

SUMMARY OF ECO CHRISTIANITY CIRCLE ACTIVITIES – 2010-2017

KITCHISSIPPI UNITED CHURCH, OTTAWA, ONTARIO



We are a group of people who are deeply committed to and interested in learning more about our environment and the impact human activity has on the health of the land, the waters, the air, our food production, wildlife and our relationship with all Creation. Each year we choose a major theme, like Food, Water, Land, etc., and develop our monthly programmes around these themes.

Our goal is to be an Ecological Christianity Circle of Learning, Support and Action, which will:

- Continue to educate ourselves and the wider congregation on the theology of Ecological Christianity and on ecological issues in general;
- Support each other in our commitments to live out our Ecological Christianity; and
- Give leadership to specific congregation initiatives and projects to put the principles of ecological Christianity into action, including partnering with other faith groups and ecologically-concerned groups in the community.

LEARNING:

Several books by ecologically minded authors were consulted, *including Darwin, Divinity and the Dance of the Cosmos* by Bruce Sanguin; *This Changes Everything* by Naomi Klein; *The Leap Manifesto: A Call for Canada based on Caring for the Earth and one Another*, by Naomi Klein and Avie Lewis; *Aboriginal Power* by Chris Henderson; *Soil Not Oil* by Vandana Shiva; *Blue Future* by Maude Barlow ; *Reclaiming the Commons for the Common Good* by Heather Menzies and Pope Francis' Encyclical on Climate Change. THREE works have been studied in depth: Bruce Sanguin's book, along with his video lecture series; Heather Menzies' book and her lecture at the West End Well (25 Nov. 2014) and connecting this U.K. example with others in Canada, such as a commons on Gabriola Island, B.C. The

Algonquin territory of Chaudiere Island was also identified as a “commons” and subsequent political actions were taken by members to preserve these sacred lands; and Pope Francis’ *Encyclical on Climate Change*, including a Sunday service with John Dorner of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Ottawa as special speaker. He emphasized the “social justice” aspect of the Pope’s *Encyclical*.

Our learning included attendance at various workshops, such as Remembering the Land, sponsored by Kairos and led by Ian Thompson, held at Centretown United Church. The participants brought their experience and a video back to the circle for further discussion and action. The video entitled “Land and Resource Extraction” opened our eyes (if they were not already opened) to the devastating effects of corporate mining on aboriginal peoples’ lands at large and here at home to the lands surrounding the Athabaska River by the Alberta Tar Sands activities, for example. Members also researched the proposed Energy East Pipeline and its potential danger to the lands, waters and people across Canada. We were encouraged to write to our MPPs, MPs and various Federal Ministers about these kinds of issues throughout the year.

Some particularly informative learning came from a member’s research into the dangers to the land and water from the practice of “fracking” and the oil industry’s proposal to transport “dil bit” (diluted bitumen) via a 55 year old natural gas pipeline from the tar sands in Alberta – a scary prospect. Also she brought our attention to the alarming reduction in the deer population where Monsanto product spraying is going on and the need to support a private member’s bill to label GMO foods.

Other reading suggestions were *Ecopsychology* (eds. Theodore Rosak, Mary E. Gomes and Allen D. Kasner) entitled “Ecology of Grief” by Phyllis Windle and *Fat Soul: A Philosophy of size* by Patricia Adams Farmer, a speaker at the Madawaska Institute in April 2017.

SUPPORT:

We felt solidarity with the “Idle No More” movement and shared what we learned in our research on such topics as the 100 Mile Diet , providing tips for

greening God's planet in the Kitchissippi United Church's Friday File. We also provided weekly practical food tips in the Bulletins and combined all the accumulated tips in a leaflet for distribution to the congregation, as well as being displayed on our church website. We also developed a Lenten Calendar containing helpful suggestions on "things to give up every day during Lent."

We supported one another through annual "retreats" which have been held in three separate locations – Tucker House, Rockland; Galilee House, Renfrew; and the Barn (please add if other name known) in Rupert, P.Q. These one-day only or overnight getaways were wonderful for recharging our batteries with meditation, time spent outdoors, group sharing, singing and silent sit-bots – quietly observing changes in a space -- at different times of day. Our retreats reinforced our relationship with the natural world and deepened friendships with one another. Topics have included "Wisdom of our Elders/Grandmothers" and "The Story of Stuff, the Story of Solutions and the Story of Change."

Earth Sunday and Environment Sunday services have been planned and carried out by members of the circle. Topics have included Rooted in the Earth, ethical investing by our church and ourselves, avoidance of genetically modified foods, limiting long-distance travel by airplanes to lower carbon emissions, and bringing back the practice of Gleaning.

ACTION:

A Green Audit was carried out at Kitchissippi United by Greening Sacred Spaces and Ecological Circle members are playing a leadership role in implementing the recommendations. We helped to DE-pave the alcove garden area of Kitchissippi United Church, with the assistance of Ecology Ottawa and several volunteers and family members. The de-paving project occupied a lot of time in its planning and execution, but the end result is a beautiful garden space with perennials and native plants in what was formerly covered in asphalt, the addition of a bird bath and a lovely bench for visitors to rest on, and the ground water level will be fed by any excessive rain water.

We have been recycling used greeting cards, thanks to the donations from members of our congregation, and a friend of the L'Arche community who ensures that the greeting cards are periodically given to the latter for their creative use and money raising purposes. We probably could be encouraging more recycling of items, such as used stamps, electronics, etc. in the future.

We participated in the Ottawa Presbytery meeting hosted by Kitchissippi United on 10 March 2015 where speakers shared the latest climate change science with the attendees. At this meeting we learned that the dumping of fossil fuels continues despite the science. CO₂ is the most common emission and can stay in the atmosphere 1000 years! Human activities are the most common cause of the warming of the atmosphere. Food production is affected by the availability of water and security threats. What can we do? Technology can help us reduce emission plus alternate sources of energy. We will need to adapt to the changes. This requires political leadership. Disparity between the rich and the poor will be exasperated. We need to invest today for future generations.

Some members participated in the Climate Justice March on Parliament Hill, 29 Nov. 2015, prior to the international Paris meetings. There are actions all around the world raising "100% possible" solutions to climate change. Locally we were represented at the "Climate Action After Paris" meeting held at Centretown United Church on 9 March 2016.

We, as Eco-Christians, CAN make a difference in helping to Green God's Planet; we have lots of information -- now all we have to do is ACT.

In keeping with the name of Kitchissippi United Church (Great River), we are very concerned about the health of the Ottawa River and conducted a "NO DRUGS IN OUR RIVER" CAMPAIGN in 2012 and are currently planning our second campaign during the month of October 2017.

Wilma MacDonald

17 September 2017