

# 'Hot Ways to Cool the Planet' looks at intersection of faith, environment

In a recent newsletter article headlined "Water, water everywhere ... and not a drop to drink," Benedictine sister and author Joan Chittister reflected on diminishing water supplies in Ireland. The water coming from the tap in her Irish cottage's kitchen ran brown for three days, and hot water, coming from rainwater caught in a tank on the hillside, went dry. Chittister's dish washing, laundry and pot of tea had to wait.

She reports that the bogs, which have supplied peat, Ireland's major source of fuel for centuries, are drying up and slowly disappearing. She reminds her readers that Ireland, an idyllic little island, is not primitive, backward or underdeveloped. It has one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. Yet even with its relatively small population and few major industries demanding water or energy, Ireland is facing the loss of its water supply and its primary fuel source. Her research leads her to conclude that the major cause of diminishing water supplies in Ireland — and everywhere — is global warming.

More evidence of global warming and its effects on Earth's ecological balance is found in new documentation on multiple deaths of polar bears off Alaska. Polar bears live primarily on Arctic ice floes, hunting marine mammals and rearing their young. More bears are drowning as they are forced to swim increasingly long distances between shrinking ice floes. According to many scientists and environmentalists, global warming accelerates the ice melt.

To those concerned about the future of this planet, the lack of potable water in Ireland and the death of polar bears in the Arctic are interrelated, signaling the serious disconnect between humans and the rest of the ecosystem.

Today, many faith traditions recognize that ecological issues are more than just environmental or scientific problems. Our shameless consumption of Earth's resources and global warming are seen as spiritual issues, signaling a failure to recognize our responsibilities to each other and to the planet. It is a failure to respect the interdependent web of all existence of which we are but a part.

Increasingly, the connection is being made between environmental degradation and justice issues, including war and social conflict. Most faith traditions recognize that it is the poor who are disproportionately affected by environ-

## CAROL MCKINLEY MIMI MALONEY perspective

mental upheavals. As people find traditional fishing, hunting and farming destroyed by global climate change, they migrate to other areas, facing resistance from populations who feel their own resources and traditions are being threatened.

The intersection of faith with environmental concerns, and how some local faith communities are addressing these issues, is the subject of a program next week.

The public is invited to attend "Hot Ways to Cool the Planet: Interfaith Perspectives on Global Warming," at 7 p.m. Thursday at Temple Beth Hatfiloh, Eighth and Washington, Olympia.

Organized by the Interfaith Earth Stewardship Committee, the speakers include members of three local faith communities who will discuss individual and congregational responses to

global warming. Karen Bray of St. John's Episcopal Church in Olympia will talk about the environmental benefits of biodiesel, and her efforts to bring the vehicle fuel to Olympia. Tom Connor of Temple Beth Hatfiloh will discuss Jewish perspectives on environmental stewardship and describe how Green Building techniques are incorporated into the Temple's remodeling plans. Leslie Romer will describe the Olympia Unitarian Universalist Congregation's Green Sanctuary program and the denomination's proposed policy on global warming. Carol McKinley, a member of Interfaith Works' board and of OUUC, will moderate. Refreshments will follow the program.

The Rev. Carol McKinley is a Unitarian Universalist community minister. Sister Mimi Maloney SNJM is the director of the My Family Home. They facilitate retreats and presentations on the responsibility of people of faith to care for the interdependent web of all existence.

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