**JAEI Enviro-corner**

**Happy Earth Day!**

Each year, Earth Day - April 22 - marks the anniversary of the birth of the modern environmental movement in 1970.

Around the world, no-one had the slightest conscience about slurping leaded gas through massive V8 sedans. The United States waged a bitter and bloody war with Vietnam. Industry belched out smoke and sludge with little fear of legal consequences or bad press. Air pollution was commonly accepted as the smell of prosperity. “Environment” was a word that appeared more often in spelling tests than on the evening news.

Although we remained oblivious to environmental concerns, the stage had been set for change by the publication of Rachel Carson’s bestseller *Silent Spring* in 1962.  The book represented a watershed moment, selling more than 500,000 copies in 24 countries, and beginning to raise public awareness and concern for living organisms, the environment and links between pollution and public health.

Earth Day 1970 gave voice to that emerging consciousness, channelling the energy of the anti-war protest movement and putting environmental concerns on the front page.

The idea for a national day to focus on the environment came to Earth Day founder Gaylord Nelson, then a U.S. Senator from Wisconsin, after witnessing the ravages of the 1969 massive oil spill in Santa Barbara, California. Inspired by the student anti-war movement, he realized that if he could infuse that energy with an emerging public consciousness about air and water pollution, it would force environmental protection onto the national political agenda. Senator Nelson announced the idea for a “national teach-in on the environment” to the national media.

On April 22,1970, 20 million Americans took to the streets, parks, and auditoriums to demonstrate for a healthy, sustainable environment in massive coast-to-coast rallies. Thousands of colleges and universities organized protests against the deterioration of the environment. Groups that had been fighting against oil spills, polluting factories and power plants, raw sewage, toxic dumps, pesticides, freeways, the loss of wilderness, and the extinction of wildlife suddenly realized they shared common values.

Earth Day 1970 achieved a rare political alignment, enlisting support from all political backgrounds, rich and poor, city slickers and farmers, tycoons and labour leaders. By the end of that year, the first Earth Day had led to the establishment of the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the passage of the Clean Air, Clean Water, and Endangered Species Acts. “It was a gamble,” Gaylord recalled, “but it worked.”

Earth Day was centred in the United States, but as 1990 approached, a group of environmental leaders asked Denis Hayes to organize another big campaign. This time, Earth Day went global, mobilizing 200 million people in 141 countries and lifting environmental issues onto the world stage. Earth Day 1990 gave a huge boost to recycling efforts worldwide and helped pave the way for the 1992 United Nations Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

Since then, 184 countries have joined the cause, reaching out to more than a billion people every year, and a day of action that changes human behaviour and provokes policy changes. The fight for a clean environment continues with increasing urgency, as the ravages of climate change become more manifest every day.

Earth Day for God’s Creation

We celebrate “Earth Day” and encourage Christians of all denominations and traditions to do so. Why? Because we believe that God created the earth, entrusting its care to man. We are called to “witness” to our faith as believers.

Participation in this event is an opportunity to express love for God and care for what He has created. We call this “creation care.” Care for the entire creation - the environment and “all creatures great and small” - is a biblical obligation (Gen. 2:15). We should walk in God’s ways (Deut. 10:12) and try to inspire people by offering broader vistas of thought and service.

Can we hear the voice of the biblical prophet Ezekiel: “Is it not enough for you to drink the water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet?” Here’s a modern-day question: Is it enough for you to enjoy a pleasant climate? Must you destroy it? Is it not enough for you to enjoy the myriad of creatures? Must you extinguish them? Major segments of the earth are dying and we are responsible. Earth’s resources are not infinite.

A new moral awakening is sweeping our land. It’s a re-awakening to the heart of the Gospel ethic: to steward the natural world in order to preserve for ourselves and future generations a beautiful, rich, and healthy environment. It is “revision-ing” our lives. Taking part in “Earth Day” is a response to this new calling.

**Take Action!**

Here are some quick ideas for celebrating Earth Day:

* Plant a tree
* Go for a bike ride or a long walk (leave the car behind)
* Hold a nature "scavenger hunt" (send the kids out into the garden or park in teams to collect - or spot - various items on a list you provide)
* Print out some of our posters and place in strategic positions around the house. Talk about saving water when brushing teeth and saving energy by turning off the lights when you leave a room
* Gather a group of people together and combine a picnic or other excursion with a litter clean-up
* Set up a recycling centre
* Look through your shelves and find some books to give away to your local charity shop or library

However, we need to make every day Earth Day – so these action ideas are just a peek at what can be done throughout the year! – we owe it to all of God’s Creation!

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| **Earth Day Prayer**  *source unknown*  **O GOD,**  we thank you for this earth, our home; for the wide sky and the blessed sun, for the ocean and streams, for the towering hills and the whispering wind, for the trees and green grass.  **WE THANK YOU** for our senses by which we hear the songs of birds, and see the splendour of fields of golden wheat, and taste autumn's fruit, and rejoice in the feel of snow, and smell the breath of spring flowers.  **GRANT US** a heart opened wide to all this beauty; and save us from being so blind that we pass unseeing when even the common thornbush is aflame with your glory.  **Amen** |

