

## Notes on Earth Day, Sunday April 23, 2006

### (intergenerational service with participation of the children)

The first Earth Day was on April 22, 1970 organized by Senator Gaylord Nelson. The concept of raising the national consciousness on the degradation to the environment had been simmering for six or seven years, and suddenly it blossomed, possibly accelerated in part by young people's attention switching from the Vietnam war. It was in Seattle in 1969 that the first major announcement of Earth Day was made; previously the peril of the environment had not been a topic of much interest. You probably knew that Senator Nelson died last year at the age of 89

The focus of this year's UUA Earth Day is global warming; in fact, it's the main UU Study Action theme for the current biennium, and it gets special emphasis on Earth Day 2006. This topic has been much in the news of late – though, as you know, we at UUCWI have emphasized it for several years. No reasonable person can seriously doubt the fact that the earth is warming, unquestionably helped along by human activity. The effects are everywhere: huge melting and thinning of Arctic ice and permafrost; great migrations of animals and insects and birds as the climate around them changes and they seek more livable conditions; important parts of the earth becoming uninhabitable, spread of diseases, more wildfires and blight on our northern forests. It's a very long list, expressed in a myriad of ways. It's hard to pick up a newspaper or magazine these days without mention -- usually concern -- about global warming

**Earth Day,  
April 22,  
2006**

*Honoring  
our Home,  
Planet  
Earth*

Earth Day often focuses specifically on children, as we are seeing here today; children all over the world are being given suggestions on things they can do to help sustain the environment where they will be living the rest of their lives - they are helped to understand the causes of global warming, they are led to visit many Internet sites, asked to take their ecological footprint, and encouraged to do little investigations of the Greenness of their neighborhoods. I have the fantasy that the current young generation will band together all around the world and work cooperatively towards a sustainable environment. Such a world-wide cohesion is also the best basis for harmony and peace among nations.

The UUA has focused on Earth Day being a significant moment to emphasize the sacred and spiritual aspects of providing a sustainable environment; these are moral issues requiring religious responses, chief among which are traditions of respect and honor for our natural world. The UUA has a web site, 20 pages long, devoted to concepts, resources etc. on the Threat of Global Warming. And of course our seventh UU principle expressly focuses on caring for the earth. The UUA site has the usual list of Earth Day style recommendations which we have mentioned in our services many a time. One in particular is a huge benefits in energy consumption of recycling aluminum cans, which is one of the chief projects our young people have been focusing on, and asking that we bring cans each Sunday to help their project. Let me just read a general quote from the UUA site

*"By our mindful deeds, Unitarian Universalists can become agents for positive change. Unitarian Universalists are called to transform our habits of life as a religious witness in a culture of economic privilege. To live*

*substantially simpler lives and demonstrate the type of personal behavior required of citizens in all developed countries will demand solidarity with one another and with all who depend on the sacrifice of our luxuries to guarantee their necessities."*

But there is a lot of good news amongst all of the alarm and scary stories. A general Google search yields 482 million hits on writings and activity connected with Earth Day. The atmosphere, at least in North America and Europe, is much more smoke-free than on the original Earth Day. Forestry and wetland management have improved enormously. Green political parties are forming in almost every country, as are leagues of conservation voters. Petitions are circulating and being sent to Congress every week on clean air, greater mileage for automobiles etc. Renewable energy alternatives are being actively investigated. Young persons are being increasingly involved, educated and engaged in an environmental sustainability. I read about one little local project whereby children are decorating grocery bags with Earth Day messages to make sure they are spreading the word. Seattle over the weekend has several events, for example many tree-planting gatherings, and a big effort to clean up stretches of the Dugumish River - just a couple of the thousands of such activities taking place this weekend all around the world.

So Earth Day, like so many focal points in our complex world and society, has its mix of encouraging things as well as the mounting alarm about environmental degradation. Today our children have helped us focus on these environmental matters; I think most of us would agree that we the adult generation have a responsibility to turn over a sustainable environment

to the next generations. Do we want our next generations to curse us for our neglect of the environment, or praise us for taking actions while there is -- barely -- still time. Thank you Lori and children for helping us focus on this vitally important topic, many aspects of which are drawn together on Earth Day. And a happy and creative Earth Day to you all!