

TASK FORCE FOR THE STEWARDSHIP OF CREATION RETREAT OCTOBER 21-22, 2005 – CAMP McDOWELL

ATTENDANCE: 16 Liaisons representing 14 parishes, as well as Task Force members Bishop Mark & Sheila Andrus, Rev. Deacon Gerri Aston, Michael Churchman, Roger Conville, Eleanor DelBene, Rosine Hall, Rev. Mark Johnston, and Freya & Loch Neely.

INTRODUCTIONS: Bishop Mark Andrus welcomed everyone and introduced fellow Task Force members. He then introduced the letter to Province IV bishops, followed by the watching of the slide presentation. Afterward, he commented on how important that window of opportunity is and reminded us that it is our job to make sure we don't let it stay just far enough in the future to not feel like a threat.

OPENING REFLECTION: Eleanor read the mission statement of the Task Force and asked us to reflect on it, and then introduce ourselves, what church we have come from, and what in the mission statement speaks to our own mission. The following are some of the responses heard:

"I've been active with many other environmental organizations and am glad I can be active through my church...I'm interested in learning and doing...I like the Earth...This is natural for the church to do this...I want to learn how to be involved...I have been a part of returning the land back to the way it once was...I want to insure that others will be able to chase fireflies and lizards...It is important to educate our children...My activism started April 20, 1970 and has not stopped...I love nature and the outdoors and knew this is what I wanted to do...We compost and recycle at home and have almost no trash...Our Earth is degrading...That is what it is all about: Educate, Advocate, and Service to others.

COSMIC WALK: Eleanor DelBene led us on a Cosmic Walk, bringing our knowledge of the 14-billion-year Universe process from our heads to our hearts. Elizabeth Lindsey lit candles along a 140' piece of rope, that represented our Universal Time line, with each instance of emergence in time marked at a proportionate distance along the length of rope in the shape of a spiral.

WINE & CHEESE FELLOWSHIP: We were unable to have a night hike, but Bishop Mark & Sheila Andrus shared Wine and cheese with everyone. This was a great opportunity for everyone to gather and get to know one another.

SESSION I, ADVOCACY: Bishop Mark Andrus and Rev. Mark Johnston

Bishop Andrus shared one perspective of advocacy, which is over the whole world. He was recently in New York City at the United Nations where he and others were discussing the Millennium Development www.un.org/millenniumgoals, 5 years after they were proposed. He said it would take Courage to continue to pursue these goals. If everyone were to give 0.7% of the world's resources, we could reduce poverty deaths by ½, or (15,000.) He shared of the Christian Reformed Church's Peter Vandermullen's pursuit of the sources that go much deeper than what is at the surface. He is reminded to look deeper by a song by Velvet Underground, where a line in their song asks, "Do I understand the under-netting?" That concept of under-netting came to be a constant thought throughout the weekend, where we may need to look not at the particular item on the surface, but at the source or under-netting. Analysis leads to the understanding of what we should be doing, which prompts advocacy. He discussed the concept and importance of Rhizomes rather than roots. Rhizomes grow laterally and roots grow hierarchically, which probably presents a better model for us to follow. If we were to use Rhizomes as a model, maybe there would be Nodes, or centers of thought, with branches going out and smaller study groups all the way out to local parishes educating themselves in order to advocate. He shared about how we have much to offer: The Episcopal Public Policy Network is a national office in Washington lobbying for our efforts; the Gwich'in Indians in Alaska live within the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and are 95% Episcopalian; www.unesco.org/water/water_celebrations/index.shtml; World Water Monitoring day in October; Alabama Water Watch. All of these are ways that we can be advocates.

Mark Johnston shared of his experiences being a spiritual leader among environmental leaders. His learning about the created beings has helped him to get to know the Creator. A big gap in society is that people miss the connectedness to the Earth – it is a spiritual disconnectedness. A word that means a lot to him is Justice, how often the environment is tied to social justice and/or the inequalities. He realized, long ago, that he didn't like what was in his backyard and he couldn't look at it anymore. "I was a dog on their pant leg, and I wasn't letting go!" He shared of helping to form the ADEM reform coalition (ARC.) He also shared several ideas that remain important: Change Public Will through Education; Be the squeaky wheel; Help the church with applicable theological reflection/ creation theology; Walk the Walk and Talk the Talk; You Are Connected; Educate Yourself; Join and give money to local environmental groups; Figure out how we can all get along.

Bishop Andrus added a few ideas: Be a Taize' community, which focuses on reconciliation and humanism; Make coalitions across denomination and dividing lines; Do something financially internationally as well.

SESSION II, EDUCATION: Rev. Deacon Gerri Aston

Out of the Five-session Adult Christian Education Curriculum Leader's Guide, Gerri led us through session II: Relationship with Other-than-humans. She read aloud Romans 8:19-23, before showing the CD slideshow. We then read a few paragraphs from the Bishop's letter and shared personal inspirations. She shared how this session can be used in different settings of education at a church: Sunday school, Advent or Lent programs, other Wednesday evening programs. She discussed how it could be a tool to raise awareness for parishioners. It does a good job to "lure" rather than force or "beat" ideas across.

LUNCH

Eleanor welcomed the group back from lunch with a song called the Universe Jam: "I just want to Celebrate..."

SESSION III, SERVICE: Rosine Hall and Roger Conville

Rosine used a speakers bureau presentation she helped prepare entitled, "Confronting Climate Change in the Gulf Coast Region." It was great at pointing out the science that backs up all the theory of what we are all about. She shared statistical data from many different sources including temperature rise and global warming, rising composition of gasses in our atmosphere, what de-forestation effects, and how population gain and the industrial revolution seem to be directly responsible for these rises. She shared how a local parish can conduct an energy audit, which the Task Force produced a guide for. She also shared how Auburn University at Montgomery has realized a \$1,000,000 savings a year, after an initial investment of \$250,000 to change light bulbs across the campus to more energy efficient options.

Roger, like Mark Johnston, shared that the struggle with Alabama Department of Environmental Management can be overwhelming. He talked about Bio-Remediation and how it can clean air, water, and dirt. He shared ideas on a Phytoremediation garden in Birmingham at Sloss furnaces. And he shared how to build a Rain-Garden at a church, a business or a home.

Closing: Michael shared how the relationship of Task Force members to Liaisons works. The Task Force meets on a quarterly basis to drive the initial effort. That effort is communicated out to Liaisons at each parish in our Diocese. Our hope is to recruit a Liaison in every parish, and then to open a direct line of communication. One idea that has come out of this weekend is to pick a topic for discussion and email through a user group where everyone can help and add to this discussion. At the end of the month, someone will summarize the results/best ideas and produce an article for the Diocese newsletter: *The Apostle*.

Liturgy of Creation: Bishop Mark Andrus and Rev. Deacon Gerri Aston

We officially closed this retreat with a Liturgy of Creation: A celebration of the Beauty and Wonder of God's World & Our Stewardship of All God's Creation. At the dismissal, we all shared what we will do...

A small group from the retreat joined together at Rev. Mark and Maggie Johnston's house for a wonderful hike to Clear Creek (with a slew of dogs!) and enjoyed the quiet outdoors, great food and fellowship with Mark's family, and left under a night sky where those of us from the city were able to view the Milky Way.