

# 'I WILL FEED THEM WITH JUSTICE' SUSTAINABLE LIVING

CHRIST THE KING, YEAR A

**Lectionary Texts:** Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24    Psalm 100    Psalm 95:1-7a  
Ephesians 1:15-23    Matthew 25:31-46

**Focus Text:** Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

<sup>11</sup> For thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. <sup>12</sup> As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. <sup>13</sup> I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. <sup>14</sup> I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. <sup>15</sup> I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord GOD. <sup>16</sup> I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice.

<sup>20</sup> Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. <sup>21</sup> Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, <sup>22</sup> I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. <sup>23</sup> I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. <sup>24</sup> And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.

NRSV

## ADDITIONAL TEXTS

*Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, "Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land."*

Deuteronomy 15:11

*When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and for the alien: I am the LORD your God.*

Leviticus 23:22

*O God of our salvation; you are the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas... You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it. You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth. You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with richness. The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy. Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth.*

Psalm 65:5a, 9 - 66:1

*And [Jesus] said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What shall I do for I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample good things laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."*

Luke 12:15-21

*Come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you. Your riches have rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days. Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous one, who does not resist you.*

James 5:1-6

## SCRIPTURE COMMENTARY

BY CHRIS LIU BEERS, PROGRAM ASSOCIATE,  
NC COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

Ezekiel, no doubt one of the strangest of a strange bunch – the prophets of Israel – lived in a time of great social upheaval and distress. The book of Ezekiel is dominated by the context of the exile of the people of God from their homeland as they are conquered by Babylon. The book articulates the fundamental question of the exilic and post-exilic community – “how then shall we live” in light of everything that has happened (33:10b)? Today’s lectionary passage falls in the third part of the book, in which Ezekiel describes the character of salvation for a new Israel. In the context of exile, what does salvation look like? What does it really mean? Today’s passage provides a part of the answer – salvation necessarily entails a community characterized by sustainable abundance, in which everyone has enough, and the vast disparity between the “strong” and the “weak” is undone.

Because the lectionary reading has gaps in it, it is important for us to discuss *all* of Ezekiel 34. Starting in verse 17, the prophet invokes a scene of judgment between the faithful and unfaithful sheep (an image later made famous by Jesus in Matthew 25). Ezekiel states: “As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord GOD: I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats: Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, but you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture? When you drink of clear water, must you foul the rest with your feet? And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and drink what you have fouled with your feet? Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep” (34:17-20). The main indictment against the “fat sheep” is that they have hoarded the free gifts of God, they have lived beyond their boundaries, they have consumed too much, and in their arrogance they have polluted the resources of the earth. In so doing they have poisoned and starved the “lean sheep.”

Then, in verses 20-24, we see how God promises to intervene in this life-and-death struggle. Through God’s “one shepherd, my servant David,” God will overturn the twisted logic of overconsumption, setting the people on the path to true and lasting peace: “I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild animals from the land, so that they may live in the wild and sleep in the woods securely. I will make them and the region around my hill a blessing; and I will send down the showers in their season; they shall be showers of blessing. The trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield its increase. They shall be secure on their soil; and they shall know that I am the LORD” (34:25-27). Throughout this passage, there is a deep and abiding connection between the people’s willingness – or lack thereof – to share their resources and the flourishing of the land. Thus, for Ezekiel, to live in a sustainable way is truly to live at peace with God and with each other.

## PASTORAL REFLECTION

BY REV. CANON BRIAN COLE, THE CATHEDRAL  
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Ever since seminary days, I have known the phrase “clergy wellness.” While the phrase is concerned about the overall health of ordained religious leadership, in its simplest definition, it means your preacher should go to the gym. So, most weekday mornings, I am a member of the early risers at the downtown YMCA in Asheville.

One set of exercises I do each morning involves a medicine ball. You might remember medicine balls from junior high P.E., the oversized basketballs which weighed a ton and were supposed to make us all big and strong.

A little while back, I discovered the large black medicine ball I use each morning was made in India. The ball traveled halfway around the world to end up in the Asheville Y so I can stay fit and keep well. Besides a few minutes each morning, my thoughts rarely go to India. It is simply the place where they grow medicine balls.

However, I recently traveled to Northeast India to visit the region and to be with Christians who are a part of a companion diocese relationship between the Diocese of Durgapur in the state of West Bengal and the Episcopal Diocese of Western North Carolina. For two weeks, I along with four other team members from our diocese visited several communities in the mostly rural region along with two brief visits to Calcutta, the major city in that section of India.

I am now back from my time in India and my sleep patterns have returned to normal and I am back at work. I have even spent lots of time again with the Indian medicine ball. But I can’t get India out of my head.

I did not see the factory where my medicine ball came from. But I did see many signs of new industrial activity right alongside traditional practices of rice farming. And the air quality I experienced in India was abysmal. How many Indians breathe poor air so I can stay fit with my medicine ball? How many Indians drink dirty water so I can be a model of clergy health?

In North Carolina, we have begun to pay more attention to the quality of our air and water and how our daily practices, both individually and corporately, can contribute either to environmental degradation or restoration. But my time in India impressed upon me the reality that my concern for clean air and water can not stop at the state line.

In Ezekiel, we hear the cry of God for God's sheep throughout the land and nations. As a shepherd, God makes connections across lands and regions where we have, time and time again, made divisions. For too long, we have defined health with a too limited view as to who my neighbor is and who my fellow sheep are.

God promises to be a shepherd to us all and to practice a just care of us. If I understand myself to be a member of a common community then it is easier to see how my actions and my decisions impact other members. Such intention is the beginning of developing that most mature and underrated spiritual practice—the practice of paying attention. The term often associated with such thinking now is *sustainable*. While the word may be new to us, the practice is an ancient one.

The vision we hear in Ezekiel is one where a fractured world is being recreated and gathered again properly. In a fractured world, we too often ignore those whose faces we do not see or whose lives we do not encounter daily. If India is only the place where my medicine ball came from, then my vision of sustainability will be shortsighted and incomplete. Whatever it takes to get me the medicine ball so I can be healthy is one way of living in the world. But that is not the vision of God who promises to shepherd us all.

"I will shepherd the flock with justice." In other words, God promises to be an honest broker to all the relationships that we either are unaware of or choose to ignore. God's vision of health, of true health, requires us to seek the mind of the Christ, who like God in Ezekiel's vision, promises to seek the lost. Our vision is incomplete. The vision of the Christ is whole.

So how does our incomplete vision grow? How do we seek the mind of Christ? How do we pay attention without being overwhelmed and paralyzed with all the injustice in our world? By redefining what it is we need—fewer things and deeper relationships. I am truly defined by my membership in God's flock, not by the things I choose to possess without regard for how these things came to me.

At the end of our time in India, we drove through the streets of Calcutta as we searched for our hotel for our last night in the country. At a stop sign, I looked out the car window and saw a taxicab driver asleep in his cab. The man remained asleep and I do not know his name and he does not know mine. But the image of him remains with me like a kind of ordinary icon; a passage into a more sustainable vision of the true world God created and desires us to live in.

The man in the taxicab was "made in India," too. Each morning at the Y, the burden of the ball is intended to make me fit, stronger, more able to take on the world. But the ball is also becoming a means for prayer, an instrument to remember that God makes us all good. As we are made good, so we are called to treat each other with care and dignity. One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism. One Shepherd, one Flock, one Air to breathe, one source of Water to drink.

## WORSHIP AID - 'I WILL FEED THEM WITH JUSTICE'

### RESPONSIVE READING

On those bowed down by poverty,

**Lord have mercy.**

On families whose children go hungry,

**Lord have mercy.**

On the prosperous who live as if they have no limits,

**Lord have mercy.**

On those who have plenty and need to understand those who lack,

**Lord have mercy.**

On farm workers who labor in the sweltering heat,

**Lord have mercy.**

On farmers who cannot sell what they produce,

**Lord have mercy.**

On our waters and lands ravaged by pollution,

**Lord have mercy.**

On rural communities and urban economies,

**Lord have mercy.**

For politicians and decision-makers who can affect the welfare of our persons and our earth,

**Lord, give them wisdom and compassion.**

For ourselves, as we struggle with issues of diversity, equity, and sustainability,

**Lord, make us the means of change.**

For your world,

**Lord, please make us whole.**

(B. J. Morton. Adapted from the litany for Make Poverty History at [www.portsmouth.anglican.org/spirituality/make\\_poverty\\_history\\_prayers\\_and\\_resources](http://www.portsmouth.anglican.org/spirituality/make_poverty_history_prayers_and_resources))

## PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Lord, you have given us this beautiful world, with the ability to harvest its products for our nourishment. Yet in our greed we have been robbing future generations, poisoning your world, and destroying many of your creatures. Help us to realize that we interfere with your world at our peril. It is your hand, not ours, that rules your world, and we are here, during our short lives, as temporary caretakers.

(adapted from "A Prayer Guide for the Care of Creation," [www.christian-ecology.org.uk/p0701.htm](http://www.christian-ecology.org.uk/p0701.htm))

## SUGGESTED HYMNS

✠ <i>All Who Are Thirsty</i>	GC 501
✠ <i>Cuando el Pobre (When the Poor Ones)</i>	CH 662/MW 689/PH 407/UMH 434
✠ <i>Great is Thy Faithfulness</i>	AM 84/BH 54/CH 86/CM153/ MW 460 NCH 423/PH 276/UMH 140
✠ <i>Son of God, Eternal Savior</i>	LW 394/MW 648/NCH -542
✠ <i>The Harvest of Justice</i>	GC 711
✠ <i>'Tis the Gift to Be Simple</i>	BH 568/TH 554

### ◆ Hymnal Legend ◆

✠ <b>AM</b> – African Methodist Episcopal
✠ <b>AZ</b> – African Methodist Episcopal Zion
✠ <b>BH</b> – Baptist Hymnal
✠ <b>CH</b> – Chalice Hymnal (Disciples of Christ)
✠ <b>CM</b> – Christian Methodist Episcopal
✠ <b>GC</b> – Gather Comprehensive (Rom Cath)
✠ <b>LW</b> – Lutheran Worship
✠ <b>MW</b> – Moravian Book of Worship
✠ <b>NCH</b> – New Century Hymnal (UCC)
✠ <b>PH</b> – Presbyterian Hymnal
✠ <b>TH</b> – The Hymnal 1982 (Episcopal)
✠ <b>UMH</b> – United Methodist Hymnal

## ADDITIONAL PRAYERS

### Open Our Eyes

Lord God, you have shown us clearly where our present lifestyle is leading us. Open the eyes of all – especially the rich and powerful – and draw us together in a common determination to change our ways, to reduce our consumption of natural resources, and to share what we have with others who have so little to sustain them.

(adapted from "Open our Eyes," at [www.christian-ecology.org.uk/p0701.htm](http://www.christian-ecology.org.uk/p0701.htm))

### Stewards of God's Gifts

Almighty and ever-faithful Lord,  
gratefully acknowledging Your mercy  
and humbly admitting our need,  
we pledge our trust in You and each other.

Filled with desire,  
we respond to Your call for discipleship  
by shaping our lives in imitation of Christ.  
We profess that the call requires us  
to be stewards of Your gifts.

As stewards, we receive Your gifts gratefully,  
cherish and tend them in a responsible manner,  
share them in practice and love with others,  
and return them with increase to the Lord.

We pledge to hold one another accountable in our ongoing formation as stewards  
and our responsibility to call others to that same endeavor.

Almighty and ever-faithful God,  
it is our fervent hope and prayer  
that You who have begun this good work in us  
will bring it to fulfillment in Jesus Christ, our Lord. *Amen.*

(adapted from "A Stewardship Prayer," [www.catholicdoors.com/prayers/english2/p00842.htm](http://www.catholicdoors.com/prayers/english2/p00842.htm))

## Caretakers of Our Planet

We give thanks to you, God our Creator, for all the wonderful gifts you have bestowed upon us. We are grateful to you for helping us endure as long as we have on our beloved planet earth. Wonderful Creator, we ask you for strength and courage. We ask you to help each one of us gain the understanding and wisdom we need to heal our brokenness -- to love one another and to finally realize peace, with each other and with our lands. We ask you to help each one of us become more aware of our responsibilities in caring for all life on this beautiful planet. We know deep inside that we are a part of you and all creation. We want to take back our roles as caretakers of our planet. We want to open our hearts to honoring, respecting, and caring for our natural environment so that this good earth that you have given us for our sustenance is sustained for the good of all, both now and into future generations.

(adapted from "Prayer for Healing of the Earth," at [www.nativevoices.org/articles/woody.htm](http://www.nativevoices.org/articles/woody.htm))

## Generous and loving God

Generous loving God,  
Bless these gifts from your creation.  
We thank you for the people who produced the food.  
Help us to safeguard the riches of the earth  
Let us always love the land that feeds us  
And may it ever be fruitful.  
Amen.

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## ADDITIONAL HELPS

### ▪ QUOTES ▪

*The world has enough for everyone's need but not enough for everyone's greed.*

Mahatma Gandhi

*The only factor becoming scarce in a world of abundance is human attention.*

Kevin Kelly

*The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.*

Franklin D. Roosevelt

*It's ironic that those who till the soil, cultivate and harvest the fruits, vegetables, and other foods that fill your tables with abundance have nothing left for themselves.*

César Chávez

*Food should be treated with respect since our Lord left Himself to us in the guise of food.*

Dorothy Day

*From the moment you put a piece of bread in your mouth you are part of the world. Who grew the wheat? Who made the bread? Where did it come from? You are in relationship with all who brought it to the table. We are least separate and most in common when we eat and drink.*

Thomas Merton

*Without prosperous local economies, the people have no power and the land no voice.*

Wendell Berry

*The small landowners are the most precious part of a state. Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens, the most vigorous, the most independent and most virtuous, and they are tied to their country and wedded to its liberty and interests by the most lasting bonds.*

Thomas Jefferson

## ▪ PERSONAL VIGNETTE ▪

### Sustainability—Building Our Future Now

BY HARVEY HARMAN, MANAGER, WALK SOFTLY LLC / EARTH RENEWAL SHELTER

Living in Africa for 5 years in a small mud hut in a rural village with no electricity or running water changed how I looked at the world. Hauling water from the river and washing clothes by hand took a lot of time. Reading by candles or kerosene lanterns at night meant going to bed earlier and getting up with the sunrise. It wasn't an easy life, but it was a fulfilling one. And it used a level of consumption that was more in line with what is sustainable if people are going to keep living on the earth into the future. Most importantly life revolved around interactions with other people as the center priority and not around material possessions.

When we returned to the United States I read that the average adult/family spends more time cleaning their house now than they did 40 years ago, even with all our modern gadgets. Also average house size in the United States has grown from around 1,000 square feet per family in 1960 to around 2,400 square feet in 2008. And the most amazing thing is that for all of our expansion in technology and size, people in the United States are not living happier or more satisfied lives than they were 40 years ago—and we are destroying and using up our natural resources at an alarming rate.

For the first years after returning to the United States from Africa, I farmed, using hand tools and simple techniques that could be duplicated anywhere in the world. We raised vegetables, herbs, cut flowers, mushrooms, and livestock, selling at farmers markets and through a cooperative of buyers that bought directly from the farm. During that time I helped set up the Sanford Farmer's Market and the Sustainable Farming Program at Central Carolina Community College (CCCC) in Pittsboro, NC. The Sustainable Farming Program has since grown into a 2-year degree program giving new farmers skills in sustainable agriculture and is a model for such education. I still teach a course in Permaculture/Sustainable Living each spring in this program.

For the past few years I have worked on building more energy-efficient houses and now turned my attention to developing whole neighborhoods that have sustainability built in from the start. We are developing houses that produce as much energy as they use, catch rainwater off the roof to flush toilets and wash clothes, and encourage re-use and recycling. We are working on neighborhoods with community spaces, walking trails, edible landscaping, community gardens, bike and pedestrian paths, and preservation of important natural areas. It is all work in progress, but each step is important and exciting.

Our goal is to build community, save energy, and preserve natural resources. Through these commitments we find a connection to our true selves, to each other, to the natural world, and to God the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of all Life.

## ▪ CONTACTS AND OTHER RESOURCES ▪

- ✦ [www.nccouncilofchurches.org](http://www.nccouncilofchurches.org) -- The *North Carolina Council of Churches* has three committees/programs whose work helps promote sustainability. The Rural Life Committee brings together a variety of groups concerned with issues affecting rural North Carolina, including agricultural policy, health care, disaster recovery, contract farming, housing, urbanization, and the survival of family farms. The Farmworker Ministry Committee works to improve conditions of farmworkers through public awareness, advocacy, service, support for organizing, and resolutions of endorsement. NC Interfaith Power and Light works with faith communities to address the causes and consequences of global climate change through education and public policy advocacy.
- ✦ [www.endhunger.org](http://www.endhunger.org) -- The *Society of St. Andrew*, with offices in Durham and Charlotte, is an ecumenical, non-profit, charitable organization, which launched a Hunger Relief Advocate Initiative in partnership with the General Commission on United Methodist Men that has led to gleaning operations today in more than 20 states. Its *Gleaning Network* uses volunteers to glean nutritious produce from farmers' fields and orchards after the harvest. This food, instead of being left behind to rot, is delivered to those in need.
- ✦ [www.earthrenewalshelter.com](http://www.earthrenewalshelter.com) -- Walk Softly, LLC and Earth Renewal Shelter were established to create sustainable land-use development and energy efficient building projects in which the natural benefits of the environment are preserved for residents.

- ✦ [www.rafiusa.org](http://www.rafiusa.org) – *RAFI-USA* is dedicated to community, equity, and diversity in agriculture. RAFI-USA is creating a movement among farm, environmental, and consumer groups to promote sustainable agriculture; strengthen family farms and rural communities; protect the diversity of plants, animals, and people; and ensure responsible use of new technologies.
- ✦ [www.cefs.ncsu.edu](http://www.cefs.ncsu.edu) -- The *Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS)* was established in 1994 by North Carolina State University, North Carolina A&T State University, and the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to serve as a center dedicated to sustainable agriculture research, extension, and education. Located at the Cherry Research Farm near Goldsboro, CEFS is one of the nation's largest centers for the study of environmentally sustainable farming practices.
- ✦ [www.asapconnections.org](http://www.asapconnections.org) -- *Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP)* is a nonprofit organization that supports farmers and rural communities in the mountains of Western North Carolina and the Southern Appalachians. Its mission is to create and expand regional community-based and integrated food systems that are locally owned and controlled, environmentally sound, economically viable, and health-promoting.
- ✦ [www.ssawg.org](http://www.ssawg.org) -- The *Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (Southern SAWG)* is the region's non-profit leader in creating a sustainable food and farming system. Southern SAWG provides learning opportunities for farmers and agricultural professionals and tools and support for farmer entrepreneurs. It also helps develop grassroots leadership in the sustainable agriculture movement.
- ✦ [www.carolinafarmstewards.org](http://www.carolinafarmstewards.org) – *Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (CFSA)* is a membership-based organization of more than 900 farmers, processors, gardeners, businesses, and individuals in North and South Carolina who are committed to sustainable agriculture and the development of locally-based, organic food systems.
- ✦ [www.schumachersociety.org](http://www.schumachersociety.org) - *The E. F. Schumacher Society*, named after the author of "Small Is Beautiful: Economics As If People Mattered," is an educational non-profit organization founded in 1980. Their programs demonstrate that both social and environmental sustainability can be achieved by applying the values of human-scale communities and respect for the natural environment to economic issues.
- ✦ [www.toxicfreenc.org](http://www.toxicfreenc.org) -- *Toxic Free North Carolina* is a non-profit organization working in North Carolina to minimize human and environmental exposure to toxic pesticides. This small grassroots organization focuses on common-sense alternatives to harmful pesticides.
- ✦ [www.yesmagazine.org](http://www.yesmagazine.org) – *Yes! Magazine* is a quarterly publication of the Positive Futures Network, a non-profit organization committed to sustainable living in a more just, compassionate society. Their numerous articles provide informative and educational material in addition to outlets for taking action on the issues surrounding over-consumption and materialism.
- ✦ [www.ncruralcenter.org](http://www.ncruralcenter.org) – The mission of the *North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center* is to develop, promote, and implement sound economic strategies to improve the quality of life of rural North Carolinians. The center serves the state's 85 rural counties, with a special focus on individuals with low to moderate incomes and communities with limited resources.
- ✦ [www.sustainnc.org](http://www.sustainnc.org) – *Sustainable North Carolina (SNC)* works with the business community, policymakers, farmers, environmental groups, and concerned citizens to develop practical solutions to environmental issues. Its mission is to accelerate the adoption of practices that optimize economic prosperity, social responsibility, and environmental stewardship.
- ✦ [www.nccecojustice.org/anthohome.htm](http://www.nccecojustice.org/anthohome.htm) -- For examples of church resolutions and policy statements related to stewardship of the earth and its resources for sustainability, visit the National Council of Churches of Christ site for Eco-Justice Programs, which provides an anthology of resolutions and policy statements from the American Baptist Church, Disciples of Christ, Church of the Brethren, Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Friends United Meeting, Orthodox Church, Moravian Church in America, National Council of Churches, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Presbyterian Church USA, Reformed Church in America, United Church of Christ, and United Methodist Church.

## KEY FACTS

- ❑ Why all the concern about sustainability? Modern industrial agriculture is having unanticipated consequences. Family farmers, rural communities, the quality of our water, the safety of our food, and true food buying choices all are being harmed. Since the 1970s, organizations have formed at the state and local level – public, private, and non-profit -- to create and support a more ecologically sound, economically viable, and socially just system of agriculture. Sustainability affects us all.<sup>1</sup>
- ❑ What is sustainability? Sustainability is related to the quality of life in a community -- whether the economic, social, and environmental systems that make up the community are providing a healthy, productive, meaningful life for all community residents, present and future. There are many definitions of sustainability and sustainable development; however, all the definitions have to do with living within the limits; understanding the interconnections among economy, society, and environment; and equitable distribution of resources and opportunities.<sup>2</sup>
- ❑ Why is “equity” (or “inequity”) a key term in the context of sustainability? The term equity has to do with fairness -- whether all people have similar rights, opportunities, and access to all forms of community capital. Inter-generational equity has to do with fairness between current and future members of a community. It doesn't mean that we neglect our current needs, but that we try to achieve a reasonable balance between satisfying our needs now and setting aside enough to provide for needs of the future.<sup>3</sup>
- ❑ Why buy organic food? Buying organic food and other supplies is increasing in popularity, both in the United States and abroad. Organic food is grown using production practices that feed the soil, protect natural biodiversity, and don't use synthetic fertilizers or pesticides, which degrade the surrounding environment, poisoning workers and harming people and wildlife.<sup>4</sup>
- ❑ Why buy locally-grown food? Locally-grown food is harvested at the peak of flavor and sold to you within a day or two so it is the freshest food you can buy. When you buy food grown locally, you also support local farmers and the economic health of your own community.<sup>5</sup>
- ❑ Until the 1970's, the trend for farming was either to get bigger or to get out of the farming business.<sup>6</sup> Along with increasing interest in organic and locally-grown food, census data on North Carolina show that there is a trend toward smaller farming and an increase in the number of small farms.<sup>7</sup>
- ❑ What's an example of sustainable agriculture? For thousands of years American Indian farmers have planted the “three sisters” – corn, beans and squash. This form of companion planting forms a unique ecosystem in which each plant helps the others grow. The corn provides support for the beans and the squash shades out weeds.<sup>8</sup>
- ❑ At the Paris Conference for Global Ecological Governance in February 2007, top United Nations officials called for clear objectives and strong ecological governance at the global level to reverse environmental damage across the planet, noting that environmental degradation “is undercutting our fight against poverty” and “could even come to jeopardize international peace and security.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [www.sustainablemeasures.com/Sustainability/KeyTermEquity.html](http://www.sustainablemeasures.com/Sustainability/KeyTermEquity.html)

<sup>2</sup> [www.sustainablemeasures.com/Sustainability/Definitions.html](http://www.sustainablemeasures.com/Sustainability/Definitions.html) and <http://www.sustainablemeasures.com/Sustainability/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> [www.sustainablemeasures.com/Sustainability/KeyTermEquity.html](http://www.sustainablemeasures.com/Sustainability/KeyTermEquity.html)

<sup>4</sup> [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/11/05/AR2006110500887.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/11/05/AR2006110500887.html); Agricultural Resources Center/Pesticide Education Project

<sup>5</sup> Agricultural Resources Center/Pesticide Education Project. Handout at NCCC's Come to the Table Conference, 4/10/07.

<sup>6</sup> [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/11/05/AR2006110500887.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/11/05/AR2006110500887.html).

<sup>7</sup> [www.ers.usda.gov/StateFacts/NC.HTM](http://www.ers.usda.gov/StateFacts/NC.HTM)

<sup>8</sup> American Indian Mothers, Inc. Handout at NCCC's Come to the Table Conference, 4/10/07.

<sup>9</sup> [www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=21440&Cr=climate&Cr1=change](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=21440&Cr=climate&Cr1=change)