

REFLECTIONS FOR EARTH DAY

Nancy Stiefel and Ministerial Intern Bobby Kilgore, Speaking
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Vero Beach
April 22, 2018

Opening Words by Rev. Marge Keip

As surely as we belong to this universe. . .
to this Earth. . .
We belong together.
We join here to transcend the isolated self,
To reconnect, to come to know ourselves.

To be at home, here on this Earth, on this planet,
Sustained by the sun, awed by the stars,
Linked with each other.

Come let us worship together.

Chalice Lighting by Rev. Audrey W. Vincent

We light the chalice this morning for earth, our home.
Earth abundant, source of what was before we were and will be after we are gone.
As each cell proves our common destiny, may we know earth, our mother of old,
as our friend; as we were bred of dust and stars, may we know her fate as ours.
Blessed is our bondedness to earth,
Blessed is our bondedness to all of life,
Blessed is our bondedness to the Source of life itself.

Reflections by Nancy Stiefel

This morning's video showed us the beauty of the earth and the power of Nature. But when were those photos taken? Do those areas still look so beautiful today? Does the Arctic ice cap still look like that with so much of it melting? Do the forests still look like that after the many devastating wildfires?

Between an onslaught of threats to public lands by law-makers and the very real effects of climate change being made visual to us on television and the internet, many of us feel discouraged, even overwhelmed by the deteriorating state of our natural world today.

But here's the good news: we still have the power to make a difference. And 21 youngsters in Oregon also believe they have the power to make a difference. Have you heard of the lawsuit *Juliana v. the United States*? It was filed in the US District Court in Eugene, Oregon, on Sept 9, 2015, during the Obama administration. In this remarkable lawsuit against the President of the United States, the Office of the President, and the Environmental Protection Agency, these young plaintiffs argue that the federal government, by denying climate change and/or failing to act on it by reducing carbon emissions, has deprived these young people of their constitutional right to freely pursue their lives and liberties. Their argument is based on health issues (such as allergies and asthma), recreational limitations (citing wildfires as one limitation), as well as psychological and spiritual damage.

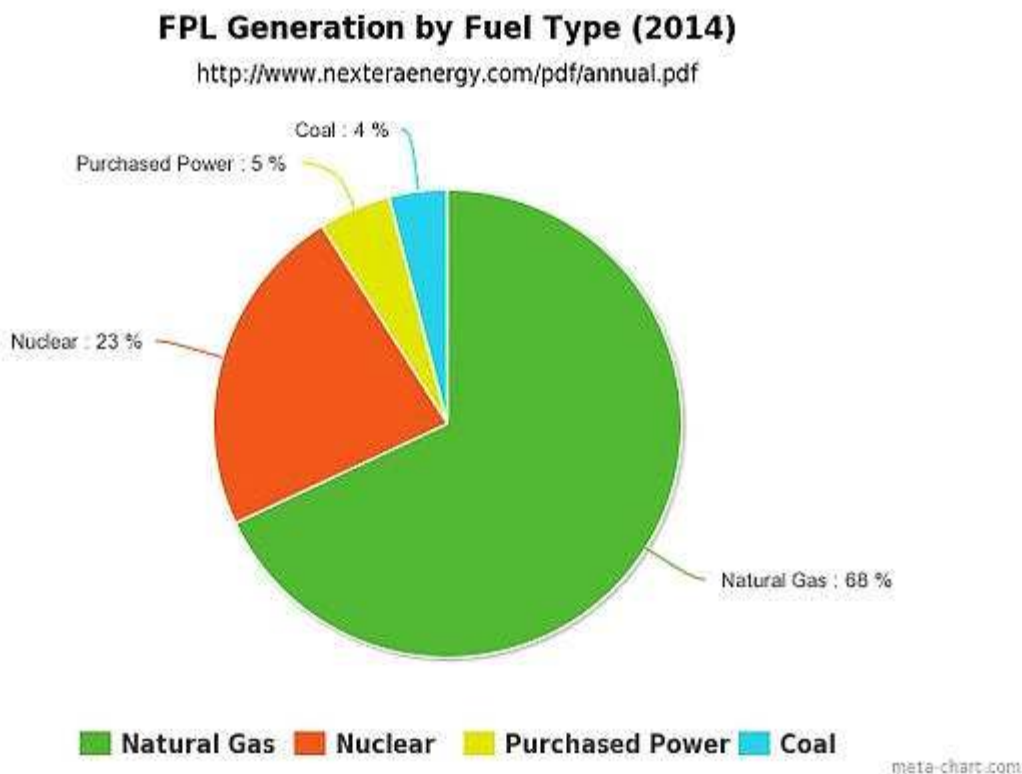
This past summer the Trump administration petitioned for a "writ of mandamus" which could force the District Court to dismiss the case, but the petition was rejected. The case will now proceed toward trial in the US District Court of the District of Oregon. These young people have bravely stepped into a complicated situation, stirring up new possibilities and vision. I encourage you to watch the news for

the progress of this lawsuit!

As Unitarian Universalists who believe in our seven principles, we know that the everyday behaviors we engage in can help change the course of the future, little by little. We believe that we can help bend the arc of the moral universe toward environmental justice!

So this morning let's take a look at how we can put our values into action in our everyday lives. Let's consider our use of electricity since the burning of fossil fuels has been shown to be the primary cause of global warming and climate change.

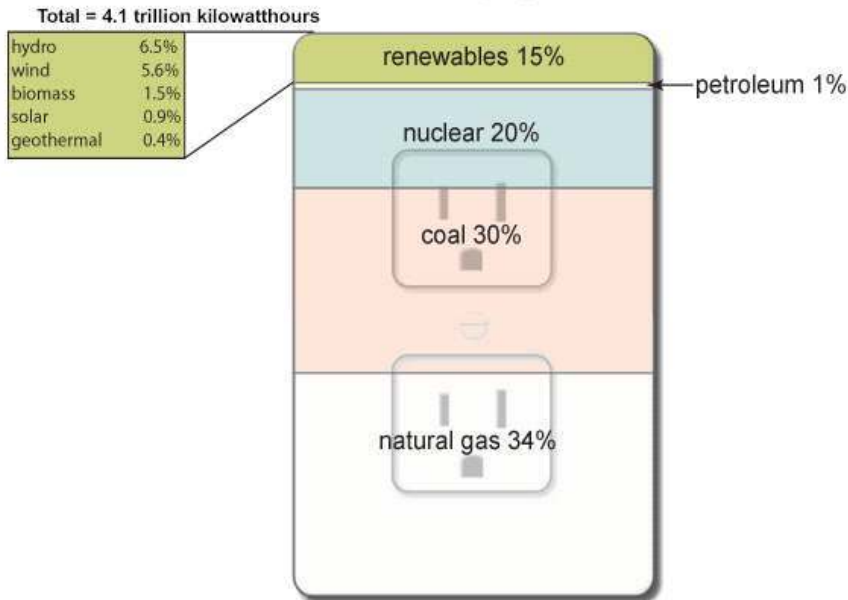
[THE FOLLOWING IS PROJECTED UP ON THE CHANCEL SCREENS]



Most of us get our electricity from Florida Power & Light (FPL). In 2014, FPL reported that 68% of its power is from natural gas (green), 23% from nuclear (red), 4% from coal (blue), and 5% is purchased from unknown sources.

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Sources of U.S. electricity generation, 2016



Note: Electricity generation from utility-scale facilities.

Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration, *Electric Power Monthly*, February 2017, preliminary data for 2016



In 2016 in the United States overall, natural gas provided about 34% of the total electricity generation (white). Coal (pink) provided about 30%, nuclear power (blue) about 20%, and renewable energy sources (green) about 15%. As individuals, we can't do much to change the percentage of electricity produced from fossil fuels nationwide, but we can reduce our own consumption of that electricity. What are some ways to do that? One obvious way is putting solar panels on our roofs. But solar panels are expensive, especially with less money in state and federal rebates available. It takes several years to recoup the expense of those panels and perhaps we don't intend to be in the same house for that many years.

But what else can we do to lessen our electricity usage? How about using our clothes dryer less? Do you have a yard where you can hang your clothes outside and let the sun dry them? Do you have a garage where you can hang your clothes to dry overnight? Do you have a clothes rack in your guest bathroom tub where your clothes can drip dry? How about turning off lights when we leave a room?

We certainly encourage you to do that here at the Fellowship when your committee meeting is over. Have you noticed those reminder signs on the light switches in nearly every room? How about replacing incandescent bulbs in your home with LED bulbs? Our Facilities Council did that here in the sanctuary this past fall; it was a huge project, but the Council knew it would save the Fellowship a lot of money on the monthly electric bill in the long run. LED bulbs have come way down in price since they were first introduced, and many styles and shapes are now available. We all know of many ideas for saving electricity, saving water, recycling more, and using fewer natural resources in general.

You found a handout in your Order of Service this morning with lots of ideas, some simple and inexpensive, some more involved and costly. One of the ideas deals with the temperature setting of our air conditioners.

Early in April, several women from this congregation attended the annual Women's Retreat, staying in cabins at Lake Louisa State Park. There were signs throughout our cabins with "green" tips. The park asked us to set our A/C units no lower than 78 degrees. One sign informed us that every degree lower than 78 requires 4% more energy. Another sign stated that solar water heater owners save as much as 85% annually on their utility bills vs. electric water heater owners.

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Americans are estimated to use 500 million straws daily. When I was growing up, straws were made of paper so they were biodegradable. But today they are nearly all plastic. Some people don't want to drink from a glass in a restaurant because of health concerns. So another option is to purchase a stainless steel straw and take it with you when you eat out. I know two women in our congregation who have done just that. But it is really easy to tell your waiter "No straw, please" and then to explain to him or her why not.

Better yet, we can talk to the restaurant manager about changing their policy to asking patrons if they want a straw rather than having waiters automatically provide them. Refusing a straw is one small but important way to reduce plastic usage, plastic in our landfills, plastic in the Indian River Lagoon, plastic pollution in our oceans, and damage to marine animals from plastic.

This issue is of interest around the globe. Friday's newspapers ran an article about the United Kingdom's plan to ban plastic straws, stirrers and cotton swabs to "join in the fight" – as Prime Minister May said – against plastic pollution.

There are about 200 of us here this morning. Let's estimate that each of us eats out twice a week. If we each refuse a straw at each of those two meals, let's do the math. Two times 52 weeks a year times 200 people results in 20,800 straws staying out of our landfills or out of the Indian River Lagoon or off our beaches and ultimately out of our oceans. That's a lot of plastic straws!

Bobby and I hope that each of us will celebrate Earth Day 2018 by pledging to add one more environmentally responsible action to what each of us already does in honoring our Seventh UU Principle.

Our principles are listed on the front of your order of service. Let's read together that seventh principle...it's the last one in the bulleted list.



Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

What is one more behavior that you will pledge to do from today onward to respect the web of all existence and to protect the beauty and viability of our planet? Let's celebrate Earth Day – today and every day.

Responsive Reading

We join with the earth and with each other.
To bring new life to the land
To restore the waters
To refresh the air.

We join with the earth and with each other.

To renew the forests
To care for the plants
To protect the creatures.

We join with the earth and with each other.
To celebrate the seas
To rejoice in the sunlight
To sing the song of the stars.

We join with the earth and with each other.
To recreate the human community
To promote justice and peace
To remember our children.

We join with the earth and with each other.
We join together as many and diverse expressions
of one loving mystery: for the healing of the earth
and the renewal of all life.

We join with the earth and with each other.
To celebrate the seas
To rejoice in the sunlight
To sing the song of the stars.

A 12-minute video of many of the earth's natural treasures – mountains, lakes, deserts, etc.
Shown by Bobby Kilgore

Benediction by Jacques Cousteau
Read by Bobby Kilgore and Rev. Scott Alexander

This is our hope:
That the children born today may still have, twenty years hence,
a bit of green grass under their bare feet,
a breath of clean air to breathe,
a patch of blue water to sail upon,
and a whale on the horizon to set them dreaming.

AMEN.