Streams

No. 40 Summer '10 A Newsletter of Crystal Spring Center for Earth Literacy

Who Shall Inherit the Land?

Forty years ago a grassroots movement took hold across this nation. A growing awareness of the environmental degradation of our waterways and farmland, our air and oceans, stirred a response from a young, activist generation whose actions helped shape the first Earth Day. The decade following ushered into law the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the United Nations World Charter for Nature. Our human actions throughout the 200 years of the industrial age had come to bear a devastating weight upon ecosystems everywhere. This year, on April 22, over 500 million people in 175 countries around the globe participated in the 40th anniversary celebration of that first Earth Day. Our perceptions shift slowly from an understanding of "our human discontinuity from the natural world" to a conscious awakening that we are only one manifestation of being in a complex system of inter-dependent and finely balanced Life. As astronaut Edgar Mitch wrote, "My view of our planet was a glimpse of divinity." Our religious sentiment and perception of Wholeness has radically changed.

Many projects, programs and special events have unfolded at Crystal Spring over the years. An array of activities are advertised and described in various expressions from newsletters to colorful flyers and even a sandwich board that sometimes sits on the front lawn inviting folks to a seasonal fest or fair. However, there is one particular work that perhaps seems too narrowly focused for general publication. Yet, the Religious Lands Conservancy Project defines this moment in our mission in a significant way.

Religious Orders of women and men have made a crucial contribution to Western civilization over the last 1500 years. Though we are no longer recognized or even needed for the particular services that called us forth in a moment in time, we still have a great contribution to make. Religious Orders are founded in times of socio-political shifts, when the arc of compassion opens to a wider embrace. With the spawning of revolutions and the fall of Kingdoms across Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries, and the burgeoning of population, a new form of society appeared with staggering masses in great need. Orders were established to feed, to house, to heal, to educate, to meet every human need.

In the rising age of commerce and the capacity to traverse the great seas, wave after wave of immigrant populations arrived on the North American continent. Members of Religious Orders accompanied the emigrants or new Orders were founded here to serve the needs of the many, the destitute. Marked by humble, difficult and harsh beginnings, most knew the same poverty as those to whom they ministered. Over time, the Orders purchased at minimum cost, or were given, or even inherited, beautiful landscapes upon which to construct homes and hospitals, seminaries and schools.

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Who Shall Inherit the Land? *continued*

With great intensity and keen focus members of numerous Orders went about the task of tending human needs. Little consideration was given to the natural environment that surrounded them. One might say they withdrew from the world into spiritual and intellectual pursuits out of concern for human endeavors. There was little sensitivity for the local environment, for the ecosystem of which their very living was an intimate part. Environmental devastation was hardly noted in preaching and teaching, in the personal life or even in the vocabulary of most members of Congregations. Surely, the natural wonders and beauty of a place offered rest for the soul and reflection for the inquiring mind. Yet, how easy to slip into the cultural assumption that the marvels of all that bloomed and blossomed, that soared and swam, that nested and nurtured Earth in its glorious modes, were there to serve our human needs.

As the industrial age completed its garnering of "our natural resources," and the technological age reengineered the very essence of life forms, many saw for the first time the environmental devastation. The places of natural beauty and ecological integrity were greatly diminished, many species gone forever. The song of the rivers, the song of migrating and native winged ones, the song to the trees in the great forests stirred by the winds moving across the mountain ranges were hushed, even silenced. Finally, the land itself, no longer recognized as a community of beings living in place, became the final "resource." Land succumbed to market forces. The "community of beings" native to a place is now considered in terms of "greatest financial gain" through sale for development.

What assumptions have allowed this devastation? Our assumptions flow from our beliefs. If we believe in "the discontinuity of the human from the natural world," then our attitude toward all that is not human easily slips into a posture of use. Surely, the actions of the last 300 years demonstrate that attitude. As all things emerge in the light and in the dark, so too our technological capacities. It was the extended eye of the telescope that allowed our human seeing to comprehend our place in the unfolding Universe story. The belief of our "discontinuity" no longer held. Within a new understanding of our beginnings, and new referent to our belonging, we could overcome our alienation from the natural world and begin the restoration of life on a sustainable basis.

Religious Orders often describe themselves as prophetic. Their way of life arises out of the human spirit as a response to the unfolding of life in a given time and place. No Order has ever been founded to serve existing structures. They issue a call for radical change, new values, a new integration. Edgar Mitchell contemplated, "I have seen divinity." The time has come when: "the greatest service that Religious Orders can make to the larger destinies of the human, the christian, and the earthly community would be the recovery of the human and religious intimacy with the spontaneities of all the wonderful participants in the universe of being." (Thomas Berry) Acceptance of this intimacy is surely the way to adjust the attitudes that have unleashed devastating actions over the centuries upon the Earth.

It's impossible for restorative and sustainable values to permeate the economic fabric of life without a rootedness in the natural world. Such values and the actions that flow from them are taking root among Religious Orders across the continent. A new relationship with our lands is our contribution to and our participation in the coming ecological age. Our founding charisms of charity, good neighborliness, mercy, compassion are finally in service to the most ancient voices of life forms crying to be heard. In protecting our lands we are re-founding our Orders. Look on our web site for the good news stories in Stoughton and Dartmouth, Wareham, Attleboro, and more, and even one in Plainville. ■CL

Heirloom Harvest ~ *Seeds of Change*

Farmer John has to adapt to climate change and social change. Every farm is unique in terms of how the soils, the ecosystem and the weather variables interact to create a growing environment. Solid record-keeping can tell what works over time. This year John will be growing more modern tomato varieties that have better resistance to late blight. The blight, which is always present in the environment, caused the tomato crop failure last season at Heirloom Harvest CSA and most other farms in the region. Twenty six cool rainy days in June pro- vided the conditions. A great raspberry crop helped sustained the shares. This year new plantings of rhubarb and strawberries are set.

Though some members have requested newsletters and announcements, Farmer John is using the farm Facebook page to offer short updates of what's happening at the farm. He finds the Facebook platform easier to communicate, and to resolve the drawbacks of emailing –too many changed e-mail addresses and announce-ments getting sent to spam folders. It's an open-source publication where members can post their own stories, recipes, links, etc., eliminating the bottleneck of having to send such items to the farmer or one of his staff. So, get out your favorite recipes and share them!

Summer Solstice Celebration

Saturday, June 19, 2-4 pm

We'll celebrate the life forces in the gardens, and woodlands, and remember our human place in the order of things. Join in our meditation walk and drumming circle as we reverence the mystery of being and celebrate our place in nature.

Admission is a potluck dish. Thanks for pre-registering.

Children's Corner

Summer Adventures

July 26th – 30th
9:00am to noon

If you're 5 to 11 years old, you won't want to miss this week outside in the woods and the wild. It's a chance to discover the Universe Story as it unfolds within you and all around you. Explore the natural world from stardust to water and rocks to those who delight in a leaping frog. Find your place in the celebration of life right here where you live on planet Earth.
Cost: $90

Kids Climate Summit

Get outside to learn the ways of eco-critters

Join groups of kids who are passionate about the community of life. Whether you're in home-school network, scouts, 4H, elementary school, you'll want to participate in an opportunity to "get with it" for the world we love. The **Kids Climate Summit** is a cooperative learning effort of Crystal Spring and New Dawn Earth Center to give voice to children's perspective as they shape our way into the planet's future. Activities and resources will be made available. Celebra-tive gathering planned for May 2011. For more information, contact cryspr@comcast.net.

Continue for Calendar and Fall Program Preview…

Please pre-register for all programs - call 508-699-7167 or email cryspr@comcast.net

Summer into Fall Calendar 2010

Summer Solstice Celebration

Saturday, June 19, 2-4 pm

Come celebrate the abundance of life in our woodland and in our community. On this longest day, join us in celebrating the triumph of the light. We'll start with a meditative walk in the woods, have a rousing drumming circle with Dave Curry of *Drums for One and All* and enjoy a potluck supper. *Admission is a potluck dish. Thanks for pre-registering.*

Fall Evening Series

Wednesday eves ~ Nov. 3, 10, 17, Dec. 1
7:00 – 8:30pm

Using Pema Chodron's book, *The Places That Scare You: A guide to Fearlessness in Difficult Times,* we'll explore ways to awaken basic goodness in ourselves and others, staying with all the present moment has to offer. Discussion and meditation are our guides in this process.
Cost: $35 includes copy of Chodron's book.

Summer Adventures

July 26th – 30th
9:00am to noon

For 5 to 11 year olds. Cost is $90.

Kids Climate Summit

Contact Crystal Spring for more information

Homeschool In the Fall (module#1)

Nov. 9th – Dec. 14th
9:30am – 11:00am
Ages 5 – 11

Did you know that the water in the pond turns over from top to bottom every fall? Animals and trees, soil and water have a wondrous fall season that we humans are seldom aware of. This is a module to "get with it!" Discover the wonders right under our noses and feet. Learn what kids are doing to make sure all this amazing life keeps unfolding "down to the seventh generation." Cost: $35

Crystal Spring is the work of the Dominican Sisters, who are supported and encouraged in this work by many friends and people of like mind and heart. To register for a program or to seek further information, contact Crystal Spring.

Crystal Spring Center 76 Everett Skinner Road, Plainville, MA 02762
508-699-7167 cryspr@comcast.net www.crystalspring.org