

# FOCUS ON

## *Sustainability and the AAR*

### **AAR Initiatives to Address Sustainability**

#### IN THIS ISSUE

**AAR Sustainability Initiatives** .....13  
*Working to Encourage Green Practices*

**Education for a Sustainable Future** .....14  
*The Role of Religious Studies and Theology Education*

**The Greening of the World's Religions** .....15  
*An Emerging Alliance of Religion and Ecology*

*Look for the  
October  
Focus on  
the Religion  
Major and  
Liberal Education.*

IN THE PAST couple of months, concerns about the environment and the human condition have spurred sustainability issues into everyday conversation, and the AAR is — and has been — involved in taking steps to contribute to a more sustainable future. Sustainability is classically defined as “the ability to provide for the needs of the world’s current population without damaging the ability of future generations to provide for themselves.”

Several AAR members have been active on this front for quite a while. Pioneers such as John Cobb, Rosemary Ruether, Larry Rasmussen, and Sallie McFague have studied religion and ecology issues for decades. The AAR’s Religion and Ecology Group began in 1993, and is now led by John Grim and David Barnhill. Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker are co-directors of the Forum on Religion and Ecology, and together organized a series of ten conferences on world religions and ecology at the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard Divinity School.

Now it looks as if the fruits of their labor and the realities of global warming have pushed this specialty of religious studies and theology into mainstream consciousness — and beyond ecological concerns to ever-increasing social justice concerns. Not only is this subject on the cover of recent magazines — from the *Atlantic* to *Sports Illustrated* to *Convene* (the magazine of the meetings industry) — but it is also moving into the forefront of the AAR. From greener meetings to curriculum, the AAR is sailing full-speed toward addressing the issue.

Being one of the largest disciplinary associations, the AAR can have tremendous influence on other organizations. Board member Sarah McFarland Taylor, who is instrumental in shaping the Midwest Regional conference to be eco-friendly, sees great potential for leadership.

“Our Annual Meetings are attended by more than 11,000 people,” she said. “We have the potential to make a huge impact, not only in the practices we adopt at our own Annual Meeting, but by creating a template that other organizations can easily adopt. What we do will most certainly have a watershed effect.

“I think the AAR is poised to lead the way in becoming the greenest academic association in North America and perhaps beyond. That is a great role for us

to be taking on and it makes a powerful statement about who we are. It also challenges a lot of stereotypes about scholars of religion being somehow stodgy, removed, or not really ‘in tune’ with what’s truly going on in the world.”

For the past year, Kyle Cole, AAR Director of College Programs, has represented the AAR at meetings of the Disciplinary Associations for Sustainability, a working group formed within the U.S. Partnership for Education for Sustainable Development. At these meetings, 20+ disciplinary associations work to create new practices — from intro textbook changes to greener meetings to actual mandatory learning outcomes — that will address important sustainability issues. The partnership was formed when the White House decided not to participate in the United Nations General Assembly resolution which declared a Decade of Education for Sustainable Development to begin on January 1, 2005. The partnership hopes to develop a cross-sector action plan for a U.S. Decade for Sustainable Development.

The idea of working with disciplinary associations follows sustainability movements on campuses across the United States and Canada. The difference is that while colleges and universities can make institutional changes that have great impact on their campuses, it is in the actual disciplines (through their courses) where sustainability messages are transmitted to the students. The AAR, in participating with the other associations, is beginning to organize the various sustainability efforts within religious studies and theology, and asking members to join in whenever possible. A task force was presented for AAR board approval at its April meeting, but action occurred after press time.

Several initiatives are already taking shape. The Academic Relations Committee and the Theological Education Steering Committee are organizing a Special Topics Forum on the Greening of Theological Education at the 2007 Annual Meeting. And that is the tip of the iceberg for the Annual Meeting, as Aislinn Jones, AAR Annual Meeting Program Director, is working to make this meeting as eco-friendly as possible.

During the four days of the AAR and SBL Annual Meetings, over 11,000

people will use over 190,000 plates, 270,000 napkins, 225,000 cups or glasses, and 270,000 cans or bottles, based on estimates listed in the *Professional Meeting Management Guide*.

“The list of resources that go into one Annual Meeting are many and it leaves a heavy ecological footprint,” Jones said. “AAR is beginning an investigation on how we can minimize the impact of the Annual Meeting on the environment.”

AAR plans to establish these guidelines in Annual Meeting planning:

#### **Meeting Room and Hotel Accommodations:**

- Require that the headquarter hotels and convention center have recycling bins for attendees to use during the meeting.
- Request that all Annual Meeting hotels offer the option not to change linens, such as towels and sheets, unless requested by the person in the room. This practice substantially reduces the amount of water and energy used during the meeting.
- Offer water stations outside the meeting rooms with drinking glasses instead of disposable cups. AAR will request the hotels and outlets use reusable utensils instead of dispensable utensils whenever possible. Using 1,000 disposable plastic teaspoons consumes over 10 times more energy and natural resources than manufacturing one stainless steel teaspoon and washing it 1,000 times, according to the Environmental Defense Council.

#### **Reduce consumption by:**

- Continuing AAR’s current practice of donating leftover food from Annual Meeting receptions and lunches to local homeless shelters. Last year in Washington, D.C., AAR donated leftover food to the D.C. Central Food Kitchen. In San Diego, Food Recovery, Inc. will work with Annual Meeting locations to serve a variety of shelters.
- Serving buffet lunches instead of “boxed” lunches (i.e., a cardboard container with a premade sandwich, chips, etc.) in order to reduce consumer waste.

# Education for a Sustainable Future: The Role of Religious Studies and Theology Education

Debra Rowe, U.S. Partnership for Education for Sustainable Development

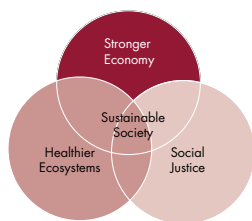


Debra Rowe is the Higher Education Co-Chair and President of the U.S. Partnership for Education for Sustainable Development ([www.uspartnership.org](http://www.uspartnership.org)). The U.S. Partnership has sector teams for: higher education, K-12, business, faith, and youth. She is also Senior Fellow at the Association of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future ([www.ulsf.org](http://www.ulsf.org)), National Co-coordinator of the Higher Education Associations Sustainability Consortium ([www.heasc.net](http://www.heasc.net)) and Senior Advisory Councilor for the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education ([www.aashe.org](http://www.aashe.org)). She helps higher education associations and institutions integrate sustainability into mission, curricula, research, student life, operations, and community partnerships. She was the energy and sustainability consultant to the National Science Foundation-funded National Science Database Library (Electronic Environmental Resources Library). Rowe has been professor of energy technology for over 26 years at Oakland Community College.

**RSN:** What is sustainable development?

**Rowe:** From the 1987 Brundtland Commission, the most common definition of sustainable development is “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” In 2003, Dr. Rolf Jucker further illuminated the idea: “Sustainability is achieved when all people on Earth can live well without compromising the quality of life for future generations.”

The vision of sustainable human society resides in the simultaneous and synergistic creation of economic growth and equity, conservation of natural resources and the natural environment, and sustainable social development. It is often visually represented as follows:



The three components of sustainable development.

**RSN:** Why should educators in North America care about sustainable development?

**Rowe:** There is an urgent need for us to care and educate ourselves about sustainable development. The extent to which we, the people of the United States, adopt and embrace the principles of sustainable development may determine the quality of life that our country and all humanity enjoys in the decades ahead. As 5 percent of the world’s population, we consume 25 percent of the world’s resources. Ecosystems we depend on to provide clean air, water, food, and other essential resources are degrading and climate change is occurring. The Earth simply cannot tolerate billions of people following the path we chose.

Now, as responsible educators, we must demonstrate new paths to economic, environmental, and community health which do not compromise our future. Many U.S. citizens do not know that:

- We are exceeding the carrying capacity of the planet. ([www.myfootprint.org](http://www.myfootprint.org))
- The ecosystems are degrading. ([www.worldwatch.org/topics/nature](http://www.worldwatch.org/topics/nature))
- We can cost-effectively reduce human suffering and environmental degradation now while building stronger economies.
- Education is the key to creating necessary behavioral and policy changes. Sustainable living, consumption, and investment behaviors can be learned, and unreasonable policies and regulations can be revised to create a future that supports actions for a sustainable future.

**RSN:** Why should those in religious studies care about sustainability?

**Rowe:** At its core, sustainability is about the reduction of human suffering. It is about human rights, social justice, and respect for the life-supporting ecosystems on which we all depend. This is the first generation whose decisions will determine the habitability of the planet. The decisions of today’s students will help dictate whether the future is one of scarcity wars and more human suffering or sustainable abundance and less suffering.

Religion has played a key role in the global and historical human dialogue about morality, human rights, and social justice. Many religious traditions have stories of creation and concerns for human suffering, morality, human rights, and social justice. These themes can be explored by students as commonalities among the religious traditions, particularly in “Introduction to World Religions” and “Comparative Religions” courses.

Religious studies can make important and unique contributions to sustainability education for all undergraduates on college campuses, as it plays such an important role in liberal education. Religion courses could easily engage students in the sustainability issues of this generation, and help them think about and practice the necessary behaviors and actions for a sustainable future. (There is a lot of activity already occurring regarding the “greening” of the theological curriculum.) Religion professors don’t need to know the answers to bring these issues into their course; raising the issue for discussion can be fruitful. The core question is “How can we use what we are learning to help create a better, sustainable future?”

**RSN:** What is the role of U.S. higher education in creating a sustainable future?

**Rowe:** There is enormous potential within U.S. higher education. Some of the key statistics are illuminating:

- 4,096 colleges and universities
- 14.8 million students
- U.S. higher education expenditures are greater than the GDP of all but 25 countries in the world.

Students need to know that their daily decisions affect the quality of life of people around the globe. By making more thoughtful decisions, students can help create a better world. Through real world expressions of spiritual values in assignments, religion educators can engage students to help colleges and universities and the larger society change operational, curricular, and policy norms. Students can learn and practice via such assignments how to be more environmentally responsible and socially just.

The goal is to engage students as effective change agents in our sustainability challenges. Students can learn, for example, that their purchasing choices can support either immoral, unsafe, and slave-labor conditions or fair-wage and safe working conditions, for oftentimes the same price or only pennies more per product. Students can learn stories about how collective action is powerful, such as:

- The recent corporate Nike story, where students refused to buy Nike brand shoes until Nike committed to monitor implementation of a new no-sweatshop policy;

- The Campus Climate Challenge, where students are working with campus administrations to measure and reduce greenhouse gas emissions that are causing climate change ([www.climatechallenge.org](http://www.climatechallenge.org));
- The collaboration of science and religions to get action on climate change.

A list of sustainability-oriented campus activities, learning outcomes, and change agent skills that can be included in any course are available at [www.myacpa.org](http://www.myacpa.org). Educators can also utilize the book *147 Strategies for Teaching Sustainability* from Atwood Publishers. Researchers can focus on religions’ existing and potential contributions to sustainability.

**RSN:** What is already occurring in the United States in terms of education for a sustainable future?

**Rowe:** There is a national trend to infuse sustainable development behaviors, practices, and curricula throughout higher education institutions. HEASC, the Higher Education Associations Sustainability Consortium ([www.heasc.net](http://www.heasc.net)), has been formed to catalyze education for a sustainable future in curricula, operations, purchasing, planning, research, student life, investments, and community partnerships. Fourteen national higher education associations have joined HEASC. These associations represent facilities directors, business officers, college and university planners, trustees, purchasers, residential housing, student affairs, campus activities, campus bookstores, and college and university presidents.

Twenty national disciplinary associations have also been networking and collaborating for a sustainable future. Their working groups are focusing on infusing sustainability into curricula, professional development, standards, cross-disciplinary projects, legislative briefings, and ways to educate the public about how to help create a sustainable future. AAR is part of this network.

**RSN:** What can interested members do?


**Rowe:** Many things:

- Become more educated about our sustainability challenges and possible solutions;
- Include information on sustainability efforts in courses, including the National Religious Partnership for the Environment ([www.nrpe.org](http://www.nrpe.org)), and social justice, human rights, and social welfare initiatives;
- Join in on the national efforts to:
  - ♦ create a learning community in sustainability and religion
  - ♦ develop curricular and professional development materials for the AAR, including textbook revisions to include sustainability
  - ♦ work on standards that include sustainability principles for AAR and higher education
  - ♦ volunteer to be part one of the following interdisciplinary working groups:
    - public information campaign
    - legislation education
    - cross-disciplinary research.

You can send an e-mail to Kyle Cole, *RSN* Executive Editor, at [kcole@aarweb.org](mailto:kcole@aarweb.org) to find out more about these efforts.

**RSN:** Where can we get more information?

**Rowe:** You can visit the following sites:

- Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education — [www.aashe.org](http://www.aashe.org)
- Association of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future — [www.ulsf.org](http://www.ulsf.org)
- United States Partnership for Education for Sustainable Development — [www.uspartnership.org](http://www.uspartnership.org) (click on “partner resources,” then “higher ed and faith”). 

# The Greening of the World's Religions

Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim



Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, founders of the Forum on Religion and Ecology, teach religion and ecology at Yale University. They are editors of the Harvard book series on World Religions and Ecology. More information on the Forum on Religion and Ecology is available online (at [www.religionandecology.org](http://www.religionandecology.org)).

As a professor of religion, John taught courses in Native American and Indigenous religions, religion and ecology, ritual, and mysticism in the world's religions. His published works include: *The Shaman: Patterns of Religious Healing among the Ojibway Indians* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1983) and, with Mary Evelyn Tucker, a co-edited volume entitled *Worldviews and Ecology* (Orbis, 1994, 5th printing 2000). In the ten-volume series "World Religions and Ecology," John has edited *Indigenous Traditions and Ecology* (Harvard, 2001). He also co-edited the *Daedalus* volume titled *Religion and Ecology: Can the Climate Change?* (2001). He is currently a visiting scholar at the Institution of Social and Policy Studies, Yale University, and President of the American Teilhard Association.

Mary Evelyn is the author of *Worldly Wonder: Religions Enter Their Ecological Phase* (Open Court Press, 2003) and *Moral and Spiritual Cultivation in Japanese Neo-Confucianism* (SUNY, 1989). She co-edited *Worldviews and Ecology* (Orbis, 1994), *Buddhism and Ecology* (Harvard, 1997), *Confucianism and Ecology* (Harvard, 1998), *Hinduism and Ecology* (Harvard, 2000), and *When Worlds Converge* (Open Court, 2002). With Tu Weiming, she edited two volumes on *Confucian Spirituality* (Crossroad, 2003, 2004). She also co-edited a *Daedalus* volume titled *Religion and Ecology: Can the Climate Change?* (2001). Mary Evelyn is currently visiting professor at the Institution of Social and Policy Studies at Yale University and most recently edited Thomas Berry's book, *Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community* (Sierra Club Books and University of California Press, 2006).

AS REPORTED LAST YEAR in the Millennium Ecosystems Assessment, we humans are destroying the life-support systems of the planet at an alarming rate. The data keep pouring in that we are altering the climate and toxifying the air, water, and soil so that the health of humans and other species is at risk. The population explosion in the twentieth century from two billion to more than six billion people and the consequent devouring of resources are on a collision course with global sustainability. Global warming is already evident in melting glaciers, thawing tundra, and flooding of coastal regions. Furthermore, scientists are documenting that we are living in the midst of a sixth extinction, with more than 20,000 species lost annually. This period represents the largest loss of species since the extinction of the dinosaurs, 65 million years ago. In other words, we are shutting down life systems and causing the end of our geological era.

For many years, environmental issues were considered to be the concern of scientists, lawyers, and policy makers. Now the ethical dimensions of the environmental crisis are becoming more evident. What is our moral responsibility toward future generations? How can we ensure equitable development that does not destroy the environment? Can religious and cultural perspectives be considered in creating viable solutions to environmental challenges?

Until recently religious communities have been so absorbed in internal sectarian affairs that they were unaware of the magnitude of the environmental crisis at hand. Certainly the natural world figures prominently in the major religions: God's creation of material reality in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; the manifestation of the divine in the karmic processes underlying the recycling of matter in Hinduism and Jainism; the interdependence of life in Buddhism; and the Tao (the Way) that courses through nature in Confucianism and Taoism. Despite those emphases on creation, many religions turned from the turbulent world in a redemptive flight to a serene, transcendent afterlife.

The questions arise, then: If religions are willing to stand by and witness the withering of the earth, has not something of their religious sensibilities become deadened, or at best severely reduced? Why have religions been so late in responding to environmental issues, and what are the obstacles to their full participation? Has concern for personal salvation or redemption become an obstacle to caring for creation? Why has apocalyptic thinking come to interpret ecological collapse as a manifestation of the end time?

Some within religious communities, such as the cultural historian Thomas Berry, do acknowledge the critical nature of our present moment. The concern arising in some religious and environmental circles is whether humans are indeed a viable species — whether our presence on the planet is sustainable. As the Greek Orthodox theologian the Metropolitan John of Pergamon has written, the problem is not simply about creating a stewardship ethic in which humans "manage" the earth. Rather, he suggests that the current crisis challenges us to reformulate our ontology, our very nature as humans.

We need not deny the limits or the intolerant dimensions of religions as expressed in sectarianism and violence. Examples are evident throughout history as well as in contemporary global conflicts. However, religions have also contributed to liberating movements for social justice and human rights. In that spirit, it is important to note that religions have changed over time, transforming themselves and their dogma in response to new ideas and circumstances. Although Christianity had no ban against slavery, Christian churches in Britain and the United States came to embrace the abolitionist position. Many Christians became leaders in the abolitionist movement of the nineteenth century and in the civil-rights movement of the twentieth. Given that history, we have reason to believe that as the moral dimension of the environmental crisis becomes ever more apparent, religions will energize and support a new generation of leaders in the environmental movement.

Indeed, many people recognize that religions, as enduring shapers of culture and values, can make seminal contributions to the rethinking of our current environmental impasse. Religions have developed ethics for homicide, suicide, and genocide; now they are challenged to respond to biocide and ecocide. Moreover, the environment presents itself as one of the most compelling concerns for robust interreligious dialogue. The common ground is the earth itself, along with a shared sense among the world's religions of the interdependence of all life. This shared sensibility and the extent of the environmental crisis present themselves as a moment of enormous opportunity for cooperation around a common cause — the activation of flourishing human-earth relations.

A new scholarly field of religion and ecology is emerging, with implications for environmental policy as well as for understanding the complexity and variety of human attitudes toward nature. The Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, for example, under the leadership of Dean James Gustave (Gus) Speth, has initiated an interdisciplinary project on climate change that includes the role of religion and values. Many environmental-studies programs in the United States are seeking to incorporate such a broad ethical approach into their curricula.

Scientists and policy makers are also recognizing the importance of religious and cultural values when discussing the

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## RESOURCES FOR WORLD RELIGIONS AND ECOLOGY

### WEB SITES

Forum on Religion and Ecology Web site at Harvard's Center for the Environment  
[environment.harvard.edu/religion](http://environment.harvard.edu/religion)

*Daedalus* Volume — available online  
*Religion and Ecology: Can the Climate Change?*  
Edited by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim  
[www.amacad.org/publications/fall2001/fall2001.aspx](http://www.amacad.org/publications/fall2001/fall2001.aspx)

### PRINT RESOURCES

[www.environment.harvard.edu/religion/publications/brochure/index.html](http://www.environment.harvard.edu/religion/publications/brochure/index.html)

The Harvard Book Series on World Religions and Ecology (ten volumes)  
Series Editors: Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim

*Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* (two volumes)  
Edited by Bron Taylor  
Continuum Publishers, 2005

*Oxford Handbook on Religion and Ecology*  
Edited by Roger Gottlieb  
Oxford University Press, 2006

*Worldviews, Religion and the Environment: A Global Anthology*  
Edited by Richard Foltz  
Wadsworth Publishers, 2002

*A Communion of Subject: Animals in Religion, Science, and Ethics*  
Edited by Paul Waldau and Kimberley Patton  
Columbia University Press, 2006

*Worldly Wonder: Religions Enter Their Ecological Phase*  
Mary Evelyn Tucker  
Open Court, 2004

### JOURNAL

*Worldviews: Environment, Culture, Religion*  
Published by Brill Academic Publishers  
Edited by Christopher Key Chapple  
Submissions: [cchapple@lmu.edu](mailto:cchapple@lmu.edu)  
Subscriptions: [cs@brillusa.com](mailto:cs@brillusa.com)

### AMERICAN ACADEMY OF RELIGION

Religion and Ecology Group  
[www.religionandecology.org/call-for-papers.php](http://www.religionandecology.org/call-for-papers.php)

environment. The biologist E. O. Wilson, in his recent book, *The Creation*, urges cooperation between religion and science on environmental issues. The Stanford scientists Paul Ehrlich and Donald Kennedy have called for a major study of human behavior and values in relation to environmental protection and preservation.

The effort to identify religiously diverse attitudes and practices toward nature was the focus of a major international conference series from 1996 to 1998 on world religions and ecology. Held at the Center for the Study of World Religions, at the Harvard Divinity School, it resulted in a ten-volume series of books, published by the center and distributed by Harvard University Press. More than 800 scholars of religions and environmentalists attended, leading to a continuing forum on religion and ecology that has grown to more than 4,000 participants. The series concluded in New York with conferences at the United Nations and the

See TUCKER p.16

AAR, from p.13

- Reducing the number of one-time-use signs and trying to design signs so that they may be used for more than one year.
- Providing exhibitors and exhibit hall management the opportunity to recycle materials.
- Using recycled or organic cotton for tote bags. We are exploring the possibility of using a tote bag that is made of recycled plastic bottle containers and excess cotton from clothing manufacturing.
- Offering bins for attendees to place the plastic name badge holders at the end of the meeting so that they may be reused.

One of the heaviest areas of consumption is the energy used to get to the Annual Meeting, whether by plane, train, or automobile. The majority of meeting attendees fly to the Annual Meeting, which uses a great deal of jet fuel and expels several tons of carbon into the air. Several organizations offer travelers the opportunity to purchase carbon offsets in order to “buy back” the carbon used by the airplane. These organizations invest the money into programs such as wind power, tree plantings, and other activities that are designed to offset carbon dioxide emissions. Purchasing carbon offsets only adds \$4–10 to the cost of a ticket to San Diego. AAR is exploring the possibility of giving members the opportunity to purchase carbon offsets during the Annual Meeting registration process.

We encourage you to consider ways you can help the AAR in its goal to “go green” at the Annual Meeting. The opportunities are many, including:

- Register for the Annual Meeting through the online registration and housing system (reduces paper waste).
- Purchase carbon offsets when making travel arrangements.
- Use public transportation or mass transit options in your travel and during your stay in San Diego.
- Bring a mug from home to the meeting and reuse it instead of disposable cups.
- Bring your own name badge holder and reuse it year to year.
- Make use of the recycle bins.

## Carbon Offset Organizations

CarbonFund: Give customers the choice of which products they wish their offsets to fund in three categories: renewable energy, energy efficiency, and reforestation.

[www.carbonfund.org](http://www.carbonfund.org)

ClimateCare: A British company that invests in energy efficiency, renewable energy, and reforestation projects in developing nations. Rated #1 by A Consumers' Guide to Retail Carbon Offset Providers, which rated companies based upon offset quality, transparency, education, sustainability, and verification/certification.

[www.climatecare.org](http://www.climatecare.org)

Offsetters: Canadian-based non-profit that invests in energy efficiency and renewable energy projects in developing nations and in Canada.

[www.offsetters.org](http://www.offsetters.org)

“Since planning for each Annual Meeting begins well in advance of the Annual Meeting dates — contracts are established years beforehand — some of these initiatives will not go into effect for several years,” Jones said. “Others will be available at the 2007 Annual Meeting in San Diego.”

AAR seeks to work in partnership with our members, the host city, and the meeting vendors to explore solutions on how we can minimize our environmental footprint. The goal is to continue to provide quality meetings yet make them green. During this process, we welcome your suggestions. If you have an idea that you did not see listed above, please send it to [annualmeeting@aarweb.org](mailto:annualmeeting@aarweb.org).

Without question, the primary motivator for the “green meeting” is Taylor, the Midwest AAR Regional Secretary. In the past five years, the region has taken incremental steps that have led to a full-fledged green meeting. MAAR implemented a number of measures to reduce the ecological footprint of its conference and to offset carbon emissions by asking its members to consider the following:


- Bring a reusable beverage container.
- Reuse nametag holders from past/other meetings.
- Use public transportation to get to the hotel and to get around the host city — or to carpool with other members attending the meeting.
- Tell hotel housekeeping not to change the linens nightly.
- Turn off lights and equipment in session rooms when no other session follows.
- Purchase Renewable Energy Credits to offset conference travel.

Taylor says her area of expertise, Religion and Ecology, led her to initiate these ideas. “I have things like reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and arctic climate impact assessments covering my desk,” she said. “Even if I wanted to ignore these things, the nature of my research makes this impossible. So, as soon as I was elected the Midwest regional director, I set about planning a ‘greener’ annual regional conference.”

The conference center for MAAR agreed to serve organic, fair-trade, shade-grown coffee for a small fee. Taylor said the cost was minimal and MAAR was able to offset the costs on other materials it was not consuming.

“Ecological concerns are closely tied to social justice concerns, and the fair-trade coffee will help to support struggling farming families while the shade-grown approach is much more bird-friendly and helps to conserve vital habitat and biodiversity,” Taylor said.

She said there was a groundswell of support for her ideas. After sending an e-mail outlining her proposal for green practices at the conference, her inbox was jammed with replies. “I cannot tell you how many of these notes started out with the word ‘Finally!’” she said. “In general, our membership seems to be pretty well informed about these issues and genuinely wants opportunities to be active in helping to solve environmental problems. So far, they have jumped at the opportunity to ‘go green.’”

As the AAR moves into the sustainability forefront, great thanks are extended to the pioneers of this movement in religious studies and theology, and to the Religion and Ecology Group. Their efforts have given the AAR the foundation upon which to move these issues into the mainstream of educating all undergraduates and theological students about the importance of sustainability for a viable future. If you have additional ideas about how the AAR can encourage sustainability, please contact Kyle Cole at [kcole@aarweb.org](mailto:kcole@aarweb.org). 

TUCKER, from p.15

American Museum of Natural History, featuring religious representatives in discussion with scientists, economists, educators, and policy makers.

Meanwhile the American Academy of Religion has a vibrant section focusing on scholarship and teaching in religion and ecology. A scholarly journal, *Worldviews: Environment, Culture, Religion*, is celebrating its tenth year of publication. A two-volume encyclopedia of religion and nature has been published by Continuum. Clearly this field of study will continue to expand as the environmental crisis grows in complexity and requires increasingly creative interdisciplinary responses.

As scholars and theologians explore culturally diverse environmental ethics, religions are starting to find their voices regarding the environment. The monotheistic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are formulating original eco-theologies and eco-justice practices regarding stewardship and care for creation. Hinduism and Jainism in South Asia, and Buddhism in both Asia and the West, have undertaken projects of ecological restoration. Indigenous peoples bring to the discussion alternative ways of knowing and engaging the natural world. All of those religious tra-

ditions are moving forward to find the language, symbols, rituals, and ethics for encouraging protection of bioregions and species. Religions are beginning to generate the energy needed for restoring the earth in such practices as tree planting, coral-reef preservation, and river cleanup. In addition, religions are bridging the gap between those concerned with social and economic justice and those working for a sustainable environment.

In many settings around the world, religious leaders and local communities draw on traditional religious ways of respecting place, land, and life as well as current understanding of environmental science. For example, in Malaysia, as health officials plan protocols for malaria reduction, they take into account the concerns of indigenous Temiar elders regarding the use of pesticides and the well-being of birds that inspire their traditional healers. Tree-planting ceremonies in Zimbabwe bring together congregations of Dutch Reformed African Zionist Churches and indigenous Shona villagers. In northern Thailand, efforts to block the construction of a tourist gondola on Doi Suthep, a mountain, coalesce around the local Buddhist monastery's appreciation of the peak as similar to a sacred stupa that holds the relics of a Buddha.

In the United States, the greening of churches and synagogues leads religious communities to search out sustainable building materials and renewable energy sources through InterFaith Power and Light, a nonprofit organization that works with religious organizations on environmental issues. A group of Christian leaders in the Evangelical Climate Initiative is focusing on climate change as a moral issue that will adversely and disproportionately affect the poor around the world. “Green Yoga” is exploring ways in which yoga practitioners can bring their meditative focus to greater awareness of environmental concern. The “Green Nuns,” a group of Roman Catholic religious women in North America, sponsors a variety of environmental programs drawing on the ecological vision of Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme, who describe the story of the universe in both sacred and scientific terms. In Canada the Indigenous Environmental Network is speaking out about the negative effects of resource extraction and military-related pollution on First Nations Reserves. Internationally, the Greek Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has led several international symposia on religion, science, and the environment, focused on water issues.

Some of the most striking examples of the intersection of religion and ecology have taken place in Iran and Indonesia. In June 2001 and May 2005, under former President Mohammad Khatami, the government of Iran and the United Nations Environment Programme sponsored conferences in Tehran focused on Islamic principles and practices for environmental protection. The Iranian Constitution identifies Islamic values for appropriate ecological practices and threatens legal sanctions against those who do not follow them. In Indonesia projects of tree planting and restoration work draw on the Islamic principle of maintaining balance (*mizaa*n) in nature. Students in Islamic boarding schools are taught such principles and are encouraged to apply the Islamic doctrine of trusteeship regarding the environment.

As those examples illustrate, a many-faceted alliance of religion and ecology is emerging around the planet, with attitudes and behaviors being reexamined with attention toward the future of the whole community of life, not just humans. This is a new moment for the world's religions, and they have a vital role to play in the development of a more comprehensive environmental ethics. The urgency of this process cannot be underestimated. Indeed, the flourishing of the earth community may depend on it. 