

Re-enchanting the creation

During the winter of 1997, I knelt down on the edge of a forest outside Nazareth and gently planted four trees in the ground.

They were in honor of four teenagers who had died, only days earlier, in a car accident not far from where my family and I make our home. My action, at that time, was part of Israel's innovative reforestation project inviting guests in their country to donate a tree in honor of a loved one or in tribute to a worthy cause.

After a year of organizational transition, the EarthKeepers, a team of volunteers from ten faith traditions across the Upper Peninsula, will join with the Superior Watershed Partnership and Cedar Tree Institute in launching an extraordinary project planting 12,000 trees in 15 counties on a single afternoon.

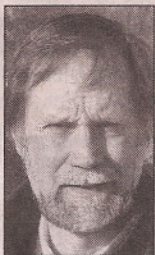
We're expecting 100 faith communities to participate. On May 3, following distribution of the seedlings to congregations, prayer services and hymns will be lifted up as hundreds of volunteers from all walks of life participate in this visible sign of renewal and hope.

The tree has always held a special place in the great religions of the world. Alongside sacred teachings in Native American and Buddhist traditions, the Old Testament begins with its memorable reference to the Tree of Knowledge. The New Testament closes with a ringing image of the Tree of Life in the Book of Revelation. Church historians remind us that in early designs of medieval crosses, Jesus was often depicted as the Tree of Life, filled with vegetation and harkening back to the Green Man revered in old religions of northern Europe.

Having become part of creation and unjustly executed, he becomes an advocate for those who have been trampled underfoot. Slain on the cross but risen, he carries a declaration of abundant life and light, even out of injustice and death.

This year's project is another step in building a new vision for interfaith engagement in stepping up to the challenge for building a more just and sustainable ecosystem in the Great Lakes Basin. In 2004 leaders of nine major faith traditions in Northern Michigan made an ongoing commitment to an EarthKeeping Covenant.

It encouraged their congregations to engage in a deeper understanding and stewardship of our natural resources here in the Upper Peninsula. In 2005, 47 tons of household hazardous mate-



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AT A GLANCE

The public and news media are invited to an Earth Day 2009 Ceremonial Tree Planting with representatives of 10 faith traditions at 3:30 p.m. April 22 next to the Presque Isle Pavilion in Marquette. A blessing and planting of 12,000 trees will be held at various times on May 3 at about 100 churches and temples across the Upper Peninsula. Participating faith traditions include Lutheran, Catholic, United Methodist, Presbyterian, Jewish, Bahá'í, Unitarian Universalist, Zen Buddhist, Quaker and Episcopal. For more information call the U.P. EarthKeepers at 906-228-2388 or the Superior Watershed Partnership at 906-228-6095

rials were collected in three hours at 28 church parking lots in 15 U.P. counties.

In 2006, 320 tons of electronic waste were collected using a similar strategy. In 2007, over 2,000 pounds of discarded, outdated pharmaceuticals were collected at churches in our region and disposed of by municipal authorities. In 2008, over 3 million pounds of carbon were reduced through voluntary household energy conservation.

This year the Lake Superior Friends (Quakers) join us in bringing a message of hope and "hands-on" participation for what we intend to be a positive witness to those discouraged and cynical about the future.

A rising new environmental consciousness around the world is changing community life in ways we could have never imagined. Connect with a participating faith community in your neighborhood. We will welcome, more than you can know, your support and encouragement. Though we live here in Michigan in a remote, often forgotten and stressed economy, history reminds us a prophetic word often emerges from such places and such times. Many of us believe this is just a moment.

Editor's note: This is the first of a series of articles on the topic of the EarthKeepers Initiative, an interdenominational commitment to protecting and preserving the environment and quality of life in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Jon Magnuson is a Lutheran Pastor and Director of The Cedar Tree Institute.

Mining Journal
April 9, 2009