



## Earth Day 2011: Sacred Waters

*By Rowan Van Ness, UUMFE Program Associate for Environmental Justice at the UUA*



*Earth images throughout this newsletter are from the NASA Godard Photo & Video photostream, flickr/Creative Commons*

Unitarian Universalists (UUs) all over are thinking about water justice, from the UU Legislative Ministry of California’s campaign to pass legislation on the Human Right to Water to congregations in New York examining the impacts of natural gas hydraulic fracturing on watersheds. Water sustains all life and insufficient access to clean drinking water and sanitation results in disease and dehydration. Many environmental justice issues, from immigration to climate change, deeply impact water.

As UUs, we are called to respect the interdependent web of all existence and water is a common thread. Water’s both live-giving and life-taking qualities have made it an important symbol in many of our world’s religious traditions. UU Ministry for Earth (UUMFE) is asking congregations to celebrate the sacred waters that sustain us all this Earth Day and to commit to actions that will make our world more just.

Unitarian Universalists (UUs) are committing to small and large daily actions over 40 days, from Sunday, April 17, to Thursday, May 26, for the sake of the Earth and all who live here. Our choices affect many aspects of global environmental justice. When 40 people in one congregation make 40-day commitments, that congregation will be included in the roll of participating congregations.

One participant in the 40/40/40 campaign on Ethical Eating in 2010 reported that since the 40 days ended, he has continued to practice his new commitment of turning off the water when he brushes his teeth. Another person pledged to eat local foods for 40 days and, since the campaign has ended, she has continued to look into ways of making her eating habits more in line with her values by exploring veganism. Pledges large and small, held in community, have allowed UUs across the country to examine how they can live in right relationship with the planet and each other and find the support needed to try out a change that would ultimately transform their lives and the lives of those affected by their new choices.

An individual’s commitment for 40 days makes a real difference, and it is only amplified by doing this in community. More than 150 congregations registered participation in Earth Day in 2010—let’s make it even greater this year!

From sample actions around water justice to order of service covers, the Earth Day pages on our Website (<http://uuministryforearth.org/2011-ED-MainPage>) give congregations tools to plan successful Earth Day events. Be sure to register your congregation’s participation so we can include you in our annual list of participating congregations and share your stories with others! ♦

### Inside This Issue

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 2 From the Board  | Energy System                           |
| 3 <i>Staying Present for a Troubled World</i> Workshops | 6 Earth Jurisprudence: Beginning To Bud |
| New Gulf Coast Resource from NWEI                       | 7 Poem: <i>I Am the UUA</i>             |
| 4 Mt. Vernon Church Breaks Ground for Net Zero          | 8 How You Can Help                      |



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### ABOUT UUMFE

Unitarian Universalist  
Ministry for Earth is a non-  
profit organization whose  
membership envisions a  
world in which all people  
make reverence, gratitude,  
and care for the living Earth  
central to their lives.  
Unitarian Universalist  
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## From the Board

### As We Begin a New Year . . .

**T**he start of the new year always gives us a reminder to take stock of where we've been and where we are going. For many of us the next year looks manageable, though with some challenges, but it's the long-term view that is truly scary in terms of the changes we see as inevitable for the future.

As Board members for UU Ministry for Earth, we're at that same point: next year looks pretty good, but we get scared when start looking at the world we'll be leaving our children and grandchildren. We ask ourselves when we're planning for the future, how can we as an organization help UUs face the despair around the future in a way that is constructive and in line with our values?

Of course, there are no easy answers to this question, but we do know that both individually and organizationally we feel less frightened when we're doing something to help reduce the effects of environmental destruction, especially when we're looking to help reduce the consequences for those who have the least or are unjustly suffering. So, as an organization we feel that the best strategy for helping people cope is our focus on environmental justice and how we can help UUs work together on issues of Earth ministry that recognize the rights of all species.



Our focus on water for our Earth Day materials embraces that direction. Already hundreds of millions of people do not have adequate, clean water. As fresh water supplies dwindle and our oceans are compromised, the need to find ways to deal with water pollution and scarcity is critical. We hope you will find the materials provided for Earth Day to be useful in bringing attention to not only gratitude for the beauty of our rivers, lakes, and oceans, but also how we can help assure that they are available to all of Earth's people and other species into the future.

I'll close with this quote from Thomas Merton that reminds us that action is the best antidote for despair:

"Do not depend on the hope of results. You may have to face the fact that your work will be apparently worthless and even achieve no result at all, if not perhaps results opposite to what you expect. As you get used to this idea, you start more and more to concentrate not on the results, but on the value, the rightness, the truth of the work itself. You gradually struggle less and less for an idea and more and more for specific people. In the end, it is the reality of personal relationship that saves everything."

With Earth in mind,

*Nancy King Smith, Co-Chair, UU Ministry for Earth Board* ♦

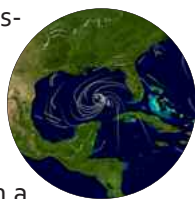
## News From UU Ministry For Earth

### Staying Present for a Troubled World – New Workshops Offered to UU Congregations and Districts

By Irene Keim, UUMFE Board Co-Chair

"If the world is to be healed through human efforts, I am convinced it will be by ordinary people, people whose love for this life is even greater than their fear." – Joanna Macy

UU Ministry for Earth (UUMFE) is partnering with Barbara Ford to offer new experiential workshops to churches and districts across the country to address the spiritual concerns of congregants who are wondering how to keep doing the work of justice without succumbing to burnout, and with a clarity of intention and joy shared in a loving, mutually-supportive community.



As Barbara reminds us, "We are bombarded by news...news of horrific war, of dying seabirds coated with oil, of unbounded greed by corporate profiteers, of disappearing mountaintops, of families separated by borders and fear...how do we stay present to this world we live in without succumbing to despair, anger, or paralyzing fear?"

"These feelings lie less in concern for our personal self, as much as a manifestation of the apprehension of our collective suffering. We know it is not just we who are suffering, but our children and their children, and the living body of Earth. This awareness is the natural and revered quality of compassion – the quality of "suffering with," to join with the world with a sense of shared destiny and responsibility."

These new workshops are based on the transformational and ground-breaking work of eco-philosopher Joanna Macy, called *The Work That Reconnects*. These workshops offer the opportunity to find ground in gratitude, honor our pain for the world, deepen our sense of interconnectedness, and strengthen us for the work of healing our world.

The workshops – entitled "Staying Present for a Troubled World" – are facilitated by Barbara Ford, an artist, singer, facilitator, activist, and a colleague of Joanna Macy. Barbara is a former board member of

UU Ministry for Earth and served as the Board Chair for three years. Presently, she facilitates workshops on activism, spirituality, and creativity through GAIA Workshops – Growing Awareness Into Action. Joanna Macy says of her: "As an inspiring guide in the *Work That Reconnects*, Barbara Ford combines a contagious vitality and a firm faith in the power of the human spirit. It is a joy for me to watch how she enlivens groups with her humor, intellect, and creativity. I rejoice that she is bringing this life-changing work to our world."

One workshop participant said of her experience: "Staying on task with our work of healing the Earth is hard these days, especially with the denial and resistance to change we see all around us. Barbara's workshop was like an oasis in the desert offering respite, confronting the despair, and finding strength in a community of companions."

UU Ministry for Earth will be sponsoring workshop tours to be offered to districts and congregations throughout the country. A portion of the workshop proceeds will go to support the important work of UUMFE. If your congregation or a group of congregations are interested in bringing a workshop to your area, please contact the UU Ministry for Earth office: e-mail; [office@uuministryforearth.org](mailto:office@uuministryforearth.org); US mail, UU Ministry for Earth, 1034 SW 13th Ave., Portland, OR 97205; telephone, 503-595-9392.

For more information about Barbara Ford, go to [www.gaiaworkshops.net](http://www.gaiaworkshops.net). ♦

### Northwest Earth Institute To Publish Gulf Coast Resource

By Ellen McClaran, UUMFE Board Member



The Northwest Earth Institute will offer a new discussion resource in February – *Just Below the Surface: The Gulf Coast Oil Spill*, a study guide addressing the Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill and exploring opportunities for change. This one-session guide includes articles and discussion questions to facilitate a deeper investigation into the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill, *cont'd on page 4*

## News From UU Ministry For Earth

### Gulf Coast Resource . . . from page 3

which spewed over 200 million gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico, making it the largest environmental disaster in U.S. history. The \$5 guide explores how the Gulf of Mexico oil spill is connected to our daily lives and how we can make meaningful and lasting changes. This guide is free with any order of NWEI's climate change guide, *Global Warming: Changing CO<sub>2</sub> course*.

Gather together with others for one session of criti-

cal reflection and action planning, or use this one-session reader in addition to any of NWEI's other guides. If you would like to reserve your copy, please e-mail [lacy@nwei.org](mailto:lacy@nwei.org). You will be able to order this resource online in February at [www.nwei.org](http://www.nwei.org).

If you select UUMFE/Green Sanctuary as your "connection" when you order this or any of the other excellent discussion guides, NWEI will share some of the profit with UUMFE. ♦

## News From Members and Congregations

### Mt. Vernon Church Breaks Ground for Net Zero Energy System on Winter Solstice

By Mary Paden, Mt. Vernon Unitarian Church

**O**n the snow-patched lawn of Mt. Vernon Unitarian Church (MVUC), on the chilly afternoon a few hours before the church's Winter Solstice celebration, Rev. Kate Walker, clad in black robes, bade a ceremonial



goodbye to a black-draped rusted heating and air conditioning unit before a small crowd that included U.S. Rep. Jim Moran and State Sen. Toddy Puller.

Rev. Walker began by noting that the congregation had been kept "comfortable" for many years by an energy system that allowed coal miners to "die deep beneath the Earth, mountaintops to be torn apart, soils to wash into the sea, and streams to turn orange with acid and metals." She said the congregation has decided to enter a new world "where lives are not devalued and the Earth is respected." Turning to the unit, she

Rev. Walker

said "Today, I offer these words for our old-world heating and air conditioning system: You have served your duty. But your time is up. We say 'no more' to what you represent. We created you in a time of need and we shall terminate you now for our needs have changed. We have created your replacement."

Board of Trustees Chair Joan Darrah stepped forward to cover the unit in a tasseled black cloth, as Rev. Walker pronounced, "Your existence is over, as ours begins anew."

With that, Rev. Walker and Ms. Darrah, broke ground for a new geothermal heating-cooling system that, together with solar panels, will allow MVUC's 5,200 square foot meeting house to become a net zero user of energy from the grid by spring, possibly making it the first church in Virginia to do so. As she took the shovel, Rev. Walker said, "May this represent the turning over to a new future of living our deepest values."

Inside the Meeting House, Rep. Moran praised the church for its leadership in converting to renewable energy. "Unfortunately, we will not be able to get new energy legislation through Congress this year," Moran said. "So programs must be done at the grassroots level, like here at MVUC, which has put its money where its mouth is. It is one thing to say wonderful, inspiring things and another to do them. "MVUC could have gone the easy, cheap way and replaced its fossil fuel system, but it decided to do the right thing, and, as a result has set a high standard and become a national model. It is right for a faith-based community

cont'd on page 5

## News From Members and Congregations

**Net Zero Energy System . . . from page 4**  
to help make a better future for our children. You found a way of using federal financial incentives and a creative company to make it work for you. You have made the right investment and others will come from around the country to see how you did it. This is a really big deal and I couldn't be more pleased that it is being done in our district."

Sen. Puller, who lives near the church, noted that, "This church has been on the cutting edge for many years. This project is historic."

MVUC member Albert Weinstein, one of the instigators of moving to renewable energy, presented the church with a check for \$10,000 toward the new system. Of his donation, Weinstein said, "A lot of people talk about solar energy. I decided to jump start the process."

MVUC went through a months-long process of evaluating alternatives to its ailing conventional heating system. According to the report of the committee, headed by Ken Pilkenton, the equipment costs of purchasing a new conventional system would have been about \$50,000 plus maintenance and monthly utility bills, while buying, installing, and maintaining a geothermal system would have cost about \$300,000, a very high initial cost for the church.

Then Zachary Fettig, President of Shenandoah Sustainable Technologies (SST) of Harrisonburg, Va., proposed to design, install, operate, and maintain a geothermal system under a 20-year contract, during which time MVUC would make a monthly payment. SST was able to offer this long-term package through a combination of favorable private financing, various government tax incentives for alternative energy projects, and the virtually no-grid-based power consumption costs once all the equipment is in place. At the end of the contract MVUC would own the equipment.

The MVUC finance committee determined that the SST proposal was comparable to purchasing geothermal equipment, but without the high initial cost. The conventional option was somewhat cheaper, but did not figure in likely increases in the cost of energy over 20 years or the environmental damage caused by burning fossil fuels.

MVUC wanted a system that met its environmental and social values, and also provided a solid investment for the future. Finding an affordable renewable energy system would fulfill a long-term dream of MVUC, which had constructed its Meeting House in the mid-1880s with the chapel roof designed for solar panels and with a previous generation of a geothermal heating-cooling system, which had failed after a time.

The church contracted with SST in late November and broke ground on the Winter Solstice.

The geothermal system relies on extensive underground fluid-circulating pipes branching-out from opposite ends of the Meeting House (which contains a chapel, commons area, kitchen, nursery, and church offices). The pipes are buried several feet underground where the ground maintains a steady temperature of about 55 degrees. SST will remove all of the Meeting Houses' conventional heating and cooling equipment and replace it with state-of-the-art geothermal equipment. In addition, solar panels will be installed on the south roof of the chapel to generate the electricity for the building and the heat exchange pumps for the geothermal system.



*Board of Trustees Chair Joan Darrah and Rev. Kate Walker break ground for Mt. Vernon Unitarian Church's new solar-geothermal system.*

Last year SST installed a modern closed-loop geothermal system at St. Mark's Church in Springfield, which has received praise from church officials there. The MVUC system is different in that it incorporates solar energy for electricity to make the Meeting House a net zero energy user from the power grid.

The transition will come none too soon, Rev. Walker said, "because the old system has required half a dozen visits from the furnace repair people in the past ten days, including today." ♦

## News From Members and Congregations

### Earth Jurisprudence: Beginning To Bud

*UUMFE member Joe DuRocher, First Unitarian Church of Orlando, contributes this thought-provoking article about a 'new jurisprudence' from Sister Patricia Siemen, OP, Esq. More information about the Center for Earth Jurisprudence may be found at [www.earthjuris.org](http://www.earthjuris.org).*

But we have only begun  
to love the earth.  
We have only begun  
to imagine the fullness of life.  
How could we tire of hope?  
– so much is in the bud.<sup>1</sup>



**A**s the poem alludes, Earth jurisprudence is only "in bud," yet the urgency of ecological destruction is bringing this bud into blossom across the planet.

The term "Earth jurisprudence" was conceived by Thomas Berry in 2000. He said we need a *new jurisprudence*, a set of laws and governance for our time of unprecedented ecological destruction: law that flows from Earth's integral functions and recognizes the interdependence and intrinsic value of the natural world. Current law is grounded in protecting short-term human interests. It does not adequately address the needs of future generations nor recognize the interconnectedness of all the members of the wider Earth community.

As a legal response, Earth jurisprudence is aligned with a strand of environmental law that seeks to protect the natural world because of its inherent value and not solely for its usefulness to humanity. Berry is known for his signature "three rights" of nature: "Every being has three rights: the right to exist, the right to habitat, and the right to fulfill its role in the ever-renewing processes of the Earth community."<sup>2</sup> While a few environmental lawyers have advocated legal protection of nature,<sup>3</sup> Berry issued a call for a re-envisioning of law and governance from an Earth-centered, rather than human-centered perspective. In *The Great Work*, Berry stated:

"In this new context (of humans becoming present to the Earth in a mutually enhancing manner) every component of the Earth community would have its rights in accord with the proper mode of its being and its functional role. In each case the basic rights would be for habitat and the opportunity of each being to fulfill its role in the natural systems to which it belongs. Humans would be obliged to respect these rights."<sup>4</sup>

Earth jurisprudence proposes that it is nature, not humanity that is the primary architect of law and governance. Human governance systems should stem from and be consistent with the geological, biological and ecological laws (and limits) of nature. Foundational sources of Earth jurisprudence are the customary laws of indigenous peoples and other ancient traditions, as well as contemporary science, environmental ethics and a spectrum of legal areas including environmental, international and human rights laws. The laws of the universe and the laws of nature are the primary laws that govern the health and well-being of Earth; they constitute a "great jurisprudence"<sup>5</sup> that originates in the story of the universe, the developmental process out of which Earth and all life emerge.

Multiple initiatives are moving the field of Earth jurisprudence from bud to tender blossom. There is the Earth Jurisprudence Resource Center (EJRC)<sup>6</sup> in London which collaborates with the United Kingdom Environmental Law Association (UKELA).<sup>7</sup> In 2008 Ecuador became the first nation to adopt a constitution that provides protection of the rights of nature.<sup>8</sup> In April 2010, Bolivia hosted the World's Peoples Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth which issued the Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth. The tenets of that declaration were inserted into the negotiations for the upcoming international conference on climate change to be held in Cancun in December. In addition the Center for Earth Jurisprudence (CEJ)<sup>9</sup> located at Barry and St. Thomas Universities Law Schools develops programs, publications and courses. It offers an annual conference on rights of future generations, has developed an LL.M in Environmental Sustainability at St. Thomas University Law School, and is an essential component of the Environmental Law, Justice and Jurisprudence *cont'd on page 7*

## News From Members and Congregations

### Earth Jurisprudence . . . from page 6

concentration at the Barry University Law School. It is currently engaged in creating a series of chapters comprising an electronic teaching anthology on Earth jurisprudence.

Despite the escalating processes of environmental destruction, there are numerous buds of “blessed unrest” rising up across the planet. As we look into both the promise and the peril of the future we remember the hopeful words of Thomas Berry:

...the basic mood of the future might well be one of confidence in the continuing revelation that takes place in and through Earth....There is reason to believe that this same guiding process is precisely what has awakened in us our present understanding of ourselves and our relation to this stupendous process. Sensitized to such guidance from the very structure and functioning of the universe, we can have confidence in the future that awaits the human venture.<sup>10</sup> ♦

1 Denise Levertov, *Beginners, Candles in Babylon*: New Directions Publishing Corp, New York, NY, p. 55.

2 Berry, Thomas. *Evening Thoughts*, Sierra Club: San Francisco, CA, 2006, p. 110.

3 See especially the work of Christopher D. Stone, *Should Trees Have Standing? and Other Essays on Law, Morals and the Environment*. Oceana Publications: Dobbs Ferry, New York, 1996. See also Thomas Linzey, Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund at [www.celdf.org](http://www.celdf.org) for adoption of local ordinances denying corporate rights and inserting legal rights of nature.

4 Berry, Thomas. *The Great Work*. Three Rivers Press: N.Y., 1999, p. 80.

5 See Cullinan, *Wild Law* at 84.

6 See <http://www.earthjurisprudence.org/> whose mission is to make accessible materials that “advocate and embed Earth Jurisprudence at community, law and policy levels around the world” as well as nurture and support an international and interdisciplinary network of Earth jurisprudence practitioners.

7 See <http://www.gaiafoundation.org/documents/wild-law-report.pdf> They issued a 2009 report analyzing selected national laws to determine to what degree those laws supported, undermined or was neutral to three key elements: Earth-centered governance; mutually enhancing relationships; and community ecological governance.

8 See <http://www.celdf.org/Default.aspx?tabid=548> Article I of the new “Rights for Nature” chapter reads: “Nature or Pachamama, where life is reproduced and exists, has the right to exist, persist, maintain and regenerate its vital cycles, structure, functions and its processes in evolution. Every person, people, community or nationality, will be able to demand the recognitions of rights for nature before the public bodies.”

9 See <http://earthjuris.org/>

10 Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, 137.

### I Am the UUA

*A poem by Christopher D. Sims*

I am the UUA

I am the UUA.

I am what I believe.

I am religion, as I breathe.

I am the UUA.

I am of earth, justice-jargon,  
and community.

I am the UUA.

A seeker, a searcher, an explorer.

However, I am centered in our  
Seven Principles

And my belief is invincible.

I am the UUA.

My colorful community fills churches  
small and large across America and beyond.

I am the UUA.

A fighter, a writer, a humanist,  
One who is deeply spiritual.

My faith is found in the grass,  
the ground, poems by Rumi and Mary Oliver,  
or quite simply, biblical.

I am White, I am Black, I am Brown,  
I am Yellow, and I am Red. By Unitarian  
Universalism my spirit is greatly fed.

I am the UUA.

With passion and fire I sing.  
Followers of my faith are fighters.  
They marched with and died for  
Martin Luther King, Jr's dream.

I am the UUA.

Humble, hopeful, happy, and free.  
No other faith or religious tradition  
is better for me!

I am a Unitarian Universalist. ♦

*Christopher Sims – poet, community  
organizer, and performer – is a member  
of the UU Church of Rockford, IL*



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### How You Can Help . . .

*By Irene Keim, UUMFE Board Co-Chair*

**T**he resources provided by UU Ministry for Earth (UUMFE) are the product of donations and memberships from UUs who value connection, renewal, and inspiration. When you contribute to UUMFE, you join with others who are also dedicated to Life, Earth, and Spirit. Here are a few ways you can help these values grow within our congregations and communities.

- Plan an Earth Day service for your congregation. See the resources UUMFE has prepared for you online.
  - Join UUMFE on facebook and read the opportunities for action posted – both regional and national.
- Make a donation to UUMFE to support the work of Environmental Justice throughout our denomination.
  - Encourage congregation members to join with you in supporting the UUMFE vision . . .

*"A world in which all people  
make reverence, gratitude, and care for the living Earth  
central to their lives."*

To donate, join, or comment, visit [www.uuministryforearth.org](http://www.uuministryforearth.org). ♦