

September 2000

# Earth Letter

earth ministry • connecting people with creation

## Returning and Rest

by *Carla Valentine Pryne*

“O God of peace, who has taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be our strength: By the might of your Spirit lift us, we pray, to your presence, where we may be still and know that you are God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.” (*Book of Common Prayer*)

I am a lover of water. If I believed in astrology, I would attribute my love of water to the fact that so many of my planets are in water, including my sun sign, Pisces. When I was a child, come summer time, my parents would have to haul me out of the Atlantic or, of a Saturday, I would be in there for ten hours straight. I remember well the mandatory and excruciating commandment that came from on high: “You must spend half an hour out of the water after lunch, or else...” Or what? “OR...you’ll get stomach cramps and die a horrible death.” I remember counting the minutes since having ingested my peanut butter and jelly sandwich, eager to return to what felt like my homeland—the sea.

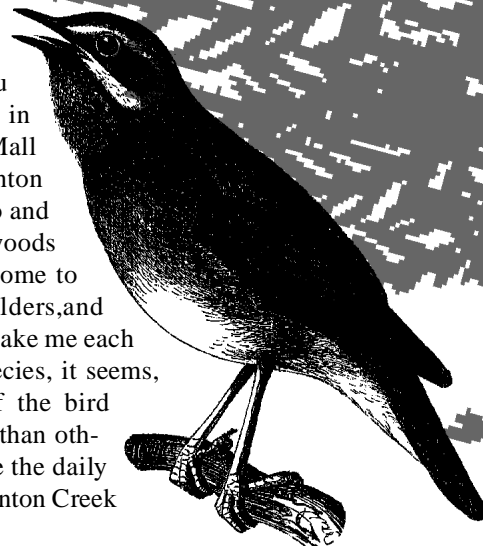
At forty-six years old, I find myself living in a new house by a creek, and, my, it is a coming home. Thornton Creek, the North Fork of it, flows by our house. You can see it, hear it, and within minutes you can put your feet or any other part of you right in it. Beginning in Ronald Bog in Shoreline, flowing past the Northgate Mall (which used to be cranberry fields), Thornton Creek carries water and, these days, coho and chinook to Lake Washington. The woods beside and around Thornton Creek are home to Douglas firs, Western red cedars, maples, alders, and hemlocks, with their droopy tops. Birds wake me each morning at dawn and in sequence by species, it seems, praise God with their chorus (some of the bird species must be more “morning people” than others). I am amazed at and particularly love the daily changes in water flow. In a dry spell, Thornton Creek

is just that, a lazy spit of a creek winding its way through the woods. But after only a few hours of rain, the creek is transformed into a noisy, boiling torrent, pulling with it soil and logs, and whatever is in its path.

It has been clear to me for a long time that my love of water is deeply linked to my spirituality and my relationship with God. Water is a central metaphor for the way God’s presence winds through my life, sometimes lazily and quietly, sometimes torrentially, pulling me along for the ride. Cleansing, nourishing, life giving and purging, stripping me clean of what does not abide in life. The landscape around the water changes as my life goes forward in time, and as I change. But the water is ever present, and ever on the move.

Living by water, I am reminded every day that I am part of a full web: the trees, the birds, the mammals, a swarm of mostly unidentified flying insects that hang out at every outside light, the rude-mouthed but stunningly beautiful Stellar’s jay, wily raccoon. We

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*Earth Letter* is a "mini-journal" of Christian environmental spirituality published five times a year (Jan., March, May, Sept., Nov.) by Earth Ministry. It attempts to present a broad spectrum of theological and social points of view, and holds no one specific theological or ecological orthodoxy. Letters and comments are welcomed, but reception does not guarantee publication. Submission of articles for publication consideration are welcomed as well. Mail should be directed to Earth Ministry, 1305 NE 47th St., Seattle, WA 98105. Our telephone is (206) 632-2426.

**Earth Ministry** is a tax-exempt, non-profit Christian, environmental, ecumenical ministry incorporated in the State of Washington. Earth Ministry is funded exclusively by donations from individuals, congregations, and charitable foundations. It seeks to draw attention to the spiritual and moral dimensions of environmental issues.

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**Earth Ministry's mission** is to engage individuals and congregations in knowing God more fully through deepening relationships with all of God's creation. We believe that through this experience our personal lives and our culture will be transformed. These transformations include simplified living, environmental stewardship, justice for all creation, and a worldview which sees creation as a revelation of God. Together these lead to a rediscovery of the vitality of the Christian faith.

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# Editor's Corner



Each year Earth Ministry chooses several issues around which to develop events, highlight resources, and promote education. Last year, and again this year, we chose climate change and salmon.

Although scientists debate the possible effects and extremes of projected climate change (temperature warming may range from 1 to 6 degrees F), the world is demonstrably warming. Even small changes, such as the recent 1 degree shift in temperature, have caused dislocations and suffering. Already, polar ice sheets have melted, disease-carrying mosquitoes are moving north, and violent hurricanes have threatened entire regions. Citizens of island nations are very worried. A larger temperature change could be catastrophic. The United States is the number one emitter of greenhouse gases, yet our country is doing nothing to reach the modest goal set by the Kyoto accord (to reduce emissions by 7 percent below 1990 levels). For this reason, among others (in particular the questions of justice that climate change raises) the church has mobilized Christians to learn about and respond to climate change.

In "Thinking about Climate Change" WA state legislator Dave Anderson evaluates the debate over the extent and effects of climate change. Why is it difficult for people to respond to this problem? He offers a practical, and guardedly hopeful, viewpoint.

To look at the fate of presently endangered salmon is to appreciate a different kind of issue. Salmon are endangered because many humans have "loved" them and used them to death; their runs have been decimated by logging and toxic waste dumping. But for Native Americans, and others who truly love salmon, the salmon has become the "icon" of the Pacific Northwest. As a natural icon, salmon tell us about ourselves and help us find ourselves integrally within the bioregion of land and waters. (See Carla Valentine Pryne's article, "Returning and Rest" for an evocation of this theme.) From this perspective, to envision salmon and, better yet, to actually see them, is to gaze down into flowing water. It is to think and feel locally, bioregionally; to envision food, nourishment, and mythic meaning; to be affected by beauty and the lives of a creature mysteriously different from yet living very close to us. It is to acknowledge the value of the culture and very existence of the native peoples of our region to which the salmon were, and are, integral.

In "A Prayer for the Salmon's Second Coming," David James Duncan passionately pleads that we save the salmon from ourselves. The eradication of God's gift would reveal true hardness of heart and an incalculable human failing. The book review by Tom Dean of Jim Lichatowich's *Salmon without Rivers: A History of the Pacific Salmon Crisis* fills in necessary information and outlines very disturbing trends over the past century of salmon "management."

These two themes—salmon and climate change—together weave a web of meaning and impact. Somewhere in the mix we find our own story writ large—the tragedy of human work and greed and power that tends to capsize the lives of other creatures.

For Christians, God created the waters and the heavens... And Christ is Lord of all. In harming the life around us we don't know what we are doing. More's the pity and the potential catastrophe.

*The Rev. Nancy G. Wright*  
*Editor*

# Goings On at Earth Ministry

by Jim Mulligan

## Our Constituents' View of Earth Ministry

While the informal feedback about our work has been overwhelmingly positive, we were not sure how well we actually communicated our multifaceted vision. Therefore, in January of this year we sent a letter to a representative sampling of our constituents. We asked these constituents if they would participate in a research project to help us learn more reliably *what it is about our work that they most value*. We hired the local firm of Parker LePla to conduct interviews (with these constituents, staff, and board), compile the results, and help us consider the implications.

Here's what we learned. Parker LePla had never worked with another organization whose constituents' perception (external) of its values so strongly matched its own perception (internal). Here are the values that our constituents see as communicated in what we do, and our board and staff see as driving the organization's actions: *faith-based, eco-justice oriented, inclusiveness, integrity (walking the talk), collaborative, valuing community, celebratory*. LePla staff also helped us to think about how, now that we know this, we might explicitly highlight these values in all that we do.

## Field Trips, Gatherings, and Cosponsored Events

On Saturday, May 5, about twenty hearty souls gathered at Grays Harbor National Wildlife Refuge to witness some of the 15,000 shore birds that stop there to feed on their annual northern migration. On August 12 about forty-eight hikers carpooled to Chinook Pass (in Mt. Rainier National Park) for our annual Wildflower Field Trip. Dr. Peggy Hudson, Professor of Botany at Seattle University, once again led our trip, this year into the Naches Peak area. To be nose-to-petal with these flowers, and

eyeball-to-wing with the birds, is a kind of mystic experience, a momentary immersion in part of the vast sea of biodiversity that we tend to take for granted in our daily lives. On May 25, we cosponsored (with EarthSave Seattle) Alan Durning, Executive Director of Northwest Environment Watch, who spoke about how our high consumption lifestyles place tremendous stress on our ecosystems. In mid-July, Mike Schut, our part-time staffer, presented a week-long series, on simple living and eco-justice, at Holden Village, a Lutheran retreat center in the North Cascades. In addition staff made presentations at sixteen different settings between May and September. In September Nancy Wright will be one of the featured speakers at the "Spirit, Commerce, and Sustainability" conference in Missoula. (For more information on this conference see the Calendar Page, or visit our website.)

## Ministry to Public Life

Earth Ministry not only works with individuals and congregations but also embodies a prophetic outreach to address public life. During May and June Tanya represented us (in collaboration with Washington Sustainable Food and Farming Network) at the State Department of Health's public comment period regarding the inclusion of organic foods as an option in their Women, Infants, and Children Program. On May 22, Tanya represented us at a "People's Forum on Dioxin and Persistent Pollution" sponsored by Washington Toxics. On June 28, Jim Mulligan spoke at a press conference in collaboration with Washington Wilderness Coalition and the Sierra Club and then testified at a hearing by the US Forest Service on their proposed new policies for roadless areas within our national forests.

## Celebration of St. Francis

Our Celebration will be held on Saturday, September 30 (see calendar page or visit our web site) for more information. This annual event brings to our community voices from the arts. It is our belief that in our culture artists often serve the role of prophets, helping us to see and understand deeper meanings in the events of our own time.

This year we are trying something new, staging a play: "A Sense of Wonder," based on the life and writings of Rachel Carson, author of *Silent Spring*, the 1962 book which brought environmental crises into wide public recognition. This one-woman play will be performed by playwright and actress Kaiuiani Lee. Lee was described in the Bangor Daily News as "...not one of those publicity-driven actresses who makes your skin crawl. No, Kaiulani Lee has other goals, loftier goals, and a voice from the 1940's. So she's actually the kind of actress who makes you believe in the profession all over again." Mark your calendar; this should be a wonderful evening.

## Fall Fundraising Campaign

Earth Ministry is supported, almost exclusively, by donations from our constituents. Twice a year, in the spring and fall, we ask our constituents to consider making a financial contribution. You will be receiving a mailing in October. Please read it thoughtfully, and make your decision. †

