

Walter Brueggeman, an Old Testament scholar, wrote that "Land is a central, if not *the central theme* of biblical faith. Biblical faith is a pursuit of historical belonging that includes a sense of destiny derived from such belonging." As the church, we have no place to be, exist, or even love without land. Yet current trends in our culture have forced us again to consider what it means to be the progeny of folks who had no home- no place to lay their head- save the very land which they roamed. What we believe and profess to do as the church in the world attempts to embody the biblical faith of old.

It is such faith and belief that we want to try to live out in our world, this place where we live, where we do ministry. Camp Lake Stephens, now over 70 years old has been a place of refuge, renewal, and resurrection for many. As such, this very place is a living, breathing example of God's creation and its redemptive power. It is an example, which forces added responsibility on its caretakers to ensure that the practices that affect its land are not only beneficial to the land and those who spend time on it / with it, but that those who work together with Camp Lake Stephens avoid sinful behavior when dealing with the land. Because this is so important to us, we take care to teach others that taking care of the earth is not a trend, and not simply "environmentally sound." It is a calling, a biblical and intrinsic responsibility to love the Lord by loving and caring for what we have been given. Thus, sustainable living is not merely an ecological improvement, but a spiritual necessity, benefiting the entire ecosystem, which is seeking an embodied, whole, reality.

Our call to sustainability, then, not only comes in broad theological terms but in specific relationships with the materials we consume and how we give back to the earth. We at Camp Lake Stephens are concerned about our relationship with the earth, and want it to be as efficacious for the earth as it is for us as Christians. As such, we want to be mindful of practices that are harmful to creation and curb harmful behaviors, while building new practices of environmental stewardship and caretaking. Below are a few essential points that make up our call to sustainability:

### 1. *Buying Local*

Nothing can be more environmentally redemptive than buying local. The biggest way we can buy local is through our food suppliers, and that is something that we have not done as well as we could have as of late. While we plan to start with simple foods, we hope to eventually buy a majority of what we eat from local, sustainable growers. The shipping and handling costs will decrease our carbon footprint up to 40%, as well as lower the costs of our food purchases and raise the quality of the food we prepare. In the summer of 2012, we sourced more than 10,000 pounds of food from our garden, saving us food costs as well as lowering our carbon footprint and most importantly, teaching our campers the values of caring for God's creation.

## *2. Landscaping*

Current weather patterns have been a severe detriment to the topsoil at Camp Lake Stephens. Because of this, we have lost most of our grass and when it rains, we have more mud than green. It is our goal, then, to build retaining walls and plant trees that will impact our topsoil in such a way as to provide the most erosion resistance possible, while also creating a positive change to the aesthetics of this place that so many consider beautiful and sacred.

## *3. Reducing Our Carbon Footprint*

Because over 5,000 folks set foot on Camp Lake Stephens each year, we produce gross amounts of pollution in the place we call home. The impact of vehicles on our lots, waste gathered and manufactured at our facilities, and the resources it takes to maintain and provide for our facilities are all results from how we operate. Realizing this, we want to do better and reduce our carbon footprint. A few ways we are doing this are:

*Planting Trees:* We plan to plant thousands of trees over our 150 acres to *completely* offset our carbon emissions over the course of a year. Perhaps in the future we can offer to plant trees here for others who also wish to offset their carbon footprint.

*Recycling:* Oxford offers mixed paper, #1/#2 plastic, aluminum, and cardboard recycling. We take advantage of all of these and recycle all that we can.

*Tankless Water Heaters:* We have recently purchased two tankless water heaters for our dining hall, where we use more water than any other facility, particularly during summer camp. These heaters will not only save us money by reducing our water bill, but they will use less water and electricity, by assisting our attempts to be better stewards of our gifts.

*Composting:* We are currently institute composting of our left-over food and compostable materials from meal times during the summer months. This not only helps our garden by providing free, premium quality soil, but it also helps cut down as much as 20% of our waste from any given summer camp week.

*Treehouses:* Our new treehouses, built in the summer of 2008, are sustainable buildings. Using a green design, they are powered by solar energy, and rely on efficient facility use to generate electricity.

*No Trace Camping:* We believe in Leave No Trace camping and are members of the organization Leave No Trace, which emphasizes low impact camping and hiking. We emphasize this with our adventure camps, cookouts, and campouts.

For more information about Leave No Trace visit [LNT.org](http://LNT.org)