

Our Commitment to the Earth
Unitarian Universalist Church in Cherry Hill
Sunday, April 21, 2024
Rev. Margret A. O’Neill, Amélie Harris-McGeehan
Walt Nodolny, Sharon Hardy

Rev Margret

Amanda Gorman, former National Youth Poet Laureate of the United States, was only 16 years old when she presented her poem "Earthrise" to the Climate Reality Leadership Corps in 2018. This poem, which she called "Our Purpose in Poetry," is dedicated to Al Gore and The Climate Reality Project, to which one of our members, Sharon Hardy, has a direct family connection which you will hear about later. The poem and the poet speak for themselves, so now we share the video of Amanda Gorman reciting her poem, *Our Purpose in Poetry: Earthrise*.

Rev Margret

A core principle and value of our Unitarian Universalist faith is our connection with the planet and all beings that inhabit this miracle of existence. The seventh principle commits us to practices that demonstrate respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part, and the new value of Independence echoes that language, as we covenant to "honor the interdependent web of all existence.... to cherish Earth and all beings by creating and nurturing relationships of care and respect."

Members of this church over the decades have worked in many ways to create and nurture relationships of care and respect for the planet, including care for this 17-acre property which sustains an arboretum, a living museum of plants and trees with amazing diversity of plants native to this geography, climate and land type. The plants and trees, in turn, support a variety of bird and animal life, including a herd of deer, along with fox, groundhog, skunk, chipmunk and squirrel families – and if you participated in the bird walk this morning, you will know that we live among a bountiful variety of avian life.

Walt Nadolny and Sharon Hardy took the lead last year to organize our Environmental Justice Team, connecting with other local and national organizations, as well as the environmental and climate initiatives within UU Faith Action New Jersey, our statewide UU justice advocacy coalition. As Walt and Sharon reflect on their commitment to the planet, we begin with Walt.

Walt Nadolny

A bit of background. I have been a committed environmentalist since 1981, the year I observed the Brazilian rain forest being burnt for crops and cattle from a ship; at that time I was a ship's officer. It's a long story that I can relate at another time. It did get me questioning and doing research into the arguably dire straits into which we as a civilization were headed. A few years later I had the opportunity to attend grad school focusing on environmental, law, policy, and management. That has become my focus and career for the last 35 years, the last twenty as a professor within the State University of New York system, as well as various institutions abroad as a speaker and guest lecturer.

We are trained by newspapers and TV to focus on the bad news. The old journalistic corollary was and still is "if it bleeds it leads." Troubling news hits us every day when we open our media sources. Environmental degradation, etc.

I am standing here to relate to you some of the immense progress we as a global society have made in the last 35 or so years. The first step was that WE have acknowledged the problem. We

have done this globally, domestically (in spite of some politicians stuck in the 19th century) and locally.

When approaching Europe by sea one observes thousands of wind turbines, powering homes and industries throughout Europe. In Spain, Portugal and Morocco, formerly barren, arid lands are covered by hectares of solar panels silently producing megawatts of electricity. All of these projects cut down on the use of petroleum and the emission of greenhouse gases. Internationally, the internal combustion engine is being rapidly replaced by electric powered vehicles. I drive one. Locally we are fighting for the New Jersey Green Amendment as well as a leaf blower ban in Cherry Hill. (Please stop by our table in the Commons to sign postcards and a petition)

My research focus as a professor has been the oceans and polar areas, in particular regulation. For a decade I was a member of the International Maritime Organization (the IMO), Marine Environmental Protection Committee. We met three times a year in London to draft international law governing the oceans, polar areas, and the shipping that traverses those areas. You may not realize it, but 95% of everything you buy, wear and use comes by ship at some point. This body of the IMO is a place whereby all 164 member nations, as well as non-governmental organizations, make the laws that we as a global society agree on. During my tenure, we gave the polar areas the highest level of protection with the Polar Code. We banned the dumping of any trash in the oceans, mandated vast areas as protected zones for cetaceans as well as fishing bans. We banned the use of high sulfur fuels and limited particulate matter emissions -- that is the stuff that darkens the planet's albedo and hastens warming. We have been in the forefront of mandating alternate fuels such as liquified natural gas, biofuels and wind, which again help in cutting the use of heavy petroleum products.

In ancillary work we are greening ports. Replacing the diesel-powered equipment that keeps commerce running with clean electric-powered machinery. This has several added benefits: lowering operational costs from refueling and repairs, and much more importantly, reducing respiratory ailments in the minority communities that surround ports.

Being a professor, I could talk for hours about these things and introduce statistics, PowerPoints, and possibly assign a paper, but Rev. Margret said 500 words and I will defer to her on this point.

Thank you all, and please acknowledge the bad news but do see all the good that has been accomplished since I started my journey 35 years ago.

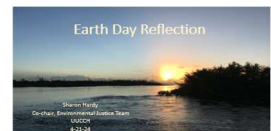
Rev. Margret

Thank you, Walt. Your personal journey is testament to the good and productive work being done, nationally and internationally, at so many levels. And now we hear from Sharon Hardy about her commitment to the Earth and the work of the UUCCH Environmental Justice Team. Sharon.

Sharon Hardy

I wanted to follow on from the theme Walt was sharing about looking for the good news in environmental work. He shared specifics from his life, but I would like to take this more broadly.

I want to introduce you to a site called Information is Beautiful. This is a collection of good news, unseen positive trends, uplifting statistics and facts that show creative solutions — all beautifully visualized by Information is Beautiful. The purpose is to move our attention beyond dramatic news headlines to the slow developments and quiet trends that go unseen, uncelebrated.



Amazing things are happening in the world, thanks to human ingenuity, endeavor and collaboration. This site showcases GOOD NEWS about the environment, as well as women's issues, animals, clean energy, and many more areas of society.

Here are a few examples. The dark green box in the middle lists organic, biodegradable alternatives to single use plastic – show in the circles with more information. It shows:

- Seaweed extract can replace bags
- Fish scales bound with algae creates packaging
- Mycelium replaces Styrofoam
- Cellulose fibers from wood pulp
- Hemp can be turned into bottles
- Elephant Grass becomes low-cost packaging



The next slide shows that plastic-eating worms could tackle trash; this is from a Stanford study: 100 mealworms can munch through 35 milligrams of Styrofoam a day (about the weight of a small pill). Microorganisms in their guts break down the plastic. About half is digested into carbon dioxide which can be captured, and the rest is excreted as biodegradable waste, safe to use as soil for crops.



Here are a few more examples – these are all from the Eco and Climate tab, which covers areas such as Ecotech, Electric Vehicles, Emissions, Energy Use, Food; Forests, Green Roofs, Legislation, Oceans, Plastics & Recycling Pledges & Targets, Zero Energy

1. New buildings in San Francisco must have solar or green roofs using 15-40% of roof space
2. Global tree cover is expanding; this slide shows gain and loss of tree canopy from 1982 to 2016, showing a net gain of 5.4%
3. 75% of all the aluminum ever used in the USA has been recycled; it takes an average of 60 days to be recycled and back in use. Brazil and Japan are top recyclers of drink cans.



The next slide is about food waste... The US is aiming to halve food waste by 2030. America throws out 30-40% of its food. The plan is to solve this through a joint effort of institutions, restaurants and grocery stores. South Korea had an even bigger problem, bigger than Europe and North America! They instituted a ban on dumping food in landfills and began compulsory food recycling. The results: They recycled 2% in 1995 and 95% in 2019, which you can see by the dots on the grid at the bottom of the graphic.



I could go on and on... and I do suggest you look at this wonderful site regularly – the information is amazing and inspiring and counters the bad news we see every day.

To switch gears here, I want to talk about what we are doing locally. UU New Jersey FaithAction is working with a large coalition of social justice groups throughout New Jersey and one of the primary goals for the last few years has been to help pass the Green Amendment – this would enshrine our collective right to clean air, water and a healthy environment in our state constitution.

And so we each do what we can, what we must, to cherish this blue marble, this blue marvel, this fragile blue vessel on which we sail the cosmic seas. Let us rise now in body or spirit and join in singing our closing hymn, #1064 in your hymnal, Blue Boat Home.

Sources

Amanda Gorman, Earthrise retrieved from <https://www.sierraclub.org/los-padres/blog/2021/02/earthrise-poem-amanda-gorman>

Information is Beautiful (<https://informationisbeautiful.net/beautifulnews/>)

Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*