NEPA Synod Green Team

e-newsletter #2, Summer 2022

ELCA Logo in sassafras leaves.
Created by Pastor Inge Williams at Friedens Lutheran Church, Shartlesville on October 13, 2021

Welcome to our second newsletter!

We present to you this collection of prayers, tips and ideas on caring for God's creation, book reviews, news about and from notable places within the synod, advocacy opportunities, and inspirational stories of good work being done on our territory.

Any questions or comments on this newsletter would be appreciated – please send them to pwmetzloff@gmail.com.

Please feel free to share this with anyone who would be interested!

A Prayer for Use in Summertime

by Pastor Carl D. Shankweiler

Provider God, it's summertime!

As Mr. Gershwin's song tells us, "the livin' is easy, fish are jumpin', and the cotton is high." Some of the bountiful produce to sustain us is already ripe and ready to pick; in other cases, grains, fruits, and vegetables grow bigger every day as they head towards a fall harvest. Because it is summer, we may indeed have time and opportunity to travel, engage in recreation, or just stay home and relax in the soft grass.

Summertime can be very good! Thank you for summer!

But summertime can also be oppressive when the temperatures are too hot for both work and recreation to be safe; when gentle rains do not arrive to soften the grass and farmers' crops wither and die; when nature fights itself with terrifying storms and with insects and diseases that destroy plants and reduce food supplies. Summertime can be harsh.

Give us strength to endure — and wisdom to deal responsibly — with the challenges that summer can bring!

Every season, O God, has its unique beauties and joys, its difficulties and struggles. Make us faithful stewards of summer's blessings as we care for creation, share the earth's resources, and enjoy what you have provided. Help us to sing our own songs of praise for what you have done by giving us summer!

Amen!

Green Tips

As the summer heats up, our tips this month focus on water use.

For outside:

- Outdoor water use spikes in the summer – we use two to four times as much when weather is warmer. Water in the early morning or evening to limit evaporation.
- Avoid overwatering. Water for no more than 15 minutes per station per day and for only three days a week at most.
- If rain is in the forecast, turn your sprinkler system off ahead of time.
- Replace thirsty turf – lawns - with native plants.
- Use drip systems for plants, flowers and older trees.
- Add mulch around plants and trees to help retain moisture.
- Use a smart controller that will adjust your watering automatically depending on the weather.

For inside:

- Test your toilet. Put a drop of food coloring into the toilet tank. After 10 minutes, if any color shows up in the bowl, you have a leak.
- Listen for running water. One of the easiest ways to check in on your pipes is to listen for drips from faucets or showerheads and running water from your toilet.

Book Review

Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Yard
by Douglas W. Tallamy

Douglas Tallamy has written three superb books – his first, *Bringing Nature Home*, focused on native plants; his latest, *The Nature of Oaks*, examined the keystone tree species that's most widely used by insects and wildlife; and the central and broadest one is *Nature's Best Hope*. In this work he lays out the scientific reasons behind the current crisis in wildlife numbers, in straightforward and understandable terms.

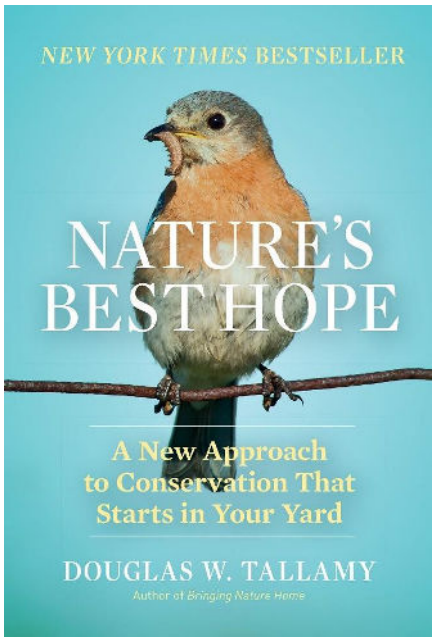
This could be – and most certainly is – sobering and depressing information; what's sometimes called the extinction crisis is just as important, and just as threatening, as the climate crisis. But Tallamy moves beyond despair. He builds on the work and ideas of some key naturalists and environmentalists (Aldo Leopold and E.O. Wilson) and quickly presents a workable and achievable approach to modern conservation, which he dubs 'Homegrown National Park.'

Based on such simple and useful ideas as shrinking useless lawns, planting native species, allowing insects to thrive, and simply leaving areas alone, he argues that the vast acreage of privately held land (think your yard) can be turned from an ecological wasteland to a functioning part of the overall ecosystem. What you do, on your acre or in your garden or in the pot on your patio, or on your church grounds, matters.

That's the point of the book. And it's supported by gorgeous photography, plenty of useful references, and a great summation chapter aptly titled 'What Each of Us Can Do.' Anyone who has any property at all – including congregations – should read this book.

Tallamy has also created a website in support of his ideas, including an interactive map where people can list their homes when they've taken some of the steps that he has recommended (I have); it's at

https://homegrownnationalpark.org/



And, if you're interested in hearing a version of his points in a video rather that reading the book, there's a good short video called 'What's the Rush?' at

https://vimeo.com/699543873/ab8b61fa68

Enjoy –

Paul Metzloff

Notable Places: Bear Creek Camp

– Collin Grooms, Executive Director

The 3000 acres of Pocono Mountain wilderness that comprise Bear Creek Camp are home to countless species of plants native to Northeast Pennsylvania. During a week of summer camp or on an environmental education field trip, campers spend time hiking and exploring, learning from trained staff as they identify different species and point out the unique ways that the plants tell the story of the land they grow on.

Unfortunately, invasive plant species also grow in the woods of Bear Creek and shape their part of the story. One of the invasive species that has been identified on the property is Japanese Barberry (Berberis thunbergii). Like many invasive species, Japanese barberry is often planted in landscaping for its aesthetic features. This shrub typically grows red leaves when it's purchased for planting and then grows green offshoots as it begins to spread where its drooping branches touch the ground or where animals drop seeds after eating its small red berries.

Josh Flad, consulting forester,
examines a dense area
of Japanese barberry
on the Bear Creek Camp property.

If you were to walk through BCC's forest in the early spring, barberry is one of the first plants to grow green leaves and is therefore very obvious as a part of the undergrowth. The shrub has small thorns and can grow four to six feet tall which will crowd out other undergrowth. Annual shedding of leaves, especially in densely populated areas can shift the pH of the soil, making it more basic, which further excludes native plant species.

Recent studies are beginning to show a relationship between Japanese barberry and deer ticks. The structure of the plant creates a habitat favored by ticks to allow them to withstand temperature and weather fluctuations as well as providing low foliage to more easily allow access for ticks to latch onto humans and animals. The shrub also serves as good habitat for mice which are the primary carrier of Lyme, creating a higher density of Lyme-infected ticks as they exist together in the micro-ecosystem created by the plant.

Bear Creek Camp has recently begun a management project in partnership with the United States Department of Agriculture to control Japanese barberry that will include two years of removal followed by a year of planting native shrubs and trees to restore the areas of the forest where the barberry has been removed. Because of the density of the invaded areas, for this project removal will be done with cutting with forest mowers followed by spot application of appropriate herbicide under the supervision of a licensed forester. Japanese barberry can be controlled on a smaller scale with hand cutting and small amounts of chemical treatment like Round-up.

For Bear Creek Camp, the end goal of this project is to care for the health of the forest to meet our forest management objectives of protecting the recreation opportunities of the woods so that campers and hikers can utilize the property and enhancing native wildlife habitat. We're excited by the opportunity provided by the USDA to encourage us on this small project that will give us the skills and tools to continue to do this type of management in other areas of the property into the future.

Penn State Extension (2020). Japanese Barberry Invasive Plant Fact Sheet. https://extension.psu.edu/japanese-barberry

Advocacy/Action:

Did you know that you can choose the source of your electricity?

And that you can choose sustainably generated – by wind or solar – electricity?

Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania (LAMPa) has produced an excellent instructional webinar on exactly how and why to do this (and it's not hard). The webinar can be found at

https://www.lutheranadvocacypa.org/issues/care-for-creation/webinar-plug-in-to-solar-wind-choosing-an-electricity-supplier-with-creation-care-in-mind/

and it's well worth the time to watch.

This option of choosing electricity providers is open to individuals as well as congregations.

Given recent rises in fossil fuel and traditional energy costs, many sustainable and carbon-free options are better financial options *in addition* to being better for creation.

So if you are not able to put up your own solar panels, tap into community solar, or have your own windmill, this is a great option to start using sustainable and renewable energy!

And, on a related topic, there was a resolution submitted to this year's synod assembly on the just transition to sustainable energy. Although there was not enough time at the assembly for it to be discussed, it will be taken up by the synod council, and the full text can be read here:

https://nepasynod.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/2022-NEPA-Synod-Assembly-Resolution-3.-Just-Transition.pdf

Inspiration: Learnings of a Retired Pastor

by Rev. Wayne D. Moritz

Over the last few months I've retired from parish ministry, made some unexpected discoveries, and started a new lifestyle.

My first discovery was of a beautiful new sanctuary - my backyard. I've seen a fair share of church sanctuaries, both in the churches I've served as a Pastor and in the cathedrals I've stepped into while touring Europe. Luminous stained glass windows casting rainbows of color. Centuries old mosaics telling the story of Christ and His faithful saints. Aromatic, lily crowned chancels coming to life with the first rays of light on Easter morning. In and through them all I find myself reveling in the Wonder of the Divine Presence.

And that's the same feeling I now find flowing out of moments spent in my backyard. Sitting outside in the warmth of the sunshine, which I now have much more time to do, I've started noticing the elegance of the trees my wife, Lorraine, and I have planted. The various shades of green. The artistry of their branches, whether laden with leaves or needles, and how they wave in the breeze and how they shelter the sparrows, robins, and cardinals darting in and out of them. I've even named some of the trees. Our son thinks that rather amusing. I think it's easier than remembering their Latin titles. But the four spruce trees bear the names of the Gospel writers. The three green giants are Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. The Hinoki cypress, to their right, is Daniel. And all the rest of the backyard residents have followed suit, from the shrubs and bushes to the birds, rabbits, and occasional cat and fox running through them to the buzzing bees and ever-changing clouds far overhead.

We've become friends. Or better yet, they reached out in friendship to me with life-giving greetings from our Creator, inviting me in turn to live in friendly, caring relationship with them. They've been doing that all along. I just never realized it. That we all share this planet together. That we are all tied together in life-giving fashion. Brothers Sun, Wind, and Air, St. Francis called them centuries ago (Canticle of the Sun). Mother Earth. Sister Water. We're all part of this wonderful sanctuary of God's Creation.

My second discovery didn't take long to follow. And that is - Creation is trying to tell us something. Earlier this year I finally got around to reading the book of Job, not my favorite biblical writing. Yet one passage caught and has kept my attention. In it Job speaks to his friend, Zophar -

> "But ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you" (Job 12:7-8).

So I've been trying to keep my eyes and ears open in new ways to what my backyard companions are saying and doing. Take the Baird's Sandpiper, for instance. None are nesting in my biblically named trees - they're shore birds of the higher Arctic regions. Yet due to global warming, they're struggling to survive. It's a question of timing. The rise in temperature has changed their migratory patterns, forcing them to arrive later at their customary feeding grounds. By then the anthropoids, they like insects - have already moved on and are off the menu. Consequently, caring for themselves and their chicks is infinitely more difficult for the Sandpipers, even life threatening.

"Birds are telling us that we're in a climate emergency," notes the Audubon Society, "and it is wreaking havoc on our communities, our lands, and our waters." We could also ask the manatees living in the coastal waterways of Florida the same thing and they would tell us about the dangers of rising ocean temperatures which diminish the reserves of seagrass they need for food to live. What I'm learning is that we have a lot to learn from the inhabitants of Creation's sanctuary. Their declaration is one of both warning and hope. Take note of what is going on they're saying. And trust in what can still be done.

And that leads to my third discovery - that there's a great deal we can still do to restore the health and well-being of our earthly home. We can encourage nations to do their parts as at the United Nations Climate Change Conference last November. We can push businesses and organizations (even churches) to commit to fostering a greener world. Yet it begins with us, each of us individually, as caretakers of God's Creation.

I've never been one to pay much attention to plastic bottles, water usage, tire pressure, shopping bags, dietary habits, or thermostat settings. But I do now because it's simple things like the above and how we use them and observe them that can make a huge difference in how we tackle the climate crisis. It boils down to developing a new lifestyle that embodies and expresses, on a daily basis, our care for Creation.

Think of it as an act of discipleship. Think of it as an offering of praise to our Creator. Envision it as a gift to our children and their children. But take this opportunity to start doing the little things that can lead to a healthier, happier world. Be ready to make your own discoveries of that Divine Presence and to listen, learn, and grow.

Conclusion

The Peace of Wild Things
by Wendell Berry

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

Thanks for reading! If you're interested in being a part of the synod's Green Team, please see our page on the synod website at www.nepasynod.org/green-team.