

Faith and the Environment – A Conversation
June 27, 2010

Opening Thoughts

Excerpts were read from the pastoral letter from the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church, “God’s Renewed Creation: Call to Hope and Action” [Full Text of Bishop's Letter](#)

- The Earth is a gift from God, and He has entrusted its care to us
- Our neglect of this responsibility has fostered poverty, disease, and an environmental crisis
- God still invites us to participate in the work of renewal
- *“We cannot help the world until we change our way of being in it.”*

As you reflect on today’s worship experience [Earth Day Celebration], what does it mean to be stewards of God’s creation?

- Seeing all living things as divine changes the vision of what a steward is responsible for
- Honoring the sacred in nature and allowing this to be the foundation of ethical actions
- God is both **on** and **in** the earth
- The earth is one of the ways that God reaches out to us – we can ask “Am I paying attention?”
- Stewardship is like a garden – using our gifts to make something flourish or returning something to God better than we found it
- Stewardship is about both individual and collective responsibility
- Recognizing what a privilege it is that we have the earth and each other and the many blessings of a developed society
- Respecting the ways of wildlife rather than exercising dominion over wildlife
- Conserving our resources
- Working towards a balance with the cycles of nature
- Creating balance between preserving the environment and using resources responsibly or creating jobs
- We could plant trees, build schools, do mission work
- As consumers, we could carefully distinguish between wishes and needs
- As caretakers of the earth, we can get overwhelmed by the immensity of the responsibility
- Facing massive problems can lead to paralysis
- The presentation in church didn’t include any city environments, and it is sometimes easier to deal with earth/nature issues in rural settings
- Cities have to take responsibility for nature as well

What can you do as an individual to be a better steward of God’s creation? What are you willing to do, and what one thing are you committed to doing?

- Awareness and education – we need to be more informed
- Learn more about the sources of energy and their impact on the earth
- We need to know what we have (tune in to what is there and learn about it) in order to take care of it
- Our motives need to lead to actions (don’t just “talk the talk” but “walk the walk”)
- Get the environmental stewardship word out in person, not just on a piece of paper
- We can ask questions such as “Am I applying my gifts to what I see?” or “What can I contribute to a given need or issue regarding the earth?” or “Am I called or obligated to act?”
- Become more vocal in an active way instead of just a negative way

- Don't assume that someone else will take action
- Do energy surveys or household energy audits to see how we are using (or wasting) energy
- Use more energy-efficient cars or sign up for Ithaca Car Share
- Choose to walk, bike, carpool, or use public transportation whenever possible
- We could leave small "footprints" and live more simply
- Be willing to sacrifice some convenience
- Share expensive tools (like lawnmowers or snow-blowers) with others
- Sustainability can affect poverty
- Learn more about organic resources (not just food but things like fertilizer and pesticides)
- Compost
- Some actions to which individuals were willing to commit themselves include:
 - Switching to compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFL)
 - Biking to work as much as possible
 - Carrying shopping bags to grocery store and mall (to avoid plastic bags)
 - Eating locally grown food from CSA or Farmer's Market
 - Reducing the use of plastic of all sorts
 - Buying used clothes
 - Hanging clothes out to dry (using the dryer less often)
 - Buying Energy Star appliances
 - Turning off power strips and appliances that use energy even when "off"

How can we as a church go deeper with this process of taking care of our environment?

- The church needs to teach by example – continue to decrease use of paper and other resources
- Publish a list (with visual images) of things already done towards sustainability in the church
- The Trustees could prepare a sustainability report for the work completed thus far
- Increase the green space somewhere (plant trees, work in partnership with another church)
- Compost more (e.g., student groups doing composting/recycling/trash (CRT) work)
- Educate the congregation on proper disposal of things (e.g., signs at Collegetown Bagels)
- Create awareness of what happens to products (the waste they create, whether they are biodegradable)
- Revisit the church rummage sale as a way to keep things out of the landfill
- Communicate with local organizations and colleges to become aware of the learning opportunities available around here
- Give youth ministries a sense of purpose and community – get them to take ownership of an environmental project/task/initiative
- Publish and communicate the positive news, so the cause doesn't seem hopeless
- Coordinate with available resources and existing organizations, such as Cornell Cooperative Extension, maybe bringing groups in for workshops
- Invest the church's endowed funds in sustainable resources or companies that practice sustainability
- Have each church committee take responsibility for its own environmental impact (for various activities) rather than establishing one isolated Green committee
- Encourage carpooling to retreats
- Use mugs instead of paper/plastic cups at church functions – have people bring their own mugs
- Save towards future projects to make the church more energy efficient
- Have committees and/or individuals pledge themselves to sustainability