

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
JUSTICE AND WITNESS MINISTRIES

700 Prospect Ave.
Cleveland, OH 44115-1110
Phone: 216.736.3700
Fax: 216.736.3703



Jim Deming
Minister for Environmental Justice

Witness for Justice #550

October 17, 2011

Hello and Goodbye

Jim Deming

Minister for Environmental Justice

I thought I would be glad to say goodbye to Andy Rooney when he retired a few weeks ago. You know, he's the guy on *Sixty Minutes* who was always nattering on about some trivial issue like, "And what's the deal with the lock on *Ziploc* bags? Do we really think locking up a thin layer of plastic is going to keep out thieves?" I know many of us who watched him always asked why anyone would get paid for highlighting the mundane side of life.

But since a recent trip to Lucca, Italy, I've had to rethink my farewells. My spouse and I and another couple rented a small house for a week near this historic city, and as we checked in with our host, we were confronted with a long and complicated list of what we had to do with our trash. There were buckets for food scraps, plastics, glass, metals, paper, and a small bucket for anything else that did not fit those categories. Each bucket was marked in English and Italian, and the separate days of pick-up were listed on each. And, in a gentle pre-scolding, we were told by our host that violations would incur a fine. Andy would have been so proud of all the details.

In the beginning, it seemed a hassle for us Americano paying-guests to acknowledge the remains of every item we ate or bought or used. But as the week progressed, we became more aware of every piece of “trash” and its lifecycle and eventual destination. What seemed at first an imposition became instead an awareness of our patterns of consumption and waste.

For those of us who live with an environmental conscience, the most obvious lesson here might be that none of God’s gift of creation should be “thrown away.” Everything we use, consume, recycle, or send to the dump was and still is a part of the sacred gift of life. There is no secular/sacred divide. Every scrap and detail is sacred because it comes from God, and how we use or abuse the earth’s abundance reflects on our respect of and love for our Creator.

And for those of us who live with a social conscience, the lesson might be that there are no unimportant people in God’s eyes. Jesus tells us that God cares even for the tiny sparrow, a creature of insignificance even for seasoned bird-watchers. So it would seem that God has a place in God’s heart for the ordinary, the mundane, even the naturally and socially insignificant.

Which leads me to one more conclusion: maybe those folks protesting on Wall Street are proclaiming that there are no “throw-away people.” Maybe they are telling us by their protest that this competitive culture bent on dividing haves from have not’s or have nothings is not life-sustaining or just. Maybe they are raising our awareness of our patterns of consumption and waste on a human level. That we can’t hide our “trash.”

Thanks, Andy, for reminding us that even the mundane are sacred.

The United Church of Christ has more than 5,277 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.