

Annual Report of the Eco-Justice Team for 2007

Submitted by Barry McPherson, Team Chair



“Eco-justice” is about conducting our lives and our institutions in ways that limit ecological impacts so God’s Creation can be sustained to support human societies indefinitely, as well as the many plant and animal species and overall integrity and beauty of the Creation. It also has to do with conducting our lives and institutions in ways that limit economic injustices, as Jesus would have us do (such as buying products and services from sources that provide fair compensation and healthy work conditions for their employees).

With strong encouragement from **Pastor Don Taylor**, the Eco-Justice Team at our church was formed in mid-November of 2006 under the umbrella of the Peace and Justice Committee of the church, a committee that was chaired by Session Elder **Mike Eastman**. **Barry McPherson** served as the Chair of our Eco-Justice Team for the first year. He was a member of the Presbytery’s Eco-Justice Team in the 1980’s and rejoined that Presbytery team in May of 2005.

Our Eco-Justice Team had a productive and fun year in 2007 and is looking forward with great anticipation to 2008. There are about 30 people on the email distribution list who get meeting announcements and other items from the Chair, and share information, inspiration, and suggestions via this network. Most of these people are from our congregation (including high school students), but a few are from Atonement Lutheran Church and other churches in the area. We are working toward cooperative efforts on some eco-justice issues and projects with Atonement Lutheran Church. Through Time and Talent pledges submitted in November-December, a substantial number of people from our congregation expressed an interest in being involved with the Team, so the Team should be able to accomplish even more in 2008. The Team has been meeting almost monthly at the church (currently it’s the second Wednesday evening of each month).

There are many who have helped make the Eco-Justice Team a success over the past year and I thank them all, but I especially thank those who have been most involved: **Beth Hubbard, Mark McConnell, Rhonda Harman, Shirley George, Ben Bodenmiller, and Bill Barss**.

Events Held in 2007

The Team’s first event was a “Soup and Talks” session after church on January 28. Over 50 attendees enjoyed vegetarian soup prepared by **Beth Hubbard** and **Denise McPherson** and then church member **Rob Thompson** of Thompson’s Sanitary Service gave a presentation and answered questions about recycling and reducing waste. Our second speaker, **Doug Shaller** of our church and an employee of Lincoln Co. Public Works gave a presentation and answered questions about identifying and eradicating noxious weeds.

Our most inspirational event was “*Everything is Connected*”, a wonderful Earth Day church service on Sunday, April 22nd that the **High School Youth Group** put on with great direction and set design from **Mark McConnell**. In very creative ways, the youth expressed their concerns about pressing ecological problems and ways in which Christians can work toward solutions. It involved scripture and Creation Care writings, music written and performed by student **Marcus Luther** and helpers, and a wonderful play about the effects of global warming on polar bears. This included amplification of cell-phone conversations carried on by several students during the play to get their message across. Student **Todd Miesen** wore the polar bear costume and all others wore polar bear T-shirts that student **Kaitlyn Heater** had custom-made locally for the event. **Dave Heater** and student **Ben Bodenmiller** did a great job with the sound system and visual aides. At the end, there were earth-friendly treats to eat and free trees for attendees to take home and plant.

A big event reaching beyond our community was hosting the Presbytery’s *Creation Care Conference* at our church on Saturday, September 22nd. We worked with the Presbytery’s Eco-Justice Team to line up some great speakers and hold some good discussions. Presbyterians for Restoring Creation, a national organization, helped sponsor the conference. There were 56 people in attendance from Presbyterian churches in western and central Oregon as well as folks from local churches and some who were not connected with any church. The speakers were the **Rev. Irene Martin**, an Episcopal minister, author, and commercial fisher; **Carrie Newell**, professor, author, and whale guide; **Jim Golden**, fishery biologist; **Dr. John Chapman**, marine biology professor; **Doug Shaller**, forester and weed control specialist; and **Kaety Hildenbrand**, marine fisheries extension agent. The conference ended with a visit to the Oregon Coast Aquarium and an evening bonfire at Agate Beach.

Big thanks are owed to **Beth Hubbard** for developing the lunch menu, purchasing food, and leading a crew in preparing, serving, and cleaning up. And thanks to all the crew from our church who helped Beth. Many thanks to **Mark McConnell** for baking cinnamon rolls, helping with publicity, putting Rev. Irene Martin and her husband up for the night at the McConnell’s house, and organizing the donation of Oregon Coast Aquarium tickets for conference attendees (thanks to many in our congregation who donated tickets). Thanks to **Dave Heater and Rhonda Harman**, the sound system and the projection of the speakers’ slides and videos on the big screens went well.

Efforts to Inform and Inspire in 2007

An Eco-Justice bulletin board was set up in main hall opposite the restrooms. Materials to inspire and inform about eco-justice were posted there and updated frequently, including materials from the Presbytery Eco-Justice Team and churches in our community. Some excellent “Creation Care” stickers were placed there and also near the church’s recycling bags/bins. A “U-pick” distribution center for information sheets was set up on a table leading to the coffee and “goodies” in Geneva Hall. Some of these information sheets are “Good EarthKeeping Idea” flyers downloaded from the Presbytery of the Cascades web site. For example, “Support Your Local Farmer”, “Providing Wildlife Habitat” (for song birds and such around your home, church, or business), “Conserving Energy” and “Be Carbon Neutral” are some of the flyers. More flyers are being developed by the Eco-Justice Team of the Presbytery.

Articles about Eco-Justice Team activities and upcoming events and opportunities have been published almost every month in the church newsletter (The Beacon). During Sunday services this fall, the Team began presenting a “Minute for Creation Care.” We will continue to periodically do these to inform and inspire the congregation. In December, we established and labeled an Eco-Justice section in our church library and began stocking it with pertinent books, magazines, and other materials.

At the request of Presbytery, **Barry McPherson** gave a talk on streamflow requirements of fish at a Presbytery workshop in March and a talk on how to start and grow eco-justice teams in churches at Presbytery’s *Cascades Summer Conference*. As a result of these talks, he responded to a request to deliver a talk at the Presbyterian Church of the Siuslaw in Florence.

Projects Done in 2007

As one way to promote eco-justice on a more global scale, the Eco-Justice Team started donating coffee for the after-service coffee time on Sundays. The Team donated coffee that is organically grown, fairly-traded, and grown as locally as possible (e.g., Mexico). We began successfully obtaining similar donations from other members of the congregation. Most of this coffee has been obtained through the Presbyterian Coffee Project (www.pcusa.org/coffee) but there are also stores selling it in Newport. One can also get organic, fairly-traded tea and chocolate through the Presbyterian Coffee Project.

Through the hard work of **Mark McConnell**, a community Garden was established on our church property. This involved tilling the ground (by **Al Eames**), setting up a water meter, developing a registration form (\$15/plot), and advertising the availability of garden plots. Organic gardening techniques and locally appropriate vegetables and flowers were emphasized. Several families in the community grew food in the plots. Due in part to Mark, a grant application to Presbytery secured \$1,000 in assistance for community gardens throughout Lincoln County in 2008 (Lincoln County Master Gardeners wrote the application).

The Earth Day worship service initiated our church’s move toward “paperless worship services” (no printed bulletins). This would not have been possible without the good work by **Dave Heater** and student **Ben Bodenmiller** in producing and displaying the audio-visuals on the big screens during Sunday worship services. A few bulletins are still printed and available each Sunday.

What’s Ahead in 2008

The Team is working on an Eco-Justice Mission Statement for the Session to adopt. The intent will be to help inspire and guide the Session and congregation in reducing our ecological footprint on God’s Creation and on people who are least able to protect and conserve the Creation they depend on for their health and happiness, especially future generations.

Through attendance of workshop titled “*Save Your Congregation Energy and Money*” presented by Oregon Interfaith Power and Light at Atonement Lutheran Church on November

3rd, we were lucky enough to be granted a free energy audit of our church conducted by a professional engineer. The Team will review the audit when completed in early 2008 and submit it to Session along with the Teams own recommendations so the church can start some serious planning for conserving and even energy generation (such as from solar panels) on the church property. For example, some significant infusion of funds will be needed, but with new government cash incentives and tax credits that can be “passed-through” to businesses or individuals wanting to reduce their taxes, it looks like our cost for solar panels could be recovered within about 6-7 years. The solar panels would then go on saving the church on energy bills and reducing the church’s ecological footprint on God’s Creation.

The Team is working on ideas in collaboration with other teams in the church to communicate more of the church’s information, such as the newsletter, through the church’s website. We want to help lower the church’s paper, copying, and mailing costs, yet provide the same information to everyone, including those without access to the internet.

We have already scheduled one 2008 event: a “Soup, Salad, and Speakers” event after church on January 27th. This will include a speaker on successful installation of solar panels in African villages and another speaker on energy efficient lighting that anyone can implement. We intend to do more events this year, both indoors and outdoors.

If you are interested in joining our team or just being on the email list, please contact Barry McPherson at 574-6111 or bdmcpherson@coho.net.

Return To Creation Care