Double the Green: Sustainable Garden Audits

by Katherine Forster

Katherine Forster is the local representative for Greening Sacred Spaces, a program of Faith & the Common Good.

In the spring and summer of 2017, Faith & The Common Good (FCG) offered a new Outdoor Greening service to spiritual communities around Ottawa.

The Outdoor Greening Audit program offered a free 60 minute visit that included a walk-around and discussion about current gardening issues and sustainable and ecological opportunities for the green space associated with participating communities.

Funding to test out this newest Outdoor Greening offering was generously provided by the Ottawa Community Foundation and the City of Ottawa. The program was advertised in the bi-monthly Ottawa Chapter newsletter and was so popular that all available spots for were quickly filled!

Property owners considering changes to their outdoor space and congruent volunteers looking for guidance on plant choices were among those who signed up. There was great interest in the opportunity to extend the “Care for Creation” practices outdoors, where they would be a great visible example to the wider community.

Other participants were keen to have a visit to review their current outdoor maintenance practices, and see if there were ways to incorporate more sustainable and ecological options.

Visits started in May, as soon as the weather was nice and gardeners were keen to get their hands dirty. They included two downtown community garden sites that wanted to support the food gardens with native pollinator garden beds, and two communities that wanted to learn about native ground covers and shrubs that would provide a low maintenance landscape, including options for salt-tolerant plants near the parking lot.

Another popular topic for five of the faith communities was drought-tolerant native plants.

Specific concerns included use of these hardy species in ornamental container displays, and in an east-facing urban space that only received morning sunlight. A pollinator garden that needed some help was shaded by a large tree that received dappled light until later afternoon. Even gardens located in suburban areas were keen to learn how to save on water.

Some tough questions included whether vines could damage stone walls, and how to eliminate a much too healthy food grown in the gardens. Some gardens scheduled a few volunteers to participate in the walk around, while others invited a larger group, which allowed for more shared knowledge and discussion.

There was even some plant identification at one location where volunteers were happy to allow certain friendly “weeds” to grow. These species can be sought out by native insects including butterflies, skippers and many smaller creatures that aren’t as visible, but which are just as important in ecological food chains and pollination.

Each garden received a written report after the visit with a summary of the audit findings. This included photos to highlight most-discussed areas, tips on the specific concerns or questions addressed by the audit, and the main topics communities had identified as those they wanted to learn more about.

It was incredibly inspiring to see the interest and the hands on work that faith & spiritual community volunteers have achieved already at various places of worship, and to help those who want to consider new approaches to landscaping that support Care for Creation.

Learn more about Ottawa’s Outdoor Greening Program and access resources and Case Studies at the Faith & Common Good Website: http://greeningsacredspaces.net/regional-chap-
Benefits of a Community Garden Done by Youth: École élémentaire catholique Saint-Albert

by Christelle Grondin

Christelle Grondin is the Francophone Coordinator with the Ottawa Chapter of Faith & the Common Good.

École élémentaire catholique Saint-Albert is one of three youth gardens in Ottawa participating in Faith & The Common Good’s “Growing Community” Garden program.

This initiative, funded by Ontario 150 Youth Partnership Program, provides youth with opportunities to actively participate in their communities in ways that reflect their environmental stewardship, entrepreneurship, healthy living, and civic engagement.

Situated just outside of Ottawa, the school’s involvement was spearheaded by six enterprising student volunteers.

Through the new community garden, students are learning about growing their own food, from researching what plants to grow and the best way to grow them, planting the seeds and watering/weeding them during the summer, to harvesting and making meals with their vegetables in Autumn.

The community of Saint Albert, including the families of the students, is encouraged to promote the garden.

Ten sustainable garden projects were created: ten case studies of specific garden projects, including how to make a plan for garden, or designing a recycled watering system with perforated plastic water bottles in the soil, so that the soil regulates its own water needs.

Students also created a plan of where to sow the seeds, and other students joined in to help sow. Crops planted included beans, hot peppers, carrots, tomatoes, cucumbers, radishes, spinach, beets, lettuce, zucchini, and peas.

With the creation of this garden, the students learned new skills and knowledge, including how to make a plan using a unit of measurement they previously did not know. They also planned the purchases and ordered all the materials required for their garden.

The students did their own research, and were careful to consider the spacing in between each vegetable to allow them to grow while also allowing for more efficient watering.

The students are very proud of their garden, and have organized themselves well to take care of it. A schedule with the names of students and dates of when the garden was last watered helps them keep on track.

They also created a watering system with perforated plastic water bottles in the soil, so that the soil regulates its own water needs.

The students were happy to plant and eat vegetables that they had grown themselves, and reported that the vegetables from their garden were fresher and tastier than those from the supermarket. Their hope for the harvest in autumn was that there be enough vegetables for everyone to try everything!

Finally, the students planned to save the seeds in order to re-use them for next year, ensuring the future of the garden!

Caring for Creation in Ottawa: FCG Ottawa Chapter Update

by Katherine Forster

Katherine Forster is the Ottawa representative for Faith & the Common Good.

Faith & the Common Good (FCG) is a local organization in Ottawa that supports diverse faith and spiritual communities of Ottawa to Care for Creation goals, whether it is considering alternative transportation options to get to worship, starting a new pollinator garden, or designing a recycling program for their building.

In 2017, there was a focus on a new Outdoor Greening Program. New garden resources specifically for faith communities were created: ten case studies of local inspiring faith community gardens, and ten fact sheets on sustainable and ecological garden projects.

Three local youth gardens were supported with Ontario 150 grants, located at L’École élémentaire catholique Saint-Albert, St John’s of March Anglican Church, and Maison Tucker House in Rockland.

Local spiritual communities also received garden sustainability audits to provide them with advice on how to improve their current gardens, or ideas on new gardens or changes to their landscape.

It was inspiring to see the interest at various places of worship, and a willingness to consider new landscaping approaches that support Care for Creation.

The Ottawa Community Foundation and the City of Ottawa have generously provided funding for the Ottawa Chapter of FCG to create these new outdoor greening resources.

The local case studies focus on gardens that support sustainability goals, including creating new native habitat for pollinators and growing local food in community gardens.

Some of the unique projects include Kitchissippi United Church’s Depave Project where over 100 square meters of pavement was removed and replaced by gardens; the Glebe-St. James United Church’s Medicine Wheel garden with a beautiful dreamcatcher art installation, and two raised garden beds on urban sidewalks at St Luke’s Anglican and Centretown United.

Inspiring the creation of other local gardens is one aim of the new Outdoor Greening fact sheets. They include information on sustainable lawns and native groundcovers, drought-tolerant landscaping, native trees and shrubs, wildlife-friendly gardens, and urban meadows.

These resources are now available on the Ottawa FCG Chapter’s website at: http://greeningsacredspaces.net/regional-chapters/ottawa-chapter.

Ten sustainable garden audits were performed at ten local faith communities, with discussions including the best solutions and upkeep for ivy on stone walls, best native plants to help with soil retention and other purposes, transplanting saplings, no-mow lawns, identifying “friendly” weeds that native pollinators appreciate, softscaping alternatives for replacing a fence, and salt-tolerant groundcovers. It was inspiring to see the interest at various places of worship, and a willingness to consider new landscaping approaches that support Care for Creation.

Another key focus for FCG has been in increasing our Francophone outreach, with the help of our newest staff member, Francophone Coordinator Christelle Grondin.

She is working on the translation of some of our more popular resources including the Greening Sacred Spaces Certification program and our Outdoor Greening program, as well as networking and outreach to local Francophone communities. A new French version of our website with Christelle’s contact information and some of these resources is available at: http://greeningsacredspaces.net/le-virage-vert-des-lieux-sacres-branche-dottawa.

Are you aware of a local need that Faith & the Common Good can help out with, in French or English? Please let our local chapter animator know! We’re always excited to start new collaborations and build new partnerships.

Students at École élémentaire catholique Saint-Albert proudly show off their completed raised beds. Photo courtesy of École élémentaire catholique Saint-Albert.
Climate Ready: Helping one Another

by Beatrice Ekoko

Beatrice Ekoko is the Communications Coordinator for Faith & the Common Good, and is based in Hamilton, Ontario.

Our communities are increasingly facing climate change impacts, from extreme heat to wildfires to severe flooding. That’s why it is so critical that we work together as neighbours helping neighbours, and that we begin to build networks of support well before disaster strikes.

Governments can’t do it all. Community resilience is a process – it takes time and trust to build, the sooner we start, the better.

We can begin by strengthening our ties to one another, and breaking the isolation many residents experience in day to day life, by creating reasons for people to get together in the first place.

There are any number of ways to do this, including hosting regular street parties, barbecues, events, etc. Service providers can also be facilitators and catalysts to help people help each other, but we all have individual skills to offer.

Working together

At Faith & the Common Good (FCG), we continue to encourage faith groups in examining their own preparedness for climate-induced extreme weather events, as well as to reflect on how they can best support climate-vulnerable neighbours in their social and ecological justice work.

To this end, we collaborate with partners for broader impact. FCG is a founding member of CLARION (Community Lead Action for Resilience in Our Neighbourhoods). CLARION is a cross-sectoral,volunteering group promoting emergency preparedness and climate adaptation hubs at the neighbourhood level across Canada (www.clarionhub.ca).

A Philosophical Framework: The Climate Adaptation Pledge

I pledge to create a durable future for my community and the environment, at home and at work, by thinking about the future in all I do.

I commit to:

• Use best available science and knowledge: Considering present, past, and future conditions in my actions.
• Decide with, not for: Invite, recruit and promote the broadest diversity of partners and stakeholders in conversations and decisions in my community.
• Build climate equity: Work to ensure the equitable sharing of the benefits of resilience-building and the equitable bearing of the costs of climate change.
• Safeguard integrity: Ensure transparency, accountability & follow-through.
• Minimize harm: Evaluate how actions might affect other people, living things, places, goals and endeavor to minimize adverse impacts while maximizing common benefits.
• Be honest about the challenges: Give voice to the fact that resilience requires adaptation to a world of change and mitigation to maintain it.
• Foster an inspired community: Use the knowledge that a long-term plan and vision that engages and inspires the community comes from tapping into hope and creativity.
• Adapt holistically: Your community is affected by & affects the world around you.

From the 2017 National Adaptation Forum. How might faith communities tailor this pledge to guide their own climate action work?

We’re working with the City of Brampton’s recently approved Project Lighthouse, from the city’s Emergency Management Office. Project Lighthouse aims to support and train diverse places of worship across the city to act as points of rendezvous for vulnerable people needing guidance and support during extreme weather emergencies. It is an amazing first step to enhance neighbourhood-level climate resilience by the City of Brampton. We hope this work can be replicated across the region and the country.

In May, CLARION was well represented by a team from Toronto at the National Adaptation Forum in Minnesota. They were there to bring the very best of resilience practice to Toronto, with a particular focus on the health and well-being of Toronto’s vulnerable populations. We know with certainty that the disadvantaged among us will suffer disproportionately from climate related impacts of extreme weather, and from illness caused by polluted air and water, or vector born diseases such as Lyme or West Nile. This is true globally, but also locally: such as Lyme or West Nile. This is true globally, but also locally:

We can’t wait to see what we can all work on in order to help each other, and build vibrant, connected communities in the process.

Although designed for Toronto area faith groups, it can be easily adapted to the needs of Ottawa communities.

Preparedness is something we can all work on in order to help each other, and build vibrant, connected communities in the process.

The Cycling Cleric Rides Again

by PERC staff

PERC is run almost entirely by volunteers like you! Get in touch to join our reporting and editorial team.

If you picture anything at all when you read the words “Cycling Cleric”, you might picture a Catholic priest awkwardly toiling up a bumpy cobblestone hill in the Irish countryside on a vintage fixed speed bike, priestly vestments and stray hairs flapping in the wind. (Or perhaps that’s just an artefact of my having read a lot of pre-war British novels, and you picture something different.)

This is a more modern, Canadian version of that: a Muslim Imam riding a rather nice bike for long distances to raise money and awareness about specific causes.

Imam Mohammad Jebara is the resident scholar at the Cordova Spiritual Education Centre (often called simply the Cordova Centre), and he is also (an apparently very fit) cycling cleric.

The Cordova Centre is an Ottawa-based non-profit organisation that aims to enrich the multicultural Canadian experience by promoting understanding, cooperation and friendship between different spiritual groups and communities.

The Cycling Cleric started as a way to raise funds for specific causes relevant to the communities involved, often medical or humanitarian in nature. Imam Jebara is a great ambassador of a truly interfaith, intercultural and humanitarian in nature. Imam Jebara is a great ambassador of a truly interfaith, intercultural and humanitarian in nature.

Previous years’ rides have benefitted medical research, and promoted organ donation and heart health practices.

To date, all of the Cycling Cleric’s rides have started in Ottawa, and while the distances covered (Quebec City, Toronto, etc) were certainly not short, they pale in comparison to the ride planned for August 2018.

This cross-country tour will span all ten provinces and three territories, include a diverse group of clerics, and will commemorate Canada’s 150 year anniversary.

For more information about Cordova, the Cycling Cleric, and the upcoming ride, visit www.cordovacentre.org, or keep an eye on the PERC website and social media – this is definitely a topic we’ll want to follow up on!
Catholic Parishes Moving Forward in Energy Conservation

by John Dorner

John Dorner is frequent PEN contributor and a fixture of the sustainability scene in the local Catholic community - read all about him in this edition’s Hello Volunteer column!

In recent years, the Environmental Stewardship Program of the Archdiocese of Ottawa has encouraged Catholic parishes to reduce their energy consumption. Many parishes have participated in the saveONenergy Small Business Lighting Program with grants applied towards lighting retrofits. Several parishes have had energy audits or Green Audits provided by Faith and the Common Good resulting in energy conservation measures in a variety of areas, including heating and lighting.

Yet much more can be done to ensure that we are finding ways to conserve energy – a moral imperative as we face the reality of the climate change crisis and the need for urgent action.

To continue supporting energy conservation measures, the Environmental Stewardship Program has conducted an analysis of the electricity and heating costs of each parish with the assistance of Philip Yung, a data analyst.

The aim of this study was to determine the impact of energy costs on the financial condition of parishes, and to identify those with relatively high energy costs. Parishes are then listed in priority order for follow-up, with the goal of finding ways to address environmental and economic matters.

An initial energy cost study based on 2015 financial data was communicated to parishes in March 2017, resulting in a number of inquiries from parishes about their energy consumption compared to other parishes. As a follow-up, each parish received a spreadsheet listing that year’s electricity and heating costs for each parish within the archdiocese, represented by a number, not by name, to ensure financial confidentiality.

The initial energy cost study also resulted in a few parishes enquiring about reducing electricity consumption through lighting retrofits and the current saveONenergy financial incentive program offered by Hydro Ottawa and other hydro utilities.

This program offers a free walk-through assessment to determine recommended retrofits and incentive grants. In addition, to assist parishes, a lighting analysis self-assessment worksheet was created by Philip Yung and shared with parishes that are interested in estimating the potential savings and payback period of a lighting retrofit project.

Energy conservation is important to many Catholic parishes and in-line with the teachings of the Pope, but clearly efficiency is not limited to the Catholic community. What is important is that all faith communities have a clear idea as to what will reduce their energy consumption and costs, resulting in long term financial sustainability while helping mitigate climate change.

Other groups looking into this should always remember to check first what incentive grants are available through local hydro utilities and Enbridge before initiating a project, as one cannot apply for a grant if a project has already been started.

For further information about this project and resources available, please contact John Dorner by email (jdorner@archottawa.ca); or by telephone 613-738-5025, ext. 251).

A French-language presentation at St. Genevieve parish. Faith & the Common Good is pleased to be able to expand its French resources through the new Francophone coordinator position. Photo: Katherine Forster

A saveONenergy walk-through lighting assessment underway at a local Catholic parish. This free assessment can make a huge difference to energy consumption by faith communities. Photo: John Dorner

Clear signage helps promote proper recycling. A Greening Sacred Spaces Green Audit includes advice on waste reduction. Photo: Katherine Forster

This PEN INSIDER edition was produced in partnership with the Greening Sacred Spaces Program of Faith & the Common Good. Special thanks to the Ottawa Community Foundation.
Heritage, Community, Sustainability: Repurposing All-Saints Sandy Hill

Kathryn Guindon

Kathryn Guindon is a former representative of the Grenville Sacred Spaces program in Eastern Ontario. She loves old buildings.

Like many historic religious buildings, All Saints Anglican Church (now All Saints event space) in the Sandy Hill neighborhood of Ottawa had long been a multi-purpose space and a gathering spot for the community. A heritage structure, the original church building was built in 1899. It was the site of important debates about conscientious objectors in WWI, and women’s right to vote, and still has many historical artifacts including a stained glass window dedicated to Sir Robert Borden, Canada’s 8th Prime Minister.

Over the decades the nature of the congregation and the role of the space shifted. For many years, the basement was home to the Betty Hyde Nursery School, which brought in extra revenue, but eventually a major decision had to be made regarding what to do with the building, which was still beautiful, but needed repairs and upgrades.

Enter Leanne Moussa, a board member at Betty Hyde who initially got involved to help the nursery school find a new home. Passionate about community and coming from a real estate savvy family, Leanne managed to find a nearby property with greenspace (a rare commodity downtown) for sale.

Employing an innovative business plan, Betty Hyde was able to purchase and refit the property into a community-based vision for the space as one of the hardest challenges, but also one of the most important priorities for her. Not unlike anyone who has ever attempted renovations on an older building, the All Saints team was in for a few surprises.

Some of these were challenges - unexpected foundation repairs, discovering a lack of any insulation in certain areas - but there were some happy surprises as well. Removing the drywall in a basement room revealed stunning original stone and brick work in what is now one of the most popular rental areas.

Being able to re-use and re-purpose original components of the building has been an important theme during the All Saints transition. Sustainability was a recurring priority in community consultations, and was important to the Anglican congregation as well.

The team worked with an artist named Claire Mac Donald to chronicle much of the process. Installations made from photographs, old hymn books and recycled containers decorate the halls and the new café, some of them interactive, all of them telling a story.

Recycling is a common and ongoing theme in the building. A rebuild of one of the halls was planned, using as many materials from the original structure as possible while also updating the space and making it more energy efficient.

Basic upgrades to the building envelope and climate control have made the space much more comfortable with less power. Recognizing that overhauling such a large, old space would be an enormous job, the team took a very holistic and ongoing approach with usability, comfort, and sustainability of the space.

All Saints isn’t a church anymore – except when it is. Faith communities still sometimes rent out various parts of the building (now a multi-use event space), and Borden Hall (as the sanctuary is now called) is a popular wedding venue.

The bell tower is still equipped with original bells made in 1906, and the bell ringer from the previous Anglican congregation will still play them for weddings, asking only for a $100 charitable donation in exchange.

The building is also a popular location for dance groups, yoga classes, and all sorts of receptions and awards ceremonies. The Guild Room Café is open seven days a week and is a great place to stop for a snack, fair-trade coffee, or locally brewed beer when it’s not rented out.

Churches have always been community gathering places, and preserving this function along with the history of the building was Leanne’s biggest goal and one of the things she’s most proud of.

Music and the arts continue to play an important role. From Leanne’s description of Borden Hall filling with music during any one of the many excellent concerts that have taken place there, it’s clear that that this old church building is still creating some spiritual moments in its new form.

For more information about All Saints event space, or to inquire about booking part of the space for a function, visit http://allsaintsottawa.ca/ or call (613) 230 – 3050.

View more pictures of this amazing space online through our social media pages.

Photographs and upcycled plastic packaging make art that documents the All Saints history. Artist: Claire MacDonald.

Leanne Moussa surveys the historic bell tower that still plays a role in many events at All Saints. Photos: K Norman

Stained glass windows full of historical - and aesthetic - value were preserved during the All Saints transition.

YOUR AD HERE

Advertise in the PEN - reasonable rates, targeted audience. Contact info@perc.ca for details.

Your business cares about sustainability.
Here’s a way to show it.

Peace and Environment News - PEN INSIDER

October - December 2017
Talking It Out: Connecting to People We Disagree With

by Alexandra Keenan

Alexandra Keenan is an environmental lawyer, volunteer with the Ontario Environment Network, and all round rule breaker. This is her first personal article in the PEN.

In the weekend of August 12th, 2017, the world watched in horror as white supremacists and neo-nazis gathered in Charlottesville, Virginia for a so-called “unite the right” rally. Many of us saw video footage of a car barreling into a crowd of counter-protesters. We heard about Heather Heyer, the 32-year-old woman who died in that attack. Similar groups have carried out (or attempted to carry out) rallies in Canadian cities.

The events in Charlo-ottesville sparked an outpouring of grief and condemnation. They also prompted intense debates about free speech and about the historical value of monuments to oppressors.

We need to reach out to those who hold views far different from our own. We need to hear the messages that make us feel unsafe and challenged. It’s not easy to do. We feel like we must immediately change offensive ideas, behaviours and power structures that could be em- braced by anyone - including you or me.

We’re all a product of unconscious biases we’ve been exposed to throughout our lives and the only way to overcome them is to acknowledge them and work on it.

Confirmation bias and implicit bias cause people to resisst change. It is hard work to be conscious of these forces.

It can be uncomfortable to question our own beliefs. Human beings have become very good at using implicit bias and confirmation bias to protect ourselves from that discomfort. Technology can exacer- bate this tendency. Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter are designed to show us what we hear the messages that make us feel unsafe and challenged. It’s not easy to do. We feel like we must immediately change offensive ideas, behaviours and power structures that could be em- braced by anyone - including you or me.

One way to do this is to consciously seek out and accept information that challenges our own perspectives and assumptions. If we want such chang- es to happen, we need to start commun- ica.tion with each other. We need to reach out to people who look, think and live differently. How can we overcome prejudice unless we understand it?

It’s not easy to do. Na- ture and technology both put up barriers to open-mindedness. Psychologists have identified two forces that make “Moral outrage will not wipe prejudice from people’s minds....it will not erase the social and political structures that reinforce racial and cultural inequality.”

It more difficult for a person to change their mind (see David Braucher’s article, “Fake News: Why We Fail For It” in Psycholo- gy today).

The first is confirmation bias. When we believe something to be true, we tend to seek out and accept information that confirms our belief. At the same time, we ignore or reject information that disconfirms our belief. (Editor’s Note: see the Skeptical Hippie column in this edition for more on confirmation bias)

The second factor is called implicit bias. Simply put, we tend to place more trust in people who are similar to our- selves.

It can be uncomfortable to question our own beliefs. Human beings have become very good at using implicit bias and confirmation bias to protect ourselves from that discomfort. Technology can exacer- bate this tendency. Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter are designed to show us what we like and less of what we don’t (see “Twitter’s New Order” by Will Drummen in Slate magazine).

As a result, we end up in virtual echo chambers where we hear the messages that make us most comfortable. We end up with a warped picture of what is happening in the rest of the world.

We become convinced that our own perspective is natural and unassailable. We stereotype and mistrust anyone who holds an alternative view. However, the world outside is not as cut-clean as we believe.

Like many people, I grew up in a family with many di- verse political views. Among them, I often am a mask for fear, isolation and vulnerabi- lity.

It is also something that people can walk away from. Organizations like Life After Hate were formed to help people cut off ties with their Confederate flags. They prove that minds and lives can be changed. Sometimes change starts with a cup of coffee and a willingness to look someone in the eye.

The connection be- tween knowledge and racism is complex. However, social scientists generally agree that the more a person knows about a group, the fewer stereotypes and prejudices they tend to hold against that group (Jonathan Masuzits, “Relationship Between Knowledge, Stereotyping and Intercultural Commu- nication” at www.passonline.org).

An obvious step to- wards a solution is for all of us to do more socializing outside of our normal circles. By doing so, we can begin to break down our neighbours’ prejudices - and those that we hold against others, however much we like to think we don’t have any.

It’s not easy to do. Our egos and moral judgments get in the way. For example, when someone calls us out for insensi- tive or prejudiced behaviour, we often go on the defensive and don’t want to listen.

On the other side of the coin, listening quietly while a person expresses an opposing view can feel like a moral failure.

We feel like we must immediately change offensive ideas, lest we be seen as condoning them. It helps us to think that in very many people see themselves “racists”. Using that label is a sure-fire way to shut down productive conversation. Instead, we can think of “rac- ist” as an adjective. It describes ideas, behaviours and power structures that could be em- braced by anyone - including you or me.

We’re all a product of unconscious biases we’ve been exposed to throughout our lives and the only way to overcome them is to acknowledge them and work on it.

Confirmation bias and implicit bias cause people to resisst change. It is hard work to be conscious of these forces in our own thinking, rather than people who are unaware of their own tendencies.

We’re trained to see controversy as con- tests, with winners and losers. More often than not, though, the conversation will just end with two frustrated individuals, who may have made a few dents in the wall between them.

If we want to do this work, we need to start commun- ica.tion with each other. We need to reach out to people who look, think and live differently. How can we overcome prejudice unless we understand it?

It’s not easy to do. Na- ture and technology both put up barriers to open-mindedness. Psychologists have identified two forces that make “Moral outrage will not wipe prejudice from people’s minds....it will not erase the social and political structures that reinforce racial and cultural inequality.”

It more difficult for a person to change their mind (see David Braucher’s article, “Fake News: Why We Fail For It” in Psycholo- gy today).

The first is confirmation bias. When we believe something to be true, we tend to seek out and accept information that confirms our belief. At the same time, we ignore or reject information that disconfirms our belief. (Editor’s Note: see the Skeptical Hippie column in this edition for more on confirmation bias)

The second factor is called implicit bias. Simply put, we tend to place more trust in people who are similar to our- selves.

It can be uncomfortable to question our own beliefs. Human beings have become very good at using implicit bias and confirmation bias to protect ourselves from that discomfort. Technology can exacer- bate this tendency. Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter are designed to show us what we like and less of what we don’t (see “Twitter’s New Order” by Will Drummen in Slate magazine).

As a result, we end up in virtual echo chambers where we hear the messages that make us most comfortable. We end up with a warped picture of what is happening in the rest of the world.

We become convinced that our own perspective is natural and unassailable. We stereotype and mistrust anyone who holds an alternative view. However, the world outside is not as cut-clean as we believe.

Like many people, I grew up in a family with many di-verse political views. Among them, I often am a mask for fear, isolation and vulnerabi- lity.

It is also something that people can walk away from. Organizations like Life After Hate were formed to help people cut off ties with their Confederate flags. They prove that minds and lives can be changed. Sometimes change starts with a cup of coffee and a willingness to look someone in the eye.

The connection be- tween knowledge and racism is complex. However, social scientists generally agree that the more a person knows about a group, the fewer stereotypes and prejudices they tend to hold against that group (Jonathan Masuzits, “Relationship Between Knowledge, Stereotyping and Intercultural Commu- nication” at www.passonline.org).

An obvious step to- wards a solution is for all of us to do more socializing outside of our normal circles. By doing so, we can begin to break down our neighbours’ prejudices - and those that we hold against others, however much we like to think we don’t have any.

We’re all a product of unconscious biases we’ve been exposed to throughout our lives and the only way to overcome them is to acknowledge them and work on it.

Confirmation bias and implicit bias cause people to resisst change. It is hard work to be conscious of these forces in our own thinking, rather than people who are unaware of their own tendencies.

We’re trained to see controversy as con- tests, with winners and losers. More often than not, though, the conversation will just end with two frustrated individuals, who may have made a few dents in the wall between them.

If we want to do this work, we need to start commun- ica.tion with each other. We need to reach out to people who look, think and live differently. How can we overcome prejudice unless we understand it?

It’s not easy to do. Na- ture and technology both put up barriers to open-mindedness. Psychologists have identified two forces that make “Moral outrage will not wipe prejudice from people’s minds....it will not erase the social and political structures that reinforce racial and cultural inequality.”

It more difficult for a person to change their mind (see David Braucher’s article, “Fake News: Why We Fail For It” in Psycholo- gy today).

The first is confirmation bias. When we believe something to be true, we tend to seek out and accept information that confirms our belief. At the same time, we ignore or reject information that disconfirms our belief. (Editor’s Note: see the Skeptical Hippie column in this edition for more on confirmation bias)

The second factor is called implicit bias. Simply put, we tend to place more trust in people who are similar to our- selves.

It can be uncomfortable to question our own beliefs. Human beings have become very good at using implicit bias and confirmation bias to protect ourselves from that discomfort. Technology can exacer- bate this tendency. Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter are designed to show us what we like and less of what we don’t (see “Twitter’s New Order” by Will Drummen in Slate magazine).

As a result, we end up in virtual echo chambers where we hear the messages that make us most comfortable. We end up with a warped picture of what is happening in the rest of the world.

We become convinced that our own perspective is natural and unassailable. We stereotype and mistrust anyone who holds an alternative view. However, the world outside is not as cut-clean as we believe.

Like many people, I grew up in a family with many di-verse political views. Among them, I often am a mask for fear, isolation and vulnerabi- lity.

It is also something that people can walk away from. Organizations like Life After Hate were formed to help people cut off ties with their Confederate flags. They prove that minds and lives can be changed. Sometimes change starts with a cup of coffee and a willingness to look someone in the eye.

The connection be- tween knowledge and racism is complex. However, social scientists generally agree that the more a person knows about a group, the fewer stereotypes and prejudices they tend to hold against that group (Jonathan Masuzits, “Relationship Between Knowledge, Stereotyping and Intercultural Commu- nication” at www.passonline.org).

An obvious step to- wards a solution is for all of us to do more socializing outside of our normal circles. By doing so, we can begin to break down our neighbours’ prejudices - and those that we hold against others, however much we like to think we don’t have any.
The Ecology & Theology of Beauty

by PERC Staff

This article was a collaboration between PERC volunteers and Faith & the Common Good.

You've probably heard the phrase “truth is beauty, beauty truth.” Perhaps you've philosophized about it. Perhaps you even have strong opinions about whether and how far that statement holds up.

That might even be an interesting topic for a PEN article if you feel so inclined (nudge nudge wink wink). It's certainly an interesting statement to ponder, and any conversation about the nature of truth and beauty is probably going to be interesting.

There are different kinds of beauty: the aesthetic beauty of a sunset or a flower, the intellectual beauty of the underlying science and mathematical principles that make those things what they are, the emotional beauty of experiencing oneness with nature or the kindness of another person. And somewhere, the emotional beauty of the kindness of nature or the emotional beauty of the underlying science draw from “from wisdom of philosophers, theologians, poets and trees” to explore different aspects of beauty and how it can be the base for a rich spiritual life that is in harmony with nature. Saturday brought a whole day of workshops, and on Sunday Kitchissippi United Church welcomed Rev Adams Farmer in a weekend of joint events held by Kitchissippi United Church in Ottawa in partnership with the Madawaska Institute for Religion and Culture in April of 2017, entitled “The Salvific Power of Beauty for Spirituality, Ecology and Justice.” Beginning on the evening of Friday, April 21st with a lecture by Rev Adams Farmer (an ordained minister of the Christian Church – Disciples of God, as well as author of books such as Embracing a Beautiful God (Chalice Press, 2003)), the weekend invited participants draw from “from wisdom of philosophers, theologians, poets and trees” to explore “Drawing from wisdom of philosophers, theologians, poets and trees . . . explore the variegated landscape of beauty and discover a creative center for spiritual life, worship, planetary wellbeing and social justice.”

2017 Faith Commuter Challenge
Statistics by Province:

British Columbia: 14 communities, 125 participants
Alberta: 3 faith communities, 14 participants
Manitoba: 1 faith community, 108 participants
Ontario: 19 faith communities, 326 participants
Nova Scotia: 4 faith communities, 32 participants

This initiative was supported by Auto Recyclers of Canada; with local teams in Halifax, NS; Vancouver, BC; Hamilton, ON and Sudbury, ON.

Peace & Environmental Organizations with Religious Roots

By Stefan Hammonds

development organization working to improve livelihoods by promoting agricultural biodiversity. The organization was founded in 1945 by Lotta Hitschmanova as the Unitarian Service Committee of Canada. USC Canada’s mission is to promote sustainable living through strong rural communities with family farms and healthy ecosystems. As of 2017, the organization is run by a staff of approximately 30, most of whom are based in Ottawa. USC Canada is a non-profit, non-denominational charitable organization that promotes vibrant family farms, strong rural roots, and healthy ecosystems around the world.

With engaged Canadians and partners in Africa, Asia and Latin America, USC Canada supports programs in food security, health, and every community service project, Scouts Canada makes one simple promise to Canadian youth, parents and society.

Scouting began in 1907 when Lt. Gen. Robert Baden-Powell took a group of youth to a camp on Brownsea Island in the United Kingdom. There is evidence that a few Scouting groups started up in Canada in 1907.

The Canadian General Council of the Boy Scout Association was incorporated by an act of the Canadian Parliament on June 12, 1914. In 2007 the name was officially changed by an act of Parliament to Scouts Canada. Today, Scouts Canada is a highly diverse organization and every community service project, Scouts Canada makes one simple promise to Canadian youth, parents and society.

Scouting began in 1907 when Lt. Gen. Robert Baden-Powell took a group of youth to a camp on Brownsea Island in the United Kingdom. There is evidence that a few Scouting groups started up in Canada in 1907.

The Canadian General Council of the Boy Scout Association was incorporated by an act of the Canadian Parliament on June 12, 1914. In 2007 the name was officially changed by an act of Parliament to Scouts Canada. Today, Scouts Canada is a highly diverse organization and every community service project, Scouts Canada makes one simple promise to Canadian youth, parents and society.

Web Watch

Peace & Environmental Organizations with Religious Roots

By Stefan Hammonds

development organization working to improve livelihoods by promoting agricultural biodiversity. The organization was founded in 1945 by Lotta Hitschmanova as the Unitarian Service Committee of Canada. USC Canada’s mission is to promote sustainable living through strong rural communities with family farms and healthy ecosystems. As of 2017, the organization is run by a staff of approximately 30, most of whom are based in Ottawa. USC Canada is a non-profit, non-denominational charitable organization that promotes vibrant family farms, strong rural roots, and healthy ecosystems around the world.

With engaged Canadians and partners in Africa, Asia and Latin America, USC Canada supports programs in food security, health, and every community service project, Scouts Canada makes one simple promise to Canadian youth, parents and society.

Scouting began in 1907 when Lt. Gen. Robert Baden-Powell took a group of youth to a camp on Brownsea Island in the United Kingdom. There is evidence that a few Scouting groups started up in Canada in 1907.

The Canadian General Council of the Boy Scout Association was incorporated by an act of the Canadian Parliament on June 12, 1914. In 2007 the name was officially changed by an act of Parliament to Scouts Canada. Today, Scouts Canada is a highly diverse organization and every community service project, Scouts Canada makes one simple promise to Canadian youth, parents and society.

Scouting began in 1907 when Lt. Gen. Robert Baden-Powell took a group of youth to a camp on Brownsea Island in the United Kingdom. There is evidence that a few Scouting groups started up in Canada in 1907.

The Canadian General Council of the Boy Scout Association was incorporated by an act of the Canadian Parliament on June 12, 1914. In 2007 the name was officially changed by an act of Parliament to Scouts Canada. Today, Scouts Canada is a highly diverse organization and every community service project, Scouts Canada makes one simple promise to Canadian youth, parents and society.

Web Watch

Peace & Environmental Organizations with Religious Roots

By Stefan Hammonds

development organization working to improve livelihoods by promoting agricultural biodiversity. The organization was founded in 1945 by Lotta Hitschmanova as the Unitarian Service Committee of Canada. USC Canada’s mission is to promote sustainable living through strong rural communities with family farms and healthy ecosystems. As of 2017, the organization is run by a staff of approximately 30, most of whom are based in Ottawa. USC Canada is a non-profit, non-denominational charitable organization that promotes vibrant family farms, strong rural roots, and healthy ecosystems around the world.

With engaged Canadians and partners in Africa, Asia and Latin America, USC Canada supports programs in food security, health, and every community service project, Scouts Canada makes one simple promise to Canadian youth, parents and society.

Scouting began in 1907 when Lt. Gen. Robert Baden-Powell took a group of youth to a camp on Brownsea Island in the United Kingdom. There is evidence that a few Scouting groups started up in Canada in 1907.

The Canadian General Council of the Boy Scout Association was incorporated by an act of the Canadian Parliament on June 12, 1914. In 2007 the name was officially changed by an act of Parliament to Scouts Canada. Today, Scouts Canada is a highly diverse organization and every community service project, Scouts Canada makes one simple promise to Canadian youth, parents and society.

Scouting began in 1907 when Lt. Gen. Robert Baden-Powell took a group of youth to a camp on Brownsea Island in the United Kingdom. There is evidence that a few Scouting groups started up in Canada in 1907.
The Wonders of the World: Sacred Spaces in Great Urban North American Cities

by Hugh Kruzel

Hugh Kruzel is a long-term PERC volunteer who considers his regular PEN contributions to be a highlight of the season.

A theme explored in previous issues of this magazine has arrived again; at first I had to check and make certain I was looking at the latest email and direction. Yes, it is this issue’s topic. Immediately I thought, “What new can I write on the subject?” and secondly – an instant leap – where did I recently have an “Oh, Wow!” experience? Think to where you had your last! I am in no way suggesting “Oh, Wow!” or epiphany is the essential ingredient in a sacred space. I truly don’t know if it is bolt of lightning for everyone, nor if it arrives “just like that” even the first time you experience a place or idea.

Are you open to it? Really, it is a personal thing (maybe deep-ly private). For some it is tranquility, for others beauty (try defining that) – and maybe it is historical rather than modern places (why I am not certain) that trigger it.

Is it a “religious” experience? I am uncertain of the criteria nor aware if it is hierarchical, but there is that definite “frisson” or tingle when you know you have found it.

Is it momentary? Does it linger? Can you return to it tomorrow, next year, a decade from now?

Of course it seems I am tying this experience unconsciously to a geographic location, but perhaps it is the night sky’s vastness, the sound of loons, the fragrance of fall wood smoke, the touch of another, the smell of spring earth released from winter’s grip, the taste of pecan pie, the texture of a child’s hair, or the even an eclipse. It transcends the dimensions of place, and time.

Though I am often out in the national and provincial parks, and do marvel at the natural world, it is the built environment that per-chance (more) reflects ourselves, our past, present, and anticipations of the future, that reaches many of us.

In fact, I am confident in it is the public art and public spaces of cities that are worthy of evaluation under the heading “Sacred Space” for they...

1) must have some reason for establishment, 2) has some reason for remaining 3) must fulfill (or have fulfilled) some mandate or need, 4) can get us to pause or stop, and does it spark dialogue (if more than one present) or reflection, and 5) will potentially get us to return (perhaps frequently)

Is it worthy of worship? Is it a sacred space? If it isn’t now, will it become one?

“Is it worthy of worship? Is it a sacred space? If it isn’t now, will it become one?”

Sir Anish Kapoor won an international competition to design “Cloud Gate” a significant and substantial work of public art in Chicago’s Millennium Park. At 100 tons and $23 million for construction it is its sinuous curvilinear continuous surface that recommends its evaluation as a sacred space.

Photos in this article by Hugh Kruzel

Dynamic sky conditions, buildings illuminated throughout the day and night, and reflection of those interacting with it, makes Cloud Gate non-static and ever changing. The fusion of organic surfaces and technology is a foil for the architecture of the city and the humans within its confines.

Sir Anish Kapoor was born in London and educated at the Royal Academy of Art School. His work has been exhibited in more than 60 countries on 6 continents. His “Cloud Gate”, a 60’x60’x26’ metallic sculpture in Chicago, is made of 168 massive steel plates weighing 25 tons each. The surface consists of 110,000 hexagonal panels. The steel reflects the sky and the people inside it.

Kapoor’s art, like his experience, is a process of reflection and expression. His art is a sensory experience that challenges the viewer to contemplate their own spiritual and existential questions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the experience of a sacred space is subjective and personal. It is a moment of awe, reflection, and connection to something greater than oneself. It is these experiences that allow us to connect with the natural world and the built environment in a meaningful way. The experience of a sacred space is not limited to religious buildings or natural wonders. It can be found in everyday experiences, such as a heart-pounding run in nature, or a moment of peace in a public art installation. The experience of a sacred space is a reminder of our interconnectedness and can inspire us to be more present and connected to the world around us.