce the emissions that fuel climate change.

Participants from 21 countries gathered at a conference in the Norwegian capital of Oslo, hoping that billions of people of faith worldwide will unite to protect the Earth's rainforests. Those forests are fundamental to human life but are suffering from agricultural and industrial exploitation in South America, sub-Saharan Africa and Asia.
Hosting the one-day meeting, Norwegian Climate and Environment Minister Vidar Helgesen said that halting deforestation requires "a global, tectonic shift in values."

The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative was launched by the Scandinavian country that has made reducing tropical deforestation one of its top international priorities, with investments of some $3 billion in the past decade.

"In that decade, the scientific case, the economic case, and the geopolitical case for ending deforestation has only grown. However, more is needed," Helgesen said. "It is not the realm of policy, commerce or science, but of spirit, faith and moral conviction."

Tropical rainforests contain most of the Earth's land-borne biodiversity, help regulate rainfall and temperature globally and regionally, and provide food, water and income to 1.6 billion people.

The conference the rapid decreased in tropical rainforests has been fueled by palm oil plantations, cattle, soy and crop production and "rapacious and often illegal mining and logging operations." It said the reduction of the rainforests amounted to an area the size of Austria, or nearly 84,000 square kilometers (33,600 square miles).

"Forest communities around the world have put their lives on the line to care for the planet's tropical forests," said Vicky Tauli-Corpuz, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. "We are nothing without our forests. Our culture, our spirituality, our livelihoods, our incomes and our health are tied to them."

Those at the meeting included representatives of Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim and Hindu faiths, and indigenous leaders, including ones from Indonesia and Brazil.


June 19, 2017

Religious and indigenous leaders urge better protection of forests

By Alister Doyle
Reuters

OSLO - Religious and indigenous leaders appealed on Monday for better protection of tropical forests from the Amazon to the Congo basin, with a Vatican bishop likening current losses to a collective suicide by humanity.

Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist and Daoist representatives met indigenous peoples in Oslo to explore moral and ethical arguments to shield forests that are under threat from logging and land clearance for farms.
Organizers said the Oslo Interfaith Rainforest Initiative from June 19-21 was the first to gather religious and indigenous peoples to seek out common ground to protect forests. They hope to organize a summit in 2018.

"Without the forests we don't have life," said Bishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, head of the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Sciences. "If we continue to do this deforestation it's like suicide."

Din Syamsuddin, an Indonesian Muslim leader, called for new technologies and changes of lifestyles to protect forests. "A true believer should maintain the balance with nature," he said.

Norwegian Climate and Environment Minister Vidar Helgesen, a host of the talks, said forests were homes and a source of income to millions of people, as well as habitats for creatures from tigers to birds of paradise.

He said rainforests were also a giant natural store of carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas from burning fossil fuels. Trees release the gas when they rot or are burnt to make way for farms, such as for cattle or palm oil plantations.

"The Paris Agreement is doomed if deforestation continues," Helgesen said.

Many countries have reaffirmed support for the 2015 Paris pact to phase out greenhouse gas emissions after U.S. President Donald Trump announced plans on June 1 to pull out, saying he wants to promote the U.S. fossil fuel industry.

Many speakers noted that a "tree of life" is a part of many religious traditions.

"Trees don't have only ecological value for us, but also cultural value for us. Every tree," said Joseph Itongwa of Democratic Republic of Congo, a representative of indigenous peoples in Africa.

The net extent of the world's forests shrank by 33,000 square km (12,700 square miles) a year from 2010-15, about the size of Belgium, the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization says.

The rate is about half that of the 1990s.

Mary Evelyn Tucker, director of Yale University's forum on Religion and Ecology, said religious groups such as the World Council of Churches were seeking ever more to restrict investments in areas that damage the environment.

(Editing by Mark Heinrich and Alison Williams)

June 20, 2017

Climate change in Vietnam causing farm failures

By Joachim Pham
National Catholic Reporter

Hue City, Vietnam - Unseasonable heavy rain poured down in late May causing serious damage to fields in Thua Thien Hue Province, central Vietnam. Dykes were breached and more than 3,000 hectares (about 7,400 acres) of rice were destroyed.

Tran Dai Hien, a farmer from Quang Dien District, said 2.5 acres of 20-day rice on his farm was waterlogged and died. Another quarter acre of rice almost ready for harvest was 2 feet underwater, he added.

Hien, 52, blamed the heavy rain on climate change, undercutting his production. "We harvest 10 tonnes [about 22,000 pounds] of rice a year but have to pay 6 tonnes for costs. We scrape out a meager living because we live only on the rest," the father of three said.

Growing rice is the main source of income for the area.

"Our future looks uncertain when the weather is unpredictable," Hien said.

Le Quoc Chu, another farmer from Phu Mau commune, said in the past the area got a few scattered afternoon showers in April and August. The weather was suitable for growing rice, vegetables and flowers.

"It is strange that heavy rain and chill wind lasted one week this period of the year," said Chu, who lost about a half-acre of young rice.

"We still owe the bank 30 million dong (US$1,322) but we do not know how to pay it back," he said.

Both Tran Dai Hien and Le Quoc Chu are among many farmers in the Thua Thien Hue province who have received support from the Daughters of Mary Immaculate.

Chu said since January the sisters have given his family cooking oil, instant noodles, 40 kilograms (about 88 pounds) of rice, some clothes and 200,000 dong ($9).

"Although their support is not much, it is a great consolation to us in a difficult time. We owe them a great debt of gratitude," the rice farmer said.

Chu is concerned about how he can continue to support his two daughters who are studying at local colleges because he is not sure about good crops in the future, he said in a low voice, wiping sweat from his face.
"We hope the sisters will have funds to offer scholarships to our children so that they can finish their studies," he said.

Chu said local farmers are deeply concerned that if they sow seeds again at this point, crops would not be ready for harvest until September, when the usual annual floods hit the area.

In late May, heavy rain also flooded many cities and provinces and damaged thousands of acres of crops across the country. Various insects, enhanced by the unusual weather, damaged crops, according to state-run newspapers.

However, a few days after the rain, scorching heat started to roast northern and central provinces, with readings from 98 to 104 degrees Fahrenheit, and a few places reaching 110.

Weather experts blamed the extreme weather on climate change.

Agriculture and Rural Development Minister Nguyen Xuan Cuong said at a meeting in April that the climate this year is unpredictable and will cause as much damage as in 2016.

Cuong said last year floods and storms led to 264 people dead or missing and destroyed 370,400 houses, 2 million acres of crops, and damaged many roads, dykes and other public facilities. The total loss is estimated at more than $1.7 billion.

Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan, chairwoman of the National Assembly, said at an international conference on May 11 that Vietnam is one of the Asian Pacific countries most affected by climate change. An estimated 54 percent of the country’s flatland will be inundated, and 10-12 percent of the population will be affected directly, she said.

**Sisters rush to offer food to victims of climate change**

St. Paul de Chartres Sister Ephreme Nguyen Thi Luu and other sisters offered $9 per household to 50 families in Phu Mau Commune on May 29. "Most farmers here have had poor crops and lacked basic food for months," Luu said. Last January, the nuns also gave them cooking oil, cake, dried fruits and sugar to celebrate the Lunar New Year.

Luu said people have fallen into poverty due to climate change and many have fled to cities to look for jobs. "It is hard for them to live on their farmlands," she added.

She said the nuns will ask benefactors to provide scholarships so the children can continue pursuing their studies in the new school year in September.

Daughters of Mary Immaculate Sister Mary Truong Thi Thu said the nuns have been giving rice, instant noodles, blankets, second-hand clothes and money to farmers in the districts of Huong Thuy, Phu Loc, Phu Vang and Quang Dien since December when floods hit the province.

"We only give basic supplies to victims of climate change when we get donations from benefactors, so we could share with them only irregularly," Thu said.
Le Thi Sen from Phu Ma commune said local people who suffered crop loss have received nothing from the government since early this year.

"We do not know what to live on, without the nuns' supplies," the mother of two said.

During the meeting held May 25 by the government's Vietnam Fatherland Front in Ho Chi Minh City, representatives from 14 religions reviewed their activities to protect the environment and strengthen people's resilience to climate change.

Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Do Manh Hung of Ho Chi Minh City Archdiocese said the church educates Catholics in environmental protection by collecting and classifying garbage, saving water sources and energy, using environment-friendly materials and planting trees. Local Catholics make donations to funds for victims of climate change.

Followers of other religions grow organic vegetables, collect used pesticide containers and save water in cultivation.

Eidvin Archer, head of Nordic Assistance to Vietnam, a Norwegian NGO giving social and humanitarian assistance in Vietnam, appreciated religions' environment activities and promised to support initiatives to join local religions in environment protection.

[Joachim Pham is a correspondent for Global Sisters Report based in Vietnam.]


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**June 21, 2017**

YDS religion-ecology scholar speaking at international rainforest conference

Yale Divinity School

**Mary Evelyn Tucker**, Senior Lecturer and Senior Research Scholar in Religion and Ecology at Yale Divinity School, was a speaker at an international rainforest-protection conference hosted by the King of Norway this week. The meeting of religious and indigenous leaders, interfaith advocates, and scientists addressed the worldwide crisis of deforestation and its relationship to climate change.

Leaders from 21 countries participated in the three-day conference, held at the Nobel Peace Center in Oslo and convened by Norway’s International Climate and Forest Initiative, Rainforest Foundation Norway, and the United Nations Development Program.

“The fact that the U.N. and a major government were open to hosting this and synergizing science, religion, ecology, and ethics made it an exciting moment,” said Tucker, who, along with
John Grim, co-directs Yale’s Forum on Religion and Ecology, which co-sponsored the conference.

Tucker spoke in a session on “Creating an Interfaith Action Agenda on Rainforests: Opportunities and Challenges” and gave closing comments in a plenary discussion of “The Way Forward.”

Read more in the Huffington Post (link is external) and at the Forum on Religion and Ecology website (link is external).

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June 26, 2017

The Life: Sisters reflect on care for the Earth

By The Life Panelists
Global Sisters Report

Since its start three years ago, Global Sisters Report has provided a forum to "give voice" to women religious from around the world. We publish award-winning journalism about the mission and ministry of sisters, but the columns written by sisters are at GSR's heart. Now we're taking that part of our mission a step further in a new monthly feature called The Life, an international panel of 20 sisters who write short reflections on various topics. About five or so will respond to a question posed every month.

We had so many applicants that it was challenging to select the panelists for this current round. Yet we emerged from that process with what we think is truly a representation of the "global sisterhood."

On the panel are sisters who've been in religious life for decades and one who just professed first vows this month; one from India who is serving in Zambia; an American sister who's spent most of her ministry — 50 years — in the Philippines; a sister from Nigeria in the U.S.; and a sister from Nicaragua and another from Mexico who serve their communities in Rome.

Other panelists are in Australia, Canada, Vietnam, India, Kenya, Ethiopia and the Philippines. Some head congregations and others have led religious conferences involving many communities and multiple congregations. Some minister solo; others live in community.
They assist refugees, combat human trafficking, help drug addicts, teach grade school and high school, catechism and college theology courses.

For this month's question, we turned to Pope Francis and asked the sisters this question:

Two years after the release of Pope Francis' "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home" how are you and/or your community carrying out Francis' call for caring for the Earth?

Mary Nguyen Thi Phuong Lan is a Dominican Sister of Our Lady of the Rosary in Vietnam.

Some parish pastors in Vietnam responded to Pope Francis by spending time before or after Mass helping Christians to understand the meaning of this encyclical letter so that they would know how to care for the common house and to better protect the environment for family, society and all of the world. Quoting Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Francis writes: "For human beings ... to destroy the biological diversity of God's creation; for human beings to degrade the integrity of the earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the earth of its natural forests or destroying its wetlands; for human beings to contaminate the earth's waters, its land, its air, and its life — these are sins" (Laudato Si’, 8).

Communities of our congregation studied the encyclical in parishes. But each member of our congregation also has a responsibility to build the future of this planet by making the environment in her small community better and safer. One community, known as the St. Holy Family community, includes six sisters and 17 poor children who are trying to carry out the calling of Francis. It has a large garden with many different kinds of fruit trees, such as rambutans, durians, avocados, mangos, mangosteens and jackfruits.

We grow these fruit trees without using chemicals and growth substances to stimulate the fruits. We use fresh water to irrigate the plants and the dung of chickens and pigs to fertilize these trees. That is why our fruits are not bigger and nicer than the fruits that are grown using chemicals and growth substances. We are not interested in earning more money from the fruit crops; we pay attention to the health of the community.

Especially as nuns, we must realize that "our responsibility with creation, and our duty toward nature and the Creator, are an essential part of our faith," as Francis quoted Pope John Paul II. Then Francis continued: "It is good for humanity and the world at large when we believers better recognize the ecological commitments which stem from our convictions" (Laudato Si’, 64).

Furthermore, it is our responsibility to educate children about the protection of all fruit trees in the garden, including not picking fruits and throwing them unconsciously onto the ground. And when they are grown, they will be aware of caring for the health of their community by not using chemicals on fruit trees and vegetables. They will also know how to protect the environment's safety and not destroy plants rashly.
Teresita Abraham is a Presentation Sister from India living in rural Zambia.

For me, *Laudato Si'* is a celebration of all those who pioneered the vision of a single sacred community and the motherhood of Earth. It is a wake-up call to humanity.

I feel affirmed about the direction of our congregation: Over the past two decades, our Presentation community has grown in awareness and action on behalf of the integrity of creation. With Pope Francis’ timely call and challenge, we respond with urgency to the beat of our time.

We are committed to this by waking ourselves and inviting others to wake up. Our network for justice, peace and the integrity of creation has been working with sisters and co-workers to bring home the message of *Laudato Si’*, the [U.N. Sustainable Development Goals](https://unsdsn.org/) and the [Paris climate agreement](https://unfccc.int/) in a variety of ways.

Together with the local community, we have initiated a new ministry in rural Zambia by creating a sanctuary of peace and harmony called the [Garden of Oneness](https://www.presentation-sisters.org/). People are the co-creators and immediate beneficiaries of this place. It is a place to help us listen to the heartbeat of God in all of life, living the vision of mystics and teachers of our story echoed in the dream of Jesus that all may be one and in the spirit of Nano Nagle, foundress of the Presentation Sisters.

This garden is a living expression of *Laudato Si’*: All life is sacred, all life is one. We engage in awakening programs with the local community, as well as national and international groups. We collaborate with our district council, traditional leaders and other groups in caring for our natural heritage.

We protect all indigenous trees in our 30-acre space and, during the past three years, we have planted more than 200 trees. We are grateful for the wisdom of mystics and teachers like John Muir who wrote that trees were "God's first temples." We hold a Mubanga tree in the garden as a space to honor our ancestors.

We grow our own vegetables, and other things we need we try to buy locally. We use locally made traditional drinks and do not encourage the use of any fizzy drinks. We use solar energy and hold this garden as a plastic-free zone. We discourage the use of bottled water and invite people to use living water from local springs.

During Holy Week, we integrated the wisdom of *Laudato Si’* into some of the programs, reflections and rituals. On Good Friday, more than 300 people took part in the Way of the Cross through the wilderness, listening to the heartbeat of the One in Jesus of Nazareth and at the heart of creation.

Pat Farrell is a member of the Dominican Sisters of San Rafael, California. She lives in the Chicago area.
Certainly, I am part of a congregation that is committed to carrying out Pope Francis' call for caring for Earth, and as executive director of the Dominican Sisters Conference, I am especially grateful for the opportunity to witness the commitment of the 19 congregations that make up that conference. It is my privilege to share from that perspective.

When the Dominican Sisters Conference met in Chicago for our 2012 convocation, we were challenged by this question: "What is Earth asking of the Dominican Order?"

So that we could study this question more deeply, our sisters across the country engaged in a process of reflection using the "Faith Praxis Cycle" to help us better understand global climate change in 2014. Our hope was that this would move us to action on behalf of Earth and God's people.

Imagine our delight when we discovered that Francis would be releasing Laudato Si'!

Spurred on by Francis' prophetic words, and knowing that the world's leaders would gather in Paris on Nov. 30, 2015, we launched — a year to the day ahead of time — a monthly study and prayer series titled "Paris 2015 and Counting." This study helped the sisters consider all the social justice issues to which they are committed in the light of climate change, and to understand that what affects Earth also affects women, migration, human trafficking, etc.

When we gathered again in Chicago for our 2015 convocation in October of that year, we not only missioned our four sister representatives to stand for us in Paris, but all of our member congregations ratified our proposal to study climate investment opportunities, with the hope of diversifying in this way.

We continued to carry out our study, prayer, reflection and action during 2016 through a study series on Laudato Si'. Our most recent work was a climate novena beginning on the eve of Earth Day 2017 and culminating on the day of the People's Climate March, April 29, which just happened to be the feast of our Dominican saint, Catherine of Siena, who had no compunction about speaking justice to those in power.

The next project on our agenda is climate change myth-busting.

Regi Joseph is a Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Sister and a teacher in the state of Jammu and Kashmir in northern India

To begin with, there has been greater awakening among the Presentation Sisters about our responsibility to care for the Earth, which is our home. We strongly believe in the spirituality of being in communion with all of God's creation and are firmly resolved to care for the environment.

About Laudato Si' specifically, we as a community would regularly gather, read a particular section of the text and spend some time in reflection. Then each member shared insights. We
also discussed the ways in which we can individually promote sustainable living with simple steps like minimizing waste of electricity, water and paper. We promote organic farming and refrain from using fertilizers.

In the school, a number of steps have been taken to help students become more conscious of the urgency of caring for the Earth. We have an Eco Club that creates awareness among the students through special assemblies and competitions (poster-making, slogan-writing) on caring for the environment.

Our school is a polythene-free zone; the students are not allowed to use it. They are also discouraged from using thermocol (polystyrene) and aluminum foil because these are non-biodegradable. They are asked to write a pledge stating that they will not tear or waste pages of their notebooks.

Just today, a student brought a sapling to plant in the school compound because it was her birthday. Last week, two other students brought a sapling to be planted on the school premises in memory of one of their classmates who had passed away in March. It is indeed heartening to note that the students are becoming aware of the need for planting more and more trees.

In conclusion, I would like to quote Pope Francis, speaking on World Environment Day in 2013:

"Nurturing and cherishing creation is a command God gives not only at the beginning of history, but to each of us. It is a part of his plan; it means causing the world to grow responsibly, transforming it so that it may be a garden, a habitable place for everyone."

Giselle Gómez Guillén was born in Nicaragua, entered the Society of St. Teresa of Jesus in 1975 in San Antonio, Texas, and now lives in Rome.

Two years after the publication of Laudato Si’, we feel confirmed in our searches and commitments to the care and integrity of creation. At the same time, we feel challenged.

In 2005, we approved our new constitutions. One of the articles refers to our position in relation to this core theme:

We love and defend life as a gift from God and we feel responsible for the survival of our planet and the construction of a just and non-violent society. We are challenged by the ecological imbalance and the devastation of the planet, the unjust distribution of land assets and situations of violence and war. These realities urge us to live the covenant of love that God established with his creatures, manifested in the fundamental unity of the human family and in the interdependence among all and the cosmos.

We are currently preparing the next general chapter of our congregation. One of the most important issues in which we want to take a stand is integral ecology.
This option implies:

- Recreating the contemplative dimension of our Teresian spirituality: The entire material universe is a language of love of God, of his affection without measure for us. The sun, the water and the mountains: Everything is the caress of God. At the same time, it means to unite us to creation because it groans with childbirth pangs before the destruction and degradation that we humans cause.
- Moving from a superficial way of understanding ecology to an integral ecology; one that sees the interconnectedness of environmental, economic, political, social, cultural and ethical issues. Such an ecology requires the vision to think about comprehensive solutions to what is both an environmental and a human crisis.
- Defend and promote human rights and an integral ecology in collaboration with many others who seek to restore justice and the integrity of creation.
- Support the projects and commitments of our congregation in areas of special relevance for the environmental future.
- Promote mission projects for more sustainable lifestyles. Incorporate ecological and care ethics (for people, the environment and social justice) into educational projects in all areas of mission in order to help grow solidarity, responsibility and care based on compassion.
- Join as a congregation the global movement for the care of creation, participating in networks and collective actions to care for and defend water, the environment, biodiversity, energy sources and non-renewable materials.


June 28, 2017

Pastor leads lawsuit opposing Bayou Bridge Pipeline to protect Louisiana Cancer Alley community

“The love of money is the root of all evil.”

By Julie Dermansky
NationofChange

Pastor Harry Joseph of the Mount Triumph Baptist Church in St. James, Louisiana, is taking legal action to prevent the Bayou Bridge Pipeline from being built in his community, roughly 50 miles west of New Orleans. He is named as a plaintiff in a case filed by the Tulane Environmental Law Clinic, petitioning the Parish Court to overturn the coastal permit that the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) gave Energy Transfer Partners, the company that built the controversial Dakota Access Pipeline.

The Bayou Bridge Pipeline will be the last leg of the Dakota Access, carrying oil fracked in North Dakota to Louisiana. The final stretch of the project, if built, will span 162.5 miles from
Lake Charles to St. James, cutting through the Atchafalaya Basin, a national heritage area and the country’s largest wetland.

This pipeline will transport crude oil from the oil and gas hub in Nederland, Texas, to a terminal in St. James Parish’s Fifth District, a small, predominately low-income African-American community of fewer than 2,000 in a stretch of land along the Mississippi River known as Cancer Alley.

*A beleaguered town with no way out*

Pastor Joseph found out about the Bayou Bridge Pipeline shortly after a tornado affected the 5th Ward earlier this year. A power line came down, blocking the only road residents can use to get in and out of the area. It was a stark reminder that the community doesn’t have an evacuation route – and the only alternative road out was closed to the public by an oil storage company that bought the land.

“The pipeline is one more risk to our community that we really don’t need,” Joseph told me. The community is already facing the imminent construction of two multi-billion-dollar methanol plants.

“People are sick of being sick and tired,” Joseph told me. “Politicians tell us that the new developments are good for St. James because of jobs and money” – two things he points out that he is not against but he thinks that the greed of those in power needs to be put in check. “My prayer is that they look at the situation the community is facing – and not just how much money the state is making, but instead, look at how many people are being destroyed.”

*A community as ‘collateral damage’?*

At a hearing for the pipeline permit, Joseph allied himself with environmental groups opposing the pipeline, including Bold Louisiana, Gulf Restoration Network, the Sierra Club, and the Atchafalaya Basinekeeper, which are also part of the lawsuit against DNR. The Louisiana Environmental Action Network has also been helping the community fight against the petrochemical plant permits and other developments adding to air and water pollution in the area.

Genevieve Butler, who goes by the name Eve Miller, a representative of the community-based organization H.E.L.P.(Humanitarian Enterprise of Loving People) Association, is also a plaintiff in the lawsuit. Miller and Joseph hold meetings about the pipeline fight the third Monday of each month at the Mount Triumph Baptist Church, which has become a hub for pipeline resistance.

I met Miller at her home before the last meeting on June 19. She lives across from numerous oil storage tanks at the end of a dead-end street. From her porch, we looked out at a field full of oil tanks. “The area used to be pastoral, but now it is almost void of life,” she told me. “We no longer hear birds, frogs, or insects, and our fruit trees don’t flower anymore.”
Miller describes the community as “collateral damage.” It angers her that, when oil storage facilities started expanding at a rapid clip in 2014, she says white residents in the area were bought out, but not a single black household.

“Everyone knows someone who has cancer, has died from cancer, is suffering from cancer, or has some type of illness that could lead to cancer. So every household knows something about cancer,” Miller told me. “But when I was a teenager growing up in the same area – you didn’t see people sick and dying.”

Because the Louisiana Tumor Registry doesn’t provide sufficient data to pinpoint elevated cancer rates in specific towns, and no recent health survey has been done, proof that the industrial installations are the cause of people’s cancer isn’t conclusive. However, anecdotal reports from the community are alarming, and the future doesn’t look any better.

“We have been told if an accident happens, to shelter-in-place,” Miller told me. “Close windows and doors till you get an all clear. But in our area, houses have shifted because of the ongoing construction – there is no place to stay safe. None of the windows and doors closes tightly.” As we spoke, we could hear banging coming from construction of a new facility on the other side of the levee down the road from Miller.

**Building a case against the pipeline**

Timmy P. Rousel, the St. James Parish President, responded to the community’s concerns after Pastor Joseph submitted a petition with 400 signatures calling for an evacuation route during a council meeting. In a letter to Joseph, Rousel encouraged residents to identify any frail or elderly who will require emergency assistance to contact their nearest senior center and have family members create an emergency plan ahead of time. “But no plan can help you if the only road in and out of the area is shut down,” Miller pointed out.

Lisa Jordan, deputy director of the Tulane Environmental Law Clinic, told me the situation in St. James was one of the worst instances of environmental injustice she has seen.

The lack of an evacuation route is a key factor cited in the law clinic’s petition. But that didn’t play into DNR’S original decision to grant the pipeline permit, according to Patrick Courreges, Louisiana DNR communications director. He explained that DNRonly takes into consideration when the proposal would make substantial changes to areas, and that the addition of the Bayou Bridge Pipeline to St. James Parish wouldn’t qualify.

Tulane’s petition to the Parish Court also alleges that the DNR ignored a state constitutional provision: “The natural resources of the state, including air and water, and the healthful, scenic, historic, and esthetic quality of the environment shall be protected, conserved, and replenished insofar as possible and consistent with the health, safety, and welfare of the people. The legislature shall enact laws to implement this policy.”
The clinic’s case argues that, as the Louisiana Supreme Court has ruled, this provision compels the state to reduce negative impacts on the environment and public welfare before approving a proposal that impacts the environment, and as Tulane says, “DNR failed to do that.”

**Can the law clinic win?**

On June 14, the Tulane Environmental Law Clinic won the reversal of another contentious permit DNR issued in a residential community in Belle River, Louisiana. In that case, DNR granted a permit to FAS Environmental Services that could lead to the expansion of its injection well operation in the Atchafalaya Basin. Like Energy Transfer Partners, FAS Environmental Services has a poor safety record, which played a role in the court’s decision to revoke the permit.

Despite the recent legal victory, the odds are stacked against stopping any pipeline in Louisiana. In the last 10 years, DNR has not turned down a single pipeline permit request. But Pastor Joseph is hopeful that the court system will ultimately help him save his community.

Even if Joseph can’t stop the pipeline, the battle against it is shining a light on the grave injustices his community is already facing. He is eager to show anyone around St. James, so others can see and hear for themselves what his community is dealing with. He doesn’t expect to shut down industry there, but ultimately he wants the companies to buy out everyone who wants to leave the area – St. James has around 1,000 residents total – because he says no one will be safe after all the pending industrial developments are completed.

He hopes the lawsuit will give pause to the other state and federal agencies yet to decide on Energy Transfer Partners’ remaining permits for the Bayou Bridge Pipeline. The company has pending requests for a water quality certificate from the Louisiana Department of Environmental Protection and a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

What Joseph sees going on around him reminds him of a lesson from the Bible, he says: “The love of money is the root of all evil.”

He wonders now if the love of money is so strong that industry leaders and politicians are willing to let people die in order to get it. Not if he can help it, he told me.


**June 28, 2017**

Three years to safeguard our climate

By Christiana Figueres, Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, Gail Whiteman, Johan Rockström, Anthony Hobley & Stefan Rahmstorf

Nature
Christiana Figueres and colleagues set out a six-point plan for turning the tide of the world’s carbon dioxide by 2020.

Read the essay here: http://www.nature.com/news/three-years-to-safeguard-our-climate-1.22201

June 30, 2017

Universe's unfolding story set to music in composer’s new oratorio

By Sharon Abercrombie
National Catholic Reporter

Passionist Fr. Thomas Berry, the cultural historian and early prophet of the current environmental crisis, encouraged artists and musicians throughout his lifetime (1914-2009) to tell the magnificent 13.8 billion-year history of the universe through music, poetry and dance.

As direct ancestors of the stars, humans collectively share a unique role as compassionate beings, to protect and to heal the earth, Berry said. Creative artists, he argued, can bring us to this point of conversion quickest of all.

The latest evidence that they have been listening is Sam Guarnaccia, a composer, classical guitarist and environmentalist who will debut a major musical ritual based on an intimate look into the universe Friday night in Cleveland.

The BlueWater Chamber Orchestra and the Cleveland Chamber Choir is set to perform the world premiere of Guarnaccia's “Emergent Universe Oratorio” at the Milton and Tamar Maltz Performing Arts Center at Case Western Reserve University.

The concert is among the events that are part of the World Union of Jesuit Alumna congress, which opened Wednesday at John Carroll University. The gathering, held every four years, focuses on a subject connected to Jesuit education and values. The theme of the 2017 international congress is “Uniting Our Jesuit Frontiers,” with the evolving universe among the session topics.

While the universe has formed over billions of years, the 73-year-old Guarnaccia composed his “Emergent Universe Oratorio” in intervals in the course of a five-year period. The oratorio's libretto tells the story of the Earth from the Big Bang to the present day, and features poetry from Rainer Maria Rilke, Wendell Berry, William Blake, Gerard Manley Hopkins and, of course, Berry.

The performance, to be conducted by Cleveland Chamber choir artistic director Scott MacPherson, will be livestreamed on the Case Western Reserve University website.
“I had a huge passion for the idea of bringing forth as much beauty as possible on this theme of our interconnected, interdependent being and belonging, from the beginning to, in and with the universe, all life and each other,” Guarnaccia told NCR.

The piece, he explained, “demands a response at all levels: feeling, seeing, understanding, experiencing and acting.”

“It is neither entertainment, a doctrinal, or even a numinous reenactment of a spiritual-religious position or story, nor just the story. It is more an attempt to evoke a deep awareness through an experience of intense emotional intelligence and the inevitability of a response, and hopefully a transformation, a crack in the hardened crust … leading to an awakening that we are integral to a living universe.”

Or as Berry puts it in his poem “Morningside Cathedral”:

“Beseeching humankind
To bring back the Sun
To let the flowers bloom in the meadows,
The rivers run through the hills
And to let the Earth
And all its living creatures
Live their
Wild,
Fierce,
Serene a
And Abundant life.”

Guarnaccia’s “Emergent Universe” drew inspiration from the 2011 Emmy Award-winning documentary “Journey of the Universe” written by Brian Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker. Tucker, a scholar at Yale University in the field of ecology, religion and cosmology, is scheduled to introduce the performance.

“This Oratorio is a magnificent tribute to the beauty and complexity of the unfolding universe across deep time. It inspires the present emergence of a flourishing Earth community,” she said in an email.

On Thursday night, she and colleague John Grim of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology hosted a screening of the hour-long film at John Carroll. Their film also spawned an online course series that explores the universe’s formation from a multidisciplinary perspective. So far, the three-class program has drawn more than 16,000 participants, Tucker said.

For the Cleveland performance of “Emergent Universe,” Guarnaccia, has written a complete orchestration for the BlueWater Chamber Orchestra. An earlier version of the piece, performed in 2013 in Shelburne Farms in his home state of Vermont, utilized a small chamber ensemble and chorus.
Guarnaccia is among several composers who have been moved to tell the story of the universe through music.

For many years, Grammy-winning soprano saxophonist Paul Winter has been celebrating Berry's vision through his jazz compositions honoring wolves, whales, elk, wrens and other earth critters. Each winter solstice, he presents an ecological-based concert at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City.

Joyce Rouse, aka “Earth Mama,” is another student and admirer of Berry. She has been writing folk music and presenting workshops to kids and adults, geared to healing the planet, one song at a time.

In March 1995, Maia Aprahamian, debuted a musical rendition of Berry and Swimme’s work, *The Universe Story*, in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations. The work was performed by the San Francisco symphony, with Swimme serving as one of the narrators.

“The day came when I was thunderstruck by the depths of the Universe. This led to my unshakable conviction that if humans get a glimpse of this cosmic magnificence, we would relate to one another and everything with infinite reverence,” Swimme told the audience that night. “Music is one of our most powerful pathways into this greater participation in our evolving Universe.”

As for Guarnaccia, he is probably best known for “A Celtic Mass for Peace, Songs for the Earth,” which he wrote in collaboration with Celtic spirituality scholar John Philip Newell of Scotland. It was performed during peace celebrations in New York and Vermont marking the 10th anniversary of the 9-11 terrorist attacks.

His attraction to the natural world is lifelong. He grew up in the outdoors of Middlebury, Vermont “next to a covered bridge and waterfall on Otter Creek, and as most fortunate rural children, spent hours and years dreaming into the landscapes, skyscapes, and soundscapes in the ‘country.’”

“It's the best education there is: just leave a child alone outside,” he said.

Along with Berry’s writings, the *Earth Charter* and ideas of Wendell Berry, Joanna Macy and Bill McKibben have all at some point flowed into Guarnaccia’s music.

In addition to the sounds of the “Emergent Universe Oratorio,” there will be a visual feast for the audience at Friday's event: 11 oil paintings by artist Cameron Davis's Endless Spring series. Davis, a senior lecturer at the University of Vermont who specializes in art and the environment, was inspired by the oratorio to paint her series.

Other points of the World Union congress, which runs through Sunday, will dive deeper into the evolving universe. A two-part panel discussion on Saturday will feature Jesuit Fr. Prashat Olaleker of Mumbai’s Xavier College (“Meditation for an Evolving Universe; “Contemplative Movement: New Frontiers for Jesuit Education and Spirituality”) and Barry Rodrigue of the
University of Southern Maine (“Big History: A Study of Existence and the Search for Meaning”).

[Sharon Abercrombie is a frequent contributor to Eco Catholic.]


July 1, 2017

Web of Life: closing the circle

By Tracy L. Barnett
Global Sisters Report

"Contemporary science is crafting a dynamic picture of how the universe came to be. From the initial flaring forth of the Big Bang some 13.8 billion years ago, to the formation galaxies with their billions of stars ... to the slow evolution of life on Earth over deep eons of time, the cosmic adventure has moved toward increasing complexity and beauty. We humans who emerged from this cosmic process a mere speck of time ago are now conscious of this history. This makes us, in Rabbi Abraham Heschel's beautiful words, 'the cantors of the universe,' those creatures who can give praise to the Creator with and in the name of all the rest."
— Elizabeth A. Johnson, Abounding in Kindness: Writings for the People of God

After four hours of Pan-American Highway, the green forested corridor and cattle ranches of Darién were now far behind us. We crossed over a struggling remnant of mangrove forest, and suddenly, Panama's skyline loomed in front of us, including Trump Tower and corporate headquarters from around the world. A river of traffic shocked the senses after a week in the quiet of the countryside.

Maryknoll Sr. Gerri Brake had arranged to meet us in El Chorrillo, not far from Balboa, the neighborhood where the Maryknoll Sisters had been in mission. In 1989, they were there on that night in December when the bombs began to fall on El Chorrillo. The U.S. military called it Operation Just Cause; Panamanians call it the U.S. invasion.

No one really knows how many died in the invasion intended to overthrow dictator Manuel Noriega; some say 5,000. Balboa High School became a refugee camp, and Brake and other Maryknoll sisters worked day and night to help ease the pain and the terror of the wounded.

Nowadays, El Chorrillo is part of the Cinta Costera, the new landscaped highway project that brought redevelopment and a measure of prosperity to the area. We ended up at Sabores del Chorrillo, a restaurant on the waterfront. Here, the ladies who used to sell their fish on the streets now have an upscale restaurant, and this was where the group landed on our first night back in civilization.
The Panama Canal, the highlight of our last day, was a study in contradictions after the full immersion in the natural world of Darién. The massive size of the undertaking, one of the most audacious engineering feats of the 20th century, inspires awe. The group watched from the platform as ships the size of a village slowly passed through the lock below.

In the context of the Web of Life, however, I think beyond this place and this moment, where 3,000 people will visit with their cameras and iPhones and take selfies in front of the moving machines. I think of the 30,000 people who died in the creation of this canal. I think of the mountains moved, the thousands of acres of forests flooded and wetlands drained, and the millions of gallons of fresh water being flushed into the sea with the movement of every ship.

Javier Pimentel, our guide, shared a few numbers that put things into perspective. Each lock is the height of an eight-story building. Each ship must be lifted 85 feet through the introduction into three of these locks, then lowered through another set of locks to cross what is left of the mountain range. Fifty-two million gallons of fresh water are required to move each ship that passes through; 35 to 40 ships pass each day. Ships pay from $800 for a small sailboat to $1 million for a massive container ship.

"That one cost $120,000," he said, pointing to the one in front of us. The one on the horizon in the new expanded canal paid $650,000, he said. The Panamanian government collected $1.6 billion from the canal last year, Pimentel told us.

The new $5.5 billion canal expansion opened a year ago to great fanfare. Already, it has exceeded expectations, with six ships passing through each day when only three were expected, Pimentel said.

Now, there is already talk of channeling a nearby river and making yet another expansion, as there are new ships that even the expanded canal channel cannot accommodate, Pimentel told us.

The group explored the three-story museum detailing the story of the canal. During Pimentel's presentation, amid the racket from the locks and the crowd, David Molineaux, caught up in the awe of admiration for sheer scale and accomplishment of the canal project, noticed a pair of birds on the railing above the stairway, one of them in a piece of straw in its beak.

"It struck me how amid all of this great work of engineering, a pair of birds were in the process of planning their nest," he said.

Claretian Fr. José Maria Vigil said he was struck by the contrast between the canal and the story told at the Biomuseo, just a couple of miles down the road, where Panama's role as the biological bridge of the Americas is celebrated.

"It's a great contradiction. Now we have the great broken bridge of the world," he said. "Here, we're seeing a new biological rupture. It's an enormous gap, and most terrestrial life cannot cross."
Maryknoll Sr. Ann Braudis contemplated the contradictions, as well. On the one hand, the canal is a great civilizational achievement, she said.

"When it was first completed, our technology and our capacity as human beings to moderate the Earth in order to serve our purposes seemed like real progress; that was the direction we were meant to go in," she said. "However, in recent times, we recognize that technology is leading us to the very destruction of the planet that supports us. And for that reason, we come into awareness of the fact that we may no longer do everything that we know how to do."

After the canal visit, some of the group went to an artisan market and visited with members of the indigenous Kuna tribe. Brake introduced us to her longtime friend Rosa Lidia Alba from the island of Ailigandi in the Kuna comarca, or territory.

Back at the Maryknoll sisters' house in Panama Pacífico, the group gathered in a final circle of reflection. Hearts opened wide with the sharing, and tears flowed. Bonds had been formed, insights explored, consciousness expanded. Scientists and people of faith had found common ground.

Clara Meza shared a moment of realization she had as she left the mission in Darién.

"I was crossing the same path I always cross, and suddenly, I saw two spider monkeys in the trees above me," she said. "They had always been there, but I had never seen them. I realize that now I am seeing with new eyes."

For Itzel Menéndez, who had never even dreamed of visiting the wilderness of Darién, the whole experience was eye-opening. Her new understanding of the interconnection of life would be something she'd take home to her family, she said — she might even be able to put aside her indispensable tool, the can of Baygon insecticide.

"I've always told my husband, 'Kill the snake!' Now, I have to change and tell him, 'Don't kill the snake!' " she said.

Maryknoll Sr. Peg Dillon said she had a realization thanks to the presentation of the team of artists tracing the tragedy of the five Ghanaian migrants. As one of the organizers of the Web of Life event, at first, she thought their last-minute request to address the group was an intrusion — then she saw it was "spot-on."

"For me, the word that comes to mind is 'trust,' " she said. "Trust in the process, trust this planet ... When I realized that they had drowned in one of the rivers that flows into the one that we were on, it blew me away. ... To realize that the same Matusagaratí that held such beauty and mystery for all of us also held the bodies of these five refugees. ... How this Earth holds the suffering of our species, and of all species, and for me to have confidence in that process — to me, the biggest learning in all of this is trust."

Maryknoll Sr. Linda Donovan led the group in a final singalong, and the merriment led one and other to request favorite songs. "Those Were the Days" brought many to their feet in a line
dance. And a favorite of Maryknoll Sr. Melinda Roper's was "God is God," written by Steve Earle and performed by Joan Baez.

I believe in prophecy.
Some folks see things not everybody can see.
And, once in a while, they pass the secret along to you and me.
And I believe in miracles.
Something sacred burning in every bush and tree.
We can all learn to sing the songs the angels sing.
Yeah, I believe in God, and God ain't me.

I've traveled around the world.
Stood on mighty mountains and gazed across the wilderness.
Never seen a line in the sand or a diamond in the dust.
And as our fate unfurls,
Every day that passes I'm sure about a little bit less.
Even my money keeps telling me it's God I need to trust.
And I believe in God, but God ain't us.

God, of my little understanding, don't care what name I call.
Whether or not I believe doesn't matter at all.
I receive the blessings.
That every day on Earth's another chance to get it right.
Let this little light of mine shine and rage against the night.
Just another lesson
Maybe someone's watching and wondering what I got.
Maybe this is why I'm here on Earth, and maybe not.
But I believe in God, and God is God.

[Tracy L. Barnett is an independent writer, editor and photographer specializing in environmental issues, indigenous rights and sustainable travel.]

Catch up with all of our Web of Life coverage here.

http://globalsistersreport.org/blog/gsr-today/spirituality-environment/web-life-closing-circle-47761

July 4, 2017

United Church of Christ approves emergency resolution on climate change

By Lisa Wangsness
Boston Globe
The biennial national gathering of the United Church of Christ approved an emergency resolution on climate change Monday, denouncing President Trump’s plans to withdraw the United States from the Paris climate accord and urging the church to take action.

Written by the Rev. Jim Antal, the head of the church’s Massachusetts conference and a longtime climate activist, the resolution urges clergy to preach on “the moral obligation of our generation to protect God’s creation” and exhorts individuals to take political action and “make decisions of integrity on our energy choices.” It appears to be the first formal action taken by a major denomination in response to Trump’s decision on the Paris agreement.

“It was important that the church be on record as declaring we are now in a new moral era because of the administration and the ways in which it is compromising truth,” in particular on denying the science of climate change, Antal said.

But he said the resolution is also important because it is directed at the church: “What’s the church going to do differently?”

The resolution, entitled “The Earth is the Lord’s, Not Ours to Wreck,” is part of a growing effort by people of faith from across the religious spectrum to stop global warming from worsening. Pope Francis injected renewed urgency into the international discussion on climate change two years ago with his letter to the worldwide church on the environment, Laudato Si.

The practical effect of the UCC resolution is unclear. The Protestant denomination has about 900,000 members across the country — about 70,000 of whom live in Massachusetts, where it is the largest Protestant denomination — and it has no authority over its churches. The resolution provides no funding for renewable energy retrofitting or other efforts that could reduce the church’s carbon footprint.

But UCC leaders said the resolution offers moral backing to clergy who preach on climate change, serves as a guidepost for members, and may lend support to other religious organizations that want to formally respond to the president’s policies.

The final resolution reads in part, “Now is the time for congregations and for every person of faith to set a moral example through our own words and actions. As individuals and as communities, let us commit to making decisions of integrity in our energy choices, undoing the disproportionate impact of climate change on communities of color, indigenous communities, and poor white communities around the world, even as we commit to hold all religions, political, corporate, and global leaders accountable to do the same.”

Many UCC clergy, here and around the country, have already been involved in climate change political activities. Polling that the church conducted earlier this year found that its members cited climate change as the most important issue for the future of the church, said Antal, who was among 16 clergy arrested in an interfaith civil disobedience action at the West Roxbury pipeline construction site last year.
The Rev. Ian Holland, pastor of First Church Swampscott, wore a life preserver over his robe when he preached on climate change earlier this spring. He spoke about how coastal flooding from rising sea levels threatened to affect the coastal community, potentially cutting off major commuting corridors from the North Shore to Boston.

“We have a moral responsibility to become aware of what the science is telling us,” he said in an interview Tuesday.

Antal wrote the resolution in 90 minutes at the request of the denomination’s president, John C. Dorhauer, so that it could be approved by the Southern California-Nevada conference, which was meeting the day after Trump announced he would withdraw from the Paris agreement. The accord is a global action plan signed by 195 nations in 2015 that aims to put the world on track to avoid the most dangerous effects of climate change by limiting global warming to below 2°C.

Sixteen other regional UCC bodies, including the Massachusetts conference, approved the resolution in advance of Monday’s vote.

The Rev. Gordon Rankin, the UCC’s South Dakota Conference minister, said many members of the church in his state have been involved in protesting the construction of two controversial oil pipelines, the Keystone XL pipeline and the Dakota Access Pipeline.

“We needed to put our mouth where our feet have been,” he said.

The annual meeting of the UCC’s Northern Plains Conference, which includes fossil-fuel-rich North Dakota and extends into Canada, also approved the resolution last month in advance of the national conference.

The Rev. Gretchen Deeg, a pastor in Bismarck, said that some North Dakotans supported it because of firsthand experience with damage to land and water by fossil fuel extraction. Others felt fossil fuel companies were taking advantage of the state, she said, or believed that renewable energy would create more and safer jobs.

“Howeover,” she said, “I think most people voted for this resolution because our faith demands we care for the earth.”

Lisa Wangsness can be reached at lisa.wangsness@globe.com.


July 5, 2017

Offering Moral Leadership, UCC Urges Clergy to 'Be Bold and Courageous' in Climate Fight

By Jessica Corbett
'The Earth is the Lord's—Not Ours to Wreck,' declares church document.

The United Church of Christ on Monday passed a resolution that calls on clergy to lead educational and legislative efforts to combat climate change, urging its members to be "bold and courageous as we address the greatest moral challenge that the world has ever faced."

The resolution, titled "The Earth is the Lord's—Not Ours to Wreck: Imperatives for a New Moral Era," was supported by 97 percent of the delegates of the church's General Synod, which meets every two years to discuss church structure and policies.

"This sets the stage for engagement and hope. This is a proclamation of truth and the love of God's gift," said Rev. Jim Antal, head of the UCC's Massachusetts conference and author of the resolution. "The climate crisis is an opportunity for which the church was born."

Framing climate change prevention as a moral obligation—similar to the message of Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical—the resolution reads: "As people of faith, recognizing that the earth is the Lord's, it falls upon our generation to embrace the imperatives set forth in this resolution."

It details a strategy for "the whole of the church to prayerfully engage" with the issue of climate change through three key imperatives:

- Let our clergy accept the mantle of moral leadership.
- Let all of us incarnate the changes we long for.
- Let us proclaim truth in the public square.

In addition to preaching the clergy's obligation to protect the planet and educate the public about the climate crisis, the resolution encourages church members to advocate for wide-scale transitions to accessible, sustainable energy sources. "Let us commit to resist all expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure and demand new sources of renewable energy that are accessible to all communities," the resolution states.

It also takes a swipe at U.S. President Donald Trump and his administration's recent actions on climate policy: "While the leaders of every country in the world recognize this reality, our current Administration ignores science, defunds the Environmental Protection Agency, and withdraws from the Paris Climate Accord."

Along with ditching the Paris Agreement and the administration's controversial choices regarding the EPA, Trump and his appointees have attempted to halt an Obama-era rule targeting methane leaks, frustrating U.S. citizens and world leaders alike. The administration's disregard for climate science and environmental protection is pushing cities, states, and groups such as the UCC to take action.

This is not the UCC's first move to address climate change. In 2013, the church's General Synod approved—also with major support from Rev. Antal—a five-year path toward divesting from
fossil fuel companies, and became the first major U.S. religious body to act on divestment. They also adopted a resolution to make UCC buildings more carbon-neutral.


July 9, 2017

Chapel built in pipeline path dedicated by nuns, anti-pipeline group

By Steve Marroni
Penn Live

To the sisters, it's more than an outdoor prayer chapel.

It's a peaceful protest, and it's their way of showing the land is sacred.

Lancaster Against Pipelines and the Adorers of the Blood of Christ order of Catholic nuns held a dedication ceremony this afternoon for a new outdoor prayer chapel on their land outside of Columbia.

And it's right in the middle of where the proposed Atlantic Sunrise pipeline will traverse, said Mark Clatterbuck of Lancaster Against Pipelines.

The nuns allowed the Lancaster Against Pipelines group to build the chapel in a cornfield on their land in West Hempfield Township, near a retirement community they operate.

Williams, the company that owns the pipeline, sought to take immediate possession of an easement last week to allow construction of the pipeline, telling a judge the chapel would cause "irreparable harm" to the pipeline project.

On Friday, the judge ruled that Williams had the right to seize the land through eminent domain but he held off that process until a hearing scheduled July 17 can take place.

But the sisters have a "land ethic" that guides them to honor and revere the Earth, which they shared with the crowd today.

And Clatterbuck said Lancaster Against Pipelines is prepared to hold constant vigil at the site to prevent the pipeline from going through.

About 200 people attended today's dedication ceremony amid the cornfields of Lancaster County. Some brought signs showing their opposition to the pipelines. Others brought their kids in big sunhats. But all sat in the pleasant rural acres to hear from the sisters.
Williams spokesman Christopher Stockton told Lancaster Online last week that the company respects the rights of protesters but "we view this simply as another blatant attempt to impede pipeline construction."

The proposed pipeline will run for roughly 200 miles, transporting 1.7 billion cubic feet of gas per day.


July 11, 2017

Meet the nuns who are growing affordable organic produce in the heart of Brentwood

By Cecilia Dowd
FiOS1 News

BRENTWOOD — An organic farm run by the Sisters of St. Joseph Brentwood is cultivating fresh and affordable vegetables to a neighborhood in Long Island where you'd least expect it.

The expansive farmland raises radishes, Sicilian eggplant, zucchinis, and tomatoes on 27 acres of land without the use of chemicals or pesticides.

The agricultural endeavor has become a success, some good news for an area that's made national headlines for gang activity.

It all began in 1896 when the Sisters of St. Joseph first arrived in Brentwood to establish a school.

“When the sisters first came, there was a working farm that supplied food for the sisters and for the girls in the academy,” said Sister Helen Kearney, president of the Sisters of St. Joseph Brentwood.

More than 100 years later, the sisters are not only embracing their roots but are ensuring that future generations do too by working with the Peconic Land Trust to safeguard the land from development outside of agriculture.

“We have found that the soil quality here is very valuable so the yield has been outstanding. We've also found that in our woodlands we have plants and species that have not been found in other parts of Long Island and they've been undisturbed,” Sister Kearney said.

The initiative has since been a win for both residents and local farmers who have a place to grow.

“The soil's great, the water's outstanding, full sun, nice breeze, you can't get any better,” Teddy Bolkas of Thera Farms said.
If you want to buy some produce from the sisters, you can find the Thera Farm Stand on the corner of Brentwood Road and Commack Road which is open Tuesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The farm stand is also run by adults with special needs through an organization called Free; they are open every Wednesday and Thursday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. on the Second Avenue portion of the Sisters of St. Joseph Brentwood property.


July 12, 2017

China’s Religious Revival Fuels Environmental Activism

By Javier C. Hernández
New York Times

MAO MOUNTAIN, China — Far from the smog-belching power plants of nearby cities, on a hillside covered in solar panels and blossoming magnolias, Yang Shihua speaks of the need for a revolution.

Mr. Yang, the abbot of Mao Mountain, a sacred Taoist site in eastern China, has grown frustrated by indifference to a crippling pollution crisis that has left the land barren and the sky a haunting gray. So he has set out to spur action through religion, building a $17.7 million eco-friendly temple and citing 2,000-year-old texts to rail against waste and pollution.

“China doesn’t lack money — it lacks a reverence for the environment,” Abbot Yang said. “Our morals are in decline and our beliefs have been lost.”

Hundreds of millions of people in China have in recent years turned to religions like Taoism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, seeking a sense of purpose and an escape from China’s consumerist culture.

Now the nation’s religious revival is helping fuel an environmental awakening.

Spiritual leaders are invoking concepts like karma and sin in deriding the excesses of economic development. Religious followers are starting social service organizations to serve as watchdogs against polluters. Advocates are citing their faith to protest plans to build factories and power plants near their homes.

“Certainly it is a very powerful force,” said Martin Palmer, the secretary general of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, a group that works with Chinese spiritual leaders. “People are asking, ‘How do you make sense of your life?’ An awful lot are looking for something bigger than themselves, and that is increasingly the environment.”
The Chinese government, which regulates worship and limits activism, has so far tolerated the rise of religious environmentalists.

President Xi Jinping has championed the study of Chinese traditions, including Taoism and Confucianism, in part to counter the influence of Western ideas in Chinese society. Mr. Xi, in articulating the so-called Chinese dream, has called for a return to China’s roots as an “ecological civilization” — a vision he has described as having “clear waters and green mountains” across the land.

Mao Mountain, with its stretches of untouched land, stands as a monument to nature. Chongxi Wanshou, Abbot Yang’s eco-friendly temple, opened in August 2016. Its 20 acres include an organic vegetable garden. Nearby is a giant statue of Lao-tzu, the founder of Taoism, who is worshiped here as a “green god.” Bees’ nests hang undisturbed, and signs remind passers-by that branches and trees are synonymous with life.

The mountain’s spiritual leaders say they are seeking to define a distinctly Chinese type of environmentalism, one that emphasizes harmony with nature instead of Western notions of “saving the earth.”

Xuan Jing, a Taoist monk with a black beard, said Western notions of the environment were focused on treating symptoms of a problem, not the underlying disease.

“You must cure the soul before you can cure the symptoms,” he said. “The root lies with human’s desires.”

As he sipped tea, he jotted down Taoist teachings: “Humans follow the earth, the earth follows heaven, heaven follows Taoism, Taoism follows nature.”

Many spiritual leaders are also energized by what they see as an opportunity for China to become a global leader on environmental issues, with the United States showing new skepticism toward causes like combating climate change.

“We all live on earth together — we are not isolated,” Abbot Yang said in criticizing President Trump’s decision to withdraw from the Paris climate accord. “As Taoists, we have to work to influence people in China and overseas to take part in ecological protection.”

Environmentalism is infusing other religions in China as well, inspiring Buddhists, Christians and Muslims to take action.

In Nanjing, the capital of Jiangsu Province, about an hour from Mao Mountain, Li Yaodong, 77, a retired government worker and a Buddhist, is the founder of a nonprofit called Mochou, or “free of worries,” dedicated to cleaning up polluted lakes.

Mr. Li said that he saw parallels between his faith and protecting the environment. He leads by example, wearing secondhand clothes given to him by his children and collecting used staples to send back to factories.
“From an environmental protection perspective, saving means reducing carbon emissions,” he said. “From a Buddhist perspective, it means accumulating merits and doing good deeds.”

Muslims and Christians are also speaking up on environmental issues, drawing on their faith to galvanize the masses. China is home to more than 60 million Christians and more than 20 million Muslims by some estimates.

Shen Zhanqing, a pastor who works for the Amity Foundation, a Christian charity, said many church members felt inspired by religion to help protect the environment. The foundation has held study groups on issues like reducing carbon emissions and climate change, and it encourages members to take buses to church.

“The decadence of human beings has destroyed the environment in China,” Pastor Shen said. “Our purpose is to protect God’s creation.”

At Mao Mountain, the monks gather each morning to read ancient texts and to write calligraphy next to the trees and stones. Hundreds of visitors climb the stairs each day to pay respect to Lao-tzu. To limit pollution, they are prohibited from burning more than three sticks of incense each.

Abbot Yang devotes much of his time to persuading local officials across China to set aside areas for natural protection, an unpopular idea in many parts. He has also worked to attract young, wealthy urbanites to Taoism. Many of them are eager for a spiritual cause and have responded warmly to Taoist leaders’ embrace of environmentalism.

Taoist officials have also spoken up at national leadership meetings in recent years, calling on the government to take more action to prevent environmental catastrophes.

The abbot acknowledged that it might seem strange for Taoists, who practice a philosophy of wu wei, or inaction, to be leading a call for change. Still, he said it was important to set an example.

“Taoism has almost 2,000 years of history — environmental protection isn’t new for us,” he said. “We have to take action.”


July 15, 2017

Climate Change and the Significance of Religion

By Mike Hulme
Economic & Political Weekly
Vol. 52, Issue No. 28
There is a growing sense that religion has a part to play in shaping our responses to climate change. Merely understanding climate science, or dealing with it through the frame of technology is clearly insufficient. Religious engagement with climate change is both necessary and inevitable. But there is much to discover about how religious beliefs, institutions and practices around the world engage with the idea of climate change, and to what effect, thereby offering rich research agendas with which religious scholars and others might profitably engage.

Read the full essay here:


July 16, 2017

Hinduism and its complicated history with cows (and people who eat them)

By Wendy Doniger
The Conversation

Just this past June, at a national meeting of various Hindu organizations in India, a popular preacher, Sadhvi Saraswati, suggested that those who consumed beef should be publicly hanged. Later, at the same conclave, an animal rights activist, Chetan Sharma, said,

“Cow is also the reason for global warming. When she is slaughtered, something called EPW is released, which is directly responsible for global warming. It’s what is called emotional pain waves.”

These provocative remarks come at a time when vigilante Hindu groups in India are lynching people for eating beef. Such killings have increased since Narendra Modi and his right-wing Bharatiya Janata party came to power in September 2014. In September 2015, a 50-year-old Muslim man, Mohammad Akhlaq, was lynched by a mob in a village near New Delhi on suspicion that he had consumed beef. Since then, many attacks by cow vigilante groups have followed. Modi’s government has also prohibited the slaughter of buffalo, thus destroying the Muslim-dominated buffalo meat industry and causing widespread economic hardship.

Most people seem to assume that no Hindu has ever consumed beef. But is this true?

As a scholar, studying Sanskrit and ancient Indian religion for over 50 years, I know of many texts that offer a clear answer to this question.

Cows in ancient Indian history

Scholars have known for centuries that the ancient Indians ate beef. After the fourth century B.C., when the practice of vegetarianism spread throughout India among Buddhists, Jains and Hindus, many Hindus continued to eat beef.
In the time of the oldest Hindu sacred text, the Rig Veda (c. 1500 B.C.), cow meat was consumed. Like most cattle-breeding cultures, the Vedic Indians generally ate the castrated steers, but they would eat the female of the species during rituals or when welcoming a guest or a person of high status.

Ancient ritual texts known as Brahmanas (c. 900 B.C.) and other texts that taught religious duty (dharma), from the third century B.C., say that a bull or cow should be killed to be eaten when a guest arrives.

According to these texts, “the cow is food.” Even when one passage in the “Shatapatha Brahmana” (3.1.2.21) forbids the eating of either cow or bull, a revered ancient Hindu sage named Yajnavalkya immediately contradicts it, saying that, nevertheless, he eats the meat of both cow and bull, “as long as it’s tender.”

It was the Sanskrit epic, the Mahabharata (composed between 300 B.C. and A.D. 300) that explained the transition to the non eating of cows in a famous myth:

“Once, when there was a great famine, King Prithu took up his bow and arrow and pursued the Earth to force her to yield nourishment for his people. The Earth assumed the form of a cow and begged him to spare her life; she then allowed him to milk her for all that the people needed.”

This myth imagines a transition from hunting wild cattle to preserving their lives, domesticating them, and breeding them for milk, a transition to agriculture and pastoral life. It visualizes the cow as the paradigmatic animal that yields food without being killed.

**Beef-eating and caste**

Some dharma texts composed in this same period insist that cows should not be eaten. Some Hindus who did eat meat made a special exception and did not eat the meat of cow. Such people may have regarded beef-eating in the light of what the historian Romila Thapar describes as a “matter of status” – the higher the caste, the greater the food restrictions. Various religious sanctions were used to impose prohibition on beef eating, but, as Thapar demonstrates, “only among the upper castes.”

As I see it, the arguments against eating cows are a combination of a symbolic argument about female purity and docility (symbolized by the cow who generously gives her milk to her calf), a religious argument about Brahmin sanctity (as Brahmins came increasingly to be identified with cows and to be paid by donations of cows) and a way for castes to rise in social ranking.

Sociologist M. N. Srinivas pointed out that the lower castes gave up beef when they wanted to move up the social ladder through the process known as “Sanskritization.”

By the 19th century, the cow-protection movement had arisen. One of the implicit objects of this movement was the oppression of Muslims.
Famously, Gandhi attempted to make vegetarianism, particularly the taboo against eating beef, a central tenet of Hinduism. Gandhi’s attitude to cows was tied to his idea of nonviolence.

He used the image of the Earth cow (the one that King Prithu milked) as a kind of Mother Earth, to symbolize his imagined Indian nation. His insistence on cow protection was a major factor in his failure to attract large-scale Muslim support.

Yet even Gandhi never called for the banning of cow slaughter in India. He said,

“How can I force anyone not to slaughter cows unless he is himself so disposed? It is not as if there were only Hindus in the Indian Union. There are Muslims, Parsis, Christians and other religious groups here.”

Today’s India

From my perspective, in our day, the nationalist and fundamentalist “Hindutva” (“Hindu-ness”) movement is attempting to use this notion of the sanctity of the cow to disenfranchise Muslims. And it is not only the beef-eating Muslims (and Christians) who are the target of Hindutva’s hate brigade. Lower-caste Hindus are also being attacked. Attacks of this type are not new. This has been going on since Hindutva began in 1923. And indeed, in 2002, in a north Indian town, five lower-caste Hindus were lynched for skinning a cow.

But, as local analysis shows, the violence has greatly increased under the Modi government. IndiaSpend, a data journalism initiative, found that “Muslims were the target of 51 percent of violence centered on bovine issues over nearly eight years (2010 to 2017) and comprised 86 percent of 28 Indians killed in 63 incidents…As many of 97 percent of these attacks were reported after Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government came to power in May 2014.”

In 2015, in the western Indian state of Gujarat, lower-caste Hindus were flogged for skinning a dead cow, triggering spontaneous street protests and contributing to the resignation of the state’s chief minister.

As these and so many other recent attacks demonstrate, cows – innocent, docile animals – have become in India a lightning rod for human cruelty, in the name of religion.


July 18, 2017

Adorers of the Blood of Christ take pipeline protest to court

By Dawn Araujo-Hawkins
Global Sisters Report
The Adorers of the Blood of Christ are taking their fight against the Atlantic Sunrise pipeline to court. On July 14, five days after dedicating a chapel in the pathway of the planned pipeline, the sisters filed a complaint against the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission in an attempt to keep the pipeline off their land.

The complaint, which says the pipeline is "antithetical to the deeply held religious beliefs and convictions of the Adorers," utilizes the same freedom of religion law that the Little Sisters of the Poor have cited in their case against the contraceptive mandate in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

In an email to Global Sisters Report, Adorer of the Blood of Christ Sr. Sara Dwyer said, "The complaint filed on Friday was a 'next step' in the Adorers' stand against this pipeline, and a statement meant, again, to publicly withstand the corporate takeover of land by right of eminent domain, especially when, we believe FERC had not considered all the elements for such a decision to move forward."

On July 17, the sisters appeared in federal court for a hearing on an earlier request by Williams — the company building the pipeline — to expedite seizure of the sisters' land. No ruling was issued, and the court is in recess until Thursday.

The Adorers are one of an estimated 32 local landowners who have refused to sell their land to Williams. The Atlantic Sunrise pipeline would be a $3 billion, 183-mile extension of the Transco pipeline system that currently runs 10,200 miles from Texas to New York.

Williams has already sought to obtain some Pennsylvania lands via eminent domain, that is, the government's ability to seize private property for public use. The company says the project would help provide inexpensive natural gas to the economically disadvantaged, keep energy costs low and support thousands of jobs.

[Dawn Araujo-Hawkins is a Global Sisters Report staff writer. Her email address is daraugo@ncronline.org. Follow her on Twitter: @dawn_cherie.]


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July 18, 2017

Archbishop: Brazil trying to undo protections for indigenous peoples

By Mary Durran, Catholic News Service
National Catholic Reporter

The Brazilian government is working to undo constitutional protections for indigenous peoples, the president of the bishops' commission on indigenous peoples told Catholic News Service as he vacationed in Canada.
"In the 1980s, we helped to draft the articles in the 1988 constitution that recognize the culture of the indigenous peoples and set out protection of their lands by demarcation," said Archbishop Roque Paloschi of Porto Velho. "Today, we are struggling to keep those protections in place."

Archbishop Paloschi is president of the bishops' Indigenous Missionary Council, known by its Portuguese acronym CIMI.

CIMI was formed in 1975 — during Brazil's military dictatorship, which ended in 1985 — to accompany the country's indigenous peoples, who have dwindled from 5 million at colonization by the Portuguese to under a million, belonging to 240 different ethnic groups.

Paloschi spoke in Montreal one month after international experts warned that Brazilian indigenous peoples are under attack and that they need strengthened protection, rather than erosion of protective measures. Three experts from the U.N. and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights pointed out in a June statement that, over the last 15 years, Brazil has seen "the highest number of killings of environmental and land defenders of any country," with an average of one a week killed. Many of those defenders are indigenous peoples, who live off the land.

On July 13, the U.S.-based nongovernmental organization Global Witness released a report citing Brazil as the country with the highest number of murders of environmental and land defenders in 2016. Forty-nine such activists, including indigenous people, were killed there.

"We are living as if under a military dictatorship," Paloschi said. "Leaders and entire peoples are being criminalized."

Since Brazilian President Michel Temer took office Aug. 31, he has surrounded himself with ministers with strong links to the cattle ranchers and soy farmers, who oppose steps taken by previous governments to implement demarcation of indigenous lands. Paloschi said that, despite CIMI's efforts, only 50 percent of the lands involved have received the legal titles. He said even land given legally to indigenous peoples is often invaded by loggers and mining companies.

The Temer government put in place a Congressional Investigative Commission that has pushed for reduced environmental and indigenous protections and has proposed constitutional amendments that would weaken the state National Indian Foundation, known by its acronym, FUNAI. Another controversial bill proposes that responsibility for demarcation of indigenous lands should be transferred from FUNAI, the Ministry of Justice and the president to the Brazilian Congress, whose majority is linked to the group of landowners and cattle ranchers opposed to indigenous land rights. The proposal would oblige all land demarcations approved in the past to be ratified by Congress.

Paloschi said the rhetoric of the commission, which accused the U.N. of promoting the agenda of international activist groups, seems to have fanned the flames of latent racism of many nonindigenous Brazilians. Violent standoffs between ranchers and indigenous groups attempting to claim lands have increased. In May, 13 Gamela indigenous occupying land had to be
hospitalized after they were attacked by ranchers armed with machetes in Maranhao state. One of the victims had his hands cut off and legs severed at the knee.

"They are the poorest of the poor, yet they are despised, and they endure constant prejudices and racism," Paloschi said of the indigenous peoples. "Without their land, they are nothing."

CIMI, whose 250 missionaries work with such indigenous groups throughout Brazil, has been accused of encouraging land occupations and stirring up trouble, a charge Paloschi denies.

"CIMI's role is to accompany the indigenous peoples, encourage them to take control of their own destiny and forge their own path forward. We cannot do this for them," he said.

The archbishop said he is saddened by the church's historical collusion with the Portuguese colonizers, who tried to put the indigenous peoples under guardianship and created dependency. But he said he sees signs of hope.

"There is an ongoing process of dialogue and some visible changes in the value given to indigenous languages and culture. But the further we go, the longer the road becomes," he said.

He said he is encouraged by Pope Francis, whose papacy and commitment to the peoples of the Americas he describes as a blessing.

Paloschi confirmed that the pope has confided in Brazilian Cardinal Claudio Hummes that he is considering a synod on the Amazon, home to the ancestral lands of the vast majority of Brazil's indigenous peoples. The pope is currently reflecting and praying for discernment on the organization of such a synod, the archbishop said.


July 21, 2017

Water Walk For Life Along Proposed Pipeline Route

By Dave Lucas
WAMC Northeast Public Radio

This weekend, an internationally renowned environmentalist and human rights activist will embark on a 170-mile "Water Walk For Life," protesting proposed pipelines that would run from Albany to New Jersey.

Parallel Pilgrim pipelines would transport 17 million gallons of petroleum products a day. North Dakotan Bakken crude oil (near Standing Rock) would flow from Albany south to Linden, New Jersey, with refined products returning north. The lines would cross 235 regulated streams in
New York and two drinking water aquifers in New Jersey. Activists warn that each of these crossings would disturb or destroy critical wildlife habitats and endanger clean water sources for more than 100,000 people.

Jun Yasuda, a Buddhist nun, whose "home base" is the Grafton Peace Pagoda, left Japan in 1978 and has walked more than 80,000 miles in various protests and demonstrations. She will begin the 13-day walk to raise awareness in New Jersey near Ramapo College. "I am now 69 years old, and this is the summertime and very hot outside. And walking 11 to 17, 18 miles to me is challenging to my body."

Jim Suriano is a walk organizer: "The Water Walk For Life" will start on July 22nd at the Ramapough Lenape Camp in Ramapo, New Jersey. It will continue to Saturday August 5th, ending in Grafton, New York, for Hiroshima Day. This is our second Water Walk for life. We had one earlier this year that went from Carteret, New Jersey to Indian Point nuclear facility."

Five proposed accessory pipelines would carry oil from the main lines to tank farms along the Hudson River. In addition to building the pipelines, access roads for construction and maintenance would be required at 1-mile intervals along the entire route for a total of 215 proposed new roadways, requiring the clearing of at least 600 acres of forest.

Yasuda has been preparing for the 170-mile trek through fasting and prayer. Looking back, she believes her years of activism have paid off. "I do same thing over 40 years. So, slowly slowly, peoples open up heart, so we just keep going. This is very slow process, little by little, step by step."

Opponents cite an analysis by the International Energy Agency, which has found that between 2004 and 2012, pipelines spilled three times as much crude oil as the beleaguered oil trains.

According to Water Walk for Life spokesperson George Cho, the refinery at the southern end of the proposed Pilgrim dual Pipeline is owned by Houston-based Phillips 66, which is also responsible for the controversial Dakota Access Pipeline.

The walk, timed to conclude around the date of the 72nd anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima, will traverse communities directly in the Pilgrim pipelines’ proposed route in New York including Harriman, Tuxedo, Newburgh, New Paltz, Esopus, Highland, Kingston, Saugerties, Catskill, Coxsackie, Bethlehem, and Albany, ending in Grafton at the Peace Pagoda.

- Join the walk for a few hours or a few days with prayers for water at risk from the proposed Pilgrim Pipeline:

  Schedule subject to change. This is a drug and alcohol free walk for environmental awareness of the sacred Hudson River Valley and its waters.

Day 1: Saturday July 22 10AM
Ramapough-Lunaape Split Rock
Prayer Camp near Ramapo College
Begin with Water Ceremony, Walk to Sloatsburg
8 miles

Day 2: Sunday July 23 8AM
Sloatsburg to Harriman
13-14 miles

Day 3: Monday July 24 8AM
Harriman to Washingtonville
11-12 miles

Day 4: Tuesday July 25 8AM
Washingtonville to Warden
11-12 miles

Day 5: Wednesday July 26 8AM
Warden to New Paltz
15-16 miles

Day 6: Thursday July 27 8AM
New Paltz to Kingston
14-15 miles

Day 7: Friday July 28 8AM
Rest Day in Kingston

Day 8: Saturday July 29 8AM
Kingston to Saugerties
13-14 miles

Day 9: Sunday July 30 8AM
Saugerties to Catskill
12-14 miles

Day 10: Monday July 31 8AM
Catskill to Ravena
18-20 miles

Day 11: Tuesday August 1 8AM
Ravena to Bethlehem
9-10 miles

Day 12: Wednesday August 2 8AM
Bethlehem to Albany
8 miles
Day 13: Thursday August 3 8AM
Albany to Troy
10 miles

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Day 14: Friday August 4 8AM
Work Camp at Grafton Peace Pagoda

Day 15: Saturday August 5
Hiroshima Day Ceremony at Grafton Peace Pagoda
Walk from Grafton Town Center at 6:30pm
4.3 miles

Ceremony for Peace at Grafton Peace Pagoda 8:00pm
Located nearby Mohican sacred burial site

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- Wikipedia link on the history of Peace Pagodas and a list of all present day Peace Pagodas around the world: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_Pagoda
- Information on Nichidatsu Fujii, Peace Pagodas and the work of Nipponzan Myōhōji: http://www.dharmawalk.org/

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Water Walk for Life Co-Sponsors: Food & Water Watch, Ramapough Lenape Nation, Coalition Against Pilgrim Pipeline, Riverkeeper, 350NJ, Central Jersey Coalition Against Endless War, Green Party, Sierra Club, Nipponzan Myohoji

http://wamc.org/post/water-walk-life-along-proposed-pipeline-route

July 22, 2017

There goes the neighborhood

By Phyllis Zagano
National Catholic Reporter

In recent weeks, the United States withdrew from the Paris climate agreement and an iceberg the size of Delaware broke off from Antarctica. As one penguin said to another, "There goes the neighborhood."
Funny? Not.

Maybe everybody's summer reading should include *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical letter "on Care for our Common Home."

That common home would be Earth.

Despite its annoying English translation — Earth is "she" rather than "it" — the recommendations of *Laudato Si'* could be enough for us to moderate the air conditioner, if not turn it off. Along with the document, we can recite both the causes and effects of environmental sins: "The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life."

We know about the problems, yet daily we collaborate in the ruination of the planet. Our highly mobile throwaway culture needs more heating and cooling than ever before. We want the newest, latest, brightest and best thing on the market. We want to move faster and farther in more comfort, by land, sea and air. We want what we want and we want it now.

Fossil fuels, fertilizers and fracking damage the planet. Greenhouse gasses damage the planet. Oil spills and waste runoff damage the planet. Yet not enough is happening to change the trajectory of the end game we are so dangerously playing.

Even so, the world's leaders seem to be getting it — 195 countries signed on to the Paris Agreement. The signers included China, India and the United States, which collectively produce as much as half of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. While President Trump famously withdrew from the agreement, that cannot take effect for some time. The United States' prior ratification stands until Nov. 4, 2020, one day after the next presidential Election Day. Things might be different then.

Also, by then three non-signers, Nicaragua, Syria, and the Holy See, might find ways to sign on. Nicaragua said it would go it alone, complaining about no punishment mechanism for offenders; Syria's warfare got in the way; and, in 2015, the Holy See said it would sign after it becomes a member of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. That has not happened. It takes a while for things to get from the Vatican in Rome to the Holy See Mission to the United Nations in New York. The Paris Agreement closed for signature on April 21, 2017.

The real reasons behind the United States' withdrawal from the agreement is anybody's guess. The agreement is aimed at limiting global warming and these months in the Northern Hemisphere might encourage folks — especially those who live in Washington, D.C. — to truly believe Earth's temperature is rising, weather systems are changing, and dirty air is not very conducive to healthy life of any kind.

Meanwhile, beyond the D.C. Beltway, in Antarctica, the ice shelf called "Larsen C" plunked a trillion tons of ice into the ever-warmer Southern Ocean. The newly named iceberg "A-68," about 2,300 square miles big, is floating north.
Did one thing cause the other? Did global warming cause a shrinking polar ice cap? And, after all, who cares? **Scientists say** it will take another 80 or 90 years for the seas to rise three feet.

Hello? Three feet. That means most coastal settlements will disappear by the end of the century. And, excluding the residents of exclusive beach front communities in affluent nations, the most seriously impacted persons will be the poor who depend on ocean waters for food, climate control and transport.

We can talk all we want about solar panels and rain barrels, but the fact is that most of the developed world is doing little or nothing to help Earth recover from its injuries. Unless we bring about real initiatives, unless we invest in robust plans to cool and clean the planet, we risk the kind of destruction American writer Cormac McCarthy warned about in *The Road*. And the destruction, the devastation, will begin — is already beginning — for the least members of the human family.

The day he was elected, Pope Francis sat next to Franciscan Cardinal Cláudio Hummes, who leaned over and said "do not forget the poor." He has not. Have we?

[Phyllis Zagano is senior research associate-in-residence at Hofstra University in Hempstead, N.Y. Her books include *Women Deacons: Past, Present, Future* and *Women Deacons? Essays with Answers*.]

https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/just-catholic/there-goes-neighborhood

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**July 23, 2017**

Is Surfing More Sport or Religion?

By Jaimal Yogis

The Atlantic

*Even hardcore devotees disagree, though many acknowledge there’s something profoundly spiritual about catching waves—a feeling scientists attribute to the power of being in the water.*

A decade ago, working my first journalism job while also pretending I surfed for a living, I rented a cheap loft in a three-story Victorian across the street from Ocean Beach in San Francisco. The home is still there as it was. Seahorses are still engraved in the blue window shutters, and the same landlord, Carol Schuldt, can still be found feeding her chickens in the backyard. If she’s not out surfing.

Schuldt—who I also write about in my new memoir, *All Our Waves Are Water*—is something of San Francisco’s patron surf saint, her home a pelagic shrine where local surfers have long left firewood offerings. At 83, after a lifetime of wave riding, helping beach bums find cheap rent, and sometimes helping them get off drugs, too, Schuldt still rides her rusted beach cruiser to the dunes and bodysurfs these frigid waves without a wetsuit. “It’s where I can still connect to the
Universal Mind,” she told me while we hiked the ice-planted dunes a few years ago, “to God, Jaimal—you know.”

Schuldt is one-of-a-kind. But surf culture is full of people who have made their daily plunge a spiritual practice. Though Calvinist missionaries outlawed surfing when they first came to Hawai‘i in the 1820s—they viewed it as frivolous and wanton—the last 50 years have seen single-fin riding rabbis, short boarding priests, and bodysurfing Buddhist monks. Surf-related yoga and meditation retreats are common, too, led by the likes of the Pipeline master Gerry Lopez. Bethany Hamilton, the professional who lost an arm to a tiger shark when she was 13, looks to her faith in God to compete on the same level as pros with two arms (which she does mind-bendingly well). The big-wave champ Greg Long sits in lotus to prepare for confronting apartment building-sized walls of ocean.

For Schuldt, and many others like her, surfing doesn’t need a specific religious structure to give it power. Nature is God, she says, the sea holy water, and surfing a meditation—a comparison that would have likely resonated with the poet Philip Larkin, who wrote, “If I were called in / To construct a religion / I should make use of water.” While pop culture and the subculture of surfing have both contributed to the mystical reputation of wave-riding, psychology and neuroscience may play an even bigger role, with researchers finding that water is a key ingredient—if not the key ingredient—in experiences people often call holy.

* * *

One can make a good argument that surfers, or at least water lovers, have access to divine real estate. After all, Genesis describes how, “In the beginning … the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters”—not a volcano, not a canyon, not a tree. Muslims perform wudu, ritual ablutions, before praying. Buddhists offer bowls of water as a symbol of clear enlightenment. Baptism is a major component of many religions; converting to Judaism requires full immersion in a mikvah, a bath that must be connected to natural water. Surfing—immersion into the liveliest of waters—has spiritual roots that started well before hippie surfers were passing the peace pipe. Hawaiian chiefs demonstrated their clout by braving big waves. When the surf raged too big for humans, it was called ‘Awili, meaning the gods were surfing.

But whether walking on it, surfing it, or bathing with it, water has been at the center of transformative rituals throughout history. “Across all spiritual traditions, cultures, and times, you find the use of water to achieve states of awe, grace, and love,” said Wallace J. Nichols, a biologist and the author of the New York Times bestseller Blue Mind, which explores how humans can benefit from being close to water. “We scientists avoid those words like the plague. But if you’re on the water a lot, those end up being the words you need to describe your experiences.”

Scientists are still learning why people say they feel increased amounts of unity, reverence, and happiness in the water, Nichols told me. But if you look at the scientific recipe for flow states—the psychological term for when people are fully and pleasantly absorbed in what they’re doing—being in water checks a lot of the boxes. First, you’re removing a lot of distractions:
buzzing cell phones, traffic, written language, and even the need for language, period. Second, you get many of the perks of solitude without the side effects of pain and loneliness.

Then, there’s what psychologists call the “soft focus” that water provides—meaning that watching water is stimulating, even entertaining, to the brain, but in a relaxing, rejuvenating way. Look at the brain of a surfer or swimmer in an fMRI, Nichols said, and you’ll see a more distributed set of points, a more spherical thinking, than when you’re, say, solving a math problem, which takes more prefrontal cortex power. What’s more, surfing—as a form of exercise that involves risk-taking and play—triggers the release of feel-good hormones that help make it so enjoyable.

*Surfer Magazine* has some anecdotal data to back up Nichols’s points. In 2010, the outlet’s editor at the time, Sam George, wrote:

If some malevolent being came into the world that forced us to close down the doors here at the Palace of Stoke, we could continue to fill editorial pages for two years solely with letters written by surfers to tell us of their spiritual quests in the waves. It’s a phenomenon, really. And it’s one, I believe, that is unique to surfing.

Still, some of the most dedicated surfers balk at the salted spiritual musings. “You can get the same feeling playing golf,” Justin Housman, a current editor at *Surfer Magazine*, told me recently. “Surfers need to stop acting like we have some special access to the Tao or whatever just because we ride waves. It’s addictive because it’s fun, because you’re getting dopamine and adrenaline and serotonin. But that’s it. If you think only surfing can get you that feeling, you’ve got to get out more.”

Housman said he sees no problem with surfers taking a metaphysical or religious approach to what they love if they happen to have that orientation to life in general. But he also believes that spirituality gets unfairly foisted onto surfing to the detriment of enjoying surfing for what it is—fun. “You don’t need to add any deeper meaning to make surfing great,” Housman said. “It’s already good enough to take over your entire life.” The reason for the mystical rhetoric, Housman told me, is that surf culture and brands—the latter dependent on surfing remaining cool for its existence—have always pegged themselves to films and TV shows that reinforce that stereotype.

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In the ’60s and ’70s, surf media tended to depict surfers as symbols of a life outside the rat race (like with the classic 1966 documentary *The Endless Summer*) or figures communing with the gravity of the moon (the 1971 film *Morning of the Earth*)—all reflections of the hippie and back-to-the-land ethos. Surfers in that era experimented with psychedelics as much as any subculture group, and Timothy Leary even spoke of the tube as the ultimate metaphor for “the highly conscious life.” In the ’80s, ’90s, and early 2000s, surf flicks pivoted toward competitive and human-versus-nature themes, perhaps a reflection of Cold War posturing. But even in films about professional contests (*North Shore*) or adrenaline junkies conquering death-defying waves (*Riding Giants, In God’s Hands, Point Break*), there is always a soul-searching bent. Recall that
Patrick Swayze’s character in *Point Break*, for example, is named Bodhi, short for *bodhisattva*, a being who embodies the Buddhist ideal of compassion for all sentient beings.

In the internet age, mass media about surfing touches on a bit of everything, though contests and Red Bull stunts play a huge role. Now there are more contemplative films about female empowerment, including the 2011 Bethany Hamilton biopic *Soul Surfer* and the documentary about women surfers *It Ain’t Pretty*. Other movies criticize consumer culture, like 2010’s *Stoked and Broke* and *180° South* (the latter features Yvon Chouinard, the founder of Patagonia, reflecting on his Zen practice and its overlap with surfing). But no matter the era, Housman said there have been far too many surf books and films with the words “soul” or “Tao” in them, a phenomenon he attributes to surfing gaining its popularity during the Beatnik and hippie eras. Now the baby-boomer surfers’ kids are grown up, addicted to surfing, and basically continuing the trip.

Housman isn’t a surf jock arguing for more wave pools and more Olympics (this coming summer Olympics will be the first for surfers). “I’d push back on surfing being called a sport alone,” he said, leaving the activity’s definition open-ended. His point, however, which many surfers would echo, is to let surfing be surfing.

Identifying too closely with surfing—whether spiritually, athletically, or territorially—can also add to what many see as the sport’s dark underbelly. Surfers are famous for becoming like angry zealots when access to their god—the waves—gets obstructed by crowds, fueling gang-like turf wars in hotspots like Palos Verdes. Steven Kotler’s book *West of Jesus* captured this tension well: “The irony of it was that most of the people considered surfing a religious experience and that their religious experience was being ruined by all the others surfing for the same reason.”

So why does surfing appear to be so much more freighted with spiritual meaning than other water sports? One key distinction is the structure and pace of the activity. Yes, there are those brief adrenaline pumping moments of actually riding a wave, but in between sets are long lulls when the surfer is just waiting, bobbing, staring at a horizon—time in which there’s nothing to do but breathe and consider saltwater’s flirtatious dance with the sunlight and sky. So whether you’re spiritual or not, there’s still a need for a contemplative solitude in relative stillness. There’s also the constant paradox of having to exert great effort to paddle, while simultaneously surrendering to the power of a wave you’re riding (or falling into)—a Zen metaphor if ever there was one.

All this may feed into why, when you look at the science of peak experiences, water and music are basically tied for first place, Nichols told me. “The ‘oneness thing’ people get is, in a sense, a brain-chemistry response of letting go of that ‘need to know.’ And interestingly, that’s also where the poetry and music is.” Of course, it would be reductive to say neuroscience explains away rapturous moments in the waves—moments that perhaps become spiritual when there is a spiritual language to describe them. And as Housman suggested, surfing is not unique in its ability to give people more happiness, well-being, and awe. But Nichols’s point—and also Carol Schuld’s—seems to be that water is the best at it. “We try to re-create the water with stained glass, grand architecture,” Nichols said, “but it really doesn’t get close to the real thing.”
Schuldt, for her part, agrees. After doing her own readings on biology and astrophysics, she thinks science has only scratched the surface in revealing why the water is so healing for people. Part of of her reasoning is personal: Her son, Peter, was hit by a car when he was just 3 years old. The doctors warned he’d be completely dependent on others for life, if he made it at all. Unable to accept that prognosis, Schuldt took Peter off life support and rolled his frail body in the icy surf. Today, Peter has a crooked gait and slurred speech, but lives a full life, competing in swimming and running—a fact his mother attributes to his daily saltwater therapy.

But if you really want to understand Schuldt’s religion, follow her on her afternoon ritual sometime, up the steep hill she rides on that old cruiser. Hike another mile with her over the golden dunes, gather firewood, build a bonfire, dive into the cold waters for a bodysurf—and, perhaps, wait for a revelation.

“People ask, ‘How do you do this, at your age,’” she said with a laugh. “I tell them to jump in the ocean.”

July 25, 2017

Environmental Teachings of Islam

By Ashraf Amin
Kashmir Images

When the individuals, families, school children, and tourists from across the globe are making trips to the beautiful gardens, valleys, national parks, sanctuaries, mountain ranges, forests, etc., in these hot summers, it is highly commendable to show the care for the places we visit. Their greenery and prettiness may not be harmed or blemished. The Creator of the beautiful nature wishes us to be friendly to our environment. Let us never overlook the blessed teachings of Islam while making a visit to any recreational area. The essence of Islamic teachings is that the entire universe is Allah’s creation. Allah makes the waters flow upon the earth, upholds the heavens, makes the rain fall and keeps the boundaries between day and night. The whole of the rich and wonderful universe belongs to Allah, it’s maker. It is Allah who created the plants and the animals in their pairs and gave them the means to multiply. Then Allah created mankind - a very special creation because mankind alone was created with reason and the power to think and even the means to turn against his Creator. Mankind has the potential to acquire a status higher than that of the angels or sink lower than the lowliest of the beasts. The success story of a human being is contained in the word “Islam” itself.

The word ‘Islam’ has the dual meaning of submission and peace. Mankind is special, a very particular creation of Allah. But still we are Allah's creation and we can only properly understand ourselves when we recognise that our proper condition is one of submission to Allah who made us. And only when we submit to the Will of Allah can we find peace: peace within us as
individuals, peace between man and man, and peace between man and nature. When we submit to the Will of Allah, we become aware of the sublime fact that all our powers, potentials, skills and knowledge are granted to us by Allah. We are His servants and when we are conscious of that, when we realise that all our achievements derive from the Mercy of Allah and when we return proper thanks and respect and worship to Allah for our nature and creation, then we become free. Our freedom is that of being sensible, aware, responsible trustees of Allah's gifts and bounty.

The primary text of Islam- al-Qur'an abounds in the verses to establish the equilibrium and the state of tranquillity between man and his environment. The primordial character of Qur’anic messages visualizes man and the cosmos in a state of harmony that reaffirms man’s inner bond with the natural world. Certain verses of the Qur’an address natural forms as well as human beings, while God takes non-human members of His creation, such as plants and animals, the sun and the stars to witness in certain other verses. The soul which is nourished and sustained by the Qur’an does not regard the world of nature as its natural enemy to be conquered and subdued but as an integral part of man’s religious universe sharing in his earthly life, and in a sense, even ultimate destiny.

The Qur’an makes use of environmental theme in encouraging humankind to be moderate, “It is He who produces gardens, both cultivated and wild, and palm trees and crops of diverse kinds and olives and pomegranates both similar and dissimilar. Eat of their fruits when they bear fruit and pay their dues on the day of their harvest, and do not be wasteful. He does not love the squandering” Al- Qur’an (06: 141). The Qur’an refers to creation or the natural world as the signs (ayat) of Allah, the Creator, and this is also the name given to the verses contained in the Qur’an. Ayat means signs, symbols or proofs of the divine. As the Qur’an is proof of Allah so likewise is His creation. The Qur’an also speaks of signs within the human self and as Seyyid Hossein Nasr explains, “...When Muslim sages referred to the cosmic or ontological Qur’an...they saw upon the face of every creature letters and words from the cosmic Qur’an...they remained fully aware of the fact that the Qur’an refers to phenomena of nature and events within the soul of man as ayat ...for them forms of nature were literally ayat Allah”. The Qur’an says, “There are certainly signs (ayat) in the earth for people with certainty; and in yourselves. Do you not then see?” (51:20-21).

Delving upon the Quranic statements, we thus arrive at a position where we see that the universe we inhabit is a sign of God’s creation as is the environment of our innermost selves. They both emanate from the one source and are bonded by only one purpose, which is to serve the divine will. This bonding of the cosmic to the inner core of each individual is the profound ecology of Islam. The Qur’anic view holds that everything on the earth was created for humankind. It was God’s gift (ni’mah) to us, but a gift with conditions nevertheless. The tests are a measure of our acts of worship (ihsan) in its broadest sense. That is living in a way that is pleasing to Allah, striving in everything we do to maintain the harmony of our inner and outer environments. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) states that every human individual is born on Fitrah i.e. as a Muslim (One whose disposition is towards submission to his Creator) (Muslim). In the same manner all natural entities are patterned on Fitrah. To alter such order may breed disharmony and chaos in the personality of a human being and the nature surrounding him.
The heavenly bodies, the earth and its ecosystems all work within their own limits and tolerances. In the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) we have practical reflections of the above mentioned principles and guidelines. We have countless pronouncements and above all his acts that stimulate and convince a believer to maintain a healthy relationship with his/ her surroundings. The glorious Prophet was deeply concerned for the well being of both flora and fauna. He was equally striving for the purity of physical environments as earth, water, and air. At the very outset earth was declared as Mosque for the Prophet. Muslims could offer their prayers where ever they are on the surface of the earth. This declaration sanctioned the sacredness of earth and the responsibility of believers to ensure the purity and cleanliness of earth as is maintained in a mosque. The Prophet’s appreciation of the earth’s natural endowment is espoused, in the following Hadith, with a challenge: “The world is green and pleasant and God has put it under your charge to see how you will manage (Mishkat 3086). We have an instant answer in the Qur’an as, “The earth is inherited by those of God’s servants that do good works and fulfil their responsibilities (21:105). The good you give to the earth, the best will it give to you. It has been well said that plants are to earth what clothes are to man. In order to add to the beauty of the earth and to maintain its decorum, planting of trees becomes inevitable. In a very inspirational Hadith, Prophet exhorts his followers as: “If the day of resurrection comes upon any one of you while he has a seedling in his hand, let him plant it (Al-Bukhari).

Prophet had a special concern for earth and he could lose no chance to ensure the greenery of earth and its rightful and judicious use; thus the encouragement in a Hadith, “One who reclaims barren land is entitled to own it (Abu Dawud).

The act of plantation not only counts the benefits of the worldly life but registers the blessings of hereafter. In this respect the saying of the Prophet runs as “Anyone who plants a tree or sows a field, and a human, bird or animal eats from it, it shall be reckoned as charity from him (Bukhari and Muslim). Prophet used to remind his followers at every step that beauty is dear to God. Prophet said: “God is beautiful and He loves beauty. (Sunan Tirmidhi). In a widely quoted Hadith the Prophet (peace be upon him) declares that “Cleanliness is half of faith” (Sahih Muslim). The cleanliness of one’s own self and one’s surroundings forms the characteristic trait of a believer. “He who goes to bed at night with his hands unclean should only blame himself (if he falls ill), says Prophet (Mishkat).

Muslims have a special relationship with water. It is one of the great signs (ayat) of God in nature, and it has been mentioned specifically in the verses of the Qur’an. Water is indeed a sign of Allah that is everywhere in one of its many forms. For everyday Muslims, water is nothing more than an expression of the covenant, or trust, (amanah) we have with God, for with it we ritually purify ourselves to begin each act of worship. Prophet (peace be upon him) warned his followers of the consequences for withholding water: “There are three persons whom Allah will not look at on the Day of Resurrection, nor will he purify them and theirs shall be a severe punishment. One of them is a man [who] possessed superfluous water on a way and he withheld it from travellers.” This Hadith is incorporated by Ibrahim Abdul Matin in his famous book, Green Deen, at page 121. Islam strongly dislikes the wastage of resources. It prefers moderation in every act. But waste not by excess, for Allah loves not the wasters, says Quran (7:31). Muslims are expected to be humble and judicious in their words and deeds. Arrogance and haughtiness is prophesised as doom and destruction in Islam. The special feature of believers is
recorded in the Qur’an as, “And the servants of the All-Merciful are they who walk on the earth gently” (25:63). At another place Qur’an states, “O Children of Adam! Wear your beautiful apparel at every time and every place of prayer: eat and drink: but waste not by excess, for Allah loves not the wasters, as stated above (7:31).

As trees and fresh lakes of water adorn our planet so do the diverse animals and birds. The cruelty to animals and birds is forbidden in Islam. There are many examples from the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) that support this prohibition — for example: “No human being kills a sparrow or [something] larger, without right, except that Allah will ask him about it on Judgment Day, says Prophet.” Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) directed us to treat animals with love. They are not to be disrespected, denied food or water, or hurt in any way. The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) once told the story of a woman who was punished because of a cat she had imprisoned until it died. “She entered the (Hell) Fire because of it, for she neither gave the cat food nor water as she had imprisoned it, nor set it free to eat from the Earth, quotes Ibrahim Abdul Matin in his Green Deen at page 173.

The precepts drawn from both the Qur’an and the Sunnah exhort mankind to be at peace with one’s own self and towards nature and society. Islam holds that the earth and the cosmos are set in equilibrium, and to alter such balance may summon harm and imbalance in our lives. Qur’an warns us in such words as, “Do no mischief on the Earth after it has been set in order; but call on Him with fear and longing (in your hearts): for the mercy of Allah is (always) near to those who do good” (7:56). Indeed Qur’an and the example of Prophet urge us to partake in the beautification and maintenance of worldly order. On the contrary “There is near total disequilibrium between modern man and nature as attested by nearly every expression of modern civilisation which seeks to offer a challenge to nature rather than to co-operate with it, laments Seyyid Hossein Nasr in his work Man and Nature at page 20.

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: “Whoever among you sees an evil action, let him change it with his hand [by taking action]; if he cannot, then with his tongue [by speaking out]; and if he cannot, then with his heart [by hating it and feeling that it is wrong] — and that is the weakest of faith.” The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was urging humanity to take action and speak out, and at the very least, recognize in our hearts when something is wrong. The above Hadith is slotted in by Ibrahim Abdul Matin in his Green Deen at page 131. The words of the Prophet echo the words of Allah, “…Help you one another in Al-Birr and At-Taqwa (Virtue, Righteousness and Piety); but do not help one another in sin and transgression. And fear Allah. Verily, Allah is severe in punishment (05:02). Thus the destiny of one’s own self and of the environment lies in the hands of mankind. All the ugly consequences bore by humanity resulting from the depletion of natural resources and the pollution cum contamination of air, water, and soil is the work of the hands of mankind itself. To beautify or to blemish our planet rests on our own actions for Qur’an openly declares, “Corruption has appeared in both land and sea because of what people’s own hands have brought about so that they may taste something of what they have done, so that hopefully they will turn back” (30-41).

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July 25, 2017

Vatican shuts down fountains as Rome deals with drought

By Junno Arocho Esteves
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- While Rome reels from one of its worst droughts in decades, the Vatican is doing its part to conserve water by shutting down the city-state's 100 fountains.

The office governing Vatican City State announced July 25 that the drought has "led the Holy See to take measures aimed at saving water" by shutting down fountains in St. Peter's Square, throughout the Vatican Gardens and in the territory of the state.

"The decision is in line with the teachings of Pope Francis, who reminds us in his encyclical 'Laudato Si' how 'the habit of wasting and discarding' has reached 'unprecedented levels' while 'fresh drinking water is an issue of primary importance, since it is indispensable for human life and for supporting terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems,"' the office said.

The prolonged drought has forced officials from the Lazio region of Italy to halt pumping water from Lake Bracciano, located roughly 19 miles north of Rome. Less than usual rainfalls in the past two years have steadily depleted the lake, which provides 8 percent of the city's water supply.

In an interview with Italian news outlet Tgcom24, Nicola Zingaretti, the region's president, said the lake's water level has "fallen too much and we risk an environmental disaster."

While the drought already forced Rome city officials to shut down some of Rome's public drinking fountains in June, it may lead to strict water rationing for the city's estimated 1.5 million residents.

City officials may also take the Vatican's lead and shut down water pouring down from Rome's many ancient fountains.

Pilgrims and visitors alike have marveled at the majestic fountains of St. Peter's Square that have cascaded water for centuries since their construction in the 17th century.

While the source of water was once provided from an ancient Roman aqueduct, the two fountains, as well as 10 percent of Vatican City State's 100 fountains "recirculate water currently," Greg Burke, Vatican spokesman, told Catholic News Service in a July 25 email.

Others, he added, "will eventually be transformed in order to recirculate" the same water rather than let it be wasted by running into the drainage or sewer system.
Burke told CNS that the Vatican's move to switch off the fountains located within its territory is "a way to show a good example" in conserving water as the city deals with the crisis.

"We're not going to be able to solve Rome's water problem this summer, but we can do our part," Burke said. "This is the Vatican putting 'Laudato Si' into action. Let's not waste water."


July 25, 2017

Keeping faith in forests

By Frances Seymour, World Resources Institute
Thomson Reuters Foundation

If climate change is the defining challenge for human society, preserving tropical forests is essential - and faith can help

I grew up as the minister’s daughter in a Baptist church in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, a college town in the southern US. I witnessed first-hand how organized and energized faith communities took on the cause of racial justice in the early 1960s, as church leaders and lay members pushed to integrate the public school system, restaurants, and even the University of North Carolina basketball team.

Fifty years on, climate change has emerged as the defining challenge for human society around the globe, and conservation of the world’s tropical forests is essential to stabilizing the atmosphere. Standing forests provide safe-keeping for the carbon embodied in leaves, branches, trunks, roots, and soil.

Forests are also the only technology for carbon capture and storage to date that is safe, natural, proven, and cheap. Tropical forests alone capture 1.4 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide annually, almost as much as the combined emissions from France, Germany, and the United Kingdom in 2015.

And just like in my youth, religious communities are now mobilizing the faithful, helping world leaders include forest conservation—and the rights of indigenous peoples, stewards of these forests—in climate change strategies. The most well known statement was issued two years ago when Pope Francis published his encyclical, Laudato Si. This widely quoted thesis singled out tropical deforestation early and often as a threat to many values of importance to the world’s religions.

But the Pope is not alone in his advocacy. He is joined by clergy and lay people from many faiths, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism, all of which share messages of respect and stewardship for the natural world, as well as a moral obligation to help the poor.
Over the last 30 years, these leaders have participated in a growing movement to focus religious attention on environmental challenges, leading to a summit in June that formally launched an Interfaith Rainforest Initiative.

Appreciation for the wonder and beauty of nature is a thread that weaves across a wide variety of religious traditions. “For the Beauty of the Earth” was a hymn sung frequently in the worship services of my childhood in praise and thanks for Creation. Tropical forests harbor some two-thirds of the world’s terrestrial biodiversity, ranging from the charismatic megafauna of jaguars and gorillas to the astonishing variety of flowering plants.

In many human cultures, spiritual traditions are inextricably bound up with nature, with forests figuring prominently in creation narratives from all parts of the world. Among the participants in the Oslo meeting are indigenous leaders from the Amazon, Congo Basin, and Southeast Asia. Indigenous communities are the de facto stewards of much of the world’s remaining forested areas, even if their rights to these forests often remain unrecognized.

But in addition to their spiritual values, intact forests provide a wealth of wild products and environmental services that nurture and sustain human communities from local to global scales. Households that live in and around forests in developing countries derive, on average, more than one-fifth of their incomes from forest products such as fuelwood, honey, and wild fruits. And recent research reveals that forests generate the rainfall that maintains agricultural productivity in landscapes thousands of miles from the forest edge.

Faith leaders care especially about the connections between access to forest goods and services and amelioration of poverty and injustice. Dorothy Stang, the American-born nun murdered in the Brazilian Amazon in 2005, is one of many people of faith who have been martyred for standing up to the loggers, ranchers, and other agents of deforestation that destroy the forest-based livelihoods of the rural poor.

And among these injustices, climate change now looms as the largest. An increasingly unstable climate will worsen poverty and inequality, both within and between nations. Exposure to just one severe tropical storm—of the sort expected to become more frequent and severe with climate change—can knock a country off its path of economic growth for decades.

For poor households—without financial assets, sturdy housing, insurance, or access to medical services—the droughts, floods, fires, and pestilence that accompany a warming planet are beginning to look apocalyptic. To cite just one example, the 2015 fires in Indonesia—fueled by damaged forests and peatlands—are estimated to have caused some 100,000 premature deaths.

Achieving the goals of the 2015 Paris Agreement and limiting the scope of global warming is hard to imagine without forests. Currently, emissions from deforestation are a major cause of climate change, accounting for more annual emissions than those from all sources in the European Union. And the role forests play, in removing carbon from the atmosphere, is critical; they buy the world time to achieve the deep, dramatic cuts in fossil fuel use needed to slow global warming.
When I get discouraged about the possibility of achieving the Paris goals I remember my childhood, when my father started his ministry in Chapel Hill. At that time, racial segregation was the norm and Coach Dean Smith’s recruitment of UNC’s first African American basketball player was a breakthrough. Today, my father’s church, where Coach Smith found support and encouragement, now has an “Earth Ministry” and solar panels on its roof.

Agents of change inspired by religious conviction are again taking the lead. People of faith are bound to follow.

Frances Seymour is a distinguished senior fellow at World Resources Institute. She is the lead author of the book, Why Forests? Why Now? The Science, Economics, and Politics of Tropical Forests and Climate Change and the former Director General of the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR).

http://news.trust.org/item/20170725163604-unjqw/

July 26, 2017

This massive natural gas pipeline will run right through Native American communities

By Mark Hand
Think Progress

Dominion’s Atlantic Coast Pipeline disproportionately affects Native communities.

Protests against the Dakota Access oil pipeline in North Dakota escalated more than a year ago when Native Americans realized the pipeline’s developers and government officials intended to ignore their request to reroute the pipeline around the Standing Rock reservation.

The decision to proceed on building the Dakota Access pipeline on a path opposed by Native Americans highlighted how federal and state government agencies are accustomed to ignoring or downplaying the concerns of indigenous populations.

Now, a similar scenario is playing out in Virginia and North Carolina, where Native Americans are urging federal, state, and local officials to listen to their concerns about the 600-mile Atlantic Coast Pipeline, a pipeline system that would transport fracked gas from West Virginia into Virginia and North Carolina.

Native Americans “didn’t have opportunities to learn how the route was chosen or to provide input on bodies of water or specific landscapes that their tribes consider sacred and that they might have problems with a pipeline passing through,” Ryan Emanuel, a member of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina who serves on the environmental justice committee of the North Carolina Commission of Indian Affairs, told ThinkProgress.
About 30,000, or 13 percent, of the people who live within one mile of the proposed route of the pipeline in North Carolina are Native American, even though Native Americans represent only 1.2 percent of the state’s total population.

The pipeline originates in northern West Virginia, a region that is seeing heavy natural gas production, and ends in Robeson County, North Carolina, a county with one of the highest percentages of Native Americans east of the Mississippi River.

The Atlantic Coast Pipeline’s proposed route crosses territories of four Native American tribes in North Carolina: the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina, the Tuscarora, the Haliwa-Saponi, the Coharie, and the Meherrin Nation. Of the eight counties in the state through which the pipeline would travel, four have large Native American communities.

Members of tribal groups worry the pipeline could damage sacred Native American sites and the surrounding environment. Last Friday, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) issued a final environmental review of the pipeline, concluding that the impact on the environment would be reduced to “less-than-significant” levels if the developers follow certain mitigation measures.

FERC did not conduct a comprehensive assessment of the pipeline’s impact on Native American communities along the pipeline’s route. But the agency did instruct pipeline developer Dominion Energy to submit documentation showing that it met with tribes in North Carolina prior to beginning construction. The project is also owned by Duke Energy, Piedmont Natural Gas, and Southern Company Gas.

“I still don’t believe that the FEIS [final environmental impact statement] acknowledges the disproportionate impacts on indigenous peoples in North Carolina,” Emanuel said.

In an article published in the July 21 issue of Science, Emanuel, a professor of forestry and environmental resources at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, North Carolina, wrote that the Dakota Access Pipeline controversy “demonstrates that all parties suffer when environmental justice analyses and tribal consultation are treated as meaningless rote exercises.”

One of the biggest issues in the Dakota Access dispute was the issue of consultation, a term used to describe official communication between the federal government and tribes. The Standing Rock Sioux is a federally recognized tribe, which gave it standing to have formal consultation with the federal government.

In North Carolina, the tribes whose land would be impacted by the Atlantic Coast Pipeline are not federally recognized. By statute, federal agencies are not required to offer consultation to these tribes. However, the advisory body for the National Historic Preservation Act recommends that federal agencies offer formal consultation to non-federal tribes if they can demonstrate an interest in a particular issue. In the case of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, FERC did not offer formal consultation to the North Carolina tribes.

Dominion had not responded to a request for comment at the time this article was published.
Even though FERC approves almost every pipeline application it reviews, the indigenous population along the pipeline’s route remains hopeful in its opposition. “It’s definitely not a done deal, even though they’re presenting it like it is. It falls upon us as citizens to make people understand that it’s not something that’s set in stone,” said anti-pipeline activist Jorden Revels, a Native American student at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke in Robeson County.

Fix Cain, a representative with the Coalition of Woodland Nations, a group formed to unite Native people to protect the environment, sacred sites, and areas of cultural and historical significance, said he had heard reports that the pipeline route was originally designed to travel west of the current route, through the Piedmont region of North Carolina, where communities are not as economically disadvantaged as the eastern part of the state.

“They didn’t want the pipeline to go through their backyards,” Cain told ThinkProgress. Instead, the modified route is “hitting almost every single contemporary and historical native community between western Virginia all the way down to southeastern North Carolina,” said Cain, a member of the Skaroreh Katenuaka Nation, which is part of the Tuscarora community.

“These same communities are also some of the most economically fragile and not just in the Native communities. You have impoverished white communities, you have impoverished African American communities, and various other minority communities here as well. There’s nobody here who can afford to fight it,” he said.

New industries are emerging in the region that could help strengthen local economies without causing significant pollution—unlike fossil fuel infrastructure or the region’s ubiquitous hog and chicken farms. From 2007 to 2014, Robeson County had the highest eight-year investment in solar farms in the state with $170.6 million and the second-highest total renewable energy investment with $188.6 million, according to a report.

“In the midst of all these negative stories, eastern North Carolina is starting to see a boom in deployed solar panel operations. There are a lot of people who think these communities should be looking at things like solar power and not be the dumping ground for the types of industries that pollute air and water,” Emanuel said.

North of the border, in Virginia, the pipeline also threatens sacred sites of the Monacan Indian Nation, according to anti-pipeline activists. During the regulatory review process, the Monacan Nation wrote to FERC voicing its “strong opposition” to the pipeline’s construction through Nelson County, Virginia due to its impact on archaeological sites.

“Our tribe was one of the first formally in opposition to the Atlantic Coast Pipeline and we were the first to send a letter to FERC outlining our opposition and the reasons for our opposition,” said Dwayne Painter, a member of the Monacan Nation and a representative with the Coalition of Woodland Nations.

Opposition to the pipeline is growing among Native Americans along the East Coast, Cain said. With the Monacan people, if they want us to stand with them and block the pipeline, “that may not be completely out of the question,” he stated.
“We want to make sure this is done as peacefully as possible. We want to exhaust all legal methods before we have to get out there on foot and protest,” Cain said. The protest against the Dakota Access pipeline was the largest Native American unification in history, Cain noted. Virginia and North Carolina, on the other hand, have traditionally been “pretty shaky” on unification of the tribal people for any issue.

Witnessing how the Dakota Access pipeline developers trampled on sacred Native American grounds in North Dakota, Cain said, invigorated tribal members in Virginia and North Carolina to oppose the Atlantic Coast Pipeline by encouraging them to educate fellow members.

FERC has 90 days after issuing its final environmental analysis to make a decision on the pipeline. Dominion Energy also must receive state water permits for the pipeline. The original targeted in-service date for the Atlantic Coast Pipeline project was late 2018, but the company now expects the pipeline will begin serving customers in early 2019.


July 27, 2017

Homeless center goes solar, adds to 'faith bottom line'

By James Dearie
National Catholic Reporter

Lexington, Kentucky - The Catholic Action Center here will soon adopt solar power as its sole source of energy, perhaps becoming one of the first homeless centers in the country to take this innovative step.

Since its founding in 1999, the center strives to meet the spiritual needs of its residents, providing daily prayer services, for example, and it has held nearly 100 funerals for residents who died alone. It also helps connect its guests to the services they need outside the walls of the center. It accepts no government funding and is run by unpaid volunteers.

In April, Catholic Action Center moved to its current location on Industry Road and is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, combining services under one roof that were previously offered in four different buildings. It provides 129 guests a place to sleep and serves between 400 and 500 meals a day. It also has activities, including a choir, bingo, Bible studies, Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, and has even produced a play, written and performed by guests of the center, which did a small local tour for the center's 10th anniversary.

Ginny Ramsey, who helped found the Catholic Action Center and has served as its director since, said that she began to envision the switch to solar power when she got approval to buy the previously city-owned building earlier this year.
As an organization that provides dozens of showers and several hundred meals a day, Ramsey said "we are a big footprint." She became certain that God was calling her to make the energy switch in June, when President Donald Trump announced the United States' withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord.

As the center is funded entirely through the good will of the local community, Ramsey initially met with skepticism that the project could find the necessary financing, "but we do our due diligence," she said.

The Catholic Action Center partnered with Edelen Strategic Ventures, a management consultancy also based in Lexington, to help put together a plan. The firm has previous experience as a solar energy leader, helping a local coal mining company open a solar farm on an old mine strip, and is led by former Kentucky auditor of public accounts Adam Edelen, who has worked with Catholic Action Center in the past.

"We believe that the center is the first shelter to go solar without any government subsidy," Edelen said.

Local company Synergy Home LLC installed the panels for a reduced price, and Eastern Kentucky-based Traditional Bank financed the $75,000 project. The center expects that the switch to solar power will pay for itself in the next five to seven years.

"The return on investment is so great," said Ramsey. "There is no other way can you get this kind of [return]."

The center will also be able to take advantage of a Kentucky law that allows buildings powered by solar panels to place some of their power into the electric grid and receive credit on electric bills for energy used when the sun goes down.

Sarah, a Mississippi-born woman who has been a guest at the center and involved in its choir for the past five years, said that the switch to solar power has been "great," in connecting guests and staff to creation.

"It gives us all a better sense of life," she said. "It's about the community."

Ramsey credits the community of Lexington for helping to make the Catholic Action Center and its solar project a reality, from the hundreds of faith communities that support it financially, to the businesses that have partnered in its work or donated food.

"We have been very blessed by the way the community responds," she said. "We connect people; that's our job. All of us are broken and can only be healed by connectedness and relationships."

Ramsey said that even as the work of connecting the Catholic Action Center, its guests and the community continues, so does spreading the word about care for the environment. "It's about more than just saving dollars," she said, "it's about being a witness."
In the days leading up to the switch, Ramsey and Edelen sent out literature explaining both the environmental and financial benefits of going solar to many of the faith groups that support the Catholic Action Center. Edelen believes that the shelter has provided a model for faith communities trying to become more environmentally conscious.

"They found a way to make it work for their faith bottom line as well as their financial bottom line," he said.

In the meantime, the center's work with the disadvantaged of Lexington continues. Ramsey believes that her community has seen an abundance of signs of God's blessings throughout the years.

"I've always said the day we can't pay our electric bill is the day the good Lord is telling us to close," she said. "We haven't closed; we've expanded, and now the good Lord is paying our electric bill."

[James Dearie is a writer from Cincinnati, Ohio. He graduated from the University of Notre Dame in 2017 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science and theology.]


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**July 31, 2017**

Climate change: It’s not just for liberals anymore

By Renee Garfinkel

Washington Times

Al Gore’s prominence in the climate change discussion has led some in the media to assume that it’s strictly a liberal and secular issue. They are wrong.

On a viciously hot day in Jerusalem this brutally hot summer, three prominent religious figures - a Christian, a Muslim and a Jew - gathered at the Jerusalem Press Club to call for action on climate change, “the ultimate religious imperative of our time!”

These religious leaders are not members of liberal denominations - quite the contrary; religiously speaking, you might call them strict constructionists. Father Francesco Patton is the Franciscan order’s chief custodian of the Holy Land, Kadi Iyad Zahalha, is a judge on the Shari’a Court of Appeal in Israel and Rabbi David Rosen is an Orthodox rabbi who was the former Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

Brought together by the Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development, the three spoke from their hearts to an audience of international media. Although they based their comments on different sacred texts, they expressed a unified message:

- Protecting the environment is a religious obligation.
Climate change is an urgent problem.
Interfaith cooperation is required to properly address it.

We human beings are part of nature, the panel agreed, created by one God, and given the responsibility to care for and protect the rest of creation. Failure to meet this obligation constitutes sin. When we stand idly by as the environment degrades, we are also failing our responsibility to fellow humans, and to future generations. In Rabbi Rosen’s words, the answer to the environmentally related question, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” must be a vigorous “yes!”

Father Patton made reference to his own personal history. He recalled his childhood on a farm in Northern Italy, when the harvest normally took place in September and October. Now they harvest in August. “Strange summers,” he observed, that bring unusual heat and thunderstorms.

Recognizing the ongoing political conflicts that blazed even as we met, Kadi Zahalha said, “Let’s leave conflict out of this dialogue; leave that to others.” He poignantly noted, “what is the point of struggling for territory if it will all become desert?” Father Patton referred to Pope Francis’ comments about the worldwide refugee crisis, which includes climate refugees as well as war refugees. Populations are migrating to find sustenance, fleeing exhausted lands, now arid and unproductive. (Seventeen million people face hunger in East Africa alone this year, according to the United Nations.)

We can no longer afford to ignore the relationship between an overheating, parched environment and global political issues. Case in point: The war being waged by Saudi Arabia against Iran’s proxies in Yemen, combined with a record, climate-change compounded drought, has resulted in the worst cholera epidemic in modern history, which has already spread beyond Yemen’s borders.

The message of this conservatively religious panel was clear: Responding to climate change is a religious imperative. That was also the message Pope Francis sent when he gave President Trump a copy of his encyclical on climate change. That is, as well, the message of the statement by Israel Orthodox Rabbis on the Climate Crisis, and the Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change.

The faiths that inspire us with a vision of nature in the fabled Garden of Eden are now calling upon us to act to protect what’s left of the garden.


July 31, 2017

In development goals, sisters set a people-first example

By Chris Herlinger
Global Sisters Report
Summer may be a time when the pace of work and life slow down a bit. That's not the case for those fighting global poverty.

The United Nations recently concluded a set of meetings on its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development — the efforts by the global community to eradicate poverty and promote development that is sustainable in a world facing severe environmental challenges.

A centerpiece of the U.N.'s work in the last few weeks was a high-level forum convened by the United Nations' Economic and Social Council. The July 17-20 meetings, held at U.N. headquarters in New York, were a chance for governments, advocacy groups and others to assess how the world is doing in reaching 17 sustainable development goals.

These goals aim — and aim high — to end poverty and hunger, promote action on climate change, and end gender inequality.

Secretary-General António Guterres said during the meetings that "implementation has begun, but the clock is ticking," the U.N. News Service reported. An assessment of the agenda, he said July 17, "shows that the rate of progress in many areas is far slower than needed to meet the targets by 2030."

In other words, greater efforts are needed to meet the goals.

It's a high order, and those involved in the work, including Catholic sisters who represent their congregations at the U.N., know these meetings may seem like a long, drawn-out, maybe even tedious process. But, hopefully, meetings at the U.N. do some good and help keep the world on track and focused on needed changes for the global community.

In written testimony to the Economic and Social Council, the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, which has ministries in 74 countries, made clear that those at the grassroots are experiencing "multi-dimensional poverty — 'lingering deprivations,' gender inequality and effects of climate change."

Those living in poverty, the congregation said, face overlapping challenges, including poor health, malnutrition, lack of sanitation and clean water, inadequate education, violence, and some things that may seem intangible but are all too real, such as shame and disempowerment.

The Good Shepherd congregation urged the U.N. to encourage its member states to promote policies that encourage new thinking; not be afraid to tackle controversial matters, such as social norms that exclude and discriminate against people; and, this is key, promote ways for those living in poverty to become actors "at the center of their own development."

Luckily, this idea has the support of many at the United Nations. During the recent U.N. meetings, Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed urged governmental bodies to more fully embrace the 2030 agenda and the sustainable development goals.
When the center of government functions effectively, collective expertise from across the public sector can be mobilized and brought to bear on the most pressing decisions confronting a country," she said on July 18, the U.N.'s news service reported.

She said it was important that governments listen to their citizens and seek their participation in programs to help alleviate poverty, adding that the goals have a people-first focus.

"No one is too hard to reach," she said.

It is not surprising that sisters know this already: They are promoting people-centered programs that move away from viewing people living in poverty as objects of pity but as the real center of ending poverty. I know from my travel experiences in countries like Haiti that the sisters are tireless in such efforts.

A program new to me is Mercy Focus on Haiti, a ministry of the Sisters of Mercy. The congregation just announced a new initiative in Haiti's Gros Morne region, an isolated and impoverished area in northwest Haiti.

The congregation is working with the Haitian-based microfinance alliance Fonkoze in an 18-month program the congregation said is "designed to enable ultra-poor women to emerge from poverty by acquiring income-generating assets and the skills, health, and confidence to grow such assets."

The Fonkoze program, called Chemen Lavi Miyò (the Pathway to a Better Life), has already graduated 5,000 Haitian women in other parts of the country. It aligns well with the congregation's focus on efforts in Gros Morne, which have included immersion trips by congregational members as well as supporting local, on-the-ground efforts in such areas as agronomy, women's programs, and housing for senior citizens.

The Mercy sisters have a long history in Haiti, said congregational spokesperson Maureen Falcon, and as part of their programs will bring medical interns from Johns Hopkins University to the Gros Morne area twice a year.

The Fonkoze program is based on participants developing dependable livelihoods.

"They learn to manage income-generating activities, and they receive the assets needed to jumpstart their economic activities," the congregation said in an announcement of the initiative. "They then receive close accompaniment through weekly home visits throughout the program."

Mercy Focus on Haiti raised the money needed to bring the Fonkoze program to Gros Morne and celebrated a launch ceremony July 13.

Sr. Kathy Thornton, a member of Mercy Focus on Haiti, said the launch "filled my heart with joy for the 200 women and their families whose lives will change forever in the next 18 months."

Another 200 women will join the program in 20 months, Falcon said.
This model of sisters supporting the work of local groups is becoming increasingly common. Earlier this year, the Atlantic-Midwest Province of the School Sisters of Notre Dame said it is joining the Washington, D.C.-based humanitarian organization Beyond Borders in a partnership in Haiti.

These alliances and partnerships may well be part of the larger efforts to end poverty. They are certainly needed, as those at the U.N. know.

"Empowering vulnerable groups is critical to ending poverty and promoting prosperity for everyone, everywhere," said Wu Hongbo, the U.N.'s under-secretary-general for economic and social affairs.

[Chris Herlinger is GSR international correspondent. His email address is cherlinger@ncronline.org.]

http://globalsistersreport.org/blog/gsr-today/equality/development-goals-sisters-set-people-first-example-48276

August 1, 2017

Trees donated to Whanganui's Sisters of St Joseph project

By Laurel Stowell
New Zealand Herald

They bought land, made a wetland and now Whanganui's Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart want to plant the steep hillside below their Mount St Joseph.

The hill is "what's holding it all up", Sister Noeline Landrigan said. It suffered slips in the June 2015 heavy rain and sheep can no longer be grazed on it.

The sisters applied to national body Trees That Count for a donation of up to 300 native trees to help hold on to the soil. There were more than 1000 applications and theirs was one of seven lucky ones.

The trees arrive next month, and Sr Noeline is organising a planting day for August 30, starting at 9am. Anyone who wants to help can ring Mount St Joseph on weekdays and register with Karen Erueti, ph 345 5047.

The Sisters used to own a little farm on the edge of St John's Hill. They kept the land at the top, and their Mount St Joseph base and Nazareth Rest Home and Hospital are built on it.

They bought a 1ha swampy area back from a neighbour, and turned it into the Te Punanga Ripo wetland in 2004. It's now a nursery for eels, Sr Noeline said, and the eels have to leave it to get to sea and breed.
"Some of the staff have seen old female eels heading across our drive down to the river."

Some of the Sisters' hillside is already taken up with one of the City Mission's gardens, and about 80 fruit trees. Much of the rest is very steep.

Sr Noelene has had Whanganui plant ecologist Colin Ogle there, to make a list of suitable trees. She wants some for bird and bee forage, and all will store carbon, slow the pace of rainwater and hold on to the hillside soil.

Species are likely to include ngaio, pittosporums and matai. She's hoping they will shade out the kikuyu grass growing there, and stop it spreading.

Much of the work will be done by part-time employee Shane Dean, who helps with the planning. The Corrections Department's community workers will do any heavy jobs.

The project is in line with Pope Francis' views on "integral ecology", and Sr Noelene is part of a group of sisters investigating the true meaning of kaitiakitanga with tangata whenua.

"It's the local understanding of love of the Earth and relationship with the Earth," she said.

http://www2.nzherald.co.nz/the-country/news/article.cfm?c_id=16&objectid=11896331

August 2, 2017

Religious leaders unite to fight Holy Land environmental issues

By Judith Sudilovsky
Catholic News Service

JERUSALEM (CNS) — A heat wave in Israel and the Palestinian territories in July and near-record electricity usage — where it was available — are indications that, despite the continuous political tensions here, Christians, Muslims and Jews are facing a common enemy that needs to be confronted in a united manner.

“The level of the lake of Tiberias and of the Dead Sea is lower than 10 years ago, and the landscape is changing because of a continuous construction of houses,” Franciscan Father Francesco Patton, custos of the Holy Land, told Catholic News Service.

Father Patton and two other religious leaders spoke at a recent news conference organized by The Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development, a Jerusalem-based environmental organization. They spoke about the urgency of putting aside political and religious difference to face these challenges and the role religious leaders can take in increasing awareness of the issue.

Rabbi David Rosen, international director of interreligious affairs for the American Jewish Committee, told journalists the Jordan River Valley, another area of Biblical importance, is
facing an environmental crisis. In a covenant signed by religious leaders four years ago, they noted that over the past 50 years, the lower Jordan River has had 96 percent of its flow diverted, and what little water remains is polluted with saline and liquid waste or sewage.

Father Patton told CNS that other pressing issues in the Holy Land include the increasing water shortage, improper waste disposal and growing air pollution in various regions.

While Israel has begun a garbage recycling program, the Palestinian Authority has yet to institute such an effort. Awareness of proper garbage disposal is also an issue among certain sectors of both populations, with many people still tossing garbage on the side of the road or outside their buildings, with little regard to garbage bins at their disposal. In certain places of East Jerusalem, garbage pickup by the municipality is either lacking or erratic, and Palestinian residents often burn their own garbage for lack of a better solution.

Recent internal political differences have caused electrical shortages in the Gaza Strip. This has affected the ability of the sewage system to function properly, which has caused raw sewage to flow into the Mediterranean Sea, which borders Egypt and Israel.

The northern industrial Israel port city of Haifa, though often lauded for its political tolerance, is also often sighted even by its own residents for the lack of the environmental controls over the chemical factories located on its seashore. In a position paper earlier this year, the Israeli Ministry of Health noted Haifa has a 15 percent higher rate of cancer than the rest of Israel and leads the country in asthma and breathing problems.

Father Patton, Rabbi Rosen and Kadi Iyad Zahalka, head judge of the Muslim Shariah courts in Israel, said religious leaders needed to unite in their efforts to educate and create a greater awareness about these environmental issues.

“We should offer values that can inspire the everyday life of people, and also recall the principles of our religious traditions that can inspire wise economic and political policies and decisions,” Father Patton told CNS.

He noted that the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, which is in charge of holy places, is working on a pilot project to include environmental education in its local schools curriculum for the coming school year.

The impact of climate change can be easily ignored if a person lives in an acclimatized environment with the air conditioning on in the summer and heating on in the winter, said Father Patton, the son of a farmer in northern Italy. He told CNS he has seen how the harvest seasons have changed over the past 10 years.

“This means something has changed … climate change is something which touches our lives,” he said.

Referring to the papal encyclical “Laudato Si’, on Care for Our Common Home,” Father Patton noted the value of an interfaith strategy toward environmental issues in the Holy Land in the
form of an “integral ecology.” He said the issue is not only one of “environmental ecology” but also of “cultural ecology,” which “connects the ecological issue to many fields in a reciprocal relationship.”

“In this place, it is particularly important to have a linked vision, to work on a connection … between different cultures (and religions) of Judaism, Islam and Christianity. This is an integral vision of ecology in the encyclical of Pope Francis,” Father Patton told CNS. “He speaks of the importance of dialogue between religions of different faiths in this field. We can work as people of goodwill.”

At the news conference, the religious leaders discussed the common respect for the environment and nature inherent in their religious traditions and holy books, and the responsibility these teachings entrust to people.

Despite the continuing political violence and struggle to control land not only in Jerusalem and the whole Middle East, but also around the world, people need to start discussing the issues of real importance concerning climate change and environmental sustainability before there is no land left to fight over, said Zahalka.

“Our lives are more important than all these issues,” he said. The issue of environmental sustainability “gives us the opportunity to rethink all these (political) issues and put them into context … to focus and invest in what is really important, which is life.”

Father Patton said the creation of an interfaith environmental dialogue could even serve as a confidence-building measure between Israelis and Palestinians and others in the region, which could enable future discussions on social, political and religious issues.

“We received the gift of creation and, first and foremost, we are part of creation, we are not over creation. We have a shared responsibility toward this generation,” he told journalists. “We can cooperate for something important for every human being in the present and in the future.”


August 3, 2017

African youth takes stand at first ever WCC Eco-School

World Council of Churches

“It is imperative for churches to invest in the youth of Africa so they can take leadership in addressing these issues in the timeframe of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals”, said Prof. Dr Isabel Phiri, World Council of Churches (WCC) deputy general secretary for Diakonia and Public Witness as she spoke to young people attending the first-ever WCC Eco-School in Blantyre, Malawi.
The “Eco-School on Water, Food, Health and Climate Justice,” a 10-day capacity building workshop held from 24 July – 3 August was co-organized by two WCC initiatives, the Ecumenical Water Network and Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance.

Vulnerable communities in Africa are some of the most affected by climate change, often suffering disproportionately from lack of food and water as well as illness.

It is vital for all of us to see these challenges through the lenses of justice and human dignity, but perhaps most vital is for the youth of Africa to lead the way toward a future in which all people can lead full lives.

The Eco-School reflects the WCC’s commitment to helping youth fulfill a defining role in building resilient and transformative communities.

Thirty young people from 16 countries gathered for comprehensive and intensive study involving inputs from various disciplines, experiential learning, community interactions and field visits.

Fourteen experts and faculty members representing 10 different countries, including WCC staff, guided the school, which was hosted by the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian – Blantyre Synod, at its Grace Bandawe Conference Centre, which provided a lively campus setting. Young people had the opportunity to study and reflect on local, regional, and international manifestations and causes of the water crisis, food insecurity, health challenges and the impacts of climate change.

The eco-school’s commitment to including spiritual life deepened the students’ understanding of ecological issues, with particular emphasis on climate change, water, food and health, in the context of their faith and profoundly influenced the proceedings and deliberations.

Apart from participating in Bible studies, the students offered devotions and prayers focusing and reaffirming their studies. Students also preached on eco-justice in three Blantyre congregations.

Participants were given certificates of recognition for successfully completing the course.


August 3, 2017

Delray religious school teaches about Jewish cuisine

By Randall P. Lieberman
South Florida Sun-Sentinel
JoAnn Gorodetzer, a teacher at the religious school of Temple Sinai of Palm Beach County in Delray Beach, says there is an old joke about Jewish food.

"They tried to kill us," Gorodetzer starts. "They failed. Let's eat."

All kidding aside, Gorodetzer believes Jewish food is very important in Jewish culture as something all Jews have in common — and she incorporates the teaching of Jewish cuisine into her classes at the religious school at Temple Sinai (a Reform congregation).

"I incorporate Jewish cuisine into my Judaics curriculum at the Temple Sinai Religious School to help students make connections to their personal family histories, our collective Jewish history and contemporary Jewish living," Gorodetzer said. "We also collect family recipes for a classroom cookbook among other activities.

"We make hamantaschen (fruit-filled pastries) before Purim, matzah (unleavened bread) on Pesach, and hummus (mashed chickpea dip) for Yom Ha'atzmaut (Israeli Independence Day)."

Gorodetzer piloted this curriculum with the fourth and fifth grades at the Temple Sinai Religious School last year and will be teaching it to the fifth and sixth grades this year.

"When JoAnn came to me with the idea to teach this last year, I thought it would be great for our students," said Rivka Felsher, religious school director of Temple Sinai of Palm Beach County. "The kids love it. They put on their gloves and get a little messy. It takes them out of their comfort zone which helps open up their minds."

According to Felsher, another project the Temple Sinai Religious School will feature this year is My Family Story — a cultural history project using a curriculum written by Beit Hatfutsot (Museum of the Jewish People) in Tel Aviv in Israel.

This program will help teach Temple Sinai's students in grades seven through nine about how their current family is shaped by Jewish traditions, history and cultures.

"This program will allow our students to trace their family roots through the Jewish diaspora based on where their families came from," Felsher said. "The program is project-based learning in a six- to eight-week module — allowing the students to really go in depth with their explorations of this topic."

Finally, this year the Temple Sinai Religious School is adding a focus on ecology throughout the entire school.

"We will be teaching our students about being stewards of the earth and practicing spiritual ecology as guided by Torah principles — led by Rabbi Aviva Bass, the spiritual leader of our temple," Felsher said. "We will be doing fundraising for tree planting and greening projects in Delray Beach — and starting a gleaning program to help grow, gather and distribute tree fruits for the hungry in our area."
No matter what curriculum is being taught, parents of students in the Temple Sinai Religious School praise the school for its atmosphere.

Marta Josephson of Lake Worth has a daughter Jenna, 11, going into sixth grade.

"Jenna loves the Temple Sinai Religious School," Josephson said. "She loves going there every week and she just loves the teachers. There's something about the atmosphere there where the kids just feel comfortable."

"When my son Jake, who is now 15 and in 10th grade, first went there years ago he had come from another religious school that he hated going to," Josephson continued. "But, at Temple Sinai, they made the lessons fun.

"The teachers don't try to make the kids conform to a certain learning style; they teach each kid in a way that's comfortable for the child's learning style."

Up through third grade a child can attend the Temple Sinai Religious School without the family being temple members, but starting in fourth grade the family must join the temple to send a child to the religious school.

Temple Sinai of Palm Beach County is located at 2475 W. Atlantic Ave. in Delray Beach — approximately a quarter-mile west of I-95.

For more information about the Temple Sinai Religious School, visit its website at [www.templesinaireligiousschool.com](http://www.templesinaireligiousschool.com), or get in contact with Felsher at schooldirector@templesinaipbc.org or 561-276-6161, Ext. 119.


August 7, 2017

"We're Ready to Stop It Again": KXL Opponents Flood Nebraska's Capitol

By Jessica Corbett
Common Dreams

Hundreds demonstrated in Lincoln, Nebraska, on Sunday as part of the March to Give Keystone XL the Boot.

The protest of TransCanada's proposed pipeline kicked off a week of events planned to coincide with public hearings, set to begin Monday, by the Nebraska Public Service Commission about the pipeline, which would run 275 miles across the state.
Locals farmers and ranchers as well as members of the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska and Yankton Sioux Tribe marched with a coalition of environmentalists from Bold Nebraska, 350.org, Sierra Club, Indigenous Environmental Network, CREDO, Greenpeace, Oil Change International, and MoveOn. Some even rode on horseback through Lincoln's streets.

The coalition has collected thousands of written public comments expressing concerns about Keystone XL's threats to climate, water, and property rights, which will be delivered to the commission Thursday morning.

"The Nebraska Public Service Commission has an immense responsibility. Not only does it have the responsibility to act in the best interest of Nebraska but also bear the trust responsibility the federal government chooses to ignore," said Harold Frazier, Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe chairman. "Approving the permit for TransCanada would send a message that Nebraska supports the damage that has already happened to our environment from the tar sands oil."

"Keystone XL never has been and never will be in Nebraska's public interest. This is a foreign pipeline, headed to the foreign export market, wanting to use eminent domain for private gain on Nebraska landowners," said Bold Alliance president Jane Kleeb, who also noted that the proposed pipeline route crosses the Sand Hills and the Ogallala Aquifer.

A recent Greenpeace report (pdf) predicted that the Keystone XL pipeline, if constructed, would average more than one significant spill per year, posing a serious threat to all water resources along the route. The Nebraska Sand Hills—the Western Hemisphere's largest sand dunes—has been designated a National Natural Landmark by the U.S. Department of the Interior. (However, the department seems unlikely to fight the pipeline, with a deputy secretary who, before his appointment by President Donald Trump, had built a successful career as a lobbyist for the oil and gas industry.)

"It is not in Nebraska's interest to place a tar sands pipeline through Nebraska's eastern Sand Hills and over the Ogallala Aquifer, or to allow a foreign corporation to use eminent domain for corporate greed and abuse landowners with 'all risk, no reward' easements," said Art Tanderup, a landowner along the Keystone XL route.

"Commissioners in Nebraska have a choice to make—either they protect the fossil fuel industry's greed, or they stand up for the health and safety of our climate and our communities," said 350.org's Sara Shor. "Communities in Nebraska and from surrounding states, including farmers, Indigenous peoples, and many more, are here to keep the pressure on and fight for a livable future. We've built solar panels in the path of Keystone XL to show what we need on a massive scale."

Last month, the coalition launched the Solar XL campaign to install solar panels at several locations along the proposed pipeline route, which a 350.org statement explained "will help power the farms and ranches threatened by TransCanada's use of eminent domain for private gain."
Sunday's protest ended with a display in front of the state's Capitol, with protesters using their bodies to send a message: Yes Solar XL, No KXL.

https://www.commondreams.org/news/2017/08/07/were-ready-stop-it-again-kxl-opponents-flood-nebraskas-capitol

August 7, 2017

South Sudan village finds fragile hope in food endeavors

By Chris Herlinger
Global Sisters Report

Spend a morning under a shade tree with residents of the tiny village of Kabu and it is easy to see that the challenges they face — food shortages, meager crops, rising crime, economic travails and ethnic tensions — mirror those facing much of South Sudan.

Kabu, with its 125 families located about 10 miles west of the capital of Juba, might be a microcosm for those areas in South Sudan that have not been laid to waste due to famine, or to a four-year civil war, but still face enormous challenges with food security — the availability and access to food.

Yet, there is a sense of hope, however fragile, in Kabu, which is benefiting from efforts by a congregation of sisters from India to build a greater sense of community. The common goal? Grow enough food to sustain the village.

"It's hard work, but seeing the challenges, well, we take them as stepping stones towards our goal," said Sr. Rani Mary, who coordinates the food security program for the Society of Daughters of Mary Immaculate, or DMI sisters, an India-based congregation.

The fields are set back from small houses that are either thatched or made from mud, wood and roof sheeting. Many are home to families with three, or even four, generations.

Taken together, Kabu is a community trying to work out its destiny peacefully. And the sisters have a key role in that.

"The sisters are motivating us," said resident Joselin Tabu, who praises the sisters' work in particular for giving women more of a voice within the community. Men and women have an equal say in a farmers' association that consists of three groups of about 40 each. The three groups cultivate and harvest crops and, when there is food leftover, market it.

There are challenges aplenty in building up the community's food security.
The rainy season was late this year, causing delays in planting — though there was some rain in May and June and, in general, the rains so far have been an improvement over last year. (Harvest is expected to begin in September.)

Still, the dependence on rain — there are no immediate water boreholes near the fields and only one for the community at large — remains a challenge.

More telling, roadside robberies and overall insecurity have made people wary of venturing out to the fields. In late May, several people working in the fields were robbed of cash, cellphones, farm implements and tools.

Even so, the flat land with fields planted with corn, peanuts and sorghum holds hope, despite these setbacks "The land is beautiful," said resident Oliver Andrea.

True about the land, said fellow resident Jane Tumalu Erasto. "But people are living on God's mercy," she noted of overall conditions. "It's difficult now, very difficult."

It's not only the land that presents challenges. South Sudan's economy is in tatters. Many people have not been paid their salaries or pensions for months, or even years. Devaluation of the local currency, the South Sudanese pound, is making purchases of food and everyday items like soap and other hygiene necessities a challenge.

And the country's civil war has exacted a cruel price: The United Nations' World Food Program said that, before the conflict, the country was making progress in its fight against hunger. But with at least a million displaced, either within the country or outside, the country has reversed its progress. The World Food Program says that South Sudan now "ranks as the 11th country in the world for child hunger, with 32.5 percent of children under the age of 5 underweight."

In terms of food in Kabu, residents say they are hungry. Not starving, but hungry — meaning people are coping with smaller meals, once-a-day meals, or meals without meat or other proteins.

Though many — relief agency officials, locals and sisters — say South Sudan has the resources to become relatively self-sufficient in growing its own food, the country has developed an import-based economy, in which much of its food comes from neighboring countries like Uganda.

A lot of that has to do with South Sudan's decadeslong war of independence from Sudan — during that war, South Sudanese become dependent on imported food. That conflict ended with the country's independence in 2011, though civil war within South Sudan began in 2013 and so the dependence on food imports remains.

And with a shortage of hard currency, like the U.S. dollar, the government has opted to devalue the pound. As a result, the price of everything has soared — vegetables that cost a few pounds years ago now cost 50 times that amount.
"These are linked problems — one after one," said Mary, who along with Daughters of Mary Immaculate Sr. Shebi Rengitha visits Kabu several times a month. As a congregation, DMI has worked with the villagers since 2012.

The sisters affirm the villagers' complaints about rain and the overall difficulties of economics and insecurity. There are also the problems of poor roads, which make getting tools, tractors and implements to the farm areas difficult.

But the challenges are also deeper in some ways.

It is difficult for the sisters to organize communities like Kabu, they said, because of continued problems in uniting people for a common purpose. Ethnic differences remain a key — even outsize — part of life in South Sudan.

In the case of Kabu, people of different groups — for now — get along in a fairly neighborly way. (The people in Kabu are mostly Bari and Mundan, and many are migrants from other parts of South Sudan and Sudan.) But even in Kabu, where the land is owned by members of the Bari tribe, it's hard for many to look beyond loyalty to an ethnic group — especially when the current government is seen as primarily Dinka, the largest single group in the country. Those who are not Dinka say they feel repression or the threat of it, though they are reluctant to mention specifics.

"It's a big challenge to bring people together," Mary said.

In a nation of some 60 ethnic, or tribal, groups, that isn't surprising — but the continued tensions and the ongoing civil war that has uprooted millions and killed hundreds of thousands mean that nothing is really settled in South Sudan. So things like long-term economic planning or reforms get pushed to the side.

"If the country is not at peace, everything is in disorder," Mary said. "Basic needs can't be met."

She added, "If there is no peace in the country, there can be no peace in the community."

Many in South Sudan don't believe ethnic tensions are a given or set in stone, but rather are being used and exploited by politicians. Dismissal of "politicians" is all too common.

Some in Kabu are hopeful about their community but not about the larger political situation in the country. "You can't be optimistic listening to the radio, all of the warring parties," said Erasto. "We don't know what is next. You don't hear anything good about bringing peace. We hope God will intervene and bring peace to South Sudan."

But the residents in Kabu have been able to grow and harvest crops for themselves for a few years now and feel good about that — and the influence of the DMI congregation.

The sisters carry a message of the importance of commitment, cooperation and people working together side by side.
The work of religious, both men and women in South Sudan, Mary said, "is God's work."

[Chris Herlinger is GSR international correspondent. His email address is cherlinger@ncronline.org.]


August 8, 2017

Eckerd College Hillel’s Scubi Jew Aims To Save The Seas

By Erica Snow
The Forward

Scubi Jew at Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Florida isn’t your typical Jewish a cappella group or service club. Instead, it explores coral reefs and leads underwater cleanup sessions. Members don’t have to be Jewish to go on a dive — just scuba-certified, of course.

Scubi Jew adheres to the tenet of tikun hayam, or repairing the seas. The Jewish marine environmentalist group was created because Rabbi Ed Rosenthal, Eckerd’s Hillel adviser, said not enough attention is paid to the oceans.

“I couldn’t help but notice that nobody does anything focusing on the marine biology environment,” Rosenthal said. “While we teach students to scuba dive, the real focus is … tikun hayam, to repair the seas.”

Of the 130 Jewish students at Eckerd’s campus, 49 are certified scuba divers, Rosenthal told the Forward in an email. The school is comprised of about 1,800 undergraduates, and marine biology ranks as one of its most popular majors, according to U.S. News.

Rising junior Josh Keller is the president of the club. He told the Forward that having grown up by the water, he loves the club because it allows him to help his community. He called the ocean one of the most “spiritual places.”

Keller, a marine science major, said he was interested in Scubi Jew because it ties in with his studies and his values.

“Coming to Eckerd, one of the things I was most interested in was Scubi Jew because I get to tie in my Jewish culture with marine science and helping the environment,” Keller said. “When I’m not studying about fish in class, I’m going down and removing trash and seeing fish and studying the underwater world.”
Scubi Jew also offers scuba diving certification courses to bring beginners up to speed — they can even embark on Underwater Birthright, a special trip that features scuba diving to see marine habitats and clean up the Mediterranean Sea.

“The Jewish tradition teaches about the water and spirituality, and there’s a lot of kabbala in it,” Rosenthal said.

Rising sophomore Ariele Dashow has been diving for four years and joined Scubi Jew because she was friends with Rosenthal. She said she enjoyed having a rabbi lead the club and she’s made many friends through the club.

“It’s a great way to give back to the earth and to give back to yourself,” Dashow said. “It’s a mitzvah to give back to Mother Earth. … It allows me to do something I love while also giving back to a planet I love.”


August 9, 2017

‘Indigenous peoples are the best guardians of world's biodiversity’

By David Hill
The Guardian

Today is the United Nations’ (UN) International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples, numbering an estimated 370 million in 90 countries and speaking roughly 7,000 languages. To mark it, the Guardian interviews Kankanaey Igorot woman Victoria Tauli-Corpuz about the UN’s Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which she calls “historic” and was adopted 10 years ago.

Tauli-Corpuz, from the Philippines, was Chair of the UN Permanent Forum of Indigenous Issues when the Declaration was adopted, and is currently the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In this interview, conducted via email, she explains why the Declaration is so important, argues that governments are failing to implement it, and claims that the struggle for indigenous rights “surpasses” other great social movements of the past:

DH: Why is the UN Declaration so important?

VTC: [It’s] so important because it enshrines and affirms the inherent or pre-existing collective human rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as the individual human rights of indigenous persons. It is a framework for justice and reconciliation between Indigenous Peoples and states, and applies international human rights standards to the specific historical, cultural, social and economic circumstances of Indigenous Peoples. The Declaration is a standard-setting resolution of profound significance as it reflects a wide consensus at the global level on the minimum
content of the rights of indigenous peoples. It is a remedial tool which addresses the need to overcome and repair the historical denial of the fundamental human rights of indigenous peoples, and affirms their equality to all other members of society.

DH: How significant an achievement was it?

VTC: In the 1970s Indigenous Peoples had brought to the UN’s attention the problems and issues they were facing, which led the UN to establish the Working Group on Indigenous Populations in 1982. This was mandated to listen to the developments in indigenous territories and to draft a declaration on their rights. The drafting started in 1985 and Indigenous Peoples took an active part. When the Working Group finished its draft in 1995, it was brought to the Commission on Human Rights where the intergovernmental negotiations took place. On the first day, the Chair of the Intergovernmental Working Group told Indigenous Peoples that we weren’t allowed to speak at the negotiations - only to observe. We walked out, of course, because we could not accept and respect a declaration on our rights made without our participation. This led to a change in the UN rules and we were allowed to take part. It was during my term as Chair of the UN Permanent Forum that the Declaration was adopted. There was a real concern that [that would never happen], or that it would be watered down, but finally in September 2007 we were able to achieve this important victory.

DH: How has the Declaration helped indigenous peoples to date?

VTC: Its adoption has boosted the confidence and commitment of many Indigenous Peoples to sustain and strengthen their movements to assert and claim their rights, especially to their lands, territories, resources and self-determination, which includes the right to have their free, prior and informed consent obtained when projects are brought to their lands. I would daresay that Indigenous Peoples’ movements in many countries, regions and even the global movement gained more strength after the Declaration’s adoption. It has made Indigenous Peoples’ rights issues more visible and discussed during global processes, such as the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development Goals. Unfortunately, even if the UN’s member states adopted the Declaration, most have not been able to implement it effectively. There has been limited progress. Many Indigenous Peoples are still being dispossessed of their lands by states and corporations, and are being criminalised and assassinated when they fight to protect their lands from being grabbed and polluted by mining and oil companies. The Declaration remains the main tool to fight these battles. In some cases, these battles are being won.

DH: When you talk about “implementation”, do you mean it being respected as a Declaration or made legally binding? Are there any countries where attempts to do the latter have made serious progress?

VTC: Implementation means that states will amend their constitutions and adopt a national law to protect and respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples which are consistent with the standards established in the Declaration. Effective implementation requires states to develop an ambitious program of reforms to remedy past and current injustices. It involves all branches of the state, executive, judiciary, and legislative, and implies a combination of political will, legal reform, technical capacity, and financial commitments. Several countries have taken the significant step
of passing such laws or enshrining recognition of Indigenous Peoples’ rights in their constitutions, such as Bolivia, Brazil and Ecuador, among others. Brazil was an early leader in this regard and has titled over 100 million hectares of indigenous land, but we are now seeing this progress threatened by the current administration. Latin America has historically been the strongest with regard to recognising indigenous land rights - yet many countries now face potential roll-back. The Declaration doesn’t have to be made legally binding for it to be implemented effectively.

DH: Do you think the Declaration could be improved? Or is there anything in it you would be critical of?

VTC: No, I don’t think the Declaration has to be improved. It is not a perfect document, but it is the result of more than two decades of drafting and negotiating until Indigenous Peoples and states agreed that it was acceptable. Every article represents a response to some of the human rights violations and injustices suffered by Indigenous Peoples... We fought to be called “Indigenous Peoples”, a title that recognises us as distinct with our own identities and cultures. We fought for the inclusion of free, prior and informed consent. The biggest problem [with the Declaration] is a lack of implementation. Indigenous Peoples are still forced from their lands for development and conservation projects, and still face violence and criminalisation when they stand up for their rights.

DH: What did you think of the Pope’s comment earlier in the year saying indigenous peoples have the right to ‘prior and informed consent’? Were you surprised?

VTC: I was very glad to hear the Pope’s comments on the right to free, prior and informed consent and his recognition that our lands are vital to our identities, values and spirituality. His words inspire hope for Indigenous Peoples facing an uphill struggle. The Pope also recognised the importance of indigenous rights in the global struggle against climate change: when Indigenous Peoples’ rights to their lands are protected, they are the best guardians of the world’s forests and biodiversity. Studies show that where Indigenous Peoples have secure rights to their lands, carbon storage is higher and deforestation is lower.

DH: In your time as Rapporteur you’ve visited many countries and spoken to many indigenous peoples around the world. What has been the most distressing trip you’ve made so far?

VTC: Around the world, Indigenous Peoples face escalating attacks as well as arrests for refusing to give up the lands they have called home since time immemorial. Seeing evidence of this violence on my visits has been particularly distressing. When I visited indigenous communities in Brazil last year, they showed me the scars on their bodies from rubber bullets and the graves of their murdered leaders. I later found out that some of the communities I visited were attacked only hours after I left. I have seen evidence of this violence in many countries. In the last year alone I communicated my concerns to governments about these attacks in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, Tanzania and the United States.

DH: And what has been your most inspiring trip?
VTC: What inspires me the most is the firm determination of indigenous peoples to fight for their rights. Also, their capacity to survive and their high levels of resilience in the face of great difficulties.

DH: You’ve mentioned some of the threats and challenges that indigenous peoples have to deal with. Very briefly, what do you think are the biggest threats?

VTC: I think the biggest threats are extractive industries, conservation projects and climate change. Many Indigenous Peoples live on resource-rich territory - in large part because they have protected and preserved that land for generations - making them prime targets for both extractive industries and protected areas. Despite the fact that the UN Declaration has been accepted as an international norm, international law still heavily privileges investors and companies. Also, as I found in my report to the [UN] General Assembly last year, protected areas are still being established on indigenous lands without their consent, even though Indigenous Peoples are the proven best guardians of the forest and forcing them from their lands does not improve environmental outcomes. Finally, Indigenous Peoples often live in areas at increased risk of climate change-related disasters. I have already heard from Indigenous Peoples in Kiribati whose homes have been lost to rising seas. Unfortunately, even the solutions to climate change, such as wind farms and geothermal energy, can sometimes threaten indigenous land rights. Where Indigenous Peoples’ rights are ignored, they face the loss of their lands, livelihoods, sacred sites and self-governance.

DH: What do you think of the mainstream media’s portrayal of indigenous peoples?

VTC: I think that there has been an increase in media coverage over the years. I’m glad to see less coverage that portrays us as primitive, but sometimes the media fails to capture the fact that we are not anti-development. We are also seeing more media coverage - but still not enough - on the contributions of Indigenous Peoples to global goals on climate, poverty and peace. If Indigenous Peoples’ rights are not secured and protected, it will be impossible for the world to deliver on the promises of the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals. Secure land rights for Indigenous Peoples is a proven climate change solution, and denying indigenous land rights and self-determination is a threat to the world’s remaining forests and biodiversity. It is also a primary cause of poverty. Many indigenous communities face intractable poverty despite living on resource-rich lands because their rights are not respected and their self-determined development is not supported. Protecting the rights of indigenous women, who are often responsible for both their communities’ food security and for managing their forests, is particularly important. Finally, undocumented land rights are a primary cause of conflict and a threat to investment in developing countries. Securing their rights can help mitigate these conflicts and create a more peaceful world.

DH: Finally, do you think the struggle for indigenous peoples’ rights and territories is comparable to any of the other great social movements in the past?

VTC: I think the Indigenous Peoples’ movement surpasses other social movements. They have struggled against colonisation for more than 500 years and continue against forms of colonisation and racism. At the same time, they continue to construct and reconstruct their
communities and practice their cultural values of collectivity, solidarity with nature, and reciprocity even amidst serious challenges. Many still fight to protect their territories, which makes their movement different from others.


August 10, 2017

This Is How Indigenous Peoples Help Curb Gas Emissions, End Hunger

By IPS World Desk
Inter Press Service News Agency

ROME (IPS) - A third of global forests, crucial for curbing gas emissions, are primarily managed by indigenous peoples, families, smallholders and local communities, according to the United Nations.

Moreover, indigenous foods are also particularly nutritious, climate-resilient and well-adapted to their environment, making them a good source of nutrients in climate challenged areas, reports the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

“Constituting only 5 per cent of the world population, indigenous peoples nevertheless are vital stewards of the environment. Traditional indigenous territories encompass 22 per cent of the world’s land surface, but 80 per cent of the planet’s biodiversity. “

According to this Rome-based UN specialised body, indigenous peoples ways of life and their livelihoods can teach us a lot about preserving natural resources, growing food in sustainable ways and living in harmony with nature.

“Mobilising the expertise that originates from this heritage and these historical legacies is important for addressing the challenges facing food and agriculture today and in the future,” it added on 9 August on the occasion of the International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples.

According to FAO, here are 6 of the many ways in which Indigenous Peoples are helping the world combat climate change:

1. Their Traditional Agricultural Practices Are Resilient to Climate Change

Throughout the centuries, indigenous peoples have developed agricultural techniques that are adapted to extreme environments, like the high altitudes of the Andes, the dry grasslands of Kenya or the extreme cold of northern Canada.
These time-tested techniques, like terracing that stops soil erosion or floating gardens that make use of flooded fields, mean that they are well-suited for the increasingly intense weather events and temperature changes brought on by climate change.

2. They Conserve and Restore Forests and Natural Resources

Indigenous peoples see themselves as connected to nature and as part of the same system as the environment in which they live. Natural resources are considered shared property and are respected as such.

By protecting natural resources, like forests and rivers, many indigenous communities help mitigate the impacts of climate change.

3. Indigenous Foods Expand and Diversify Diets

The world currently relies very heavily on a small set of staple crops. Wheat, rice, potatoes and maize represent 50 per cent of daily calories consumed. With nutritious, native crops like quinoa, oca and moringa, the food systems of indigenous peoples can help the rest of humanity expand its narrow food base.

4. Indigenous Foods are Resilient to Climate Change

Because many indigenous peoples live in extreme environments, they have chosen crops that have also had to adapt.

Indigenous peoples often grow native species of crops that are better adapted to local contexts and are often more resistant to drought, altitude, flooding, or other extreme conditions.

Used more widely in farming, these crops could help build the resilience of farms now facing a changing, more extreme climate.

5. Indigenous Territories hold 80 Per Cent of the World’s Biodiversity

Preserving biodiversity is essential for food security and nutrition. The genetic pool for plants and animal species is found in forests, rivers and lakes and pastures.

Living naturally sustainable lives, indigenous peoples preserve these spaces, helping to uphold the biodiversity of the plants and animals in nature.

6. Indigenous Peoples’ Lifestyles Are Locally Adapted and Respectful of Natural Resources

Indigenous peoples have adapted their lifestyles to fit into and respect their environments. In mountains, indigenous peoples’ systems preserve soil, reduce erosion, conserve water and reduce the risk of disasters.
In rangelands, indigenous pastoralist communities manage cattle grazing and cropping in sustainable ways that preserve rangeland biodiversity. In the Amazon, ecosystems improve when indigenous people inhabit them.

FAO considers indigenous peoples as “invaluable partners” in eradicating hunger and in providing solutions to climate change.

“We will never achieve long-term solutions to climate change and food security and nutrition without seeking help from and protecting the rights of indigenous peoples.”


August 14, 2017

Eastern Spirituality Could Help Sustainable Development

By Kalinga Seneviratne

InDepthNews

This article is the 18th in a series of joint productions of Lotus News Features and IDN-InDepthNews, flagship of the International Press Syndicate.

YANGON, Myanmar (IDN) – “The desire for peace exists everywhere, but the majority of people are not in a position to enjoy peace, stability and security they desire,” noted venerable Dr Ashin Nyanissara, spiritual head of the Sitagu International Buddhist University (SIBU), in opening a two-day gathering of spiritual leaders and scholars at the university here on August 5.

The event was the second Global Initiative for Conflict Avoidance and Environmental Consciousness (SAMVAD) conference, following the first held in New Delhi in September 2015.

SAMVAD is an initiative of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to adopt principles of Asia’s age-old spiritual teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism to address modern-day issues threatening human civilisation.

Though there were a number of Muslim and Christian scholars from Myanmar and India among the 250 people that attended the event in Yangon, the SAMVAD initiative is driven by Buddhists and Hindus who are keen to exploit commonalities in their spiritual teachings to create a more tolerant, liberal and accommodative world living in harmony with nature rather than seeing it as a resource to exploit.

SAMVAD is spearheaded by the Delhi-based Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) and the International Buddhist Confederation (IBC) in association with the Tokyo-based Japan Foundation. Local partners this year were the Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies (MISIS) and SIBU.
In a video message shown at the opening session, Japanese Prime Minister Abe told the audience that Buddhists always say “may all beings be well and happy” that the spirit of tolerance and compassion encompasses coexistence of all lives.

“The spirit of tolerance is facing challenges today,” he warned. “Terrorism and violent extremism are expanding and trying to deny the existence of ‘others’ and trying to paint our world in a single colour,” adding that in Asia “we must let flowers of all different colours bloom in harmony.”

In the inaugural speech, the governor of Uttar Pradesh, Ram Naik, pointed to the great contribution of Hindu and Buddhist traditions to the modern world, such as yoga and mindful meditation. Noting that it was a Burmese of Indian descent, S.N. Goenka, who introduced Vipassana (mindful) meditation to the world, he pointed out that “such is the strength of our deeply woven heritage that, today, this tradition of meditation is being practised in over 94 countries … It would not be wrong to say that by gifting meditation and yoga, Asia has persuaded the world to take a pause and look within.”

Although SAMVAD was built as an inter-faith dialogue, it was not all sweet talk and smiles. There were some animated discussions both in the spiritual masters’ roundtable and lay scholars’ panel presentations.

Both Hindus and Buddhists repeatedly referred to problems in “Abrahamic” scriptures and their lack of tolerance of other beliefs. Many Hindu speakers from India spoke about how they have rejected old Hindu scriptures that speak of caste and “untouchability” because this does not fit into the 21st century where they are trying to build an inclusive society. They also suggested that Muslims in particular need to reject some of their “Koranic” scriptures that may preach exclusivity.

While endorsing the spirit of Buddhist ‘Kalama Sutra’ (Buddha’s sermon on free inquiry) and the Hindu sayings of Shri Ramakrishnan, Al-Haj Aye Lwin, Chief Convener of the Islamic Centre of Myanmar, stressed that truth is not in books but that it has to be experienced to be realised, warned that one needs to be vary of misinformation and disinformation on Islam in this age.

“It would be needless to say that if anyone alleged that other religions are false or label the adherents of other religions as heathens or kafirs, the dialogue would certainly be counterproductive” he argued.

“It will be equally counterproductive to brand any religion, be it Abrahamic or not, as doctrinally intolerant and consisting in exhortation to religious violence or its teachings as not being ecologically friendly.”

Lwin pointed out that there are black sheep in every religion and they should not be looked upon as role models for any religion. “No matter how good the original teachings are, people want to hijack religion to suit their vested interests and hidden agendas would twist and turn the truths and translate them in line with their sinister plans,” he warned.
Both Buddhists and Hindus pointed out that many rituals and festivals in their respective religions which have survived so far draw the link between nature and humans.

“The consciousness that man is part of nature and not independent and certainly not its master is fundamental to protecting and sustaining environment and ecology,” noted Rajalaksmi Ravi, a social activist from Chennai, in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

“Hindu culture has made the tree a symbol of forests and prescribed ‘Vriksha Vandana’ (reverence of trees) as the attitude of humans to forests – unless humans revere trees, forests are not safe,” she noted, pointing out that ‘Ganga Vandana’ (worship of water) and ‘Bhumi Vandana’ (homage to earth) “celebrate all rivers, lakes and ponds to inculcate environmental consciousness and protect water resources.”

In his video message, Indian Prime Minister Modi reminded participants that Hindu and Buddhist philosophies see nature as living in harmony. “If we don’t live in harmony with nature, we have climatic change,” he warned. “(We must) revere nature and not consider it merely as a resource to exploit.”

“Buddhists apply the concept of interdependent origination to everything in our world,” said Tibetan Buddhist monk His Holiness Drikung Kyahgon Chetsang. “An authentic environmental consciousness will develop naturally once people recognise the deep interdependence between humans, plants, and animals. Thus, the ancient Buddhist philosophy of interdependence is critical to the future of our planet,” he said.

The Tibetan monk described a “Go Green Go Organic” campaign his monastic order is developing in the Himalayan Ladakh region of India where water supplies and environment are under threat from global warming. Over 2000 trees have been planted in an effort to prevent soil erosion and also to give local people natural resources to harvest sustainably, which he called “creating sustainable economic opportunities.”

With the glaciers of the Himalayan snow mountains melting rapidly, his campaign has dug trenches to capture the water flow in the summer and distribute its water to a wider area, which is also giving rise to the growth of wild plants that contribute to tackling soil erosion.

“We need to develop a broader perspective of the earth as a whole,” argued His Holiness Chetsang. “Natural disasters and ecological problems do not choose people of one religion or one nation.”

Referring to the preamble of the UNESCO constitution which declares that “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed,” Venerable Miao Hai of the Boshan Zhegjue Monastery in China said that we need to review the rules of capitalism. “The competition for fossil fuels, especially for oil, leads to conflicts and war,” he noted. “Such fundamentally wrong attitudes expose our planet to extreme danger.”

Citing a number of instances where environmental disasters have led us to question economic models and technology, he pointed out that providing electricity to the 1.2 billion people who do
not still have access cannot be done by using existing capitalist models because this will create more conflicts for fuels.

He described a model his monastery is spreading using Chinese solar technology and a pilgrimage called the “Chan-Tea-Solar Road Trip” that started in Shanghai in May 2016 and ended in Bodhgaya in India in May 2017 passing through Thailand, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and India. This was a cross-cultural experience during which Chan Tea Musical performances were organised and solar power was introduced to communities.

The new Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh (with a population of over 230 million), Yogi Adityanath, a Hindu priest turned politician, flew all the way from Lucknow to Yangon to give the Valedictory Address in which he pointed out that Indian philosophies are not dogmatic and do not thrust their points of view on others. He particularly praised Buddhism and made many references to Buddhist scriptures in his speech.

“We have inherited this glorious tradition of tolerance and peaceful accommodation of ideas, differing from our own – something which has almost vanished in the contemporary world,” he noted. “If the world must progress towards peace and prosperity, it is time to re-evaluate Lord Buddha and his Dhamma,” he added, drawing parallels between Hinduism and Buddhism in the approach to sustainable development.

The SAMVAD process is expected to grow on a more formalised basis in the next few years and it is the hope of many of the Hindu and Buddhist participants that the two religions may be able to lead the world in promoting a sustainable development model where humans and nature can exist in harmony.


August 15, 2017

Oceania bishops discuss oceans, but also visit homeless, high school

By Michael Otto, Catholic News Service
National Catholic Reporter

Auckland, New Zealand — Church leaders from Oceania, meeting in New Zealand to discuss protecting the oceans, also served meals to the homeless and met with Pacific Islander high school students.

A cardinal from Papua New Guinea, an archbishop from New Caledonia, and four bishops from Australia and New Zealand served meals to people who are homeless, mentally unwell or otherwise economically deprived at the Auckland City Mission Aug. 11.
The prelates were in Auckland for a weeklong meeting of the executive committee of the Federation of Catholic Bishops’ Conferences of Oceania. The meeting focused on protection of the oceans and the welfare of the people dependent thereon, as well as concerns for the people of West Papua, an Indonesian province.

In a statement, the church leaders described their time at the Auckland City Mission as "a humbling experience during which we felt deeply Christ’s call to sit and walk alongside those who struggle or find themselves on the margins of society."

The day before their work at the city mission, the prelates visited De La Salle College in south Auckland, a high school with a predominantly Pacific Islander student body.

Cardinal John Ribat of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, was the main celebrant at a Mass for feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which was celebrated in advance so the church leaders could be included.

At the penitential rite during the Mass, a fine mat was place over the heads of school principal Myles Hogarty, head student Jason Eteru and Bishop Robert McGuckin of Toowoomba, Australia, as an expression of penance. The mat was removed from over the kneeling men by Ribat.

In his homily, Marist Fr. Brian Prendeville said no generation of young people since World War II has been as exposed to testing and attack as today's young people. He pointed to a recent media focus on youth suicide in New Zealand, trying to raise awareness of the pressures experienced by young people today.

Speaking the Oceania prelates, Prendeville said he knew that "you would want me to say these (following) things to these young men."

"You are not a number. You are not a police record. You are not a court appearance. You are not an NCEA (National Certificate of Educational Achievement) level 'not achieved.' You are not a loser. None of you are stupid. You are not like anyone else. You are not average. You are not trouble. You are not worthless. ... You are never a failure.

"But you are good. Let the good seed grow. You are God's work of art. And God does not make rubbish. ... God loves you."

The prelates later said the students' "enthusiastic participation in the liturgy uplifted our hearts."

Speaking about the ocean, the bishops of the Pacific said in a statement: "We are acutely aware of the impact of climate change on island nations, and some of our number have been visiting communities and recording the destruction of shorelines affecting them. On a happier note, we are heartened to learn of the systematic and coordinated opposition to seabed mining, which turns the ocean floor into a stage of exploitative destruction of ocean habitats."
Later, the bishops added: "Our interest in the 'blue economy' is to uphold a model of development that respects the fundamental importance of sustainability that looks way beyond any perceived short-term economic windfall."

The prelates applauded "government, community and private initiatives to develop water ecotourism and sustainable sea fishing."

"We are not 'anti-development.' We look to the common good and thus advocate for an integrated approach to development, where local customary practices are respected and communities are assisted to grow employment opportunities."

The second focus for the executive committee was "the livelihood and cultural integrity of the people of West Papua."

"We do not promote a view in regard to independence," the prelates said. "Indeed, we believe that where this question becomes a single focus, care to uphold and strengthen local institutions of democracy may be overlooked.

"We echo the call for quality education in Papua, for fair and transparent access to jobs, training programs and employment, for respect of land titles, and for clear boundaries between the role of defense and police forces and the role of commerce. The large majority of indigenous people of Papua seek peace and the various dialogue groups, advocating and witnessing to peaceful co-existence, are a source of hope for all."

https://www.ncronline.org/news/environment/oceania-bishops-discuss-oceans-also-visit-homeless-high-school

August 18, 2017

'Pray for the waters': Great Water Gathering brings Indigenous, non-Indigenous protectors together

Traditionally known as 'water carriers,' women take on role as protectors of water

By Lenard Monkman
CBC News

Aldeen Mason is a grandmother now, but she still remembers swimming in the Winnipeg River, in her home community of Sagkeeng First Nation. However, her favourite place to swim was also downstream from the local paper mill.

"Whatever they put into the waste, it went into the river and it affected us because we were downstream. And I remember when I was 10 or 11 years old, I would start getting this guck on
the bottom of our feet when we went swimming; it would stick to the bottom of your soles," said Mason.

Eventually, the pollution from the mill meant that the Mason family was no longer able to swim in the river, and were forced to fish upstream from the mill.

"We used to have a lot of sturgeon in the river and now you hardly see [them]," she said.

She remembers her father walking to the local paper mill in the 1980s to join a protest.

"Eventually that paper mill closed down. I think it's been about 20 years now," she said. "Sure, people complain about the loss of jobs and stuff like that. For us, that was our life."

These days, Mason is doing what she can to let her community know about the importance of clean water.

In the second week of July, Mason and Anishinaabe people from across Canada convened on Lone Island in Manitoba's Whiteshell Provincial Park for the Great Water Gathering.

The goal — to gather in ceremony, pray, and figure out how they can move forward together in protecting the waters of their ancestors.

Mason attended the Great Water Gathering after organizers extended her an invitation in the form of tobacco.

The four-day event was organized by Isaac Murdoch, Christi Belcourt, and local Anishinaabe elders from the region. It was an open invitation for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to come together in prayer for the waters.

"The idea is to come together to pray for the waters, but also to pray for future generations of not just our children, but of all babies that are going to be born in the future," said Belcourt.

The organizers invited elders from the region to share their traditional knowledge and to offer advice to the gathering on what they could do to protect the waters in their communities.

**Cultural relationship and responsibilities to the water**

In Anishinaabe spirituality, the elements — fire and water — play a significant role in ceremonies.

Traditionally, men are taught responsibilities for taking care of the fire and are referred to as "fire keepers."

Women are taught water responsibilities and are raised to be "water carriers."
"They say women are water carriers because we all have the 90 per cent water in our body," said Martina Fisher, an Anishinaabe grandmother from Bloodvein First Nation in Manitoba.

She explained that the connection of being a water carrier has to do with pregnancy and a woman's ability to give life.

"For a woman, they carry life for nine months in their womb. And we are all born in the water. We come from the water," said Fisher.

One of the more well-known Indigenous ceremonies is the sweat lodge. The lodge is dome-shaped and resembles a pregnant woman's womb.

"When you go and pray and take care of yourself and re-cleanse yourself, you go in that womb to pray in there. You're safe in there, just like you were safe in your mother's womb," said Fisher.

Mason added, "When a woman carries a child, it's that water that comes first when a child is ready to be born. It's that water that brings that life that cleanses the way for that life to be born. That's how sacred and special that water is."

**Water walks**

For Mason, the gathering wasn't the first time that she has been to a ceremony for the waters. She has been on two "water walks" to date — one in British Columbia, and one for Lake Winnipeg.

"Water walks" have become more popular in Indigenous communities over the last few years. They were started in 2003 by Anishinaabekwe grandmother Josephine Mandamin, who picked up a copper pail, filled it with water, and then walked the distance around Lake Superior.

The water walks are led by Indigenous women and are meant to raise awareness for water issues.

Mason describes a water walk as "walking, praying and singing songs for the health of the water."

The last water walk that Mason went on for Lake Winnipeg, was initiated by her neighbour who knocked on her door and told her about a dream that she had. They went to a Midewiwin elder to talk about the dream and were told that they would have to pray for the water.

"He told her to get seven women, pipe carriers. We all went down by the water, smoked our pipes and made our food offerings," said Mason.

Offerings, according to Mason, could be berries, food or tobacco.

"It's a way of giving thanks and saying thanks to our spirit helpers. It could be animals. It could be your spirit name. Water spirits — that's why we're here, for the water."
Respecting the water

When Mason was 12 years old, she remembers picking berries with her family in northwestern Ontario. The family stopped to take a break and decided to go for a swim.

"I took my sister, she was dog paddling … and then she panicked. She was flailing about. And so I panicked. I almost drowned."

The near-death experience was a life lesson for her about the respect that water commands.

"That's how powerful water is. It can take your life away. It's special and sacred, it brings life as well," said Mason.

Both Mason and Fisher talked about the cultural significance of water and were happy to be at the Great Water Gathering.

"Just like water, everything on Earth — you have to respect, so that's how we learn. We learn from the teachings from our grandmothers, our grandfathers," said Fisher.

She spoke about the teachings that were passed on from her grandmothers and grandfathers: the sacredness of fire, and how it is used for cooking and warmth, but also the dangers of playing with fire.

"If you don't respect anything, you're going to pay for it." said Fisher.

In a country where there are many First Nations without access to clean drinking water, the actions that these women are taking for the waters are important for the next generation of people living in Canada.

"Thanks to our elders, our ancestors, seven generations ago," said Fisher. "They prayed for us. They prayed for these ones. So it's up to us, to pray for the next seven generations."

Lenard Monkman is one of two recipients of the 2017 CJF-CBC Indigenous Journalism Fellowships, established to encourage Indigenous voices and better understanding of Indigenous issues in Canada's major media and community outlets. He reports from the Great Water Gathering that took place in Manitoba's Whiteshell region in July 2017, with support from the fellowship.


August 19, 2017

How art and spirituality are defining the 'water protectors'
Much of the Indigenous activism that we see in Canada is being led by Indigenous women

By Lenard Monkman

CBC News

Women have been on the frontline of much of the land and water-related Indigenous activism that we see in Canada today. In the fight for clean water, this style of activism has seen art and spirituality go hand in hand.

For many, these actions have nothing to do with activism, but rather, protecting a way of life for future generations.

For four days in July, nearly 100 Indigenous and non-Indigenous people came together to camp and pray for water at the Great Water Gathering in Manitoba's Whiteshell region. The gathering was organized by Belcourt, and a group of Anishinaabe elders in Manitoba.

"The idea is to come together to pray for the waters, but also to pray for future generations of not just our children, but of all babies that are going to be born in the future," said Christi Belcourt.

Belcourt is a Métis visual artist from Manito-Sakahigan (Lac Ste. Anne, Alta.), whose artwork has been displayed in art galleries, used by Italian fashion designers Valentino, and displayed on protest banners across North America.

"It's more important than ever that people come together and pray for the waters and make offerings for the waters," said Belcourt.

Belcourt has taken on a relentless approach to letting people know about the state of freshwater in Canada, and she worries about what the future holds for her daughters.

"In a place with beautiful pristine waters, like our ancestors had for generations, now we're in a position where we can't drink out of streams, where everything is poisoned," she said.

"As human beings, in some of those cases, we are able to filter out water from water filtration plants, but animals and birds and everything else [doesn't] have a filtration plant."

**Ceremonies for the water**

The second day of the gathering featured an "onaman face painting" ceremony, which was conducted by Belcourt. According to Belcourt, onaman is a red ochre paint which was used by Indigenous peoples for thousands of years.

Belcourt says that traditionally through this ceremony, each person who has their face painted is making a commitment to help and protect the waters.
One by one, everyone lined up, made a tobacco offering and had their faces painted.

"I think once you go through that ceremony, you feel it. Because you're a part of this Earth, and a part of the water," said Shannon Paul after having her face painted in ceremony. Paul, 29, travelled from Northwest Angle No. 33 First Nation in Ontario to be a part of the gathering.

"You want to help yourself, and you want to help the Earth, that ceremony will really help you to carry that commitment."

**Art and water protection**

In recent years, the actions of Idle No More and the Dakota access pipeline fight in Standing Rock, ND, have put environmental and water issues at the forefront of Indigenous activism.

"Mni Wiconi," which translates to "water is life" in the Lakota language, became the slogan for the people demonstrating at Standing Rock.

The clashes between police and activists in Standing Rock provided powerful images, but they also precipitated a shift in language with people on the front lines of the protests asking not to be called protesters, but rather, "water protectors."

The protests and actions prompted Belcourt to action, using her artwork.

Belcourt, along with Anishinaabe activist Isaac Murdoch, were approached by the environmental group 350.org to use their art at a mass demonstration in Winnipeg last summer.

"Since then, we've produced a few thousand banners. We've sent them out to water protection actions across North America for free. We've fundraised to do the banners, and then we've fundraised to get the mailing costs, and then we ship them off," said Belcourt.

For Belcourt, the placards that people bring to protests usually have text on them, and she says the messaging can often get lost in the sea of signs.

"When you have [one or two] strong images that say "water is life," it gives the people a voice, in a way that the placards don't," she said.

"What I really like about that is the idea that art gets the last word."

**What does it mean to be a water protector?**

Many of the people that travelled to the gathering told stories of their own community's water situation, from boil water advisories to rivers and lakes being poisoned by industry.

For Murdoch, these stories are familiar, as his own community - Serpent River First Nation, Ontario - does not have access to clean, safe drinking water.
"My daughter is four years old and she has never known what it's like to drink water out of the tap. She actually believes — we've trained her to believe — that if she drinks it, she could die. That's how bad it is," said Murdoch.

"My daughter has grown up in an age where, the very thing that gives us life, could also take her life by simply drinking it."

With stories of once being able to drink water from rivers and streams, to children having no access to clean drinking water today, it is easy to see why Indigenous people are advocating for the generations ahead.

Belcourt offers a description of what it means to be a water protector.

"A water protector is anyone who takes any kind of action for the protection of water, and for the love of water," she said.

"It doesn't matter whether it's protest, or whether it's prayer, or whether it's some other kind of thing that might be quiet that nobody sees about. Like hanging flags in a tree or ribbons or making an offering."

Despite there not being clean drinking water in his own community, Murdoch is optimistic that things will get better for his own daughter.

"Everywhere you go, you see it's our moms, it's our sisters, our daughters that are picking up the drums, they're picking up the songs. They are actually going to the front lines, not just of opposing development, but they're also the front line in the resurgence of our cultural practices and our cultural ways."

Lenard Monkman is one of two recipients of the 2017 CJF-CBC Indigenous Journalism Fellowships, established to encourage Indigenous voices and better understanding of Indigenous issues in Canada's major media and community outlets. He reports from the Great Water Gathering that took place in Manitoba's Whiteshell region in July 2017, with support from the fellowship.


August 21, 2017

Iowa's Catholic churches go solar to heed pope's call on climate change

By Kevin Hardy
Des Moines Register

NORWALK, Ia. — As the sun beat down on a recent Saturday afternoon, the mammoth air
conditioning system at St. John the Apostle Catholic Church offered welcome relief to parishioners trickling in for evening Mass.

While churchgoers filled the pews and hymns filled the sanctuary, 206 solar panels overhead converted the sun's energy into power for lights, the public address system and the crisp cold air.

"We're running on solar right now," said the Rev. John Ludwig.

The church is the first in the Catholic Diocese of Des Moines to roll out a large scale solar energy initiative. But Catholic leaders say it won't be the last.

Bishop Robert Pates credits grassroots work at the Norwalk church for bringing about the solar project, but inspiration came from the world's highest-ranking Catholic. Iowa Catholics, inspired by Pope Francis' call for the faithful to actively combat the harmful effects of global climate change, are looking for ways to conserve energy and transition to renewable forms of energy.

"It's exciting to me because I feel like they're sort of walking the walk," said the Rev. Susan Hendershot Guy, executive director of Iowa Interfaith Power & Light, a religious group aimed at responding to global warming. "They're not just saying isn’t this great. They’re really advocating for congregations to do something."

But the Catholic church isn't alone. Across the state, leaders from various faith traditions — who often worship in vast, aging and inefficient facilities — are pushing forward with energy efficiency efforts and solar installations, Guy said.

In Kalona, a Mennonite congregation invested in a community solar effort. A Soto Zen Buddhist temple in Dorchester now gets about half its energy from its solar array. And a Methodist church in Ames will host a solar workshop later this month.

"I think it is getting out to all types of denominations, congregations, faith traditions really across the conservative-liberal spectrum," Guy said. "It’s a really practical way to live out that message of how we care for the world."

In Norwalk, St. John the Apostle partnered with a parishioner's for-profit company, which unlike untaxed churches, is able to take advantage of lucrative renewable energy tax credits. The company secured investors to pay for the upfront costs. It sells the energy generated back to the church at a rate lower than what the church would pay for power on the wider grid. Ludwig says the deal will save the church $2,000 per year in energy costs.

"We got the deal of the century," Ludwig said, "because we didn't have to pay anything for it."

'We cannot abandon what God has given us'

In June 2015, Pope Francis made international news after releasing his environmental encyclical Laudato Si, which translates to "Our Common Home." While citing the messages of previous popes, Francis captured the world's attention by criticizing climate change deniers and calling for
sweeping changes in political action and personal behaviors to reduce emissions and better care for the environment.

"These situations have caused sister Earth, along with all the abandoned of our world, to cry out, pleading that we take another course," he wrote. "Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last 200 years."

In May, Francis gave President Donald Trump, who has called climate change a "hoax," a copy of his 192-page document during the president's Vatican visit.

Pates says the Bible's Book of Genesis demands that Christians act as stewards of the Earth and "provide for those who come after us."

"We cannot put our head in the sand and say we're going to continue to have children but snuff out their existence," he said. "That is why the pope is so concerned."

While environmental activists often are viewed as a bloc within the political left, Pates said the church's embrace of the issue isn't meant to make a political stance. Yet, it does highlight how the church's bearings on abortion, immigration, poverty and the environment often split between platforms of the partisan left and right.

"The pope regards this as a moral issue, not a political issue, especially given the consensus of scientists," he said. "The timeline involved is very serious. We can do something. We can change it."

Pates says the diocese won't force parishes to make changes, but it is encouraging them to explore solar installations and other green initiatives. He also hopes a soon-to-form task force will spur meaningful change for two of the area's largest Catholic institutions: Dowling Catholic High School and Mercy Medical Center.

Though Catholics, and all Christians, hold faith in the prospect of life after death, Pates said that outlook can't be used as a crutch to forsake the planet's air, land and waters.

"In the meanwhile, this is what we are entrusted with," he said. "So we cannot abandon what God has given us."

'Our kids deserve to have clean air and sunshine'

After years in the construction business, Terry Dvorak suddenly got very interested in renewable energy in 2010 while traveling around heavily polluted cities in China.

In Shanghai, it felt like he was inhaling paint fumes, he said.

"That kind of started it for me," he said. "After that trip, it solidified that I needed to do something."
He thought of the countless children who live their whole lives without escaping that tainted environment.

"Our kids deserve to have clean air and sunshine," he said, "and so does the rest of the world."

He started Red Lion Renewables, a solar development firm that installs solar arrays on commercial and residential property as well as school, church and city buildings.

A member of St. John the Apostle in Norwalk, Dvorak approached church leaders about a possible church solar project. After securing approval from the parish priest and the bishop, Dvorak and his investors put up about $200,000 to purchase 206 panels. He said the parish spent only about $100 out of pocket for a legal review of its agreement with Red Lion.

The black panels, each about 40 inches by 70 inches, sit on sloped and flat spans of the church building's southern-facing roof.

Solar delivers the biggest economic benefit to homeowners and businesses who can offset a portion of the up-front investment with tax credits, Dvorak says. But that can leave school districts, churches and local governments will little incentive to go green.

By using a third-party company, investors can earn a healthy return, while the not-for-profit entity realizes immediate energy savings.

The 69 kW array in Norwalk is expected to produce enough energy to power about 10 typical homes, Dvorak says, while eliminating about 3 million pounds of carbon dioxide emissions from the atmosphere.

Through a power-purchase agreement, the church purchases back the electricity the panels generate at a rate lower than what MidAmerican Energy would charge, Dvorak says. The estimated $2,000 annual savings will allow the church to invest more in its charitable work with groups like Habitat for Humanity or Meals from the Heartland.

"Now they can indirectly save money right off the bat on their energy bills," he said, "use their limited budgets for their own mission and help the environment in the process."

'The church definitely needs to lead the community'

About a decade ago, church leaders started worrying about the aging heating system at First Lutheran Church in Decorah. The congregation spent about $22,000 each year to keep the lights, air conditioning and heat running in its 150-year-old building.

"We had a discussion that the money could be better spent on ministry, and the church could set a better example with climate change," said Larry Grimstad, a member of the congregation's "green team."
After an energy audit, the church in 2010 added new insulation and invested hundreds of thousands into a new, efficient HVAC system.

Then, in 2014, the church unveiled a $35,000 solar installation. The 26 panels cover much of the southern portion of the roof, where energy efficiency is most ideal.

Most recently, in 2015, First Lutheran started changing out lights to more efficient LED fixtures.

The combined efforts reduced the church's energy costs by 38 percent and reduced its carbon footprint by 42 percent, he said. Now, annual utility bills run about $13,000.

But Grimstad said the church wants to reduce its carbon emissions even more. It's exploring a solar canopy project for the parking lot, and Grimstad says he's interested in a community geothermal project.

"The real goal has to be zero," he said. "So that’s where we’re going."

While churches can reap economic benefits from energy efficiency efforts, Grimstad said faith groups have a moral calling to tackle the global threat of climate change.

"We have a responsibility to do this," he said. "The church definitely needs to lead the community to do this type of thing."


August 21, 2017

Eclipse thrills, inspires viewers to admire the precision of creation

By Dennis Sadowski
Catholic News Service

HOPKINSVILLE, KY -- Science teacher Jane Irwin isn't often left without words, but the total solar eclipse left her in a quiet reflective mood.

"Awesome. God's amazing" was the best she could muster after the sun reappeared from behind the moon after totality Aug. 21.

"I've got to synthesize this myself," she said minutes after the sun reappeared as the moon moved away from obscuring Earth's closest stellar neighbor. "How can people deny the existence of God after seeing this? I'm not a terribly emotional person, but I got choked up seeing it."

Irwin was among about 50 people gathered at Sts. Peter and Paul Parish in Hopkinsville, the town near the point of maximum eclipse. She planned to have her students write about the
eclipse when classes resumed Aug. 23. Her inspiration for the assignment was Jesuit Brother Guy Consolmagno, director of the Vatican Observatory, who spoke at the parish Aug. 20 during a pre-eclipse program.

"Brother Guy said if you didn't write about it, it didn't happened. Hopefully, in 10 years when they pull that out, they'll remember and be inspired by what they saw," Irwin said.

Joining her was one of her students, Tim Sunderhaus, 8, a third-grader at the parish school.

Tim was accompanied by brothers Luke, 12, in seventh grade, and Peter, 10, in fifth grade, and father Todd. Luke called the eclipse an amazing sight.

He found the sun's corona -- the intensely hot outer atmosphere visible from Earth only during a total eclipse -- most interesting to observe. "I was thinking it finally happened because people have been talking about it for such a long time," he told Catholic News Service.

Cheers and whistles erupted in the parish parking lot where viewers had gathered as darkness approached and the corona appeared around a black hole. Three bright red prominences appeared along the right edge of the sun during totality.

People called out the planets as they appeared. First there was bright Venus to the west of the sun and then Mercury very close to eastern limb of the star. Crickets began chirping, thinking night was approaching. The air cooled several degrees as the moon's shadow deepened.

The entire event was impressive for Franciscan Father Richard Goodin, vocation director for his order's St. John the Baptist Province based in Cincinnati. The Kentucky native drove from Cincinnati overnight to see the eclipse after a redeye flight from Las Vegas where he preached at Masses Aug. 19 and 20 making a mission appeal.

"This is a once in a lifetime opportunity. I like to brag I'm all things Kentucky," he told CNS as a blue University of Kentucky cap shielded his bearded face from the hot sun. "What better and more fitting place for this to be than in Kentucky?"

Hopkinsville officials and business owners had worked for nearly two years to capitalize on the eclipse. They billed their town as "Eclipseville." Located near the point of maximum eclipse, the city of 33,000 wanted to showcase its friendliness and the quality of life it offers in largely agricultural Christian County.

Eclipse chasers started arriving Aug. 18 and by the morning of the event traffic crawled along city streets.

Some of those travelers made their way to a field the parish owns across the street from the church. Spots were going for $10. Some stayed overnight, camping in tents or in the back of their vehicle. Others, arrived in the pre-dawn hours eager to catch the spectacle.
Ron Howell and Cheri Ricketts, members of St. Catherine of Siena Church in Toledo, Ohio, were sitting in chairs next to their Chevrolet Equinox enjoying coffee in the warm early morning sun. They said they wanted to see something they had never seen before and that Hopkinsville was a reasonable distance to travel.

"We're basic, but we're prepared," said Howell, 72.

"I'm sure it's going to be spiritually moving, just to see the wonder of it all and the precision." Ricketts, 66, added.

Across the lot Hendrik Schultz, professor of nuclear astrophysics at Michigan State University, sat with his daughter, Lilley, 16, enjoying a slight breeze in the shade of tall trees. He said he brought his daughter and her boyfriend along so they could see something rare and beautiful.

But he was leaving the physics of the eclipse out of any discussion as he showed off the pinhole tube he made to observe the event.

"I don't want to spoil it with too much science. It's like a waterfall. You wouldn't want a lecture on hydrology. You just want to enjoy it," he said.

In another corner, Jayden Braga, 5, patiently waited for the eclipse as his parents, Derrick and Alissa Braga of Rochester Hills, Michigan, tended to housekeeping chores in their tent. The family traveled all night to arrive in time for the celestial wonder.

The youngster explained how important it was to view the eclipse with special glasses until the moment of totality. Then he became more animated.

"I'm so excited," he said, "I could fly off the chair."

In his presentation the evening before, Brother Consolmagno urged people to let the eclipse be an example of God's design for the universe and to appreciate the beauty of ongoing creation.

"This is more than just an emotional sense," Brother Consolmagno told the audience. "It's a sense that speaks to your soul. It's a sense I get when I'm doing science ... the sense I feel in these rare unforgettable moments of prayer and God finds the time to find me to speak."

The presentation before a full house in the church was one of several special events leading to the eclipse. The city also planned a downtown festival over the weekend before the skies darkened. Vendors hawked T-shirts, Christmas tree ornaments, plaques, jewelry, posters and anything else they could creatively tie to the event.

Sts. Peter and Paul parishioner Maureen Leamy took time Aug. 19 to visit the vendors during the downtown festival. An assistant county attorney for Christian County, Leamy was looking forward to seeing the eclipse, even though it meant that Tuesday will be a busy day for hearing criminal cases from the long weekend the court was closed.
"This is time for Hopkinsville to shine," she said. "We never had an event like this."

Andra V. Gold, owner of Accessories Plus in Hopkinsville, made several dozen T-shirts with a snappy message: "Keep calm. It's only the eclipse." He said he sold a few shirts, but more importantly the eclipse and the celebration surrounding it was a way to meet people, some of whom traveled hundreds of miles to southwest Kentucky, and impart a few words of wisdom.

"If they can travel that distance, why can't we walk out our back door and be hospitable?" he said. "We can be hospitable and understand each other."


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**August 24, 2017**

**Taking a Walk Through Deep Time**
**New App Offers a Lesson on the Earth's Long History**

**By Sam Mowe**
**Garrison Institute**

*Given the short-term concerns and speed that characterize our busy modern lives, it's easy to forget that our original ancestors were bacteria. A new app called Deep Time Walk attempts to remind us of our common evolutionary history with all life—including single-celled prokaryotes such as bacteria that formed about 4,000 million years ago—through the combination of an audio book and physical walk.*

“The idea is to help people develop a deep sense of connection with the Earth,” says Stephan Harding, the science director behind Deep Time Walk and resident ecologist at Schumacher College. “When you hear about the history of the Earth while you’re walking, then you really start to experience a felt, bodily understanding of how ancient the Earth is. Instead of just being an intellectual concept, it becomes a full-body experience in which your mind, senses, feelings, and intuition are engaged.”

The walk is 4.6 kilometers, representing 4,600 million years of the Earth’s history. Every meter is a million years, every footstep is 500,000 years. During that time, walkers learn about some of the key moments in the Earth’s history that led to the evolution of life—such as how the moon was formed, the beginning of oxygen-producing photosynthesis, and, eventually, the appearance of multicellular life. Humans don’t appear until the very end of the walk, during the last 200,000 years.

“There’s a whole series of major events that had to take place for us to be here,” Harding says. “It’s an extraordinary and mysterious thing that there is something rather than nothing in the universe. Even though the app is based on the best science, our hope is that it takes people into a dimension of awe and wonder.”
In order to have some dramatic tension between the science and sense of mystery, a scientist and a fool guide users through the app experience. The script for the audio book was written by Harding and playwright Peter Oswald.

Engendering a sense of awe around the science and mystery of the Earth’s history, Harding says, can also be vitally important for inspiring action on problems like climate change.

“If we can give people the felt experience of being inside the living Earth, perhaps that will encourage them to act in favor of the Earth,” he says. “Part of the problem we face now with respect to climate change is that people see the Earth as something external to themselves. It’s actually our wider body—a great, living being, inside which we live symbiotically.”

Sam Mowe is the editor of the Garrison Institute’s blog.

https://www.garrisoninstitute.org/blog/taking-a-walk-through-deep-time/

August 24, 2017

Judge rules Adorers must give access to land for pipeline

By Dawn Araujo-Hawkins
Global Sisters Report

A federal judge ruled Aug. 23 that the Adorers of the Blood of Christ in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, must give a pipeline company immediate access to their land.

Judge Jeffrey Schmehl's decision comes about a month after Williams, the company building the Atlantic Sunrise pipeline extension, sued the sisters for immediate seizure of their land to prevent the construction of a chapel in the path of the planned pipeline. The company had already been granted a substantive right to possession, but the chapel, which the Adorers built in July, was intended as a protest.

In his ruling, Schmehl dismissed the idea that granting Williams and its parent company, Transco, immediate access to the land violates the sisters' religious freedom.

"Adorers claim that they 'exercise their religious beliefs by, among other things, caring for and protecting the land they own,' and that their efforts to 'preserve the sacredness of God's Earth' are integral to the practice of their faith," he wrote. "However, the Adorers have failed to establish how Transco's possession of the right of way on their land will in any way affect their ability to practice their faith and spread their message. They have not presented one piece of evidence that demonstrates how their religious beliefs will be abridged in any way."

Schmehl agreed with Transco that the pipeline project has already incurred "irreparable harm" caused by delays in construction. Transco alleged that not having access to the Adorers' land —
as well as the land of the four other defendants in the case — was costing it $500,000 a month and delaying revenue of $33 million a month.

"We are disappointed that the federal judge today made the decision to condemn the rights of way and grant immediate possession of our (and others') property in Lancaster County to the Transcontinental Pipe Line Co. for the Atlantic Sunrise gas pipeline project," the sisters said in a statement posted to their website. "We will be evaluating our next steps."

The sisters declined to make any additional statement.

The Adorers are one of an estimated 32 local landowners who have refused to sell their land to Williams. The Atlantic Sunrise pipeline would be a $3 billion, 183-mile extension of the Transco pipeline system that currently runs 10,200 miles from Texas to New York.

"We appreciate the effort of the court to evaluate this issue and reach a timely decision," Williams said in a statement sent to Global Sisters Report. "It is important to stress that landowners still retain ownership of their property and are fairly compensated for the easement. The easement only gives us the limited right to install and operate the pipeline. Use of the land, with certain limitations, can remain the same as before construction."

Still pending, however, is the sisters' case against the oil company and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. That case states the pipeline violates the sisters' rights under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, the same law the Little Sisters of the Poor have cited in their case against the contraceptive mandate in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

Lancaster Against Pipelines spokesperson Lori Ann Neumann said the Adorers' lawyer is scheduled to meet with Schmehl about this case Aug. 25.

[Dawn Araujo-Hawkins is a Global Sisters Report staff writer. Her email address is daraujo@ncronline.org. Follow her on Twitter: @dawn_cherie]


August 28, 2017

Catholic groups are mobilizing to help in Hurricane Harvey’s aftermath

By Rhina Guidos
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON (CNS) -- Catholic dioceses and charities are quickly organizing to help in the aftermath of a Category 4 hurricane that made landfall with heavy rains and winds of 130 miles per hour late Aug. 25 into the Rockport, Texas area, northeast of Corpus Christi. The National
Weather Service said in a tweet Aug. 27 that the rainfall expected after the hurricane and storm are over "are beyond anything experienced before."

The hurricane, named Harvey, is said to be the strongest one to hit the United States in more than a decade and perhaps the strongest one to make landfall in Texas.

Catholic Charities USA, as well as the Society of St. Vincent de Paul Disaster Services, announced early on Aug. 26 that they're mobilizing to help an as-yet-unknown number of persons affected by the hurricane. The Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops has a list of charities helping with the disaster listed on its website at https://txcatholic.org/harvey.

Authorities reported at least five casualties as of Aug. 27, but because of safety issues, not many emergency teams have been yet able to respond to the aftermath and much of the damage is unknown. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott declared the state a disaster area, which will allow federal money to help in reconstruction. Catholic groups said they want to help with the immediate needs of the communities affected.

"We will be sending in rapid-response teams to help our impacted St. Vincent de Paul councils and we are coordinating nationally with the Knights of Columbus, Knights of Malta and (Catholic Charities USA)," said Elizabeth Disco-Shearer, CEO of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul USA.

Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, on Aug. 27 urged "all people of goodwill to closely monitor future calls for assistance for victims and survivors in the days ahead."

The cardinal also is the head of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, one of the hardest-hit areas.

"Hurricane Harvey hit the Gulf Coast in a catastrophic and devastating way this weekend, bringing with it severe flooding and high winds which have taken human life, caused countless injuries, and severely damaged homes and property throughout the region," said the cardinal in an Aug. 27 news release. "The effects of this storm continue to put people in harm's way, with horrific scenes playing out all around, such as those of people trapped on their rooftops as water continues to rise around them. Many dioceses of the church in the United States have been affected; many others will be as the storm continues."

He asked for prayers but also for assistance for those affected. One of the first to pledge help was the Diocese of Brownsville, Texas, where Bishop Daniel E. Flores authorized a second collection to be taken up at the diocese's local churches on the weekend of Aug. 26-27 to send to Catholic Charities in nearby Corpus Christi and "other places hardest hit by loss of power, storm damage, flooding."

It's been hard to communicate with other areas, said Bishop Flores in an Aug. 26 interview with Catholic News Service, so it's hard to gauge the extent of the damage. But he said his diocese wanted to get a head start to quickly divert help where it is needed and as fast as possible.
If the Rio Grande Valley, where Bishop Flores' diocese is located, was spared the major impact of Hurricane Harvey, then the diocese had a duty to help their neighbors to the north, in the coastal areas of Corpus Christi and Galveston-Houston, which seemed to be hit hardest, he said. Hurricane Harvey seemed to enter near Corpus Christi and affected seven coastal counties in Texas and one Louisiana parish.

"We continue to pray for every for everyone affected by the hurricane and those who are at risk as the storms continue," said Bishop Flores in a statement.

Though the brunt of the hurricane's winds has passed and Harvey was downgraded to a tropical storm hours after landfall, heavy rains and "catastrophic flooding" are expected for days, said the National Hurricane Center.

"We have to remember ... the families affected by flood damage in the next few days in other parts of the state will be in need of relief," said Bishop Flores. "We will assess better how we can help as we get further information about the needs from the (Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops) and Catholic Charities."

In an Aug. 26 statement published by the Galveston-Houston archdiocese, Cardinal DiNardo said powerful winds and heavy rainfall have already impacted many lives and homes throughout the region, and many in the southern counties of his archdiocese have already suffered substantial property damage and losses.

In Houston, the country's fourth largest city with 6.6 million residents, many struggled seeking safety in flooded residential streets, which are expected to get up to 50 inches of rainfall by the time the rain stops sometime at the end of August.

"Numerous homes in these communities are currently without power. Several forecasts anticipate additional storm damage and flooding in the coming days, along with high winds and tornado activity," Cardinal DiNardo said.

Up to 250,000 have been reported without power in Texas, a number that's expected to rise.

San Antonio Archbishop Gustavo Garcia-Siller said in a statement that the archdiocese pledged its support to recovery efforts that will start after the rain and wind subside.

"My thoughts and prayers are with the people of the dioceses of Corpus Christi and Victoria, as well as the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, as they cope with the damaging effects of Hurricane Harvey," he said. "The people of San Antonio have opened their arms to welcome evacuees of this historic hurricane, and Catholic Charities of the archdiocese has been assisting and will continue to assist in a variety of ways those impacted by this natural disaster."

Bishop W. Michael Mulvey, of the Diocese of Corpus Christi, said he was grateful to the bishops who reached out to him and to his diocese. He said the true damage around the diocese still is not known and officials are waiting for conditions that will allow a better assessment of the damage.
In his statement, Cardinal DiNardo asked for prayers for emergency personnel and volunteers who are out and about in dangerous conditions and also "for those residing in our archdiocese, in Texas and along the Gulf Coast, be safe and may God have mercy on those affected by Hurricane Harvey."


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**August 30, 2017**

Pope asks world leaders to listen to ‘cry of the Earth’

By Associated Press
Washington Post

VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis is urging world leaders to “listen to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor” and take measures to protect the environment.

Francis made the appeal Wednesday in announcing that he and the spiritual leader of the world’s Orthodox Christians, Patriarch Bartholomew I, would be releasing a joint statement on care for God’s creation on Friday.

In 2015, Francis designated Sept. 1 as the church’s day for prayer for the environment, framing care for the planet as a moral issue.

In his announcement Wednesday, Francis urged everyone to be respectful and responsible toward the environment: “We also appeal to those who have influential roles to listen to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor, who suffer the most from ecological imbalance.”


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**August 30, 2017**

Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew to issue joint environmental statement

Crux

On Friday, Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew will issue a joint message to mark the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation.
September 1 is observed in both the Catholic and Orthodox Churches as the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation. This year, the leaders of both Churches will issue a joint statement inviting everyone “to take an attitude of respect and responsibility towards creation.”

During his general audience on Wednesday, Francis appealed for those with influence to “listen to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, who suffer most because of the unbalanced ecology.”

The day of prayer was instituted by the Orthodox Church in 1989 by Bartholomew’s predecessor, Patriarch Demetrios I.

In 2015, Bartholomew’s personal envoy, Metropolitan John Zizioulas, was one of the speakers at the presentation of *Laudato si’*, Francis’s landmark encyclical on environmental ecology. In the document, Francis praised the ecumenical patriarch’s work for the environment.

Zizioulas suggested that all the Christian churches start marking the day together, as an ecumenical gesture.

Francis immediately embraced the idea, and decided to institute the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation in the Catholic Church the same year.

In his letter announcing the decision, Francis said the annual commemoration would offer individual believers and communities a fitting opportunity to reaffirm their personal vocation to be stewards of creation, to thank God for the wonderful handiwork which he has entrusted to our care, and to implore his help for the protection of creation as well as his pardon for the sins committed against the world in which we live.

“The celebration of this Day, on the same date as the Orthodox Church, will be a valuable opportunity to bear witness to our growing communion with our Orthodox brothers and sisters,” the pope wrote at the time. “We live at a time when all Christians are faced with the same decisive challenges, to which we must respond together, in order to be more credible and effective. It is my hope that this Day will in some way also involve other Churches and ecclesial Communities, and be celebrated in union with similar initiatives of the World Council of Churches.”

Since the beginning of his pontificate, Francis has forged a strong bond with Bartholomew. The ecumenical patriarch attended the papal installation, and met with the pope the next year when he visited Jerusalem, where they signed a joint declaration.

Later in 2014, Bartholomew hosted Francis in Istanbul, and the two religious leaders together visited refugees on the Greek island of Lesbos - located off the coast of Turkey - in April 2016. In September 2016, Bartholomew met with Francis in Assisi, for an interfaith peace congress.

In April 2017, Francis, Bartholomew, and Pope Tawadros II - the head of the Coptic Church - prayed together in Cairo, Egypt.
Friday’s message will be the first joint statement marking the day issued by the leaders of the Catholic and Orthodox communions; previously each had issued their own individual statement.

Francis said he and Bartholomew are inviting everyone “to take an attitude of respect and responsibility towards creation.”


August 30, 2017

Muslim worshippers seek green inspiration at annual Haj pilgrimage

By Adela Suliman
Reuters

LONDON (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - Some 2 million people are expected to travel across the globe to eat, sleep and pray in unison from Wednesday, as the annual Islamic pilgrimage of Haj gets underway in Mecca.

For billions of Muslims who are physically and financially able, Haj is a mandatory act of worship. But the religious celebration also has a substantial impact on the environment.

Environmentally aware worshippers say that should be reduced, while inspiring Muslims to adopt a greener lifestyle.

“Haj is all about living lightly and centering yourself around God,” 28-year-old pilgrim Shanza Ali told the Thomson Reuters Foundation from Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

“We make many journeys in our life, and we go to many places, but this is the only journey that’s physical, mental and spiritual,” said Ali, who is chair of UK-based group Muslim Climate Action.

She has found many similarities between Haj’s message of simplicity and being environmentally conscious, and has tried to minimize her own carbon footprint and waste during the pilgrimage, which lasts for at least six days and takes worshippers to a series of holy sites in Saudi Arabia.

Haj, which predates Islam and is traced by Muslims to the monotheistic figure Abraham, is now the world’s largest annual gathering of Muslims. Saudi Arabia stakes its reputation on its guardianship of the faith’s holiest sites.

For Husna Ahmad, author of “The Green Guide for Hajj”, Muslims are doctrinally required to be stewards of the Earth.
Tackling climate change is no longer about preserving the planet for future generations as its effects are evident now, she said.

The majority of Muslims live outside Saudi Arabia and could collectively influence the greening of the sacred rituals, she added.

“Consumer power is something that people need to think about in terms of flights, what they take, what they wear, the rubbish they throw, plastic bottles and all those sorts of things. We have to be conscious of that,” she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Muslims need to move away from a fast, disposable society, she added, with Haj being the potential start of that journey.

**GREEN CITY AUDIT**

In recent years, Saudi Arabia has taken steps to green the Haj, such as setting quotas for pilgrim numbers and developing the Mecca metro system to limit pollution.

The Saudi Green Building Forum, a Riyadh-based non-governmental group recognized by the United Nations, has recently been tasked with auditing green efforts in Medina, the country’s second holy city where the Prophet Mohammad is buried and a site visited by millions of pilgrims.

Forum secretary-general Faisal Alfadl said his team will measure the green credentials of the holy cities of Mecca, Medina and others against international guidelines on energy use, waste, water, transport and human well-being.

People now realize it is politically and culturally incorrect not to respect the environment, said Alfadl.

“We have moved forward,” he said, noting a shift in the public mood from desert Bedouins to city dwellers on the importance of protecting the environment, with the focus now on action rather than simply raising awareness.

Reviving traditional practices could help - for example, sharing water among pilgrims from a communal source, which was common before plastic bottles became ubiquitous.

And the white marble stones surrounding the central cube-shaped Kaaba building in Mecca naturally prevent the heat-island effect found in other urban areas, Alfadl said.

Recycling may not be at the top of pilgrims’ minds, but Muslims have a duty to recognize the creator of the environment and reflect on Islamic teachings not to harm animals, waste water or cut down trees unnecessarily, said Fatima Ragie of Green Deen South Africa, a Muslim environmental network.
Ragie, who completed Haj in 2009, urged greater efforts once the pilgrimage ends - for instance, ensuring food is not wasted when millions of animals are slaughtered, marking Abraham’s near sacrifice of his son and the start of the Eid holiday.

More mosques and Muslim leaders should also speak up about climate change and the environment, she said.

**TAKING THE MESSAGE HOME**

From Bangladesh to North Africa, climate change is a reality for many Muslims, as floods and droughts fuel instability and conflict, said Nana Firman, who participated in the U.N. climate talks in Morocco last year for the Global Muslim Climate Network.

“A lot of people feel like they don’t know what to do, so it’s really important that we engage (them),” she said.

Indonesia - which has the world’s largest Muslim population, according to the Pew Research Center - has launched initiatives, from a phone app showing pilgrims how to enjoy a green Haj, to offsetting carbon emissions from flights by planting trees, and limiting the number of times each person can undertake the pilgrimage, said Firman.

She urged Haj pilgrims to “reflect and make a change in their lives when they go back, and care more for the environment”.

As Ali prepares herself to undertake the challenging pilgrimage in the Gulf heat with her husband and mother, the natural environment offers a way for her to draw closer to God.

“I think just reflecting on the fact you’re with humanity, you see people from every corner of the world... That really makes you appreciate the idea that we’re all sharing the Earth together,” she said.

**https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-religion-environment-climatecha-idUSKCN1BA1BR**

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**August 31, 2017**

“One thing is clear, faith communities can be a tremendous driver of change”

By Albin Hillert*
World Council of Churches

*Gathering at World Water Week in Stockholm, Sweden on 30 August, representatives from a range of faith communities and organizations engaged in water issues held a session exploring how faith communities can help achieve the sixth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
The session, entitled “Water and Faith: Building partnerships to achieve the SDGs” was the second consecutive one on faith and water at the annual World Water Week. By showcasing a range of good practices by faith communities done to help achieve the SDGs on water and sanitation, it highlighted the importance of working together, within church traditions, ecumenically and in engagement between faith communities and the water community at large.

Reflecting on the role of faith engagement in achieving the SDGs, Rev. Henrik Grape, of the Church of Sweden and coordinator of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Working Group on Climate Change, said, “We have sometimes thought in the past that for many climate and water issues, technology will come to the rescue in the end. But we see today that while there are a lot of hopeful developments in the area of technology and environmentally-friendly solutions, we also need value-based organizations and communities to act as a driving force, to act and achieve changes in our behaviour and habits.”

“One thing has become clear to me over the years,” added Peter Weiderud, director of the Swedish Institute Alexandria. “We sometimes have a tendency to view religious leaders and faith communities as something constant, fixed, something that cannot change. I believe we should do the contrary. If we can address issues of water in the right way, religious communities can be a tremendous resource in driving change in many communities.”

The theme of water runs through many of the world religions, the participants observed, and faith leaders rarely need to be convinced of the importance and sacredness of water as a source of life. Instead, a key point of focus should be on strengthening the many concrete water projects run by faith communities across the world.

Representing the Hindu community, Kiran Bali from the United Religions Initiative said, “to us it is not a question of whether you are from a particular religion or indigenous tradition. What we have decided to do is to explore existing religious rituals, and see how we can make them ‘green’.”

“There are so many examples of faith communities working together at the grassroots level, to help preserve water, to help conserve water, to help clean the water, and I think it’s so important that as communities we continue to revisit the practices that we have in our religions,” Bali concluded.

**Sustainable partnerships focus in moving forward**

"I am very happy to see what we have achieved at this year’s World Water Week,” said Dinesh Suna, coordinator of the WCC Ecumenical Water Network. "In looking forward, what we want to secure now are sustainable partnerships and connections on issues of water. One step we are taking in this direction is through the upcoming production of an evidence-based research publication that will show what faith communities are actually doing on issues of water and sanitation in the context of SDG number six.”

Rev. Grape added, ”when we took the first steps towards engaging faith communities with the water community here at the World Water Week last year, I feared that it would be a one-off
thing with high-level attendance but no long-term engagement. So I’m very glad to see that we have done this follow-up, and I appreciate the promising view of a third round next year.”

“Today’s session was very encouraging,” said Dr Asa Elfström of the Church of Sweden, and a founding member of the WCC-EWN, “because it shows how faith engagement in water issues has not only been solid for more than a decade, but has clearly now moved also into the international arena.”

Rev. Adam Russell Taylor, lead for the Faith-Based Initiative at the World Bank Group concluded, “in the context of securing water for all and achieving the SDGs, it is clear that we have to utilize the distinctive assets and resources that we have each been given. And speaking from the perspective of the World Bank Group, the question is no longer if we should cooperate with faith communities to drive development forward, but how we can do so.”

The session was organized by the WCC Ecumenical Water Network in collaboration with Church of Sweden, Global Water Partnership, Stockholm International Water Institute, and Swedish Institute Alexandria.

Download free, high-resolution photos from “Water and Faith: Building partnerships to achieve the SDGs”

WCC holds public event at World Water Week in Stockholm (WCC press release of 25 August 2017)

Faith to play key role in achieving SDGs, says panel at World Water Week (WCC press release of 31 August 2016)

World Water Week Stockholm

*Albin Hillert is communication officer at the World Council of Churches


August 31, 2017

The Struggle to Protect a Tree at the Heart of Hopi Culture

By Kate Ruder
Sapiens

A rumbling, low boom unfurled over the land like a current of thunder. But it was a clear, cloudless day in northern Arizona. We realized the reverberation was the echo of an explosion—dynamite loosening the earth—and that the strip mine was finding its way toward a colossal seam of coal.
It was the fall of 2015, and the Kayenta Mine’s owners, Peabody Energy, the world’s largest coal company, had proposed to expand the mine into neighboring areas. If that were to happen, then the place we were standing on would one day be peeled open like a can of sardines to reveal the prize of shiny, midnight-black coal.

The Kayenta Mine has long been a source of controversy. Every year it ships millions of tons of coal by rail to the Navajo Generating Station northeast of the Grand Canyon. The power plant keeps air conditioners humming in Phoenix and Los Angeles, and lights shimmering in Las Vegas and beyond.

We were there as anthropologists with a team of researchers and Hopi elders to study the project’s potential impact on religious sites, archaeological remains, springs, and more. But at every stop, the elders talked about the juniper tree. The trees were so abundant—blanketing every hill that hasn’t been mined—that at first it seemed strange to be concerned about the potential loss of this plant. There were ancient Pueblo villages and graveyards to worry about. There were precious springs and rare songbirds.

But the elders kept returning to their fears for the junipers.

“We’re always going to be here,” said Bill Preston, a soft-spoken Hopi traditionalist from the village of Walpi. “This is our home. All these plants have life. What will happen when they blow it up? What for? Money. But it will be gone by the time our children grow up.”

The one-seed juniper is the most humble of trees. It grows leisurely, each year lucky to reach some 6 inches closer to the sky. A mature plant, a survivor of centuries of droughts and storms, may stand no taller than you or I. The bark, a coarse calico of grays, sheds from the trunk in long strips like peeling skin. The tree is just common enough to easily fade into the dusty landscape in which it grows—a range that extends from Arizona to the western regions of Texas and Oklahoma, from southern Colorado to perhaps as far south as Mexico. It is an evergreen, but its leaves typically feel sharp and look burned. Few would say it is beautiful.

And yet, the juniper’s ordinariness masks an array of remarkable gifts. It is an oyster of the high desert that hides many pearls inside. To the Hopi people, the juniper is a vital part of their traditional way of life.

That Hopis ascertained the tree’s extraordinary endowments is unsurprising given their dependence on wild plants for their survival. With cultural origins that stretch back thousands of years in the Southwest, the Hopi Tribe now numbers about 14,000 members who live in rural isolation. The heartland of the tribe is in northern Arizona, on a stark, high plateau that receives about 10 inches of rain a year. Hopis must make use of every possible thing. They are traditionally farmers of corn, beans, squash, and other vegetables. But their livelihood also depends on gathering a range of wild resources—animals, minerals, and especially plants. Some travel up to 200 miles away from home to gather them. These collected plants are a part of everyday Hopi life. They are used for food, housing, tools, decoration, medicine, ceremonies, and magic. Many Hopi traditionalists could name without hesitation such plants as nanakopsi
When we directed a research project in 2006 to evaluate Hopi cultural resources in the path of a new power line that stretches from New Mexico to Nevada, we discovered that Hopis depend on more than 200 plant species for their cultural practices.

Consider that. How many wild plant species and their uses can you name?

The juniper provides Hopis the basics of warmth, shelter, tools, and food. Hopis do not cut down junipers but rather collect deadwood for winter fires and for building houses, corrals, and fences. Juniper roots, which can stretch downward 200 feet, are carved into cradleboards, bows and arrows, and hairpieces that are used for the famous squash-blossom hairdo of Hopi maidens. The bark—làapu—is a fire starter, and can be rolled into a ceremonial torch called a kopitsoki. Collected deadwood is often the fuel used to cook piiki—a paper-thin rolled wafer bread made of ground blue corn.

The juniper tree’s berries are considered a “starvation food” for when the tribe’s crops fail. The berries are still eaten, but just as significantly, they recall Hopi history—all the hard times their ancestors endured. “Just because people are living an easy life now, it hasn’t always been that way,” Owen Numkena, a Hopi elder, told us during a related project. “It’s important to remember.”

The juniper’s deeper value to the Hopi lies in its powers to purify and protect. “It’s a tree with a lot of medicine,” Preston said. Boiled as a tea, the leaves are a medicine; the sap can be consumed to clean people’s intestines out. Newborn children are rubbed with juniper ash, while their mothers, who veered toward death during childbirth, are bathed in juniper-infused water. Berries ground to a paste are used to clean new mothers further. Even misbehaving youth are held to the smoke of a smoldering juniper fire to purge them of mischief. Juniper smoke also cleanses Hopis who have encountered the dead.

Hopis see the forests of juniper as interconnected to the entire natural world, a thread woven into the tapestry of life. Junipers provide shade to other plants; they give shelter and food to wildlife; their roots retain the soil, keeping erosion at bay.

In the dry, high desert of northern Arizona, the juniper contributes further to Hopi life by bringing the most precious resource of all: water. “These trees trap the clouds and bring the rain,” Lyman Polacca, an elder from the village of Sitsomovi, said. “They’re like our rainforest.”

A lot has changed since that day in 2015. The Navajo Generating Station’s owners announced in June that the power plant is no longer economically sustainable and they are planning to shut it down. Since the Kayenta Mine ships coal exclusively to the Navajo Generating Station, it appears that the mine may close by 2019.

This is good news for the juniper stands we saw as we stood near the mine back in 2015. And some people welcome the energy project’s demise for other reasons too. The power station has
degraded air quality. Peabody’s mining operations have destroyed hundreds of Hopi ancestral sites. And since the company began mining the area in the 1970s, it has used billions of gallons of pristine drinking water.

But others fear what will become of the region’s precarious economy. Peabody claims that 99 percent of its workers are Native American. The Hopi Tribe depends on royalties from the mine for upward of 85 percent of its annual budget. But while the economic costs of the plant shutting down would be steep for the Hopi and others in the region, there would also be substantial and important benefits, such as cleaner air and water, the restoration of harmony in the ecosystem, and a return to a more respectful and mindful way of life on Hopi lands.

The Dakota Access pipeline, which carries oil nearly 1,200 miles from North Dakota to Illinois, has made headlines over the last year for threatening traditional sites and waterways. But across the United States, countless development projects threaten resources that Native Americans depend on for their cultural survival. As anthropologists, we’ve worked with the Hopi Tribe’s Cultural Preservation Office for years to document the natural and cultural resources that are in the path of many new pipelines, power plants, mines, and roads.

Pinyon-juniper vegetation still covers about 100 million acres across the American West. But these ecosystems have declined over the last century. Since the 1800s, pinyon-juniper forests in the Southwest have been dramatically reduced by livestock grazing, landscape fragmentation, the timber industry, wildfire-control techniques, invasive plant species, and development projects. Hopis have agonized over these changes. Because Hopis do not cut down junipers, they must find healthy forests that produce deadwood they can collect. They have already lost easy access to junipers in their immediate homeland. When juniper forests are cleared, Hopis lose a resource that is at the heart of their way of life.

Preston told us that after witnessing the mined and reclaimed areas, he became consumed with thoughts about the survival of the Hopi homeland. “These places were put here for us, and it is our responsibility to preserve them for the future,” he said.

Hopis are further troubled by the decline in juniper forests because the tree is not merely a tool for their culture. It is a living testimony to sacred practices. “People have come here for centuries, and there are offerings everywhere,” Preston said. “The whole landscape is filled with offerings.” When the juniper is gathered for its many uses, Hopis leave offerings of corn meal at the base of each tree to feed the spirits—and as a sign of respect for the tree’s gift and a prayer that the tree continues to grow strong.

Each juniper thus becomes a shrine, an offering place. The hills and plateaus of the northern Southwest are not just forests of junipers. They are forests filled with living shrines.

https://www.sapiens.org/culture/hopi-juniper-tree-mining/