

**Faith/Wisdom Leaders' Presentations**  
***Celebration of Earth, our Common Home***

Multifaith Network for Climate Justice (MNCJ) sponsored event

Lairmont Manor

September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019

In the order of presentations....

**Reverend Paul Beckel. Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship**

Grateful to the power and beauty of natural world, which connects and includes all of us, I share here an excerpt from a poem entitled "Life," written by Rabindranath Tagore, from the Brahmo Samaj tradition, a Unitarian sect of Hinduism. The poem's focus is on the earth's majesty, and our shared part in that:

The same stream of life / that runs through my veins night and day / runs through the world / and dances in rhythmic measures.

It is the same life / that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless blades of grass / and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers.

It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean-cradle of birth / and of death, / in ebb and in flow. I feel my limbs are made glorious / by the touch of this world of life. / And my pride is from the life-throb of ages / dancing in my blood this moment.

**Satpal Sidhu, Guru Nanak Gursikh Gurudwara**

In November 2009, Sikh environmental leaders from Punjab, joined two hundred leaders from nine of the world's major faiths: Baha'ism, Buddhism, Christianity, Daoism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Shintoism and Sikhism to gather in Windsor Castle to commit to long term practical action for the environment. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon addressed the celebration hosted by Prince Philip.

A group of Sikhs living in North America have organized as EcoSikh.Org to manage the efforts "a Sikh response to help preserve the environment that is integral in the teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib". 'EcoSikh', as this global Sikh environmental initiative started in 2010.

Sikh Scripture Guru Granth has been the source of Sikh Statement on Climate:

You, Yourself created the Universe, and You it is all your pleasure.....

You, Yourself the bumblebee, flower, fruit and the tree.

You, Yourself the water, desert, ocean and the pond.

You, Yourself are the big fish, tortoise and the Cause of causes. —

GURU GRANTH SAHIB, Maru Sohele, 1020

A word about Sikh Scripture Guru (Teacher) Granth (Book). It is a book written by Sikh Guru by their own hand over 250 years. It is 1430 pages long and is a book of poems in its entirety.

There is no prose or no story of men or kings or saints or miracles. It is about poetry of love and devotion. It contains poetry from Muslims, Hindus, lower caste people, high caste people in over 20 different languages from different parts of Asia.

Respect for nature is ingrained in Sikh teachings. The Guru Granth reads: Pawan Guru Pani Pita Mata Dharat Mahat (Air is our teacher, water our father and the great sacred earth is our mother). To achieve internal peace, we must first look at the environment in which we live. For Sikhs accept that CREATOR is a 'Living Truth', and the Sustainer of the Universe. The act of creation is never ending process and is a continuous life-giving principle. He creates, animates, sustains Nature. Nature aka Creation is the dwelling place of Creator.

The scripture reads: **The Creator, Himself creates the world.....and watches all.....and alone imparts understanding** (SGGS: p.767).

Our contemporary capitalist-technocratic society, with its profit interests, claims to have mastered the techniques of controlling and conquering Nature. It is unfortunate and has become a basic threat to global living with environmental degradation.

It is time to shed this self-proclaimed superiority of Human life as above all other life forms. All life forms are the same and they are not there to serve the human species.

This egoistic human activity has eroded the nature, while Nature has all along been nourishing, protecting, sheltering, life-giving, creative and maternal. The life-giving mother earth is subjected to deforestation, depletion of ozone layer, degradation of topsoil, use of chemicals to turn it into a life-destroying situation.

It is time to learn and practice holistic religious traditions like that of Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, which are generally anti-individualistic, not consumeristic and indiscriminative. The spirit of peace, justice, global living, harmony with Nature, is what is needed most for our future generations.

Guru Granth reads: Creation is Humans, flora and fauna, pilgrimage places, banks of sacred streams, clouds, fields, Islands, spheres, universes, continents, solar systems.

The sources of creation, egg-born, womb-born, earth-born, sweat-born, oceans, mountains and sentient beings. He, the Lord, knows their condition, O Nanak. Nanak, having created beings, the lord takes care of them all. The creator who created the world, He takes thought of it as well. (Guru Granth Sahib, page 466)

Governments all over the world have been slow to enact laws to limit release of greenhouse gases and carbon dioxide. Our irresponsible consumerism continues to threaten our food and environmental security, and we should all push our own governments at all levels to act. If we act now, we can protect our atmosphere, water resources and earth for ourselves and for future generations.

Sikhs around the world are taking part in a scheme to plant a million new trees as a "gift to the entire planet" as part of celebrations marking 550 years since the birth of the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak. The religious communities can play a significant role in our effort to keep our mother earth healthy to support all species on our planet.

I will end with words of Greta Thunberg in United Nations yesterday:

"You are failing us. But the young people are starting to understand your betrayal. The eyes of all future generations are upon you. And if you choose to fail us, I say: We will never forgive

you. We will not let you get away with this. Right here, right now is where we draw the line. The world is waking up. And change is coming, whether you like it or not.”

### Reverend Kathy Hartgraves, Garden Street Methodist Church

The United Methodist Denomination is highly structured and methodical, so much so that we have a book of discipline containing a section about the Social Principles we adhere to. The Social Principles are a good faith response to what we believe God is already doing in our lives and in the public square. They are an expression of the common ground we share, reflecting our priorities and helping us learn about and advocate for vulnerable peoples and a vulnerable planet.

Within these principles is a section entitled “The Natural World.” Listen to what we as a church have to say about Earth, our Common Home...

*“All creation is the Lord’s, and we are responsible for the ways in which we use and abuse it. Water, air, soil, minerals, energy resources, plants, animal life, and space are to be valued and conserved because they are God’s creation and not solely because they are useful to human beings. God has granted us stewardship of creation. We should meet these stewardship duties through acts of loving care and respect. Economic, political, social, and technological developments have increased our human numbers, and lengthened and enriched our lives. However, these developments have led to regional defoliation, dramatic extinction of species, massive human suffering, overpopulation, and misuse and overconsumption of natural and renewable resources, particularly by industrialized societies. This continued course of action jeopardizes the natural heritage that God has entrusted to all generations. Therefore, let us recognize the responsibility of the church and its members to place a high priority on changes in economic, political, social, and technological lifestyles to support a more ecologically equitable and sustainable world leading to a higher quality of life for all of God’s creation.”(from Social Principals of the United Methodist Church 2017-2020)*

At Garden Street UMC we have an active Social Action team that has taken on many hard and important concerns in our world – one being our environment. I’m proud to serve with a congregation who has a strong social conscience.

Finally – I think this statement from Wilfred Pelletier and Ted Poole sums up our United Methodist approach to “Celebrating Earth, Our Common Home.”

*“Wherever you are is home and the Earth is paradise. Wherever you set your feet is holy land.... You don't live off the land like a parasite. You live in it, and it in you, or you don't survive. And that is the only worship of God there is.”*

## Reverend Seth J. Thomas, Saint James Presbyterian Church

### *Prayer of Confession*

O God, enlarge within us the sense of fellowship with all living things, our brothers the animals to whom thou gavest the earth as their home in common with us.

We remember with shame that in the past we have exercised the high dominion of humanity with ruthless cruelty so that the voice of the earth, which should have gone up to thee in song, has been a groan of travail. May we realize that they live not for us alone but for themselves and for thee, and that they love the sweetness of live.

How do we enter into the most critical crisis humanity has faced in our recent history? How do we not shy away from the potential of collapse and the fear of breakdown that crackles in the air?

To enter is to embrace the tension of our complicity in the problem and the possibility of hope. We must tell the truth about where we have come from, that we have embraced a collective participation and denial for far too long. And, then, as we stand here today, we embrace the possibility, the hope that there may be a way, however complex and however much sacrifice it will require, ahead of us.

To enter this complex tension is to embrace the way of wisdom. The pursuit of wisdom is among the highest, holiest tasks of our shared traditions.

Jesus spoke to his listeners in parables, wisdom stories, which challenged the status quo and awoke his hearers to a new reality he was sharing with them, something he called the Kingdom of Heaven or the Reign of God.

For us to share our home in common, to accept the responsibility of protecting it, participating in its flourishing, embracing the call to sacrifice and reduce our rampant overconsumption — this will require us to move forward not with simple solutions to complex problems, but with carefully discerned steps on the wisdom path.

The problem is — the time is now. If we do not act today, we will continue to watch as things collapse around us. The time is now.

Within my Christian tradition, the way of Jesus is to live a life in a rhythm of contemplation and action, to seek wisdom and then turn outwards in response to revelation. Or, as the Psalmist teaches, to pursue God's way is a long obedience in the same direction. People of this way are formed to hold the tension between what is and what is possible, between what is falling apart and what may yet be restored!

I believe the question before us is not whether we must act on behalf of the climate crisis, as a collective community, to save and restore our common home. We all know the answer to this. Yes, emphatically so.

I believe the question before us, which will always present itself in times of crisis as well as times of peace, is how to live in wisdom. How do live into the complex questions of our time with a stance of hope and possibility, not despair or retreat.

But are we trained in wisdom, or are we formed unto some other way? Are we practitioners of steady breath, focused minds, hearts that are fixed upon what is good and true and beautiful? A gathering of this kind gives me hope. We will not be silent. We will be focused. We will embrace the urgency of the moment and act swiftly, truthfully, sacrificially, lovingly.

As a Minister of Jesus Christ — I claim this as my way. And among my fellow clergy and spiritual leaders, I call each of us to this way as it is manifested among each of our traditions — may we boldly call each of our communities to action and...together...may we love, act, and nurture the flourishing of our common home in all its glory, goodness, and beauty.

Amen. May it be so. Amen.

### Michael Karlberg, Bahá'í community of Bellingham

There are spiritual truths that govern reality, and we ignore these truths at our peril. We can learn about these truths, to some degree, by observing their expression in nature. We can also learn about these truths by investigating the Revelations that have given birth to the world's diverse religious traditions.

As we see the underlying unity of these Revelations, we can begin to view religion, at its best, as a means by which communities investigate the truths conveyed through these Revelations. And by which we learn how to apply these truths to the betterment of humanity. This is similar to the way we understand science which, at its best, is a means by which we investigate the physical truths governing reality. And by which we learn how to apply those truths to the betterment of humanity.

As we learn to see science and religion in this complementary way, we can begin to view the entire arc of human history as a developmental process, of sorts. Humanity, as a whole, has been developing capacities to investigate the spiritual and material dimensions of reality. This process has been uneven and has been characterized by many set-backs and difficulties. Just like the development of the life of any individual.

And similar to the life of the individual, we could say that humanity as a whole is now passing through the period of its turbulent adolescence. We've developed the full powers of our physical, and technological, growth and development. And those powers have not yet been tempered by the wisdom that comes with maturity.

Crossing the threshold of our collective spiritual maturity will not be easy. It requires the transformation of hearts and minds, as well as the transformation of social structures, on a scale never seen before. Among other things, we have to transcend the prevailing culture of self-interested competition among individuals, among social groups, and among entire nations. Because this prevents us from addressing problems such as climate change.

To do this, we have to reconstruct human affairs based on the spiritual truth that humanity is one.

And since we are one, human affairs need to be organized around the principle of justice for all. This entails creating conditions in which every individual and every social group has the opportunity to develop their latent potential, so all people can make their unique and creative contributions to the well-being of the entire human family.

And in the face of climate change, we have to pay special attention to intergenerational justice. Our grandchildren and their grandchildren have the right to be born onto a planet that can nourish them as they develop their potential.

This is, in part, what it means to apply spiritual principles to human affairs. I suspect everyone in this room is trying to do their part toward this end. The Bahá'í community, for its part, has been collaborating with like-minded people from all walks of life across the planet, developing a training institute that is empowering an ever-expanding movement of people, who are learning how to apply spiritual principles individually in their own lives, and collectively in their communities, to address the exigencies of the age we live in.

One of the most pressing of these is the problem of climate change. Because climate change is fundamentally a spiritual challenge. It will only be fully addressed through the spiritual awakening and movement of populations, as growing numbers of people develop a consciousness of the oneness of humanity and learn how to translate the principle of oneness into a new social reality.

As Bahá'u'lláh wrote, the well-being of humanity is “unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established”... until “the entire human race” becomes “as one soul and one body.” The problem of climate change is compelling us to achieve an unprecedented level of unified effort on a global scale. Let us embrace this challenge and rise to the demands of our spiritual maturity.

### Paul Orlowski, Sacred Heart Catholic Church

#### *Stand Up For Earth*

[Hear the clarion call – a plea for climate justice]

Stand up for earth with climate justice, hear the clarion call.

Stand up for earth with climate justice, hear the clarion call.

1. There's no pity, when you're choking in the city,  
Coughing on the carbon while your wheezing from the smog.  
Pollution and collusion with delirious delusions,  
Rolling back environmental climate rules and regs. Hear the clarion call.

2. Arson in the Amazon and toxins from the fact'ry stack  
Thirty pounds of grain and water just for one big Mac.  
Politicians preach, “Consume!”, to offset our planet's doom,  
A hundred miles of trash at sea, no oxygen from algae bloom. Hear the clarion call.

3. Glacier ice is melting and the ocean level's rising,  
Rivers overflowing and we're drowning in the flood.

Corp'rate greed increasing, while the salmon runs depleting,  
Orcas disappearing from the Salish Sea. Hear the clarion call.

4. Commit today to join recycling, park your car and do more biking,  
Power from the wind and sun, enjoy a walk or hike or run.  
God creator made this earth, gave us all a choice at birth,  
Care for it, cause it's our own, and if it's wrecked we have no home. Hear the clarion call.

### Reverend David Weasley, First Congregational Church

Reverend Weasley offers his presentation in video format, which has been posted on YouTube.  
You will find it here: <https://youtu.be/UCg3l0iSdj8>

### Kathy Delbecq, Assumption Catholic Church

I was listening to NPR a few days ago and the guest was asked “when did the climate crisis” become a moral and social justice issue? The voice that grabbed my attention was Pope Francis. In 2015 he published The Encyclical *Laudato Si – On Care for Our Common Home*. In his letter the pope wishes “**to enter into a dialogue with all people about our common home**” about the crucial issue of our day: environmental exploitation and degradation and its affects upon the poor. (John Whitney, S.J.)

The letter begins:

**1. “LAUDATO SI’, mi’ Signore” – “Praise be to you, my Lord”. In the words of this beautiful canticle, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us.**

**2. This 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.**

The Climate Crisis and the degradation of our earth are well described using scientific, economic and political language. We can use this information for reflection and action, yet, Francis writes

**19. Our goal is not to amass information or to satisfy curiosity, but rather 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.**

#### **Notes from Kathy:**

**The red print indicates direct quotes from Laudato Si. I also offered excerpts from Laudato Si from sections 139, 217,218 and 244 that are not reprinted here.**

**I encourage those interested in Laudato Si to consider reading the letter in context. I am inserting a link to Laudato Si on the Vatican website. I am also offering a link to a review article by John Whitney, S.J. of St. Joseph’s Parish Seattle .**

**[http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html)**

**<https://www.stjosephparish.org/files/150.pdf>**

## Michael Shuler, Whatcom Pagans

### *A Pagan Viewpoint of The Earth*

Greetings everyone, my name is Michael Shuler and I am a community priest of Whatcom Pagans. First, I would like to express our sincere gratitude for allowing us to add our voice here to this group of faith communities speaking about their concerns for our Mother Earth. When I was asked to come here and speak from our own authentic perspective, I took awhile to think about what exactly that is. As one may imagine, as pagans, our viewpoints can often be a bit different than most. Unlike many other religions we don't have anything like a Bible or a Guru Granth to guide us. We exist without any firm doctrine or dogma asking us to believe in anything particular. Furthermore, we have no firm authority outside of our many small practicing groups and organizations, just loose traditions that we allow to evolve and change organically. One might imagine that because of this we have a wild spectrum of different beliefs and values, and indeed, in many cases this can be true. We have many goddesses and gods, that stand for many things and we connect with them in many ways. However, in some key ways we are of one mind and one opinion. Our feelings about the environment are one of these things.

Pagans have a reputation for being "dirt worshipping, tree huggers", and at a glance it might be thought that this was decided as a group to be part of our image, but this is not the case. The reason that pagans all end up caring deeply about environmental issues, and the welfare of our planet, has to do with our system of celebration. This system does not require faith in any particular god or deity. It could be practiced by anyone without changing their allegiance to the divine. In fact, at some point in the not too distant past it did belong to most cultures. In our work to recover the indigenous religions and practices of ancient Europe our holy days became focused on connecting with the changes of the heavens and earth. We honor and recognize the movement of the sun, and the changing of the seasons from solstice to equinox. We celebrate as the seeds are planted, and again as they are harvested and give thanks that it sustains our lives. We gather at the full moon to keep an eye on her as she changes from new and young, to full and bright, and wanes again to darkness. This is the first thing that new pagans will learn, to pay attention to the world they live in. By this simple practice, of being aware, they find great inspiration and meaning. They feel the cycles of the earth and attune their lives with her changes. They connect to the planet, as they should, knowing they are a piece of an ecosystem that lives and dies like someone gently breathing in and out year after year.

This connection and understanding is available to anyone. Just a few hundred years ago most people would have been deeply traumatized by the knowledge that what they did would destroy this cycle. They understood the frailty and vulnerability of life. It is an entirely modern conceit that we can imagine that it doesn't matter to us, and that things will work themselves out. Many of us have forgotten that we are only one bad harvest away from seeing our children starving and begging for food that we do not have. We imagine that the electric heat that warms our homes could never run out. We believe that the oceans could never run out of food, and yet, we already see the changes. We know the salmon returns are dwindling, that the orcas are dying out right next to us, unable to keep their children alive in a poison sea. This is the price for losing our connection to nature, and if we as a community and culture do not regain that connection, then our best attempts to save our world will fail, not because we lack the



resources or the science. We will fail because we never cared enough to make it a priority in the first place. We will fail because we didn't understand what was really at stake until it is too late. Thank you all for listening. Blessed Be.

(To be said when lighting candle)

Lady fill our path with light,  
illuminate the darkest night.  
Bless these folk and bless this place.  
Bring us love and peace and grace.

### Reverend Andrea Asebedo, Center for Spiritual Living

You do not have to be good.  
You do not have to walk on your knees  
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.  
You only have to let the soft animal of your body  
love what it loves.  
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.  
Meanwhile the world goes on.  
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain  
Are moving across the landscapes,  
over the prairies and the deep trees,  
the mountain and the rivers.  
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,  
Are heading home again.  
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,  
the world offers itself to your imagination,  
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting –  
over and over announcing your place  
in the family of things.

-Mary Oliver

### Rabbi Samuels. Temple Beth Israel

As a Jew living in the modern world where there is much emphasis on environmentalism and conservation, it's only natural that I would look to my tradition to help guide me in figuring out how to be a steward of our planet.

The Jewish sacred texts teach us that our role is to take care of the natural world and that it's our responsibility to look after the works of creation and not to assume someone else will.

Everything belongs to God. We're just using it all for a short time.

Furthermore, we human beings owe a debt of gratitude for the world we inhabit, which provides us with sustenance and with pleasures. Consuming the products of divine creation,

then, is an occasion for us to acknowledge the Creator. And Jews have plenty of blessing of gratitude for God that are recited each day, throughout the day.

In our role as tenders and tillers of the world and consumers of its vegetation and of some of its other inhabitants, people are called upon to exercise reverential care for natural resources.

In its legal culture as well as its ethical literature, Jewish law forbids the wanton destruction of natural resources, taking its cue from a biblical prohibition against cutting down fruit trees in the course of laying siege to a city in warfare. The biblical law of a sabbatical year every seventh year, during which all land lies fallow, may also be an embodiment of an insight about environmental sustainability. Some of these ancient laws seem so ahead of the times.

So what's the Jewish take-away from all this? What does the Jewish tradition encourage us to do? How do we root our action plan in our Judaic tradition? First of all, by implementing our belief that this is God's world, not ours. To take seriously the notion that we are but leasing the planet from God is to provide ourselves with specific behavioral guidelines. One who leases may use any part of what they borrow -- but they must ensure that, at the end of the term of the lease, and at any given moment during the lease, the property is at least as valuable as it was at the beginning of the lease

Harvest a tree? Not without planting another. Farm the land? Not without allowing it periodic rest and rejuvenation. We are to see to it that any degradation of the environment is accompanied by an equivalent restoration. We should evaluate land use on the basis of how it improves or degrades the environment. All in all, we should attempt in each of our own lives to strike such a balance, conserving energy, supporting environmental causes, planting trees, as a path toward restoration of what we have used or abused.

The Jewish notion of stewardship is a moral one, one that speaks of responsibility rather than of unlimited privilege.

There is a famous Jewish teaching that says, "You are not obligated to complete the task, but neither are you free from ignoring it." Environmental issues such as climate change, are huge, much bigger than any one person can tackle, but Judaism obligates it's adherents to do what we can. Anything helps. Silence or in-action is equal to complicity.

I want to close with a short poem from one of the great Torah commentators, Abraham ibn Ezra. It so brilliantly expresses how not only should we see nature as beautiful and worthy in and of itself, but also as a path toward the most beautiful and worthy of all, God.

"Wherever I turn my eyes, around on Earth or to the heavens/I see you in the field of stars/ I see You in the yield of the land/in every breath and sound, a blade of grass, a simple flower, an echo of Your holy Name."

Thank you.

### Nomon Tim Burnett, Guiding Teacher, Red Cedar Zen Community

Meeting climate change feels impossible but humans meet the impossible all the time. In my remarks at "Celebration of Earth, Our Common Home" I shared a poem by a teacher in our Zen Buddhist tradition about the way our lives themselves, here as mirrored in this Buddhist practice, are neither impossible nor possible but we must creatively take a bigger view of the possible and the impossible as we walk this walk of life on a planet imperiled.

Katagiri Roshi - This Peaceful Life  
Being told that it is impossible  
One believes, in despair, "Is that so?"  
Being told that it is possible,  
One believes, in excitement, "That's right."  
But, whichever is chosen,  
It does not fit one's heart neatly.  
Being asked, "What is unfitting?"  
I don't know what it is.  
But my heart knows somehow.  
I feel irresistible desire to know.  
What a mystery a "human" is!  
As to this mystery:  
Clarifying,  
Knowing how to live,  
Knowing how to walk with people,  
Demonstrating and teaching,  
This is the Buddha.  
From my human eyes,  
I feel it's really impossible to become Buddha.  
But this "I", regarding what the Buddha does,  
Vows to practice,  
To aspire,  
To be resolute,  
And tells myself, "Yes, I will."  
Just practice right here now,  
And achieve continuity,  
Endlessly,  
Forever.  
This is living in vow.  
Herein is one's peaceful life found.

SOURCE: MZMC News, Spring 1991, Vol 16 no.1, p.3

NOTES: A poem by Dainin KATAGIRI Roshi published posthumously, on the first anniversary of his death, by the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center News.

And I closed with the vows of the Bodhisattva (a being deeply committed to the wellness and enlightenment of all) which Zen practitioners recite:

"Beings are numberless, I vow to save them;  
Delusions are inexhaustible; I vow to end them;  
Dharma Gates are boundless; I vow to enter them;  
Buddha's Way is unsurpassable; I vow to become it."

In my comments on these vows I suggested that all faith traditions set out to do the impossible and we all keep going as cheerfully and devotedly as we can in that impossible journey towards wholeness, towards God, towards life. And that our fortitude as spiritual seekers and practitioners to approach the impossible is exactly the fortitude we need as we approach the impossible situation of climate change.