

Conversations with Earth II
Rev. Amy Freedman
Channing Memorial Church
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AMY: Last year at this time, I confessed my feelings of guilt. I know that the Earth is suffering and my actions contribute to pollution. Just as I expressed my commitment to *Save the Planet*, the Earth actually responded, reminding all of us that we do not need to *Save the Planet*. Instead, we need to focus our efforts on *Saving the Humans*. The Earth will go on without us if we do not survive just like the globe continued to spin once the last dinosaur became extinct. So, instead of the rallying cry of “*Save the Earth!*” we need to shift our thinking to “*Save the Humans!*” moving toward a more green way of living. This perspective has been very helpful.

In observance of Earth Day, I thought it would be good to catch up with our friend the Earth. In order to have a conversation with Earth, I need your help. On the count of three please join me in saying “Happy Earth Day!” as loudly as possible. One, two, three, “HAPPY EARTH DAY!”

EARTH: *Yawn!* Is it that time of year again? Once I reached 4 billion I stopped counting my birth days. Sure is sweet of you to remember.

AMY: Yes, it has been a year since we spoke last. How ya doin’?

EARTH: *Sigh!* Thanks for checking in with me, Reverend. Most people don’t bother to ask. I hate to bring you down but it’s been a tough year.

AMY: Oh, I am sorry to hear that. On behalf of the congregation, I want you to know that we care. We really do want to know how you are doing.

EARTH: Uh, I haven’t been feeling well lately. More wildfires, hurricanes, flooding, erosion, sea level rising, quakes, not to mention the melting of my polar ice caps... At the moment human activities are adding – cough – yup, 7 billion metric tons of carbon into our atmosphere every year. Vehicles in the United States release more CO₂ than all the energy sources in India combined. And that is only one-third of the total carbon emitted from the United States. Your largest source of CO₂ is power plants.

AMY: Yikes! That is bad news. I’m sorry to hear that you haven’t been feeling well. There seems to be a movement to have more renewable energy sources. Did you notice the new wind turbine in Portsmouth?

EARTH: Ah, yes. I love those things...makes me feel like a kid with a pinwheel. However, I’ll feel even better when there are enough wind generators to close down those dirty power plants. You humans will need to invest \$16 trillion over the next three decades in order to maintain and expand your energy supply. You have a long way to go. However, there was a bright spot this year in conservation news.

AMY: What's that? We could really use some good news.

EARTH: The Recession!

AMY: What?

EARTH: Sorry, but it's true! When gas prices were high, you folks became more conservative! I started seeing more of you walking or bicycling to work, carpooling and taking fewer trips in the car. With soaring fuel costs, many of you opted to stay at home instead of flying to far off places for work or pleasure. This past holiday season, many of you made simpler choices buying less stuff. I've noticed a significant decrease in the amount of stuff that you humans have been sinking into landfills. To help the American economy many people are choosing to buy American and buying local instead of shipping consumer goods around the world.

Yup, the recession has been great for the environment!

AMY: Wow, there's a silver lining if I've ever heard one... I guess you're right. Many of us needed the recession to change our habits and become conservationists. Earth, we know we need to make better choices. Do you think we can find the resolve to change our way of life before we reach the point of irreparable harm? I worry many people won't take our situation seriously until Thames Street is under water.

EARTH: Oh, don't you fret Reverend. I have great confidence in your ability to change. Why you folks at Channing Church have done some wonderful things this past year. It's Earth Day! Why don't you give us some of your green highlights? That will take my mind off the drought I'm experiencing waaay down under, you know, in Australia, kind of itchy.

AMY: I would be happy to share our green highlights. Last year at this time we were working on a Green Plan—a strategic plan for us as a religious community to become more environmentally responsible in our practices and programming. I am happy to report that our congregation and UU Ministry for the Earth endorse our plan to become an officially Green Congregation.

EARTH: Sounds good but not everyone knows what that means. Remind us, what is a Green Congregation?

AMY: Good question! Our Green plan is our vision as a religious community to move toward a more green way of being a church, *a green congregation*. As much as we would like to become more environmentally responsible overnight, we know that this is a process. Together we are looking at every aspect of what we do and say, preach and teach—how does it help us live in greater harmony with all of Nature? For example, instead of throwing away Styrofoam and plastic at our social gatherings, this church year we have been using dishes, glasses, and silverware.

EARTH: That's a good start! Did you know that the city of Newport produced 7,900 tons of trash last year?

AMY: Yikes! That's a lot of junk! The seventh principle of our faith is that we affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of life of which we are a part. So making an effort to create less trash and recycle more is actually a way to practice our religion. Another effort to cut down on waste is our Home Weatherization Project. Energy often leaks right out of our homes through cracks in windows, doors, outlets and walls. Teams of volunteers from our church helped weatherize sixteen homes this winter. We did this work with a grant from the New England Grassroots Environment Fund and local vendors donated the supplies.

EARTH: Brilliant! Weatherizing homes saves energy and reduces waste... Now I have to know, who spearheaded this project?

AMY: Many people came together to lend a hand but the person who provided the leadership was Beth Milham. Beth inspires many of us.

EARTH: Oh that Beth, I should have guessed it. Hey, Reverend
whisper – whisper – whisper – whisper....

AMY: Earth, that's a great idea.

EARTH: Beth Milham, will you please come forward... We want to personally thank you for all you have done and are doing on behalf of Environmental Justice.

AMY: On behalf of Channing Church and UU Ministry for the Earth, I would like to present you with this certificate of appreciation. [Applause]

Our Green Congregation initiatives are reason enough to feel proud. However, that's not all. Channing Memorial Church sponsored the Aquidneck Island Energy Conference at Salve Regina University in partnership with the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission. This event brought together politicians, local businesses, students, and private citizens to address how we as a local community can move toward more sustainable living.

EARTH: Ah, grassroots organizing—energizing! Who was responsible for this Aquidneck Island Energy Conference?

AMY: Don Mallinson serves on the Middletown Wind Commission as well as our Social Justice Committee. He noticed that even on our small island the leaders of each town do not communicate. He had the idea to bring people together for education, collaboration, and action. Tina Dolen who is also a Channing member and the Director of the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission helped to make his vision a reality.

EARTH: Don and Tina, will you please come forward so we may thank you for your Environmental Justice work.

AMY: On behalf of Channing Church and UU Ministry for the Earth, I would like to present you with this certificate of appreciation. [Applause]

EARTH: Congratulations, Beth, Don and Tina! Now just imagine if each person found a ways step it up like that.

AMY: Now, Earth I know that everyone cares about you but you can't expect every person to organize big projects like that!

EARTH: What? Oh, hmmmm... I guess you're right. Not every person has the time or inclination to be leaders in the larger community. However, each one of you can make a personal commitment to living in harmony with me.

AMY: I believe that all people know that we need to make a change but find it hard knowing how to go about it. That's why our small groups have been focusing on "Voluntary Simplicity" this session. Forty-five people have been meeting regularly to explore how to live more simply.

EARTH: That's the way to do it. Don't wish you were green, commit to, think through the best way to change over time and live it. JUST IMAGINE if every individual, family and community had their own Green Plan just like you have a Green Plan here at Channing Church. Nothing like a clear green plan to help you achieve your important green goals.

AMY: Hmm, you mean just like the church had an energy audit, my Green Plan would include requesting a free energy audit from National Grid?

EARTH: Exactly, but with a date set to make sure you follow through.

AMY: Ummm, you caught me, I've been meaning to get to that for a while but other activities seem to keep it on the back burner.

EARTH: Didn't you say that a principle of your faith is "respect for the interdependent web of life"? Seems to me that should be on the front burner!

AMY: You're right! I would also add to my Green Plan spending more time in nature and planting a garden.

EARTH: Perfect! Green living is not all hard work and sacrifice. It can be fun and meaningful. You humans are most drained when you forget that you're natural beings and part of the web of life – we should be spending more quality time together. Now the good thing about being in a community is that you can hold one another accountable! You can help each other make green plans and stick to them. In fact, we need a way to give your green efforts more visibility. Hmmmm... I have an idea, how about instead of always saying "How are you doing?" you start asking, "How are you GREENING?"

AMY: No disrespect, but that seems a bit strange! How are you greening? Somehow I don't think that will catch on in Fellowship Hour.

EARTH: I admit, it sounds a little silly. But this matters and you do such a wonderful job avoiding these issues. So let's, give it a try...Reverend, How are you greening?

AMY: Okay, let's see... well over this past week I remembered to use my canvass bags at the grocery store and I picked up a rain barrel. Hey! That does feel pretty good.

EARTH: Okay, now let's all try it! YES, you heard me... Turn to someone near you and ask "How are you greening?" Go on, you can do it...

[Take time for this.]

EARTH: Oh that was amazing. Keep up the good work! Thank you Channing Church for being a leader in the community! Don't forget to celebrate your successes! To make a personal Green Plan and hold one another accountable – ask about each other's green plans. It is important that you humans do not lose sight of the urgency.

AMY: Thank you Earth for all the gifts that you offer us. I look forward to creating my own Green Plan, finding support to move toward a life in greater harmony with you. I hope that we will have taken some significant steps by next Earth Day!