Although I enjoy hiking any time of year, I especially love the forest in spring as new leaves proclaim the depth and continuity of life in a single hue. Sunlight and wind move among canopy and forest floor creating a verdant display ranging from soft sage and chartreuse to emerald. As they have been doing for centuries, the trees especially not only herald a new season but renew my faith in eternal mysteries and the God who makes all things new. I know that the saplings lining the path will one day tower above generations yet to come.

As Matthew Sleeth, executive director of Blessed Earth, shares in his latest book, *Reforesting Faith*, trees are essential for the welfare of all living things, and God uses trees to nurture both our physical and spiritual well-being. Appearing in every major biblical event from Genesis to Revelation, trees are both sources of sustenance and symbols of life. The Tree of Life was rooted in the soil God formed into humankind in Eden and stands by the throne of God in heaven. As the longest living creatures on earth, trees connect us with past and future generations and remind us that life extends beyond the boundaries of human time and imagination.

Trees not only offer us a vision of time but model community for us as well. Scientists are discovering that the trees that enrich our communities, providing food, fuel, and the air we breathe, also nurture and support each other. They not only draw nutrients from the soil but also share food and water, and even communicate with each other through scent signals and their vast network of roots.

Truly, Grandmother and Grandfather Oak have earned their stature in our forests and neighborhoods, proving that years marked by generosity and lived in community connect us with eternity.

Seeking ways to nurture and support our spiritual connection with all of creation has always been a priority at the Center for Religion and Environment, too. Learning from the community of trees around us, we seek ways to live a deeper, greener faith through our growing selection of programs and resources. In September 2019 we will host our first fall conference, “Deep Green Faith: Holy Forest Kinship,” featuring Matthew Sleeth as our keynote speaker. In collaboration with the Beecken Center of the School of Theology, the conference will offer the opportunity to explore the many ways we live in relationship with the natural world around us.

In April 2019, we took our Deep Green Church and Opening the Book of Nature programs to Yale Divinity School as well as several churches in New Haven, Connecticut, and are nurturing new partnerships that have grown out of that visit. And our book and facilitator’s guide, *Living in an Icon*, will be published in August. You can find more information about these events in the newsletter.

As the Center’s programs and connections have expanded, we have realized the need for additional support to guide and manage our work. In the following pages we introduce you to our new advisory board as well as our executive director and fellows. The past six months have been particularly fruitful for CRE, and we are grateful for the support and encouragement we have received from the University and a growing network of individuals, churches, and creation care advocates. Truly, the work of the Center is a community effort grounded in spiritual practice and mutual love for each other and all that God has made. We welcome all of you to our growing family.
Trees have a surprising degree of significance within the Christian tradition. According to keynote speaker Dr. Matthew Sleeth, former physician and carpenter, and author of *Reforesting Faith: What Trees Teach Us About the Nature of God and His Love for Us*, “The Bible talks about trees more than any living creation other than people. When we subtract trees from Scripture, we miss lessons of faith necessary for our growth.” Meanwhile, new ecological research reveals astonishing levels of communication happening beneath the bark of our forest-based neighbors. What can this science tell us about the nature of forests, their multi-dimensional impacts on humans, and our own relationships with each other, and with the ecosystems within which we live? And how might a more soulful view of the web of creation affect not only the choices we make, but the way we view our non-human kin? Join us September 6–7, 2019, on the campus of the University of the South as we explore these and other themes in an organic interweaving of religion, science, and the arts, with contemplative and embodied experience.

At this conference, you’ll experience:

- Lectures by leading thinkers on forest and faith and the interconnectedness of the earth and its inhabitants,
- A focus on embodied spirituality with built-in contemplative experiences,
- Time for engaged dialogue and discussion,
- Community-building and networking over common meals (included in the tuition),
- A closing celebration with liturgical elements.

Tuition: **$175**, includes materials and breakfast, lunch, and dinner on Saturday, Sept. 7. Faculty & staff of the University of the South: **$50** (meals not included). Students of the University of the South (including seminarians): **$25** (meals not included). **Lodging not included.**

For more information and registration please see the conference web page at

beeckencenter.sewanee.edu/events/deep-green-faith-holy-forest-kinship
Mary: And how were you received?

Jerry: It was a busy and excellent week in New Haven. The students who helped us organize the week’s meetings and conversations were passionate about creation care and generous in their presence and engagement. What impressed me most about the week was the genuine spiritual community that is clearly present at the divinity school. They pray together, support each other, and care about the church.

Another thing I enjoyed about the week was the combination of both parish and academic engagement in the schedule. We had opportunities to meet with some churches as well as students. I think this is critical, since our work is about spirituality, faith, and life. If we can’t make it work with daily church life, it has no real meaning.

Mary: What programs and materials did you present?

Jerry: I prepared a presentation on what we call “Deep Green Church.” In that presentation, I make the case for a much deeper engagement of the parish life of worship, prayer, community, and teaching that makes “being green” something natural and normal for churches, rather than a fringe ministry or surface behavior modifications about food, trash, and energy use. I contrast light green and deep green in terms of how a church conducts liturgy, celebrates the Gospel, and orders its community life.

A critical aspect of leading toward deep green renewal in churches is to work with the religious imagination of the parish members, who celebrate and maintain in their life of worship and fellowship a relationship with the rest of creation. That celebrated relationship may be healthy or unhealthy, life-giving or neglectful. Deep green work leads toward a healthy and life-giving relationship with the rest of creation.

Robin had the opportunity to lead experiences and discussions on the Center’s work on nature contemplation which we call Living in an Icon. That material becomes available this summer in printed form from Church Publishing. Living in an Icon addresses both spiritual hunger and nature deficit by offering a substantial series of contemplative practices of and within nature. These practices can be engaged in by individuals, but we have found that they are best practiced as a group in sustained community over several months.

continued on next page
They form a journey, actually, from the healing practices of simply noticing and appreciating, through a deeper engagement of opening and acceptance, onto a true engagement of love and the presence of God.

Mary: And how was your material received?

Jerry: I think we would describe the response as mixed. Many students and parishioners revealed a genuine spiritual hunger and desire for connection. They yearned for a deeper experience of worship and of nature, and recognized in our material some hope and clarity. But others showed reluctance for multiple reasons, I suppose. The material challenges many of our assumptions, norms, and habits, and so would naturally meet some resistance. For others, they were simply very, very busy Yale students, living in a world of excellent and competing opportunities and ideas. We were but one voice among many that week.

I delivered the “deep green” presentation with two church groups and with the students during the colloquium over the course of the week. With one church, we had only 50 minutes to present and the members present were quite mixed in their views toward creation care issues. That conversation was challenging. With the other church, however, we had 90 minutes and those gathered were the “green choir.” With them, the conversation was energized, and the ideas presented were for them eye opening and hopeful. I think this means that the material is both needed and wanted. The fact that it is challenging for some means it is needed. The fact that it is welcomed by others means that it presents hope.

Mary: And so, what’s next?

Jerry: Another hunger that was very evident was the need for connection and support. Those who care about a deeper connection between their faith and creation still feel isolated. They want to discover others of like mind and heart, and they yearn for shared conversation and experience. The Center is in conversation with some of the clergy and students in Connecticut, and are looking for ways to make connections between them and those in Sewanee and other places. We hope this is but the beginning of a broad and sustained community of support.

The CRE community welcomes opportunities for conversation and collaboration with both academic and parish groups. If you would like more information about Deep Green Church, nature contemplation, or any of our other programs, please visit our website at www.sewanee.edu/resources/cre. A link to pre-order Living in an Icon is available in this newsletter.
Remembering CRE’s Week at Yale
By Grace Martien

During the first week in April, Dr. Robin Gottfried and the Rev. Jerry Cappel visited the Northeast to share their work from the Center for Religion and Environment. While Gottfried and Cappel’s visit in Connecticut began with St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Greenwich, they spent the majority of their time engaged in dialogue with students at Yale University. Their visit coincided with Yale Divinity School’s Creation Week, during which students organized events with the goal to create dialogue surrounding the intersection between religion and ecology.

The Rev. Cappel presented his work titled, “Deep Green Church,” to Berkeley Divinity School during their weekly Anglican Colloquium. Students were called to rethink their relationship with the environment and to wonder how this could be reflected in liturgy. They were greatly interested in the topic and hope to see the concepts of the “Deep Green Church” put into practice in the near future. Other events collaborated with the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies where Dr. Gottfried provided an economist’s perspective.

For me, Dr. Gottfried’s and Rev. Cappel’s visit gave me hope for the future. I am in my second year at Yale Divinity School and Berkeley Divinity School. I am pursuing ordination in The Episcopal Church and found their visit provided direction and access to resources within my faith tradition for future ministry. Additionally, as a co-leader of the Yale Divinity School’s club FERNS (Faith, Ecology, Religion, Nature, Spirituality), I have been exploring what it means to care for creation as a faith practice. I hope to guide members of the club and community towards the Center for Religion and Environment for support both during their studies and after graduation.

Grace Martien is a second year Master of Divinity candidate at both Yale Divinity School and Berkeley Divinity School. She serves as co-leader of FERNS, which is the YDS environmental student group.
Many people experience God most strongly in nature but do not know how to incorporate this experience into their spiritual life. Others question whether Christianity has room for nature at all and seek alternatives elsewhere, often leaving Christianity entirely. This book addresses this crucial issue by providing a resource for fostering a closer relationship with God and creation.

With a step-by-step approach, this book provides a framework integrating asceticism with the contemplation of nature. Each chapter contains a "take it home" section for applying the lessons learned outdoors to everyday life, connecting God and nature as seamless components of spirituality. Topics include gratitude, delight, appreciation, wonder, discernment, reverence, mortality, love, beauty, humility, silence, and hope. While the program is best suited for groups, individuals also can practice the experiences on their own.

The accompanying facilitator guide provides guidance and support to anyone leading group sessions of *Living in an Icon*. It also offers a framework for using *Living in an Icon* as a series of exercises and community building practices for small groups in various settings, from weekend retreats or study series, to a 21-week extended practice.

**Robert Gottfried** directs the Center for Religion and Environment at The University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee and coordinates its "Contemplation and Care for Creation" program, which combines theology, ecology and social science.

**Frederick W. Krueger** is the Executive Director for the Orthodox Fellowship of the Transfiguration, and a committee member of the National Religious Campaign for Creation Care, guiding organizations and religious leaders towards a more just and sustainable world.

**Jerry Cappel** is an ordained Episcopal priest in the Diocese of Kentucky, currently serving as the Environmental Network Coordinator for Province IV of The Episcopal Church. He serves on the board of the Center for Religion and the Environment at the University of the South and as a fellow with GreenFaith.
Meet the CRE Staff and Board

Recognizing the need to address the spiritual nature of our environmental crisis, the Center for Religion and Environment continues to develop new programs and resources for individuals, faith communities, and the University that nourish both mind and spirit. As we continue to extend the scope of our outreach and the size of our community, we have realized the need for additional Center support. In December 2018 we formed an advisory board to guide our community as we seek new ways to engage others in spiritual nourishment, challenging conversation, and mutual support to both love and care for God’s creation.

Robin Gottfried, CRE Executive Director
Professor of economics emeritus Robin Gottfried has long been known for his passion for environmental economics and sustainable development. He has conducted research on land use change and forest policy, as well as the economic impacts of development and other economic activity in the United States, Costa Rica, and elsewhere. Gottfried helped spearhead the creation of Sewanee’s environmental studies program and served as its first chair. He also helped start the College’s Landscape Analysis (GIS) Lab. Author of “Economics, Ecology and the Roots of Western Faith: Perspectives from the Garden” and numerous articles on land use change, forest policy, and sustainable development, as well as articles addressing the interface of social science, ecotheology, and spirituality, Gottfried facilitates “Opening the Book of Nature” programs and speaks on the relationship between the Christian faith and sustainable development.

Jerry Cappel, Advisory Board Chair and Programs Coordinator
The Rev. Jerry Cappel is an ordained Episcopal priest currently serving at St. James Episcopal Church in Shelbyville, Kentucky. He also serves as the Environmental Network Coordinator for Province IV of The Episcopal Church and as a fellow with GreenFaith. Cappel has a Ph.D. in religious education and over 20 years of experience in corporate training and development. He is a graduate of Harding Graduate School of Religion (M.Div.) in Memphis, Tennessee, and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky (Ph.D.). He has worked as an author and editor of youth and adult education materials for Smyth & Helwys Publishing in Macon, Georgia, and Church Publishing in New York.

Matthew Costello, Fundraising Coordinator
Matthew Costello has over 25 years of experience as a fundraiser, corporate executive, advertising coordinator, and innovator in the fields of education reform, environmental health, and racial justice. His varied background includes work in virtually all areas of the public and private sectors. A lifelong resident of Boston, Costello is a member of Sewanee’s class of 1984, graduating with a degree in American Studies.

Allen Doyle, Student Liaison
Born and raised in rural Tennessee, Allen Doyle says he has always felt a deep spirituality in the out-of-doors. Whether in corporate worship, or private meditation, his experience of God is heightened in these moments. Doyle, a graduate of Birmingham-Southern University, is currently a student at the School of Theology.

Mary Foster, Advisory Board Secretary and Communications Coordinator
Mary Foster has served as a fellow and newsletter editor for the Center for the past three years. She holds a B.A. in journalism from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a master’s of theological studies from Duke Divinity School. Foster serves on the Episcopal Diocese of Alabama’s Task Force for the Stewardship of Creation and has led parish programs on simpler living, contemplative practice, and creation care. She is particularly interested...
in writing about and developing programs on creation care, Sabbath practice, and human creativity as a response to God’s presence and gifts manifested in the natural world. Mary has four children and lives in Birmingham, Alabama, where she is an active member of St. Mary’s on the Highlands Episcopal Church.

Lisa Ihns, Marketing Coordinator
Lisa Ihns is a graduate of CRE’s Contemplation and Care of Creation certificate program. Ihns obtained a bachelor of arts in social work from the University of West Florida and a juris doctorate degree from Florida State University’s College of Law and is a member of the state bar of Georgia. She received her training as a spiritual director through Omega Point, a two-year program of the Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta, Georgia. While living in Atlanta, she served for many years as a Stephen’s Minister and as a teacher in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd childhood education program of The Episcopal Church. Currently, Ihns lives in Gulf Breeze, Florida, where she is an active community volunteer and serves on boards of both profit and nonprofit organizations.

David Milliken, Networking Coordinator
David Milliken is a tertiary in the Third Order of the Society of St. Francis. As a Franciscan, he serves as the campus director at the Hutton Settlement Children’s Home where he has worked with displaced children for over 20 years. Milliken is also the co-founder of the Inner Sky Hermitage, a suburban Franciscan hermitage offering contemplative retreats and spiritual guidance. He holds degrees in psychology and organizational leadership, with certificates in labyrinth, meditation, and nature contemplation facilitation.

FELLOWS

David C. McDuffie
David C. McDuffie is a senior lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies and a member of Environment and Sustainability Program Advisory Council in the Department of Geography, Environment, and Sustainability at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. His work revolves around the interdisciplinary conversations between religion and the natural sciences and the ways in which these conversations contribute to ecological conservation and public health. He currently serves as chair of the Diocesan Committee on Environmental Ministry for the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina. McDuffie holds a bachelor’s degree in political science and master’s degrees in religion and philosophy from the University of Georgia where he also earned a graduate certificate in Environmental Ethics. He earned his doctorate from the School of Theology at Sewanee graduating in 2017 with a dissertation entitled “Nature’s Sacrament: The Epic of Evolution and a Theology of Sacramental Ecology.”

Susan Ernst
Susan Ernst is a spiritual director, artist, horticulturist, naturalist, wife, and mother who believes that “beauty will save the world.” She researched the connections between creativity, nature, and spirituality at Yale Divinity School where she earned a master’s of arts in religion with a religion and arts concentration. She also holds a bachelor’s of science in studio art from Southern Connecticut State University, and an AAS in ornamental horticulture from Farmingdale State College. Ernst attended the Center’s certificate program, Contemplation and Care for Creation, in its pilot year. She facilitates art, nature, and SoulCollage® workshops and one day retreats which connect participants to the Divine through these experiences. She and her husband have recently moved to Springfield, Tennessee.
Supporting CRE

While the University generously provides substantial in-kind support, the Center for Religion and Environment relies on donations and income from its programs for financial support. As its on-campus efforts and outreach beyond Sewanee expand, its funding needs are growing commensurately. We would like to bring more workshops and visitors to campus to benefit the campus’ undergraduate and graduate students, provide more financial aid to those wanting to take CRE’s certificate program and future offerings, and to provide funded internship opportunities for Sewanee students.

We also have growing travel needs, whether to attend conferences to promote our programs or to bring collaborators to campus to work on developing joint programs. Should you wish to support us, you may do so at www.givecampus.com/campaigns/4563/donations/new, designating the gift for the benefit of the Center for Religion and Environment, or sending a check payable to the Center for Religion and Environment to Robin Gottfried, Director, Center for Religion and Environment, 735 University Avenue, Sewanee, TN 37383. Thank you.

Building Trails and Nurturing Spirits

Robin Gottfried

Rachel Eskite, a first-year student in the School of Theology, shared her experiences and perspectives on what it means to build trails at a Domain Forum at the Blue Chair on April 12, 2019. The Forum, a series of informal talks sponsored by the Center for Religion and Environment, promotes discussion about the Domain among people who might normally not have the opportunity to talk with one another. With partial financial support from CRE Rachel participated as the only woman among 11 taking the master trail course given at Sewanee by Mike Ritter of Trail Design Specialists. Rachel shared that hiking trails has always been part of her spiritual life. Among other things it leads her to ponder, “Who made this trail for us?” It turns out that the people who make a well-designed trail in turn have to keep in mind the type of trails their users will seek as well as how they will use it. This requires a keen sense of human behavior, as well as the behavior of water.

These observations led to a lively discussion on the spiritual dimensions of trails and trail building. Rachel noted that she was totally present when she was working alongside her team on building its section of trail for the course. She also had a strong sense that they were creatively working together and were doing this for others. Nate Wilson, the Domain manager, noted that one’s experience of nature changes when one shifts from observing it to actively working with it. Rachel added that the earth is a great equalizer, that it can promote social justice by bringing people together and healing individuals and relationships.

This led to a discussion of how churches might get involved in this process. Discussants noted that trail building is ideal for young people because they are less self-conscious when engaged in it. Building trails on church land also can serve as a vehicle for engaging both the church and the surrounding community. At the conclusion of the Forum several people expressed an interest in further pursuing the relationship between creation and churches in the fall.

Rachel will be working this summer and next year with the Center in its Deep Green Church and campus activities.
Sewanee Senior Studies Influence of Religion on Caribbean Whaling Practices

Hoping to illuminate the relationship between health, environmental sustainability, and faith in the Caribbean whaling industry, Sewanee senior Hannah-Marie Garcia spent two weeks last summer interviewing islanders about their faith and dietary habits. The research was part of her capstone project for the Environmental Studies and Sustainability degree she earned in May 2019. Garcia worked with Dr. Russell Fielding and a team of students in St. Vincent and the Grenadines studying mercury contamination in whales, dolphins, and porpoises.

“Whale meat tends to be a cheap available food source,” Garcia said. “There is a source of pride in whaling for many of the islanders, too.” She found that Seventh Day Adventists and Rastafarians who follow a vegetarian diet as part of their religious practice ate much less whale meat. However, poverty influences dietary decisions as well, she said. “Rastafarians are known to be vegetarians but they told me that a lot of times they eat what their pocket can get them.”

Communicating the dangers of mercury contamination faces challenges from the health care community as well. “Whale oil is used for medicinal purposes like curing colds, too,” Garcia said, so even people who refrain from eating the meat still risk exposure to poisoning through cultural practices.

Garcia said she hopes her study will contribute to research used by policy-makers to more effectively communicate the dangers of mercury poisoning in island communities. Because eating whale meat is already discouraged as a religious practice, churches could be a valuable ally in sharing the health and environmental risks of all whale products.

Garcia will begin working toward a master’s degree in marine policy at the University of Delaware this fall.

New CCC Cohort Begins Certificate Program

Coming from four states across the southeast, the newest cohort in the Contemplation and Care for Creation certificate program will meet in Sewanee at the end of May to begin their year-long journey together. During the six-day opening retreat participants will explore the spiritual, theological, and ethical aspects of creation care based on readings completed in advance. In addition to beginning a practice of nature contemplation, they will learn to facilitate retreats using the exercises in Living in an Icon.

Following the initial gathering, the group will continue to develop these practices and will share their experiences through online reflections and regular conference calls. They also will develop a project which they will present at a reunion retreat in May 2020.

The certificate program is open to anyone seeking ways to ground environmental stewardship in contemplative practice and community support. For more information about the program or to register for the next cohort, please visit our website at sewanee.edu/resources/cre/what-we-do/certificate-in-contemplation-and-care-for-creation


Center Fellow David C. McDuffie, senior lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, published the article “The Epic of Evolution and a Theology of Sacramental Ecology, in the journal *Religions*. doi.org/10.3390/rel10040244.