



FIELD NOTES  
EARTHKEEPING AS MISSION

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River Tree Press  
19353 16th Ave  
Surrey, BC V3S 9V2  
Canada  
[www.arocha.ca](http://www.arocha.ca)

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Canadian Catalogue Card Number XXXX-XXXXX-X  
Scripture quotations from the Holy Bible, New  
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ISBN X-XXXX-XXXX-X

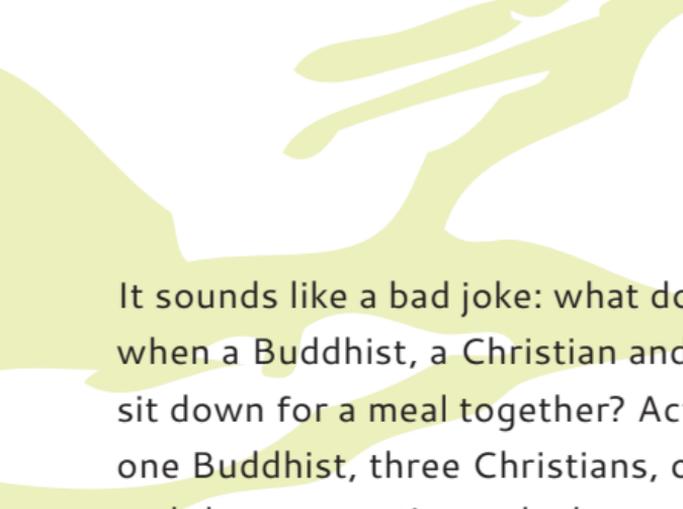
PRINTED IN CANADA  
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# EARTHKEEPING AS MISSION

Leah and Markku Kostamo



It sounds like a bad joke: what do you get when a Buddhist, a Christian and a Wiccan sit down for a meal together? Actually, it was one Buddhist, three Christians, one Wiccan and three agnostics and what you got was some amazing conversation. This montage of folks came to A Rocha, the Christian Environmental organization we help lead, as part of a University of British Columbia Earth Sciences class that required participation in a community service project. They had chosen the topic "religion and the environment," which made A Rocha a perfect fit. After spending five days at our Environmental Centre in Surrey renovating a musty Quonset hut into a glorified dorm room, we sat down to a big dinner to thank them for their hard work.

Candles were lit, the table was spread and we sat down to the feast. The conversation was lively, and centred on beliefs. We didn't have an agenda in this regard, we simply asked these students to share a bit of their own stories and, being thoughtful university students, they zeroed in on what motivated them to care about the earth. They shared their genuine grappling with issues of sustainability, the plight of the poor, and their own struggles with the Christian faith in these regards. We sat for hours. The musings were profound, earnest and articulate and we both felt like we'd landed in a well scripted foreign film.

Soon these students were directing their questions toward us. What motivated us? What did we believe? One asked how our Christian faith informed our work in conservation. Another commented on how he saw those working in the environmental

field struggle with despair and wondered where we found hope. Lastly, sweet Janet – an agnostic girl with a church background – asked what we thought was the purpose behind humanity’s existence. You know, simple questions. The amazing thing was the openness with which these questions were asked, as if they really expected to find some granule of truth in our response.

While not claiming to have all the answers, we shared a bit of our own stories

and how we’d personally found hope and purpose. The apex of the conversation came in response to the “What gives you hope?” question. We responded by considering how the incarnation shows God’s commitment to creation – the Creator becomes the created

*“The incarnation shows God’s commitment to creation – the Creator becomes the created in the ultimate act of solidarity.”*



PHOTO BY FRED CARRUTHERS

in the ultimate act of solidarity. John, the Buddhist, and Christa, the Wiccan, seemed utterly gobsmacked by this idea. Christianity suddenly was no longer an unattractive code of ethics but a divine adventure of reckless love. Christa said she'd be up all night, her mind whirling with the implications. Ian said believing this would make all the difference in how one treated the world.

Indeed. Belief matters. We work in conservation because we believe certain things about God and the world. In the words

of John Wesley, we have found that “faith in Jesus Christ [leads] us beyond an exclusive concern for the well-being of other human beings to the broader concern for the well-being of the birds in our backyard, the fish in our rivers, and every living creature on the face of the earth.”

## THE BASICS: CREATION AND THE IMAGE BEARING

Early on, A Rocha adopted Psalm 24:1 as its inspiration: “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it.” Though seemingly benign and simple, the proposition that the earth actually belongs to God and not to us is radical, and often runs counter to popular Christian beliefs. I’m not sure where we got the idea that creation is the possession of people, but it sure isn’t the message of the Bible. True, the creation narrative in Genesis

does set humans in a unique position among the rest of creation. Even then, however, as Barbara Brown Taylor points out, we don't

*"The notion that we are image-bearers coupled with the idea that the earth belongs to God has major implication for how we live."*

even get our own day, but must share Day Six with all manner of creeping things, even cows! The specialness bestowed on our species, Genesis

says, has to do with our being "created in the image of God." We reflect God's character uniquely which, rather than giving us divine-size egos, should humble us to no end and clue us in to the fact that we might have a special role to play in the grand drama of creation.

The notion that we are image-bearers coupled with the idea that the earth belongs to God

has major implications for how we live and how we respond to God's charge to Adam to "serve the garden and keep it" (Genesis 2:15). Cal Dewit, professor of environmental studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, helpfully unpacks the Hebrew words for serve ('abad') and keep ('shamar').

The first, abad, is sometimes translated till, dress, or work — all good gardening words — but it is the second word, shamar, that puts a new spin on what it means to be a good gardener for God. Shamar is sometimes



PHOTO BY PETER HARRIS

translated tend, guard, take care of, and look after. Dewitt contends that shamar implies a “loving, caring, sustaining type of keeping.” The word is the same used in the Aaronic blessing: “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and give you peace.” (Num 6:24–25)

All this points to our special role in creation, which is one of caretaking or stewarding. In fact, it is our unique position as image-bearers that qualifies us to steward God’s creation.

## CREATION IS GOOD

*“God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.”* (Genesis 1:31)

The idea that the material world is good makes theological sense – after all, God

wouldn't have taken on a human body himself if flesh were inherently evil. Through the incarnation, Jesus both affirms his creation and brings redemption to that creation.

Christians believe Jesus was fully man and fully God. Yes, he came to redeem the world, but he did so eating and drinking, walking and sleeping. And working. Jesus was a carpenter, for goodness' sake — he worked with wood, with callused hands and with sweat in his eyes.

If matter is good and Jesus fully 'materialized' — that is, he participated fully in the material life that all humans participate in — then that puts an end to silly dualistic notions that there is a division between the material and the spiritual, whereby the spiritual always stands over against the physical and is superior to it. It certainly sheds a holy light on woodworking! It also sheds a holy light on all manner of "earthy" jobs, from ditch digging to

diaper changing to gardening to fish and frog studying.

If the material/spiritual divide is only an intellectual construct, then how does one do one's work Christianly? Does the Christian biologist hum hymns while searching for signs of salamanders? Does she exclaim, "Praise the Lord!" when measuring a fresh water mussel, discovering it's over one hundred years old? Does she preach to the birds as St. Francis was said to have done? Maybe. But more fundamentally, she approaches



PHOTO BY FRED CARRUTHERS

her vocation and her tasks with a degree of reverence that acknowledges the goodness of creation and the creator who made it.

## EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED

The basic premise of ecology is that everything is connected. The very definition of ecology embodies this truth: eco from the Greek *oikos*, for “household,”

and *logia*, for “the study of.” Anyone who has grown up in a household understands that it is a complicated web of interrelated relationships. (If Mama ain’t happy, ain’t nobody happy, right?) In essence, the word ecology draws attention to the relationships

*“If one tinkers with one bit of the world, the effects are felt in radiating ripples throughout the rest of the world.”*

between living things and their environment. It implies that if one tinkers with one bit of the world, the effects are felt in radiating ripples throughout the rest of the world. To paraphrase John Muir, tug at this bit of creation and you find it is attached to everything else.

The Old Testament prophets were perhaps the first ecologists, drawing a picture for their listeners of the consequences of actions and choices that ripple out into the wider web of relationships. The prophets' genius lay in the way they extended the concept of ecology beyond the natural world to include humankind's broken relationship with God – which then leads to a broken relationship with other people and with creation itself.

Consider the words of Hosea:

*Hear the word of the LORD, you Israelites,*

*because the LORD has a charge to bring  
against you who live in the land:*

*"There is no faithfulness, no love,  
no acknowledgment of God in the land.*

*There is only cursing, lying and murder,  
stealing and adultery;*

*they break all bounds,*

*and bloodshed follows bloodshed.*

*Because of this the land mourns,*

*and all who live in it waste away;*

*the beasts of the field and*

*the birds of the air*

*and the fish of the sea are dying."*

Not exactly a cheery passage. Although it was written thousands of years ago, these words sound startlingly similar to many newspaper headlines today, do they not? Fish, birds and beasts die. Murder, theft, and adultery abound. People have lost their faith in God. Sounds like the New York Times. But whereas the New York Times presents such a litany

of calamities in standalone articles, Hosea connects them, showing the ripple effect of sin. Creation's suffering is intrinsically linked to humanity's faithlessness, lack of love, and failure to acknowledge God. The trickledown effect of our brokenness is a land that mourns and all (humans and non-humans) who live in it waste away. This is certainly what we are seeing around the world today.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) reports species extinction rates that are between one thousand to ten thousand times the natural background rates (the natural rate without human interference). According to their research, we are currently facing the possible extinction of 12% of birds, 22% of mammals and 30% of amphibians worldwide. These are staggering figures that should raise alarm bells for all who believe that creation is the handiwork of a loving God.

But environmental degradation does not just affect the fish, birds and beasts, as Hosea so aptly points out. Humans suffer too. The UN recently reported that “environmental refugees” (people who are displaced because of environmental degradation) already outnumber those who are refugees as a result of conflict. Conflicts will, in fact, be increasingly driven by the scarcity of natural resources.

In our experience with A Rocha, it is our brothers and sisters in the developing world who understand the dire implications of degraded ecosystems best and are calling us to change. Our friend Stella Simiyu, a native Kenyan and a Senior Research Scientist in plant conservation at the National Museums of Kenya, writes this about the predicament of the poor.

*"If you look at Africa, the rural poor depend directly on the natural resource base. This is where their pharmacy, supermarket, power company and water company are. What would happen to you if these things were removed from your local neighbourhood? We must invest in environmental conservation because this is how we enhance the ability of the rural*

*"When we in the industrialized West tug on the thread of our extravagant lifestyles, the web quivers all over the world in species extinction and social injustice."*

*poor to have options and provide for them ways of getting out of the poverty trap."*

Stella and her countrymen and women are calling us to what God has called us all to:

"to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God." (Micah 6:8) They are calling us to acknowledge that when we in the industrialized West tug on the thread of

our extravagant and selfish consumption, the web quivers all over the planet in the form of species extinction and social injustice.

## LIVING HOPEFULLY

Hope is a rare commodity in the environmental world, as our friends at the University of British Columbia pointed out. One of the liabilities of an ecological education writes Aldo Leopold, one of foremost nature writers of 20th century, is that one “lives alone in a world of wounds.” Knowing what conservationists know, it is only logical that they would be tempted to despair. But the Christian way is one of hope – a hope in the very real redemption of all things. Consider Paul’s words in Colossians (1:15–20):

*He (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God,*

*the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*

This is a passage that roots us in hope — a hope that someday, somehow, someday, redemption is possible for all things.

Redemption, as understood by Paul and other biblical writers, has more to do with re-creation than a whisking away of souls to heaven. N.T. Wright uses the synonyms of “healing” and “transformation” to get

at the fullness of this theologically meaty word. Redemption is fulfilled in shalom and the reign of God. In Colossians Paul links creation and humanity's redemption through the person of Jesus. Through Christ all things were created; he sustains (or holds together) all things and then through his resurrection

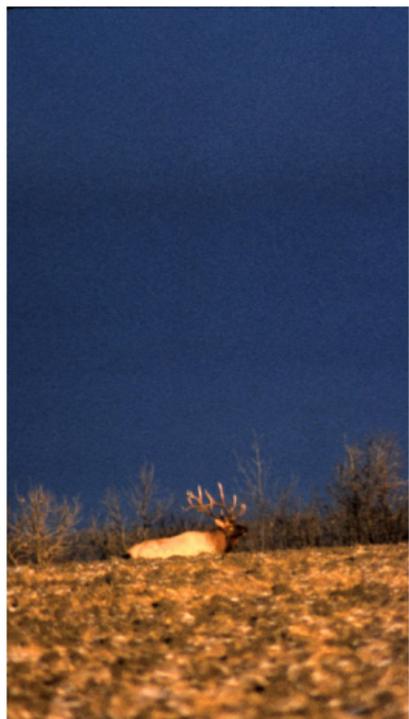


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FRED CARRUTHERS

he reconciles all things. Where might all things stop, do you think? Does it stop with people? That is how Christians often read it. Only people are reconciled. But the radical point this passage seems to be making is that creation itself participates in redemption. It is

our anthropocentric view of the world that causes us to read all things as all people. When reflecting on this passage, N.T. Wright contends that “redemption is not simply making creation a bit better, as the optimistic evolutionist would try to suggest. Nor is it rescuing spirits and souls from an evil material world, as the Gnostic would say. It is the remaking of creation.”

Paul also hits on this theme of creation’s redemption in the book of Romans when he speaks of creation “waiting . . . in hope that it will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” (8:20–21) Creation’s redemption is part of the warp and woof of his first century Jewish worldview, and Paul includes it here in way that assumes his readers already believe it as well. He uses creation’s groaning and hoping for release

as a metaphor for our own suffering and our own eventual redemption. Creation's "hope" in a future redemption is meant to strengthen our own human hope in the midst of trials.

This understanding has serious implications for our motivation in caring for creation.

We do not try to save the world: rather, we join in the saving work God has already begun.

We cooperate with the Spirit in making all things new. This hope of all things made new, both present and future, finds its grounding in Jesus' bodily resurrection. And so our ultimate hope is not "disembodied souls in heaven" but flesh and blood resurrection in a new (that is, renewed) creation. While we must remain content to live in the mystery

*"Our ultimate hope is not "disembodied soul in heaven" but flesh and blood resurrection in a new creation."*

of how this will actually unfold, Christ's resurrected body provides hints of what this transformation will be like, and points to all of creation's future transformation and renewal. Those hints are seen in the physicality of Jesus even after the resurrection. He chews and swallows bread, he is recognisable by friends (though sometimes after some confusion or hesitation), he still bears wounds in his side, and he starts a fire and fries fish for his disciples. He also walks through walls and is teleported through the air and out of sight. Clearly he is still "bodily", but with strange new abilities. He has not only ensured redemption for his creation but has experienced it in his own self!

It is this hope – a hope centred on God's ultimate care for what God has made that allows us to "be joyful though we have considered all the facts," as Wendell Berry

says. And hope, if it is true, runs deep, with taproots nourished by a subterranean grace that flows strong and swift despite outer circumstances. It is what keeps us going.

## SUMMING UP

The interconnectedness which God has built into the natural world is also apparent in the Gospel and in the church. Biblically understood, the Church is one body made up of many parts, and it takes all parts to live out a whole gospel. Most often the context right in front of us just happens to be the mission field that God is calling us to. Therefore, we applaud the caring community development worker, the humble evangelist, the erudite theologian, the dogged relief worker, the clever novelist and the compassionate civil rights activist. All these are messengers of

God's love and help bring God's kingdom to earth. We need them all (just like we need construction workers, police officers, parents and artists who see their vocations as "spiritual" callings). But let's not be



PHOTO BY PETER HARRIS

reductionistic here. Just because we all have specific gifts, it does not mean that we can shuffle off our responsibilities in other areas. While creation care as a vocation is a specific calling, as a missional way of life it is everyone's calling. Just as every Christian is called to witness to God's love and to

promote justice for those without a voice, so too, all Christians are called to steward creation. All Christians are called to cooperate with God in his work of redemption of all things.

## **WORKING IT OUT WITH A ROCHA**

Inspired by the biblical mandate to care for creation, A Rocha has taken shape in twenty countries around the world over the past thirty years. In each place, we work to show God's love for all creation through practical, hands-on conservation and education projects. In Canada A Rocha has restored salmon streams in BC, controlled invasive species on the Prairies, and grown organic vegetables for those living on low incomes across the country. All this has been done in and through community. The two of us were

part of a team that formed A Rocha's first environmental centre on the southern British Columbia coast. To get an idea of what we are about at these centres, imagine a youth hostel meets the Sierra Club, and ground the whole thing in Christian hospitality.

A Rocha Environmental Centres are places where all three of humanity's most fundamental relationships – with God, fellow humans, and with creation – have a chance to flourish. Interns and volunteers with little or no church background get to live among people of Christian faith and see what that faith can look like in ordinary everyday life. Folks are encouraged to learn to love and forgive those different from themselves as they work, play, share meals and common space together. And of course, everyone who comes gets to roll up their sleeves and care in practical ways for creation.

Because A Rocha Canada was born on the Pacific coast, our conservation efforts began with that iconic Pacific creature – the salmon. Few animals on Canada’s West Coast symbolize the link between forest and ocean ecosystems better than Pacific salmon. It’s the old hip-bone-connected-to-the-thigh-bone song and dance, but with an ecological twist, all done against the backdrop of one of creation’s greatest migration cycles.

After beginning their lives in freshwater lakes, rivers and streams, the juvenile salmon spend



PHOTO BY MELISSA ONG

a few months to a few years (depending on the species) in fresh water before they head out to sea, where they will grow up to twenty-three kilograms (fifty pounds). The fare that enables them to pack on 98% of their adult weight includes plankton, shrimp, anchovies and herring, to name just a few. At some point in each salmon's life, an instinctual bell goes off, telling it to return home. Not only do the vast majority of salmon migrate back to the very stream in which they were spawned, most make it within a few hundred metres of their hatching place.



PHOTO BY BROOKE MCALLISTER

Once again in fresh water, the drama heightens. Females' bodies bulge with eggs. Males are often battered, with humped backs and torn fins, as they make the strenuous race against time to the spawning beds. The last leg of a salmon's life might seem macabre to those who want to anthropomorphise their homecoming, but the spawning and subsequent death of salmon is one of the great connecting agents between the ecology of the ocean and that of the coastal forest of western Canada. Some twenty-two species of mammals and birds feed directly on living or dead salmon, from grizzlies to bald eagles to stoneflies. According to the Pacific Salmon Foundation, a total of 190 different species depend on salmon for survival. And so the cycle goes on, as nutrients from a saltwater shrimp are transferred to a migrating Chinook, who loses the spawning race to a hungry grizzly, who leaves his droppings at the base of a Douglas-fir seedling, which

grows to a towering height, thanks to the annual influx of fertilizer that coincides with the salmon run. Everyone scratches his or her head and wonders how that tree got so darn big, never dreaming it had anything to do with a measly shrimp!

But hazards abound for the Pacific salmon. Foremost among them are urbanization and resource extraction, both of which lead to the loss of habitat. A Rocha has worked to protect and restore salmon habitat to ensure that this amazing creature continues to thrive. In BC we have done this primarily in the Little Campbell River watershed in which our Brooksdale Environmental Centre is situated. The Little Campbell is an urban and rural jewel and has recently been named by the Outdoor Recreation Council as one of BC's top twelve endangered rivers.

"But for all this," to quote Gerard Manley

Hopkins, “nature is never spent.” Despite habitat degradation, the Little Campbell River and its watershed continue to host hundreds of species, some of which are recognised as critically threatened, like the Red-legged Frog (*Rana aurora*) and the Oregon Forestsnail (*Allogona townsendiana*). The river is also home to Coho, Chinook, and Chum salmon, as well as Steelhead and Cutthroat trout, each of which species is in various stages of stress.

We have taken a two-pronged approach to the care for the river and the greater



PHOTO BY BROOKE MCALLISTER

watershed. The first is habitat enhancement and restoration. The second is conservation science research. Habitat enhancement and restoration is basically a fancy way of saying pulling weeds and planting plants. Those who have studied ecology understand that “weed” in this case is code for “invasive species,” an issue high on their environmental radars. Because they come from afar, some introduced species have no natural predators or competitors in their new ecosystems, and thus reproduce without check, leaving a “desert” for indigenous species whose prey, soil, or forage has been consumed by these newcomers.

Thanks to an endless army of volunteers working under the oversight of our former Science Director, Glen Carlson, and our new stewardship coordinator, Christy Juteau, we have pulled, cut, and removed literally tons of English Ivy, Himalayan Blackberry, Purple

Loosestrife and Canary Reed Grass from the Little Campbell watershed. We have also planted truckloads of native plants, carved out rearing channels for salmon fry and laid hundreds of pounds of gravel to guard against erosion. In fact, each year since we moved to the watershed, we have completed three or four restoration projects in partnership with local municipalities, landowners and funders like the Pacific Salmon Foundation. All these efforts combine to make the Little Campbell River a more hospitable place for not only young and spawning salmon, but for the myriad of species from River otters to Western Red Cedars that benefit from the salmon's final gift of life's nutrients.

All this, every weed pulled, every truckload of gravel poured and every species preserved has been a missional act, for each weed pulled and each stretch of river restored is a participation in God's redemptive work. It

is cooperating with God's Spirit working to make all things new.

*"Every weed pulled, every truckload of gravel poured and every species preserved has been a missional act."*

It is this commitment to hands-on conservation as mission that undergirds everything else we do at A Rocha. While we believe in the importance of advocacy and activism, what

makes A Rocha unique among faith-based conservation groups is our dedication to on-the-ground conservation and research. Yes, we train, educate, inspire and encourage, but we also pull, plant, study, and restore. This kind of work is not flashy, but it also is not a flash-in-the-pan, since we are committed to specific places over the long term. This kind of commitment requires getting to know our neighbours, both human and non-human, and persistently working for the health of all.

If it is our commitment to hands-on conservation that makes us unique in the faith-based environmental world, then it is doing it well that gives us credibility in the secular conservation world, with whom we partner broadly. In this regard I'm reminded of the Ugly Bug Ball, which we've hosted every second year for the past six years.

The Ball isn't really a ball (though there is a dance in the evening, where everyone comes dressed as their favourite invertebrate), but a full day of encouragement, knowledge sharing and appreciation put on by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) and the Pacific Streamkeepers Federation. The party is a way of thanking volunteers from all over the Greater Vancouver Area for their efforts in stewarding their local salmon-bearing streams. Basically, DFO throws the party and A Rocha provides the setting.

This might seem like an odd partnership – a government entity and a faith-based organization – and, truth be told, the DFO officers initially thought so as well. The scouting delegation they sent to see if our property would make a good site certainly emerged from their big blue diesel trucks looking circumspect. Markku met them in the driveway and grasped the nettle straight away, asking what they thought about us being a Christian group. A couple of them



PHOTO BY FRED CARRUTHERS

admitted that it made them a little nervous. Markku assured them he was not going to whack them on the side of their heads with a Bible. A Rocha's conservation work was not a front for proselytizing, he said. They began to breathe a bit more easily. He went on to explain how doing good conservation work was an outworking of our Christian calling to steward creation. They got that. Then Markku rattled off some of our projects, things like our participation in the BC Coastal Shorebirds survey and, of course, our work on the Little Campbell River. By the end of their visit a date was set for the first Ugly Bug Ball and everyone was smiling and slapping backs.

The feelings of goodwill and admiration are mutual and have grown over the six years of partnering. We enjoy the music, games and presentations when all those ugly bugs descend on the Centre and our guests enjoy the property as they stroll down the forest

path and wander around the garden. Some even take an interest in who we are and what we are doing.

## WORKING IT OUT IN THE CHURCH

Churches are called to be a transforming presence in their communities. Historically, this transformation has happened as Christians have banded together to start hospitals, rally against slavery, and establish schools and orphanages. More recently, the Church's potential as a catalyst for transformation is being understood as extending beyond just the societal (vital as that is) but to the creation itself. Therefore, many churches now have "Green Teams" or "Environmental Stewardship Committees." Spurred on by their "green" church mates, more and more church goers are getting rid of

Styrofoam cups during coffee hour in favour of ceramic mugs. They are screwing in higher efficiency LED and compact fluorescent lights bulbs in their sanctuaries. They are listening to sermons on the theology of creation and reading books that inspire them to live out a holistic ethic of stewardship.

*"The Church's potential as a catalyst for transformation extends beyond the societal to the creation itself."*

These are just some of the myriad of ways a culture of conservation is being fostered in the Christian community, which when combined add up to significant acts of creation care. To help equip churches to further their transformational impact, A Rocha has recently launched the Good Seed Sunday.

Perhaps the most tangible and effective

creation care project a church can embark on is a community garden. Community gardens provide a way for church members to do something incredibly practical – they get to dig, plant, harvest and help a neighbour through the sweat of their brow and out of the goodness of the heart.

The members of Saanich Community Church on Vancouver Island certainly found this to be true. Back in 2006, a small band of green-thumbed congregants joined together



PHOTO BY BROOKE MCALLISTER

to transform half an acre of their church property into a thriving community garden.

Their first task was to dig up a portion of a lawn and a tangle of brambles that would serve as their garden. Today, the garden enlists up to fifty church volunteers (some regulars, some just for an afternoon) who have built a greenhouse, laid irrigation lines, and grown bushels and bushels of organic vegetables each summer. This produce has been distributed to the Mustard Seed Food Bank where it is made available to hundreds of local families living on low income. Burl Janz, a member of Saanich Community Church, has this to say about the garden: "The community building and intergenerational aspect of the project has been fantastic for our church, as seniors work alongside youth on our Saturday volunteer days, in order to help feed our less fortunate neighbours."

St. Margaret's Anglican Church in inner-city Winnipeg is another example of a congregation rolling up their sleeves to care for creation, as well as care for those living on the economic margins. They've partnered with A Rocha in our Just Growing project, fostering a connection between food, creation and community in one the city's most impoverished neighbourhoods.

Because the church property itself is mostly taken up with a building and parking lot, A Rocha Community organizer Jen Kornelsen did something creative and adventuresome – she approached folks living on the blocks around the church, to see if they'd be interested in “donating” their front lawns for this community garden initiative. Amazingly, some did! One woman even offered space in her backyard greenhouse so the Just Growing gang could start seedlings for later transplant. Residents of several social

housing societies have joined in the project, growing and harvesting and canning food. They've participated in regular Friday Feast Days and a fall Harvest Festival where they've enjoyed live music and delicious food grown by their own hands. In all this they have regained a measure of dignity, as they



PHOTO BY BROOKE MCALLISTER

have been empowered to provide themselves with the most basic of necessities. So: can planting potatoes really be mission? It seems so humble, so simple, so old fashioned — like something

our grandmas did. It is so much less dramatic than chaining oneself to a tree to save an endangered forest, or traveling to the Outer Hebrides to band Storm Petrels, or hunkering down in famine ravaged Africa to start an orphanage. Planting a garden is just so . . . ordinary. But then so are the words of Jeremiah to the Jewish people during the Babylonian exile: "Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters. . . . Seek the welfare of the city



PHOTO BY BROOKE MCALLISTER

where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” (Jer 29:5–7) When we seek the welfare of the city, when we plant gardens, when we care for creation, we join with the first Gardener who walked in the shade of the garden and saw that it was good. We join with the Gardener who walks now through our broken world and who, through our hands, feet, and trowels, works to make all things new.

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**Marrku and Leah Kostamo** helped spearhead the work of A Rocha in Canada. Markku is a Professional Biologist and outdoor enthusiast and has worked as an environmental consultant in the private sector. Leah comes to A Rocha with a background in campus ministry and education. Together, they are passionate about helping people from all walks of life and experience the wonder of creation and the love of the creator. They have two daughters and live and flourish at Kingfisher Farm in Surrey, BC.





# A ROCHA

Environmental Stewardship

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## ABOUT A ROCHA

A Rocha is an international Christian organization which, inspired by God's love, engages in scientific research, environmental education and community-based conservation projects. Our vision is the transformation of people and places into healthy communities through a movement of individuals and groups, caring for God's world.

A Rocha has established two Environmental Centres in Canada ("Brooksdale" in Surrey,

BC and the Pembina Valley Field Station in southern Manitoba) — both are places of training and transformation. In addition, A Rocha runs creation care programs in Northern B.C., Calgary, Winnipeg and the Greater Toronto Area. Finally, A Rocha's Community Garden Network is training and encouraging community gardeners across Canada.

For more information on the diversity and goodness of A Rocha's work, go to [www.arocha.ca](http://www.arocha.ca)







[www.arocho.ca](http://www.arocho.ca)  
*Published by Rivertree Press*

\$4.99



**A Rocha Canada**



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Environmental Stewardship