

Newsletter February 2013

Inspiration for faith communities



Photo: The annual [Peninsula Paddle](#) in Cape Town

IT WAS WORLD WETLANDS DAY on the 2nd February. In this newsletter edition we pay tribute to these “jewels of the landscape.”

Species of fish, insects, birds, aquatic plants, trees, shrubs, reptiles, mammals... so many diverse forms of life co-exist in the intricate eco-systems of wetlands! As humans we depend directly or indirectly on wetlands as they play a number of roles in the environment, including water purification, shoreline stability and flood control. They are valuable ‘eco-infrastructures’ in our current times of water-scarcity.

Wetlands also play a crucial role as spaces of recreation and spiritual nourishment. The influence of our natural environment on our spiritual and psychological wellbeing is immeasurable! These are spaces in which people can connect with their creator, with the source of all life. American Scientist George Washington Carver once said “ I love to think of nature as having unlimited broadcasting stations, through which God speaks to us every day, every hour and every moment of our lives, if we will only tune in and remain so.” Throughout history, faith communities have played an important part in the conservation of the environment, often to protect natural sacred sites.

Sadly, according to [Working for Wetlands](#) recent studies reveal that 65% of South Africa’s wetland types are under threat (48% critically endangered, 12% endangered and 5% vulnerable). As people of faith we can play a part in protecting and nurturing our precious natural heritage. An example of positive action was the interfaith Day of Social Action organized by the Jewish Netzer Youth at Zeekoevlei in Cape Town:



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A special meeting at Zeekoevlei

By Sarah Dekker



Every December, South Africa's progressive Jewish youth movement [Netzer](#) organize a summer camp in Cape Town. Aside from being lots of fun, these camps aim to get youth involved in social action as a means of reaching one of their ideals: Tikkun Olam (repair of the world.) This year, on their camp's Social Day of Action, or *Tikkun Day*, the aim was to have dialogues with youth from other faith communities while caring for the environment. SAFCEI put them in

touch with Father John Oliver of the Western Cape Religious Leaders Forum, who has been very involved with the conservation of wetland areas of Cape Town.

When we arrived at Zeekoevlei (one of the wetlands in Cape Town's southern suburbs), groups of young excited Jews, Christians and Muslims were scattered among the reeds, clusters of trees and fields. Equipped with spades, forks and wheelbarrows they were planting indigenous plants, clearing weeds, creating picnic areas and removing dead plant matter from the waterways. Together they were restoring the neglected wetland area. It was so inspiring to see them "healing" this spectacular peaceful setting in our urban landscape!



Maps of Zeekoevlei and lists of questions on faith & environment had also been provided. Topics of conversation ranged from chocolate and the Middle East to God, religious differences and similarities, earth keeping and how younger generations can bring about environmental and social change.

Carbon Fast for Lent

Lent for Christians, is a time of repentance and fasting, of turning away from all that is counter to God's will and purposes for his world and all who live in it. Often Christians give something up, such as chocolate or alcohol. This year, focus your giving up (or making changes to your lifestyle), to reduce your 'carbon footprint'.

The Anglican church has produced a [guide for Lent](#) with suggestions to take you from Ash Wednesday to Palm Sunday. Each week focusses on a different part of our carbon fast, encouraging us to live more simply, conserve water, cut down on electricity, and reduce our use of petrol.

Are you participating in an environmentally conscious Lent? Share your story with us and we will publish it in our next newsletter!



How to...



[...make a hotbox](#), also known as the Wonderbag.

The hotbox uses no energy or fuel and works through insulation. It is used to cook foods, to transport and continue cooking your food, as a plate-warmer keeping plates perfectly hot in the dining room, the garden or on the beach. It is a cooler box which is ideal for keeping drinks ice cold and storing ice, an incubation chamber for the making of foods like yoghurt and breads.

For those of you who are not up for the task of making your own, these can now be [purchased from SAFCEI](#). (see link for further information) We also sell extra large wonderbags for catering purposes at mosques, churches, etc.

Courtesy of WESSA and USAID

SAFCEI News

New SAFCEI office in Gauteng!

We're very excited to announce that SAFCEI now has a new office in Pretoria, South Africa. Contact details are as follows:

Address: Khanya House,
399 Paul Kruger Street,
Pretoria 0001
Telephone: 012 323 6458



Our SAFCEI team is thrilled to be more accessible to people in the north of South Africa! Working for us from Gauteng are:

- Lydia Mogano (Regional Coordinator)
- Rev Glynis Goyns (Eco-congregations Coordinator)
- Tsepo Hlasoa (Field worker)

The Energy Crisis and our Future



Fifty religious leaders joined SAFCEI for an energy briefing session in Cape Town on the 6th February. The event equipped religious leaders with factual insights on energy generation and hydraulic fracturing in South Africa.

This was a highly informative event, with presentations by environmental lawyer Cormac Cullinan, the director of Energy and Green Economy, Dr Jim Petri and energy consultant Robert Fischer of Project 90 by 2030. The talks were followed by an enthusiastic discussion. The event highlighted the importance of positive action by faith leaders and their communities to establish an alternative energy future.

Other News

NYLSVLEY UNDER THREAT



Now an internationally renowned RAMSAR site, the 4,000-hectare [Nylsvley Conservancy](#) is part of South Africa's largest flood-plain that stretches 70 km from Modimolle to Mokopane. The reserve is home to 72 mammal species, including the rare Roan antelope. High rainfall years bring a mind-boggling 80 000 migratory

water birds to the floodplains, with up to 420 recorded species.

Now this area is under threat from an opencast platinum mine. Although there will be some distance between the mine and the conservation area, there is great concern around the impact on the underground water-table of Nylsvley and its sensitive ecosystem.

GREAT NEWS: CITY'S BLACK RIVER CLEAN-UP PROJECT BEARS FRUIT!

The City of Cape Town's clean-up of the Black River has directly increased bird life in the area, including the return of the Greater Flamingo. This shows the success of the project, which is being used to address water issues



throughout the metro. It is also part of the Mayor's Special Job Creation Project, which focuses on helping those residents in the city who are most in need of income, while at the same time enhancing service delivery and improving the quality of our water. [Read full story](#)



DISCOUNT - WETLANDS RESOURCES

There is clear water up to your ankles and a dragonfly zips past your head as you watch some ducks fly off the water – welcome to the world of the wetland! In celebration of World Wetlands Day and for the month of February only, WESSA Share-Net is offering a pack of three 'wetland books' at the discounted price of R39 (usual price R60). Visit www.wessa.org.za and click on their WESSA Share-Net logo.

ANNUAL PENINSULA PADDLE



Every Year, around June, a group of intrepid social activists and outdoor adventurers take to the Peninsula's rivers, vleis and canals to highlight the plight of Cape Town's inland waterways. All citizens are connected to the City's waterways - whether living in well-served suburbs or areas of urban poverty. The event aims to highlight

the environmental, social and political challenges that affect the Cape Peninsula and to unite communities living alongside waterways in celebrating the value of these often neglected or undervalued resources while drawing attention to the need to conserve them. Check out the [Peninsula Paddle website](#) to find out more. If you're not living in Cape Town, how about organizing a similar event with your faith community to attract attention to wetlands or rivers in your area?

Upcoming event

EARTHKEEPERS - An Inter-church conference on poverty and ecology,
8 - 10 March 2013, Bellville and Pinelands, Cape Town, South Africa. The speakers include:



- Climate change and its impact - Bishop Geoff Davies (Executive Director of SAFCEI)
- Impact of the destruction of biodiversity - Michael O'Brien Onyeka, (Greenpeace Africa)
- A Theological perspective – Prof. Ernst Conradie (Department of Religion and Theology, UWC)
- A Theological perspective – Prof. Klaus Nürnberger (Theological writer, Emeritus Professor and Senior Research Associate, UKZN)
- Responsible responses from the world of work –

Sanlam, Woolworths en Argi-Western Cape

Speakers will be followed by panel discussions and video clips
The [entry form is available here](#)

Poem

Haiku Cluster: On the Earth

By Rev Glynis Goynes

Life all a'quiver
shimmer of half-light
day wakes
Crisp, startled day Brilliant blue
clad in muted rose laundered clouds drip-dry
touch me too forever ... today
Magnolias, Earthrooted tree
bird talk and sunbeams stolid, mighty
Good morning filigree leaves
Hands cold, face aglow Sun-drenched birds in flight
threadbare sun swirl and glide
I reach for warmth free in God's sight
Brittle leaves skip Moon reflected
on pavements cold splendour. Waters
warm autumn hues repose, tranquil

Special Dates in February

- 2 – **Wetlands Day**
- 6 - **Energy Briefing**
- 10 – **Chinese New Year**
- 13 - **Ash Wednesday/ Lent begins** (Christian)
- 14 – **Valentine's Day**
- 21 - **Fast of Esther** (Jewish)
- 24 - **Purim** (Jewish)

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