

Prayers for the Earth

- WIHW 2021



https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=264584925073484&ref=watch_permalink



Cape Town Interfaith Initiative partnered with Southern African Faith Communities Environment Institute (SAFCEI) and Ocean View Organic Farmers (OV) to honour the home that is common to people of all faiths – the Earth.

With the tidal waves upon us of Covid19, Climate Emergency, food insecurity and so much more, all people of faith are called on to revisit the sacred call to care for the earth. Even more, when we think of the Golden Rule and the Charter of Compassion, we realise that in treating each other with compassion and treating others the way we want to be treated, we must include all of God's magnificent creation in our considerations. How do we respect each other if we do not respect all of life?

We made our preparations on Friday 29 January when a very small group of 11 diverse Cape Town faith leaders gathered at an organic farm to help them plant a food forest. The five women of Ocean View Organic Farms were speaking about their first birthday celebrations and we were inspired by the dream and the vision they had been following.

Because of Covid19 and the restrictions on gatherings, we decided to film the event with a small group and then share the recording in a live Facebook event on Saturday 6 February. The event was fully sponsored by SAFCEI, a 16 year old multi faith organisation focused on eco-justice, which identifies as "people of faith caring for living earth". Apart from the fruit trees for planting, SAFCEI also sponsored transport and refreshments for the local participants, as well as data for internet connection for everyone who required it to attend the online Saturday 6 Feb event.

About 30 faith leaders from all over Southern Africa joined us for the Saturday morning event.

After a brief introduction from SAFCEI Executive Director Francesca De Gasparis, we played the power point presentation made up of some of the video clips recorded during our prayer and planting ceremony the previous Friday.

Then we asked people to tell us what they were doing to teach the younger generation to care for the planet.

We found ourselves in a deeply thoughtful conversation about how we express our faiths in care for the earth, and each of the faith leaders who shared their experiences and projects brought so much of value to those listening. Many people who were present felt inspired to redouble their efforts to engage with youth, the earth and issues of eco justice especially food security. This is a critical conversation in grassroots areas where the faith leader is both the example that people want to follow, as well as the teacher they want to learn from. Many faith leaders have never given much

thought to what their faiths say about care for the earth. The conversations often reveal layers in the sacred text teachings that some have not considered previously.

Some quotes and questions from the event that was distributed on Facebook live and You-Tube:

- 1. When we love the soil, the soil loves us back.**
- 2. The actions we take are all prayers for the earth.**
- 3. We must weave a community. The organic farm in OV township is an example of this. It is of particular note that it is run by women (who are often discounted as farmers).**
- 4. If we see the earth as an expression of God, does this change our relationship to one another and to our shared home?**
- 5. Ingratitude is an expression of wastefulness.**
- 6. If we were to see ourselves as a seed planted by God, how would that change our behaviour and attitudes.**
- 7. Let us be the example that people want to follow.**

A Khoi traditional leader, Andre Naidoo, told us about the importance of getting back to and acknowledging indigenous knowledge systems. He encouraged us all to return the ways of the elders who knew how to honour the earth as a sacred practice, saying:

God was the original planter.

Faiths represented at the planting ceremony: Muslim, Christian, Khoi traditional, Rastafarian, Interfaith.

There was an even split of men and women, and our age range as 13 to 83.

We sang to the trees, and realised how deeply we worship God through our engagement with the natural world.

God bless us all, every one.

Report compiled by Rev Berry Behr, Chairperson, Cape Town Interfaith Initiative in collaboration with colleagues and the interfaith community.