

Respect for the Interdependent Web of Existence

Sermonette for April 17, 2005 Service by Bruce G.S. Wiggins
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One of the principles we Unitarian Universalist congregations covenant to affirm and promote is, “Respect for the interdependent web of existence, of which we are a part.” Part of living our seventh principle is what we do as a group and a community – as a church. We at AS are doing a great deal. We have lots to be proud of ... and lots to do.

Environmentalism – or as some in the religious community call it, creation care -- is part of living our values.....And respecting each other. It is recognizing this incredible world, of which we are a part, and what a blessing we have.

At the same time, we do have severe environmental problems in our world and our country, and we can't be blind to those. The goal is to change a little bit at a time, each one of us and also in our collective life. And keep at it. The challenge is to do it out of a sense of joy and what I call wakefulness. We don't guarantee heavenly reward or retribution for our actions or beliefs. We have to find other motivations.

In 2001, at our national General Assembly, the delegates adopted a statement of conscience titled, “Responsible Consumption is a Moral Imperative.” We have copies of it in Conover Auditorium today.

Then this past year, the General Assembly adopted Global Warming as our study-action issue, to be worked on by congregations and debated for two years, leading up to adoption of a statement of conscience next year at General Assembly in St. Louis.

In addition, our national organization has founded the Seventh Principle Project, which has developed a Green Sanctuary certification program. I'll talk about that more in a moment.

Incidentally, our minister, Jim Eller, was instrumental in getting this environmental initiative started. He was one of the founders and guiding lights of the Seventh Principle Project. And he spoke eloquently in getting the Responsible Consumption study action issue adopted at General Assembly.

We are doing some wonderful things here at All Souls. Let me name a few:

1. When we renovated the building a decade or so ago, we paid attention to energy efficiency items such as zoned heating and cooling, and thermopane windows.
2. We recycle paper and numerous items from our building. Volunteers take the materials to our local drop-off centers to recycle the materials.
3. We have started serving fair-trade, organic, shade-grown coffee.
4. Chuck Downing has started a compost pile for yard wastes to keep these items out of a land fill and to make compost that can be used on the grounds

5. Chuck and the Grounds Committee have started a nature garden with native plants on the east side of the building. They have also chosen many native plants for the garden behind Simpson House. Native plants are adapted to this climate, use less water, and don't need fertilizers or pesticides. These are demonstration gardens that show us how we might do the same at home, and also show our neighbors how this can be done.
6. We are starting to work with Lifespan Religious Development to be sure environmental awareness and respect for the earth are part of our child, youth, and adult education programs.
7. We have taken the lead in developing a coalition of churches in the region to develop the consciousness and energy and motivation for environmental change in churches throughout the metro area. Part of what I want to encourage today, is that we all resist the temptation to dismiss others of different political or theological persuasions on this issue, at least, and work to form coalitions.

What are ideas and plans for the future?

Well, the Board of Trustees has affirmed that All Souls seek certification as a Green Sanctuary. What does it involve? It's a little like the process that the congregation used to gain the Welcoming Congregation designation over a decade ago. We evaluate our current practices in all areas of our church, including facilities, chemicals we use on the property, our purchasing practices, religious services, religious education, energy use, water use, and investments. ... Then we develop a plan to improve our practices, and carry it out.

This Green Sanctuary certification is like the challenge we all face in our personal lives, our households, and our work life. There are always things to learn to live more sustainably, and we hope to learn continuously. But we need to start where we are, and move forward, step-by-step. We need to support each other wherever we are, and we need to celebrate both our world and what we are doing. Community is the real antidote to our problems, as I see it. We need to help one another. Live the covenant we say every Sunday here. And have fun.

To me, the joy of gardening, the joy of our celebrations of life (hold up order of service), and the awe along with thankfulness I feel being alive, being part of this incredible universe – these are the springboards for what I do on this issue. I urge us all to find and express such joy and the hope of living our values, so our children and our children's children can enjoy these blessings.