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## Earth Day Message: Then & Now

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In 1970 Dave was a student at California Lutheran University and held the position of Religious Activities Commissioner in the Student Government.

With the support of Rev. Gerry Swanson, the College Chaplain, and the assistance of two other students, Will Hall and Susie Struck, Dave reallocated his budget to celebrate the first Earth Day.

So many good ideas soon surfaced that the event quickly became a week long celebration and included, not only the college community, but the entire city of Thousand Oaks, California.

The week long program included:

- Clifford Humphrey, founder of Ecology Action and dubbed “Grandfather of the Recycling Movement”. His photo pushing a globe in a baby buggy made the cover of New York Times magazine that first Earth Day 1970.
- Beach clean-up and party
- Tree planting at the campus chapel and service for the Earth
- Free community movie, featuring the story of John Wesley Powell’s exploration of the Grand Canyon in the Walt Disney movie. “The Ten Who Dared”, along with a Donald Duck cartoon about littering.
- Lecture on air pollution from professor from Oxnard
- Lecture on population, pollution, and survival from Dr. Wayne Davis.
- Danny Cox, who provided an outdoor concert and picnic preceded by a litter clean-up day.

Some of the key issues of the day, were how to stop pollution especially litter, recycling, air pollution, and toxic chemicals being used in fertilizers.

The first Earth Day attracted an estimated 20 million participants in programs across the nation. The event was so politically popular that that Congresspersons and Senators scrambled to find a place to give a speech to their constituents as Congress was closed for the day.

Soon after, strongly bi-partisan efforts worked to establish the U.S. EPA, and pass environmental legislation, such as the Clean Air, Clean Water, and Endangered Species Act.

The Earth Day efforts were supported by business and labor, republicans and democrats, farmers and city dwellers; and the rich and the poor of our nation.

In fact, being for a more clean and healthy environment was so politically popular that Sen. Jacob Javitz from New York expressed concern that people were working so hard for the environment that they might forget other issues like poverty, hunger, and the war.

See NBC News Broadcast [http://www.hulu.com/site-player/playerembedwrapper.swf?url=http%3A%2F%2Fvideo.app.msn.com%2Fwatch%2Fvideo%2Ffirst-earth-day-april-22-1970%2F17wfydxvn&partner=msn&eid=CBVHA7\\_QWOO5IJ-TroyLEw&referrer=none](http://www.hulu.com/site-player/playerembedwrapper.swf?url=http%3A%2F%2Fvideo.app.msn.com%2Fwatch%2Fvideo%2Ffirst-earth-day-april-22-1970%2F17wfydxvn&partner=msn&eid=CBVHA7_QWOO5IJ-TroyLEw&referrer=none)

Reese remembers his first Earth Day planting lemon and orange trees in Marin County. I remember thinking that someday these bee-pollinated fruit trees would give us such a wonderful bounty of citrus; and today those trees yield such a plentiful crop that we give more than three quarters of them away as gifts from the Earth.

Fast forward 20 years from the first Earth Day, and the issues were beginning to become more complex, though a spirit of optimism and plans for large-scale international cooperation for solutions still prevailed.

In 1987 the Bruntland Report, *Our Common Future*, had been published outlining a global agenda and potential solutions through international cooperative efforts.

That same year, the Montreal Protocol, provided the world of a great example of how international cooperation could solve serious environmental problems and addressed the pressing issue of the depletion of the ozone layer and put the planet on track to recover by the year 2050.

In 1989, our colleague, Dr. Noel Brown, former Director of UNEP for the North American Region and U.N. Headquarters in NY, was instrumental in achieving the success of the Montreal Protocol. He spoke of the upcoming challenges of climate change and the hopeful possibility that the U.N. would give the Earth actual rights and empower a new group to enforce those rights of the Earth. See: <http://www.globalhealing.net/articles/view/165360>

This new spirit of international cooperation set the tone for the 20th Earth Day anniversary in 1990, where people were preparing for the upcoming Earth Summit in 1992. In the short 20 years, Earth Day had gone from a largely U.S. event with 20 million people to an international event with 200 million participants from 145 countries.

The issues now included climate change, deforestation, population, conserving biodiversity, a possible new Earth Charter, and a program for sustainable development.

In 1992, the optimism and previous foundation of international cooperation was weakened considerably at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. While the Earth Summit did move forward with a Climate Convention and Biological Diversity Convention, there was opposition to both. The Forest Convention was watered down to a statement on Forest Principles, the Earth Charter was reduced to a short Rio Declaration, and population was removed from the agenda all together. Despite these setbacks, Agenda 21 was put in place as a global blueprint to move the world to sustainable practices and governance.

Fast forward to 20 years later to 2010, the 40th anniversary of Earth Day.

Scientists have now identified limits to the Earth's systems. In an [article](#) in *Nature*, Johan Rockstrom and his co-authors argue that to avoid catastrophic environmental change, humanity must stay within defined planetary boundaries. If one boundary is transgressed, then safe levels for other processes could also be under serious risk. The planetary boundaries include: climate change, ocean acidification, atmospheric aerosol loading, chemical pollution, land system changes, ozone depletion, overload of phosphorus and nitrates, and decreasing fresh water resources.

While the problems are more serious, needing more urgent attention, with more serious consequences, we no longer have the global community acting together to work toward solutions. Republicans have chosen to discard science in favor of corporate economic interests and protecting the wealthy. Further attempts are being made to divide business and labor, and wealth is increasingly being transferred to the wealthy at the expense of the poor, elderly, disabled, and the environment.

That was then. Now is Earth Day 2011

In a strange metaphor, Earth Day this year falls on Good Friday as if we are being reminded that the Earth is being crucified by the collective actions of humanity.

We are reminded, though, Good Friday is followed by Easter, a day set in the Christian Calendar by the cycles of nature, the first Sunday after the first full moon after the Spring Equinox.

There are many signs of hope that it is not too late to change direction to one of greater international cooperation and sustainability.

Some positive Earth Day signs of hope include:

- The Earth Day Network, now has 22,000 partners in 192 countries promoting green education, a green economy, and this year has adopted as its theme, “A Billion Acts of Green”. See: <http://www.earthday.org>
- The United Nations has now declared April 22nd as International Mother Earth Day and the issues of Rights of the Earth are once again being discussed. See: <http://www.trinity.net/MotherEarthDay/news/view/165262>
- Tourism, the largest industry in the world, now has a Global Sustainable Tourism Council with a criteria for the tourist industry from around the world to operate more sustainably. This initiative came from a coalition of the United Nations Environment Programme, The U.N. Foundation, the U.N. World Tourism Council, and the Rainforest Alliance. See: <http://www.gstcouncil.org>
- Large corporations are working to become more “Green” and providing the public with more “Green Messaging”. As an example, the Walt Disney Company deliberately opened the Animal Kingdom in 1998 on Earth Day. From the beginning they brought conservation messages and environmental education to its attractions at the theme park. Each year The Animal Kingdom celebrates Earth Day with many activities for both the young and old at heart. The underlying theme of the park is conservation and preservation, and is based on a quote by Walt Disney, “I have learned from the animal world, and what everyone will learn who studies it is, a renewed sense of kinship with the earth and all its inhabitants.” More recently, the Walt Disney Company launched the DisneyNature program, releasing a new film each Earth Day. To date the Earth Day releases have included the films, “Earth” in 2009, “Oceans” in 2010, and “African Big Cats” in 2011. “Penguins” is scheduled for Earth Day 2012 and “Hidden Beauty: A Love Story that Feeds the Earth” is scheduled for release in 2013.
- California Lutheran University, where Dave led the first Earth Day Celebration in 1970 and where Reese currently lectures, will have a week long celebration of Earth Day. Activities will include: a new online pledge that all faculty, staff, and students are being encouraged to complete, a promotion for using local and organic food, a water conservation display, an acoustic music concert (no electricity), giving reusable water bottles to students, installation of new sustainable water fountains where water bottles can be filled up and the fountains will count and display the number of refills, disposable bottles saved from landfills, and a blessing of bikes, skateboards, and feet for alternative transportation by campus pastors.

While Cal Lutheran continues the Earth Day tradition now beginning this 5th decade of Earth Days since its 1970 program, it is working year round for a sustainable campus. Its current plan calls for a path forward to become climate neutral, improve on its energy, transportation, waste, water systems, implement sustainable procurement plans, improve buildings and landscaping, and enhance the environmental curriculum of the college.

Cal Lutheran seems to be on a path where Earth Day is every day, a path we encourage the global community to join.

It was the collaboration of republicans and democrats, business and labor, farmers, and city dwellers, and education from colleges and universities that helped translate the first Earth Day into meaningful public policy.

This cooperative problem solving approach is needed again to face the challenges of the planetary boundaries so all humanity can live more sustainably; and respect and protect nature.

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