

JESUS THE ENVIRONMENTALIST

Group Calls Followers of Jesus to Care for His Creation

by Ephie Risho

A volunteer stands up from hoeing the soil and wipes her forehead. The other members of her church are bustling around the garden with wheelbarrows and gardening tools as a few kids run around the newly-created garden beds. She nods and smiles happily as she gets back to work.

Is gardening a way to serve Jesus? Members of a non-profit organization in Canada argue that the answer is a resounding yes. The earth, they declare, is God's creation, and one of our first mandates as His people is to care for it. Matter matters. And they're going to do something about it.

The group is called A Rocha, and their most recent project is called Good Seed Sunday. Their goal: to mobilize Christians in the mission to care for creation. Unlike many environmental movements, the driving motive is not politics or activism, but practical applied theology. Participants are given the question: if you're a follower of Jesus, what role will you play in caring for his creation?

"Overcoming under-informed worldviews is a big goal of what we do," says Markku Kostamo, director of A Rocha. "One of our main objectives is to encourage people to explore scripture with us and see how God cares for creation. God clearly doesn't limit His mission to people, and neither should we."

The Good Seed Sunday project is aimed at helping people care for creation and educating those who put a distance between their faith-life and the environment. Since educating people is of primary importance, the project will involve a major church resource component, including sermons, Bible study materials, children's lessons and daily devotionals. The project also promotes practical action projects, ways to care for creation and connect people to their local communities. Even something as simple as gardening.

"Community gardens are a great action project," Kostamo says. "They build healthier communities, care for the earth, and produce lots of good food that can be shared with people in need."

The efforts of A Rocha over the last decade have seen the growth of two study centres, a number of conservation projects across Canada, and dozens of community gardens. A Rocha currently provides workshops, training, and resources for church and neighbourhood groups desiring to start their own community gardens.

"It's not just about gardening," Kostamo is quick to point out. "We see in Scripture a clear connection between people's relationship with God, with one another and with the earth. It's all connected. We're trying to help people see that, and encourage them to care for the earth as much as God does. This could look completely different depending on who you talk to."

If you'd like more information about Good Seed Sunday, please call A Rocha Canada at 604-542-9006, or email goodseed@arocha.ca. You can visit the website at www.arocha.ca/goodseedsunday.



About the Author: Ephie Risho is a writer and father, based out of a small town in the Rocky Mountains. He has an MDiv from Regent College, and currently runs a creative company doing web, graphics and writing.