**Creation Justice Church Interview with Susie Allen**

September 8, 2020

Last May the congregation of the Keene Valley Congregational Church approved a Task Force to pursue an initiative to be designated as a Creation Justice Church by the United Church of Christ. We have a few questions to help us learn how you view Creation Justice and suggested ways the Task Force can engage the congregation in this initiative.

**Q. People in the community have asked the Task Force “What does Creation Justice mean?”**

 **How would you define Creation Justice from a faith-based perspective?**

A. I believe that Creation is the closest and most tangible revelation of God to us as humans. It is so critical that we understand that we are not separate from the created world – we are interwoven with all of creation as God’s revelation. As residents in the Adirondack Park, we are so blessed to have access to the vast and powerful beauty of creation right at our doorsteps. But there are so many in our world who cannot access creation so easily and powerfully. As well, there are so many whose very lives are at risk because of the impact of climate change. We are witnessing these affects right now with intense and frequent storms ravaging the Gulf Coast and thousands of acres of land and livelihoods burned to the ground in the wildfires. It is critical, essential, for us to understand our part in the web of all creation and know that it is up to each of us to take action to respond – in prayer, in learning, in reflection, in action. As a faith community, we have the capacity to do this critical work together.

**Q. When have you felt a deep connection with nature? How has this brought you closer to God?**

A. From my earliest memories, I have felt deeply connected with nature and, intrinsically, with God. I think it was clear in some deep way that nature and God were one for me. I remember having my own private space in the woods when I was young – a place to retreat to, to sit and take in the dampness of stone, the softness of moss, the warmth of sun, the smell of leaves. Sensual and close. It all felt alive and alight with God.

**Q. In what ways do you see the two words Creation and Justice affect each other?**

A. Great question! I think these ideas together remind me of the interconnection of all living things. We are interwoven in Creation, and yet each of us is affected in different ways. I/we live in a place of abundance in creation – easy access to so much that creation offers. Others live in places of scarcity, even poverty, of the richness that is creation and their part in it. As well, how can we – with our abundance and in faith – influence each other and the wider world to take action to heal our climate so that those who live in scarcity are not so vulnerable to the groanings of the Earth as manifest in storms, fires, and lack of access to healthy food, water, air, heat.

**Q. Please expand on ways you think the climate crisis is affecting the most vulnerable.**

A. I have probably answered this question in other places, but I think the climate crisis is deepening the scarcity of resources for the most vulnerable – more vulnerable to loss of life and livelihood from storms and fires; more limited access to clean water, fresh food, clean air, safe energy. And perhaps the worst of it is that the most vulnerable are often least able to impact their situation. We need to remember – always – that we are interconnected.

**Q. The Task Force is conducting an inventory of the day-to-day practices of the Church and recommending ways to become more environmentally friendly.**

**An Energy Audit is planned, as are events to engage the community in becoming more connected with the natural world, with Creation.**

 **Are you familiar with what the Task Force is doing?**

A. I think so. I am delighted to see that Jim Antal is offering a presentation on September 20. I know Jim a little from his time as President and General Minister of the Massachusetts Conference of the UCC. He is an energetic, passionate and committed speaker on behalf of Creation. I also know about the Forest Bathing, River Walking, and silent canoeing gatherings. It feels so important to create opportunities for people to experience the created world and take time to reflect together. Thank you!

**Q. What suggestions do you have to encourage the community to become more knowledgeable in the Task Force offerings?**

A. Such an important question; and the suggestions made more challenging because of the pandemic. I know I am longing to be with other people in person, and wonder how the Task Force might continue to find ways for people to be together, such as the forest bathing and canoeing. I wonder, too, how the Task Force can continue to invite speakers and disseminate information in a creative way to equip our community with information – about climate change, about actions we can take as individuals, about how we can join together to encourage others. Our unique contribution, as a faith community, is to continue to tell stories and teach others about the interconnection of all creation, and to inspire connection to God/Sacred Presence/One Another through our actions. We can help inspire a spirit of generosity.

--------------- a continuing reflection from Susie Allen -------------

I've been reading the Robin Kimmerer article, *Returning the Gift.*

Kimmerer has given me a deeper, more compelling understanding of the idea of creation justice. She says "Recognition of personhood for all beings opens the door to ecological justice. Our laws today are all about governing *our rights*to the land. The shift we need is to include the rights *of* the land: the rights to be whole and healthy; the right to exist." I want to think much more about this idea, and what we can learn from indigenous peoples about the rights of the land.

Feel free to add the above to what I have already written in response to your questions. As I read Kimmerer's article, I felt like what I had written was not enough.