

# **NEPA Synod Green Team** e-newsletter #9, Spring 2025



ELCA Logo in sassafras leaves.

Created by Pastor Inge Williams at Friedens Lutheran Church, Shartlesville on October 13, 2021

Welcome to our newsletter!

We present to you this collection of prayers, tips and ideas on caring for God's creation, book reviews, news about 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 the editor, Pastor Paul Metzloff, at [pwmetzloff@gmail.com](mailto:pwmetzloff@gmail.com).

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

## **Prayer:**

Something different for our opening prayer this newsletter – a video link from Lutherans Restoring Creation. It's called 'Fact: the Earth is Good.' And it's well worth the two minutes it takes to watch, especially in these very discouraging political times.

[https://youtu.be/HNZpr\\_z1ars](https://youtu.be/HNZpr_z1ars)



Amen.

## **Upcoming Event:** Camping at the Synod Assembly!

Consider 'connecting the dots' with creation by camping out for this year's synod assembly at Christ Hamilton United Lutheran Church in Stroudsburg!

Details to follow, but at a minimum this will involve camping on the grounds of the congregation (they have plenty of space, a fire pit and pavilion, and have graciously said we can have use of a bathroom and shower) and may also include hiking on the nearby Appalachian Trail (near the Delaware Water Gap) or kayaking on the nearby Delaware River.

## **Lutheran Environmentalists in the West Bank**

by Carl D. Shankweiler

A July 2024 New York Times article by Nicholas Kristof, "Meet the Followers of Martin Luther King Jr. in the West Bank," brought to a wider audience the fact that there are Lutherans in Palestine.

This article talks about the Nassars, initially described as "a Christian Palestinian family" who "hold children's camps and other programs on [their] farm to promote understanding and nonviolence even as they struggle to save their land from confiscation by Israeli settlers."

You can also read about this family and their farm on the website of the United Methodist Church, whose United Methodist Board of Global Ministries has supported the farm. In 2018 the World Methodist Council gave the farm its annual peace award.

But back to Nicholas Kristof. In his article, Kristof becomes more specific about what kind of Christians the Nassars are. I quote: "The Nassars say they are trying to encourage Palestinians to turn rage and negativity into something constructive. Denied electrical grid connections and piped water to their farm, which has been in their family for more than a century, they collect rainwater in cisterns and have set up a solar electricity system. At every setback they grit their teeth and double down on their values.

'We want to make this a place of dialogue,' Amal said. She leans on her *Lutheran* faith [emphasis added], but she has endured so much that she sounds like Job. A defiant Job. 'If they come to uproot one olive tree, I want to plant 10,' she said."

Yes, the Nassars are identified as being Lutheran Christians.

As is well known, Christianity in the region of Israel/Palestine goes back to the earliest days of the church. Just read the book of Acts. But over the centuries various kinds of Christianity have been brought into the region, including Lutheran. In fact, there is a church body called the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. This is a community of roughly 2,500 members (according to the Lutheran World Federation) in six congregations (according to the World Council of Churches). Their area of activity includes Jordan, Israel, and the Palestinian Authority. Their members often have a background that includes the effects of Protestant mission work in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as the Syrian Orphanage at Jerusalem (Schneller School) at which I taught in 1970-71 at its reincarnation

in the country of Lebanon and where the late Pastor Al Roberts also taught in the early 1960s.

In any case, yes, there are Lutherans in Israel/Palestine. There is even a Lutheran church body.

And now to the point of this article: this church body has a center for environmental education, called simply the Environmental Education Center. You can find its website at [www.eecp.org](http://www.eecp.org). This is part of what the website explains: "The Environmental Education Centre (EEC) is a nonprofit non-governmental centre that is part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL). We were established in 1998 and formally registered on 2010. The EEC is working in Palestine and works mainly in three districts: Bethlehem, Ramallah and Jerusalem.

"The EEC tackles all environmental issues and their effects on social, cultural and economic life. We contribute to the sustainable development of society. Objectives:

- To assist society and its various members to understand the interaction of human beings within their surrounding environment and the type of relationship and role that affects their connection with it.
- To activate the concepts of preserving the environment and its natural elements.
- To increase awareness about economic, scientific and cultural values of natural resources.
- To formulate and develop positive values, guidance and the necessary skills to understand the relationships that connects human beings with their surrounding environment.
- To contribute in promoting and raising the awareness of our targeted groups about environmental issues related to global climate change, global warming, biodiversity, Pollution, natural resources and its management, Eco tourism, environmental enhancement.
- To protect the biodiversity and the eco-tourism at the EEC
- To empower our beneficiaries with tools and techniques needed to be able to convey knowledge and skills to others
- To contribute in improving Advocacy to take action towards sustainable change."

If you go to their website, you will find some photos that help to describe their projects. One such project has to do with water conservation: finding ways to use grey water (such as from taking showers) and using that water again in toilets. And then processing the water from toilets so that it can be used safely in agriculture.

It is impressive that a church body that is smaller in membership than even one of our mission districts has an environmental center. Could it be that part of their motivation is that being concerned about the environment is not a luxury but a daily necessity? Many of us can take water for granted, but as the stories of the Nassar family and Environmental Education Center show, in the West Bank water is precious, especially when both climate and political realities make water scarce and access to water problematic.

We hope to say more about this center in the future, but for now I encourage you to visit the website of the environmental center, [www.eecp.org](http://www.eecp.org) . On the Internet you can also find various recorded greetings and messages by the Rev. Ibrahim Sani Azar, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land and in other ways learn about the Lutheran presence in the Middle East.

But if you are very interested and ambitious, you can even accept the invitation of the Environmental Education Center to make a visit: "We welcome local and international visitors from all over the world every year. If you are interested in learning about environmental work in Palestine, would like to experience the beauty of a natural Palestinian environment, or would like a tour of our campus, please contact our center."

Carl Shankweiler



## **Green Tips**

Author and Poet Wendell Berry famously wrote, in his essay “The Pleasures of Eating,” that ‘eating is an agricultural act.’ The green tip for this edition of our newsletter is to read this essay (link below)

(<https://www.ecoliteracy.org/article/wendell-berry-pleasures-eating>)

and then to consider – following one of Berry’s recommendations – growing some of your own food this year. To quote Berry again, “Participate in food production to the extent that you can. If you have a yard or even just a porch box or a pot in a sunny window, grow something to eat in it. Make a little compost of your kitchen scraps and use it for fertilizer. Only by growing some food for yourself can you become acquainted with the beautiful energy cycle that revolves from soil to seed to flower to fruit to food to offal to decay, and around again. You will be fully responsible for any food that you grow for yourself, and you will know all about it. You will appreciate it fully, having known it all its life.”

It's a great time to do this, as well – seed catalogs are out, it's seed season at hardware and garden stores, and soon starter plants will be available. Plus, gardening is a great stress reliever and a lot of fun in addition to being an agricultural act!



portrait of Berry by Guy Mendez from a Vox article at <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/10/2/20862854/wendell-berry-climate-change-port-royal-michael-pollan>

## **Inspiration: Yards and Yards of Hope and Restoration**

by Sue Reier

- A recent CBS Evening newscast covered the story of the collaboration of the National Parks out west and the native American peoples to restore the land of the Redwoods. It wasn't their way vs. our way, it was truly working together to find ways to heal the land AND the people. Defunct factories and their asphalt were removed and my husband and I cheered.
- The Episcopal Church is also studying the amount of land it owns to examine best management care.
- Some churches are moving to have "No mow cemeteries" .... beautifully planted with low-growing greens which are perennial AND have beautiful blooms, such as Creeping Thyme.

These initiatives are huge and wonderful, involving large amounts of land, and yet well beyond my ability to be involved or to feel as though I can make a difference. Several years ago, the idea of a "Homegrown National Park" came to my attention, and as I listened to its creator, Dr. Doug Tallamy, I became intrigued...but not only that, I became empowered! His basic premise is this: parks cannot possibly provide enough native settings to support the healing for which our land is so desperate. There is a great deal of acreage which is privately owned, such as our backyards. Collectively, privately owned land amounts to 85.6% East of the Mississippi and 78% overall in the US! By the relatively simple acts of providing more native plants in our garden and removing the invasives and then the non-natives, homeowners can contribute a wealth of wellness to their habitat.

But I am no plant expert!!! How do I know which ones to choose and which ones to banish? That's where Doug Tallamy along with the National Wildlife Federation have made an incredible gift: When you search the Homegrown National Park site online, you can simply put in your zip code and receive all the details you need for choosing appropriate plants. We do a little bit every year and are realizing that we are laboring less with garden chores and truly enjoying more time outdoors in the natural settings God makes which nurture our wellness and health! You can register with the group and when you do, it will be indicated on the computer map with a firefly icon. We are mowing less frequently and seeing marvelous little flowers we never saw before, and by "leaving the leaves" come Fall, we are letting the insects complete their stages through till spring when their presence is the stuff baby birds thrive on.

We must realize that pristine, manicured yards, those that boast “curb appeal” and are socially approved, are sterile. They are truly a dead zone for the creatures who help the habitat to thrive. We need to not use pesticides, herbicides and many of the fertilizers. (Do you wonder where all the lightning bugs have gone? These little critters, while they are a delight of anyone with childlike wonder, are also an ‘indicator’ species; a barometer that indicates the relative health of the environment!). Your garden can be absolutely gorgeous with natives and less grass. Yards such as these also are much better at absorbing water and reducing damaging runoff.

The point is that every little drop counts . . . each backyard, each and every choice we make! As you replace each non-native with a native, let your hands feel the soil, God’s good stuff (I often wonder just how long it takes God to make it!!!), which is full of “M-vaccae”, a tiny little ingredient that naturally boosts our good mood and outlook.

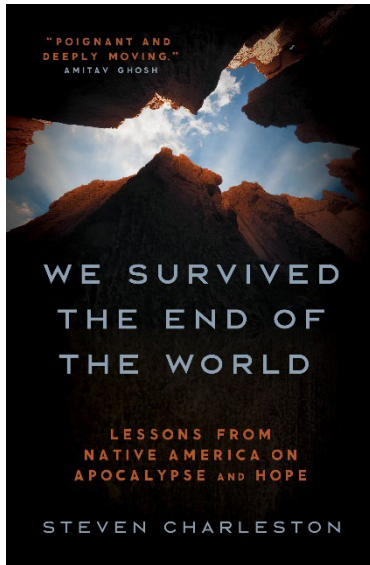
Happy Restoration!

~Sue Reier

(Editor’s note: for more on Homegrown National Park, see the last issue of this newsletter or go to <https://homegrownnationalpark.org/> )



**Book Review:** *We Survived the End of the World: Lessons From Native America on Apocalypse and Hope* (Broadleaf Books, Minneapolis, 2023) by Steven Charleston



The author of this book, Steven Charleston, is a member of the Choctaw Nation who has served as the Episcopal bishop of Alaska, president and dean of the Episcopal Divinity School, and a professor of systematic theology at Luther Seminary. He argues that “apocalypse” refers both to a catastrophic or disastrous event and to a revelation and vision of the future. He describes how indigenous tribes in America have experienced catastrophic events yet still have raised up hopeful visions, giving four examples of particular visionary leaders as well as one tribal group.

**Handsome Lake:** In the 1700’s Hadawa’ko, known in English as Handsome Lake, member of the Seneca tribe and part of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy, had a near-death experience but revived to lead a religious revival that included some Christian elements but maintained Iroquois culture. He cautioned against several evils, including whiskey/alcoholism. He preached “an adjustment of culture” from a “we” culture to a “me” culture, encouraging the importance of individual responsibility. Charleston suggests that we also need “an adjustment of culture,” but from a “me” culture to a “we” culture.

**Tenskwatawa, Tecumseh, and Prophetstown:** Tenskwatawa, which means “the Open Door,” a member of the Shawnee tribe, also had a near death experience that led to a religious vision. He preached a community of solidarity of all native American tribes over against white settlers. He looked to set up “a city on the hill” that would provide a secure place for such a community to develop and thrive. His brother, Tecumseh, more a warrior than he, helped establish Prophetstown in western Indiana, just beyond settler territory, but U.S. forces fought the residents of the town and burned it down in 1811.

**Smohalla, Washat Dances, and Dreamers:** Smohalla was a visionary leader among the Nez Perce in the Pacific northwest in the late 1800’s. Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce was one of his followers. Shohalla rejected settler culture, including farming and selling property. He was against the “Plow and Bible” approach to native tribes. Common to many indigenous groups he

taught a triangle of Creator, earth, and humans – all three are interrelated in a personal relationship; farming and selling property undermine this relationship.

**Wovoka and the Ghost Dance:** Wovoka, of the Paiute tribe, was inspired to begin the Ghost Dance in the 1890's. The dance was intended as a sacred dance of hope and reconciliation with ancestors and all fellow native Americans. The dance emerged from a fear of the white community; ironically it produced fear among whites, thinking it was a war dance. Wovoka's vision, however, saw whites being included in the dance. The dance was intended for the renewal and reconciliation of all life.

**The Hopi Community:** Finally, Charleston describes the mystical sense of the Hopi community in Arizona that we live in a succession of worlds. Now we live in the Fourth World, but we are on the brink of moving into the Fifth World. Their apocalyptic vision includes this expectation of the arrival of the next world that will replace our current, troubled world.

**Lessons on Apocalypse and Hope:** How do we face apocalyptic climate crisis and where do we look for hope? On the basis of his description of these indigenous visionaries and tribe, Charleston offers his suggestions for the lessons on apocalypse and hope we can gain from them. We can make an adjustment of culture from "me" to "we." We can pursue a vision of "a city on a hill" where we can develop such a "we" oriented community. We can foster a community that celebrates the personal interrelationship of creator, earth (and all its creatures), and humans. We can seek a fully inclusive community that moves in a dance of renewal and reconciliation.

**Charleston's Vision:** Perhaps what may be most important for our synod's Green Team is the vision Charleston describes as his own. Inspired by Smohalla, Charleston says he had a vision of all religious communities adopting a common agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in all their buildings and properties by 50% within ten years. He calls this proposal the "Genesis Covenant." In 2009 his denomination, the Episcopal Church, affirmed this Genesis Covenant, but was joined by no other religious groups. Is the Genesis Covenant something to be pursued by our synod's Green Team?

Rev. Dr. Roger E. Timm  
Member, St. John's Lutheran Church, Emmaus PA  
Resident of Luther Crest Retirement Community, Allentown PA

## **Advocacy/Action:**

Obviously, it's a difficult time to be an environmentalist, as the new administration (among its many other faults) has sold itself completely to the fossil fuel lobby and is both anti-science and anti-creation care.

However, there are many groups resisting the often illegal and almost always immoral agenda being pushed by the Trump administration, and many of them are environmental groups. Earthjustice, the Sierra Club, the Union of Concerned Scientists, 350.org, the National Resources Defense Council, the Nature Conservancy, Greenpeace – the list goes on. We encourage you to learn about, be involved with, and support any of these that touches you.

One organization that we would like to raise up this edition is called Climate Action Now, particularly their daily email and app that gives one concrete action every day that you can take to further progress on climate change and care for creation. Whether emailing your elected officials at the state or federal levels, learning about some positive initiative somewhere, or other related action, these are useful tools for combatting inaction and despair. More details and a signup are at their website at:

<https://www.climateactionnow.com/>



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](http://www.nepasynod.org/green-team). Questions or comments can be sent to Pastor Paul Metzloff, editor, at [pwmetzloff@gmail.com](mailto:pwmetzloff@gmail.com).