



The
Episcopal Diocese
of New York

Committee
on the
Environment

“Finding Courage, Finding Hope”: One Year into an Earth Ministry at Christ Church Riverdale

At a time when I was casting about for a meaningful way to combine my growing sense of urgency about the environment with my conviction that urban children need to make real and deep connections with the natural world, I read an article in ENY about the Committee on the Environment. The writer invited participation and very helpfully provided an email address. On impulse, I reached out and introduced myself and soon after received an informal and friendly response, inviting me to attend an upcoming workshop in several months. In early October, 2014 I attended the Committee on the Environment’s workshop, “Finding Courage, Finding Hope,” at Trinity Church in Ossining, NY with a fellow parishioner. We came away determined to organize an effort in our parish, full of ideas but with only the vaguest sense of how to go about this. That was little more than a year ago.

Today we have a committed Earth Ministry, a small but determined group of parishioners that has put issues surrounding climate change and the church’s response to it on the agenda at Christ Church Riverdale. How did we get from there to here, I find myself wondering in some amazement as we enter a second year. While I have nothing like a blueprint to offer, perhaps a brief history of our process will be of use to others setting out with a similar interest and sense of mission.

Though our intended mission was to raise awareness within the parish of the global environmental crisis and engage us as a congregation in taking actions that honor and protect God’s creation, our small group found itself first required to raise its own awareness and we set out individually and together to educate ourselves on the issues and science of climate change, and to figure our way forward as a collective.

We have reached out to the larger community— environmental initiatives in Riverdale, NYC, NY State, and beyond, where things are already being done to address climate change—and considered how and where our parish efforts might connect with those of others. As we learn, we share with the parish, bringing resources and engaging the discussion of what we as a church can and must do.

To date the CCR Earth Ministry has provided opportunities for parishioners to educate themselves through forums, films, a book reading/discussion, and regular “Green Strides” (brief statements suggesting individual actions) in the Sunday bulletin.

We have made our voices heard, advocating our care for God’s creation with postcards and phone calls to legislators, through participation in two interfaith vigils for climate justice and other local and citywide events, through a bell ringing at the conclusion of a Sunday service in June in support of the Papal encyclical on climate justice (this event covered by a local newspaper), and with a special mid-week Mass in September to call the world to honor creation.

The CCR Earth Ministry has overseen a more rigorous recycling effort at our communal parish functions. Our parishioners have embraced the use of ceramic cups at coffee hour thereby significantly reducing waste. We provided Lenten Carbon Fast calendars beginning the Sunday before Lent, we invited participation in a local e-waste drive, and in April, following our Anglican bishops’ meeting in Cape Town, South Africa to consider the climate crisis, we held a Call to Action forum attended by 70 parishioners. Of those, 50 committed to taking one or more of the several actions called for by our bishops.

But the most important action the CCR Earth Ministry engaged this year was that of pressing our parish to commit to the **Interfaith Coalition for Energy [ICE] Audit** called for by the Diocese. In his address to convention this year, Bishop Dietsche said, *“the sustainability of our buildings and properties... is where our own convictions about global warming meet the place of our greatest challenges. This is where we show whether we are really serious.”* Our ministry took on this challenge by accepting responsibility for the first step in the process—seeing that the ICE audit was done at CCR. Over the course of a year, we have shepherded this process through the vestry, from considering to deciding to a signed commitment and action.

On January 5, 2016, our buildings were inspected by Andy Rudin of ICE and we are awaiting his report. When repairs and improvements are implemented, CCR should save substantially on energy costs and we will be on a path toward carbon-free energy in the next decade.

So how did we get from the concern of two parishioners to a parish audit in twelve months?

Getting the Audit Completed

The first step was getting the vestry to agree to the ICE audit. The Earth Ministry presented the vestry with a **fact sheet** explaining why the audit was important for both practical and moral reasons. On the practical side, we would learn steps we can take to be more energy efficient with resultant savings to budget. The ICE audit is the way our Diocese, concerned with both parish budgets and planetary health, has of insuring

that its churches are as energy efficient as possible. The ICE audit is specifically designed for churches, examining parish buildings in a holistic way, looking at patterns of energy use and detailing recommendations for improvements.

The ICE audit costs about \$2,800 and this, naturally, was a big concern. We explained that though it may cost more than some audits, the Diocese, certain that this is the best audit available, has allocated grants of \$1500, paid for through congregational assessments and additional grant money. Property Support will provide an additional \$1,500 for implementing the audit's recommendations. These grants are available even if congregations have already completed other, less thorough audits.

On the moral side, we reminded each other that saving energy reduces our use of fossil fuels, helping to limit greenhouse gases in the environment. But beyond all the reasons listed above, conducting the ICE Audit is also part of a community-building effort by the Diocese, a call to unite together, to work at transformation both within our individual parishes and as parishes joining together—sharing resources, sharing concerns, sharing responsibility for ourselves, each other, and the larger world.

A New Year, A New Direction

Now with the new resolution passed at the 2015 Convention, there is added urgency and a new timetable, calling on us not only to do the audit, but to commit to completing the repairs and improvements within three years, and to create a self-study plan with the goal of becoming carbon free in the next decade. So our work as a ministry and as a congregation has just begun. CCR will receive the energy auditor's report very soon; then our work will be to prioritize how we are going to proceed. We are nervous about the financing but excited and invigorated by the chance to take those "substantial, sacrificial, and prophetic actions," Bishop Dietsche spoke of in his 2014 Address to Convention, and to confront the global crisis in our own backyard.

The Earth Ministry at CCR began with two parishioners who set out to build a new ministry from the ground up without a blue print to follow. Once we called for others to join us, four others signed on and several more expressed support and interest, staying in the loop as best they could. Because the new group needed direction, the two of us who began it functioned as co-chairs—calling for meetings, setting agendas, making announcements to the parish, etc.

But something has happened over the year as six to eight of us have wrestled together over how to make this new ministry effective. We came as individuals with different perspectives and backgrounds and interests with only a common will to make something happen, and perhaps it was necessary for a time for there to be designated leaders. But as we began to recognize and appreciate our different gifts and passions, as we began to discover that what we did as a whole was truly greater than the sum of our individual contributions, we have also found the need for a new structure that allows us more flexibility and freedom. As of our last meeting, we have become a

“Self-Organizing Team” with a rotating secretary or convener to keep us on track and moving forward.

We have also begun to attract the interest of others in the parish and our email contact list for calling meetings and conveying information is slowly growing. It is scary and exciting, but we head into a new year grateful and ready to work.

Thanks be to God.

Jo Anne Kraus, Christ Church Riverdale