

An Invitation to Ethical Eating

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Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice is the subject chosen by delegates at the General Assembly of the UUA, for congregations like ours to study and act upon if they choose to. Why food, you may ask? (Apparently the other option had to do with nuclear proliferation.) Maybe it's because, in the words of the Sesame Street song, "Everybody Eats." It's something everyone can do something about, without joining one protest, signing one petition, or writing one letter. And, although food is something we generally take for granted, it does matter. In the words of Rev. Alison Wohler of Amherst MA:

". . . It matters because how we eat is not an isolated issue. . . . In this world of infinite connections, our interdependent web, there is no such thing as an isolated event, and because of that fact it matters what we do. It matters what we eat. It matters where our food comes from. It matters how it's grown. It matters how an animal is slaughtered. It matters that...eating food that has been transported long distances is contributing to the greenhouse effect.... It matters that raising livestock produces copious amounts of methane, ...which is twenty-three times more harmful to the atmosphere than carbon dioxide. It matters if the food we are eating was harvested by people being paid less than a living wage. Nothing is an isolated act.

"But, it also matters that eating is one of the most intimate and pleasurable of human

experiences. The food we eat becomes a living part of us. We are literally what we eat. It is ethically important to feed ourselves and our loved ones food that makes us healthy and happy. . . . And, it matters very much that eating with friends is fun and a way to get to know each other better. These kinds of things may all play into our decisions about how, when and what we eat. The cost of buying food involves more than dollars and cents. [And] the benefits of food involve more than protein and carbohydrates. . . ."

At this point, perhaps some of you are feeling as I often do when I begin to think too hard about stuff like this, a little overwhelmed. Others may be saying, I know all that and I'm already doing something about it. For me, that is the beauty of this year's Earth Day program, the 40/40/40 challenge. The idea is to get 40 people from your congregation (or 40% if you're small, but I like to think we can get 40 people) to sign up to try one or more of 40 actions for 40 days. It breaks the whole issue into bite-sized pieces. And there's something for everyone. The actions range in how challenging they are from giving up fast food, as Donna mentioned, to becoming a vegan for 40 days. There are even suggested actions that don't change what you eat at all!. Or if you think you do most everything on the list that you can imagine doing, try ratcheting up what you already do a notch. I buy Fair Trade from June... most of the time. Maybe I'll commit to buying Fair Trade exclusively for 40 days. We don't eat much meat, in our family and when we do we usually buy locally, humanly raised meat, but maybe we'll extend that to buying only local organic milk, too. And here's one I've been meaning to do, but never quite get around to: Offer a spoken grace before meals for 40 days. There's also a list of actions for children and youth. Or

you can invent your own action. So there really is something for everyone.

But here's what I'm really excited about: for those who choose to, we can fulfill our pledge by starting a voyage of discovery together. I have read the UUA's resource guide and it is stuffed with books, articles, videos, and websites on every aspect of Ethical Eating, from many different perspectives. I have added a class on Ethical Eating to the list of Adult RE classes we are offering. I hope we can gather a group of interested people and choose a direction to explore together. From that, I can imagine hosting a film series on Ethical Eating, open to the public. I would personally like to find out more about where even my locally sourced food comes from, so I'd love to start a series of field trips to local farms, accompanied by any interested children or adults. Any children who plan to attend Religious Exploration classes over the next 40 days can sign the pledge, since we'll be continuing our food focus, started back in February, with a unit on Fair Trade and a taste test with Karen Kleinkopf. And how about if we initiate another round of circle suppers, but this time commit to using as many local foods as possible.

So choose your action now and sign the pledge at the table to the left as you go out, or sign the pledge, knowing that you will be able to find an action that is a good fit and take the list home with you and think it over. And start a conversation with others who are signing the pledge about what they plan to do. If you'd like more information or have questions or comments, please stay for a discussion after the service and THEN sign the pledge!

I would like to leave you with the words of Rev. Robert F. Murphy, spoken to his Falmouth, MA congregation about the ethical eating challenge. "Some of you have been asking, 'How do we build a sense of community? How do we revitalize this congregation?' Let me offer a suggestion. 'This is the moment.' The opportunity that you seek is here and now. If you want to experience what is really important in healthy religion - if you want to understand things like hospitality and gratitude and compassion, and if you want to feel connected to something that is larger than yourself - then, please, join us in this conversation about food and religion...come into the fiesta. Come join the dinner party..."