

## **4/18/10 Sermon**

"It's Good to be Green"

Rev. Paul D. Daniel, Minister

Our UUA Web site reminds us that today we celebrate Earth Day, a time to advocate with one voice for the health of the Earth. Today, we call for national environmental legislation that will be effective in reducing our use of the nation's resources and reducing our carbon footprint on the planet, without benefiting corporations at the expense of low-income families and communities of color.

Our gratitude for our Earth is heightened by our growing anxiety for its wellbeing as we confront the growing extermination of species; global warming; rapacious energy policies that spew CO<sub>2</sub> into the air; the privatization of water resources; wasteful eating that uses far too many resources to grow food for too few people. All of these practices cause perilous changes to our environment that threaten our very existence.

This spring as we Unitarian Universalists, descendants of Emerson and Thoreau and the other Transcendentalists, celebrate Earth Day, we are called to action. In their honor and tradition, let us work together to ensure the continued seasons of rebirth and renewal of this planet we hold dear.

My focus today is primarily on ethical eating issues and begins with a quote from Rowen Van Ness of the Unitarian Universalist Ministry for Earth. He writes, "If you walk into an average supermarket these days, you'll find thousands of choices of things to eat. Some things may be grown or produced in low-impact ways at a nearby farm, but chances are that many items for sale contain ingredients whose production has negatively impacted the Earth and her people."

As Unitarian Universalists, we are committed to living in ways that respect the inherent worth and dignity of all people as well as the interdependent web of life of which we are a part. With so many choices, how can we find ways to eat ethically and, in so doing, live our principles?

Fortunately, people all over the United States are thinking about this right now. Books have been written about what to eat, and UU congregations have been engaging in the current Congregational Study/Action Issue, "Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice."

On this Earth Day, the "UU Ministry for Earth" is asking members of all congregations to think about what they eat and what food choices are available to those in their communities.

Our own Sustainability Committee is leading the way at UUMAN. They make detergent and cleaning products to distribute to families in need to create a safe home environment and raise their level of consciousness to protect our environment. We have recently purchased and installed an energy-efficient dishwasher to save water and eliminate disposables that consume resources and are harmful to the environment. Currently, the committee is asking you to donate funds to purchase reusable china plates so that, as a congregation, we consume fewer resources and eliminate throwaways. So participate in the "Step Up to the Plate" sale. Remember, it is good to be Green.

My hope today, on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Earth Day, is to inspire you to find ways that you can celebrate the abundance of our planet in a just way, to help reduce our impact on the planet. It is time that we live in covenant with the planet that sustains us. As Unitarian Universalists, we understand that our lives depend on the interdependent web of existence of which we are all a part. We draw spiritual sustenance from our Earth-centered consciousness and religion and we must work to reclaim our place in the web.

Unfortunately, to the detriment of the planet, we have acted out of our selfish individualism.

As Tracey Robinson-Harris, the UUA's Director of Congregational Services, put it:

"Our individualism – whether as persons or nations – has led us to act as if we can meet our personal needs, sustain our lifestyles, attend at a time of our choosing to those in need, conserve a little when it is convenient and use as much as we 'need' for our comfort. Our government says that signing on to the Kyoto protocol is too costly in dollars and jobs. Yet there is the will and the money to spend billions on a war over oil. This spring, in this season of rebirth and renewal, perhaps it is to our own souls we should attend. This planet, as never before, depends on us."

We are all in peril, but not helpless in the face of this crisis.

With that hope, we have begun a two- to three-year process to make our congregation a "Green Sanctuary." This is part of a denomination-wide effort to partner with each other to make personal lifestyle and church-wide

changes to become Earth-friendly, to eat in ways that provide us sustenance and save our planet. This is an issue where small changes in our habits can truly matter. Ethical eating, like ethical living, is not about absolutes. It is about doing the best you're willing and able to do, and nurturing the will to do better.

Our current efforts concerning ethical eating are part of broader denomination-wide study and action item designated at General Assembly in 2008 through 2012 to draw attention to this issue. I am asking you to research and participate in the UUA 40/40/40 program: 40 years of Earth Day ... 40 days of commitment ... 40 UUs in our congregation, or 40% of our congregation, to stand up for the Earth.

You can join the work begun by our Sustainability Committee, ably facilitated by Kate Hudson. In so doing, you can put your faith into action to benefit the environment and build environmental justice. I ask you to consider making what small or large change you can make to benefit the environment.

You might consider giving up bottled water and use the metal bottles offered by the Sustainability Committee. Or give up soda, a tough one for me, but – *gulp* – I am going to try. Try eating a step lower on the food chain. Don't eat beef, unless humanely treated or avoid it all together. It is estimated that if Americans were to reduce their meat consumption by only 10% for one year, it would free 12 million tons of grain for human consumption, or enough to feed 60 million people.

You can also avoid animals in the food chain injected with hormones, antibiotics and other drugs and grown in confinement containers. Buy certified organic produce from the farm co-op that has its pick-up on Thursdays here at UUMAN. Avoid genetically altered food. Become a vegan. Buy locally. Say Grace each meal to honor the chain of production from field to table. Drink only "fair trade" coffee. These and other changes can be fun, especially in community, and will prove that we are indeed capable of making changes that matter. Now is the time to put those ideas that have dwelled in the back of your mind into action. You can answer the call of 40/40/40 to become good stewards of the Earth. We can start by "eating our values."

May it be so!