



Desmond Hartwell
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Environmental Fridays:

From Awareness to Action—Addressing the Lamentations of Nature



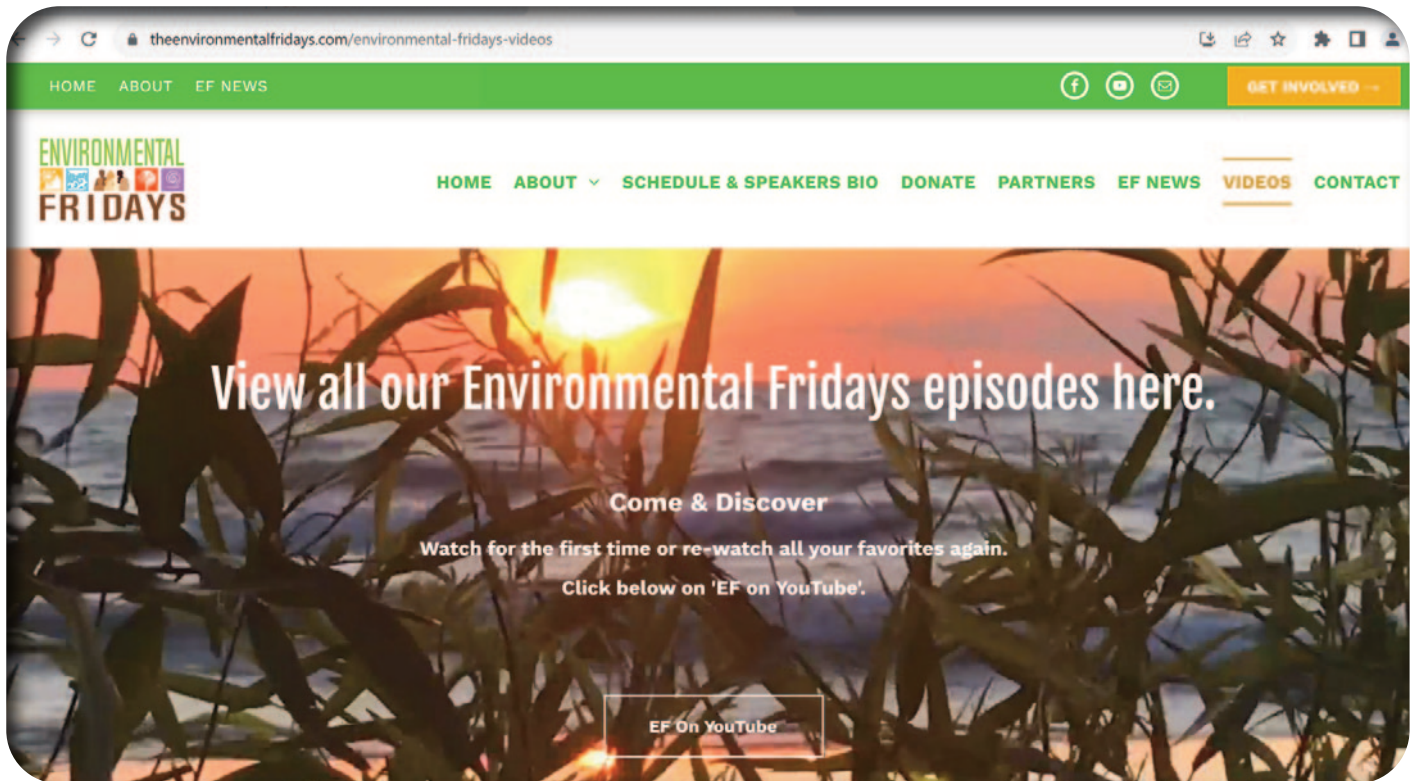
It is late June 2023. The air quality index (AQI) in southwest Michigan’s Berrien County is dangerously unhealthy, as it is in many other places across the United States.¹ On my way to O’Hare International Airport, haze obstructed the view of downtown Chicago as it did in other major American cities. The skies in some places appeared flaming red-orange as the Canadian wildfire smoke pervaded the air. Health advisories encouraged residents to stay inside—especially asthmatics—or to wear N95 masks when going outside.² Millions of people were affected one way or another by this border-crossing smoke.³

Unsurprisingly, studies have consistently shown direct connections and correlations between air pollution and respiratory diseases, including Long COVID.⁴ For some, breathing is hard and labored; for others, it is deadly. According to a 2021 report, air pollution contributes to almost 11,000 deaths in the U.S. annually.⁵ Another report indicates that it contributed to at least 1.8 million excess deaths globally in 2019.⁶ Air pollution is at once unapologetically local, regional, and personal. It needs no passport; there is no hiding place. Indeed, the influences and impacts of nature and the environment are uniquely un-

bothered by immigration laws and international treaties. Borders cannot protect us, for we live entangled on earth and under the heavens.

Air pollution, along with record-breaking global high temperatures,⁷ are subjects of interest and relevance, among many other wide-ranging topics, featured in a free online extracurricular guest-speaker lecture series I designed and organized called Environmental Fridays (<https://www.theenvironmentalfridays.com/>). This article not only describes the program but also focuses on the broader value of this series for environmental education, particularly within the Seventh-day Adventist setting.

At the beginning of human time in the Eden School, after God created the heavens and the earth, humans were given the responsibility to “dress it and to keep it” (Genesis 2:15, KJV). Herein lies the genesis of the core and immutable ethics of environmental stewardship and conservation. This mandate remains binding upon us all even now, as witnesses to and participants in both the glories and the lamentations of nature. This should be imminently true for those who profess belief in the divine creatorship of everything in heaven and on earth. Therefore, it lies within our



responsibility to future generations to preserve the glories of creation and to remedy the lamentations of nature: pollution, loss of biodiversity, the climate crisis, and other crises.⁸ We must resolve to change the fact that we are the only life form, of the 1.2 million that have been identified so far, that routinely and deliberately destroys our environment. The recovery of nature around the Chernobyl nuclear disaster and during COVID speaks volumes about our impact and nature’s resilience.⁹ We must now come to fully realize creation care,¹⁰ stewardship, and redemption as urgent values in our relationship with the environment.

I have undertaken a way of integrating into our education system this faith—our faith—with the responsibility of environmental stewardship and conservation. I call the initiative *Environmental Fridays*. . . . *It Is Personal*. It is a free Zoom-based weekly lecture series that fosters environmental awareness and encourages action, restoration, and stewardship. It offers free supplemental multidisciplinary subject content covering physical, social, health, and life sciences related to numerous environmental concerns, including pollution, biodiversity, and climate change.

Over the past two academic years, there have been 58 episodes hosted by 70 speakers from 12 different countries. All episodes are recorded, uploaded, and accessible on YouTube.

However, Environmental Fridays goes beyond faith and information by seeking to translate both into interventions, improvements, actions, and solutions. It is both a vehicle for awareness and action and a call for our restoration and stewardship of the environment. But it is even more. It seeks more: to reconnect us spiritually with nature and create meaning for our lives that transcends our secular culture, and goes beyond our science and technology.

William Wordsworth, romantic English poet (1770–1850), reminisced in his ode, “Intimations of Immortality,” about the past glory

of nature: “The things which I have seen I now can see no more.” . . . “That there hath past away a glory from the earth.” . . . “Where is it now, the glory and the dream?”¹¹ But, is it that nature has lost her glory or that we do not behold her as we ought to; that we are more disconnected from her than past generations were? Is it also that we view her mostly by what she can do for us, what we can get from her, rather than what we can give to her? That we now see her mostly for function and utility rather than for inspiration and beauty? Environmental Fridays seeks

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Environmental Fridays Guest Lecture Series Season V

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 Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/environmentalfridays>



DATE	TOPIC	SPEAKER
9.15.23	Environmental Education and Environmental Justice in Michigan	Eileen Boekestein & Regina Strong Michigan EGLE, USA
9.22.23	Conservation and Sustainability in the Grenadines	Orisha Joseph The Grenadines, Caribbean
9.29.23	Marine Biology of Reefs in Toco, Trinidad	Stanton G. Belford Tennessee, USA
10.06.23	Castara, Tobago: A Model Eco-Friendly Community	Natasha Legall-Roberts Tobago, Caribbean
10.13.23	World Food Day – October 16, 2023	Daphne Ewing-Chow Cayman Islands, Caribbean
10.20.23	Ocean Literacy and Edutainment	Katrina Khan-Roberts Trinidad, Caribbean
10.27.23	Break the Cycle Student Projects	Leslie Rubin Atlanta, Georgia, USA
11.03.23	Environmental Science, Policy, and Management	Jessica Penrose Davis, California, USA
11.10.23	Green the Church	Ambrose F. Carroll Oakland, California, USA
11.17.23	Sustainable Development in the Americas	Mark Lambrides Washington, DC, USA
11.24.23	Colorado River Drought	Eric Balken Colorado, USA
12.01.23	Impact of Literature on Environmental Movements	Jessica J. Lee Cambridge, United Kingdom
12.08.23	Marine Biodiversity of the Caribbean	Shivonne M. Peters Trinidad, Caribbean
12.15.23	Chemical Composition of the Canadian Wildfires	Motria Gaudill Chicago, Illinois, USA

Environmental Fridays Guest Lecture Series Season VI

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DATE	TOPIC	SPEAKER
1.12.24	Environment in Native America-Themed Movies	Kimberly Guerrero Riverside, California, USA
1.19.24	Environmental and Economic Implications of Declining Honeybee Populations	Seth Borenstein Washington, DC, USA
1.26.24	Environmental Innovation and Adaptation in the Caribbean	Leah Fouchong Trinidad, Caribbean
2.02.24	Environmental Action Based on Local and Indigenous Knowledge	Joseph Karanja Tempe, Arizona
2.09.24	Emerging Contaminants in Caribbean Waters	Quincy Edwards St. Kitts, Caribbean
2.16.24	Effect of Air Pollution on Child Brain Development	Megan M. Herting Los Angeles, California
2.23.24	Impact of the Environment on Human Health	Sonya Gupta Cambridge, Massachusetts
3.01.24	Stories from an Environmental Journalist	Alexis Young New Orleans, Louisiana, USA
3.08.24	Environmental Solutions Through Biomimicry Chemical Principles	Mark Dorfman New York, New York, USA
3.15.24	Increasing Greenhouse Gases: Causes and Consequences	Ralph Keeling San Diego, California, USA
3.22.24	Environmental Innovation and Entrepreneurship in the Caribbean	Sharda Mahabir Trinidad, Caribbean
3.29.24	Chemical Contaminant Exposure Among Children in Westside Atlanta	Eri Saikawa Atlanta, Georgia, USA
4.05.24	Water Policy, Regulations and Public Health	Adrienne L. Katner New Orleans, Louisiana, USA
4.12.24	Pollinators of the Caribbean	Lena Dempewolf Trinidad, Caribbean
4.19.24	Communicating Climate Change and Sustainability	Andrew C. Revkin New York, New York, USA
4.26.24	National Asthma and Allergy Month	Monica Pagua Chicago, Illinois, USA

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to repair this breach in our relationship with nature, the environment, and ultimately with ourselves.

Over the past two academic years, there have been 58 episodes hosted by 70 speakers from 12 different countries. All episodes are recorded, uploaded, and accessible on YouTube. The episodes of Environmental Fridays can be found by searching on YouTube using the phrase, “Environmental Fridays.”

Season V is scheduled Fall 2023 (September 2023 to December 2023) with 14 episodes lined up and will subsequently be followed by Season VI (January 2024 to April 2024), with 16 episodes. (See the schedules on pages 27 and 28.) Details and updates can be found at the Environmental Fridays website: <https://www.theenvironmentalfridays.com/>, and in its Facebook group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/environmentalfridays>.

So far, Environmental Fridays has led to the formation of two derivative organizations that are actively translating awareness and knowledge into action and solutions: A 4 Asthma (https://www.facebook.com/gto_groups/a4asthma) is committed to alleviating the suffering of asthmatics in Benton Harbor and beyond in southwest Michigan, and in Tobago (<https://www.facebook.com/com/groups/intobago>) focuses on increasing awareness of the rich biodiversity on the Caribbean island of Tobago, which may contribute to building its ecotourism sector. Both organizations are community focused and engage students and youth. For example, InTobago was co-founded and is led by Kerisanne Adams, a Tobago national, pursuing a premed biology degree at the University of the Southern Caribbean, located in the Maracas Valley, on the island of Trinidad.

Environmental Fridays is also listed and referenced on the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy website as a Michigan Partner in Environmental Education (<https://www.michigan.gov/egle/public/egle-classroom>). Selected testimonials from students, teachers, and others regarding Environmental Fridays can be found here: <https://www.theenvironmentalfridays.com/environmental-fridays-testimonials>.

Getting Involved

There are at least six different ways you can get involved with Environmental Fridays. First, visit the Environmental Friday website and view past episodes. (See <https://www.theenvironmentalfridays.com/environmental-fridays-videos>.) Second, suggest a guest speaker and or topic, including presentations by students. Third, volunteer to co-host with me to introduce guest speakers and facilitate the Q&A session. Co-hosts can be teachers, staff, students, and others. Fourth, attend the live-streamed scheduled episodes at 9:30 a.m. EST on Fridays. Fifth, use the videos posted on YouTube as supplemental classroom and course materials. Sixth, attendees and patrons of Environmental Fridays can translate the knowledge learned into action and solutions.

Topics and Speakers

A variety of topics are presented in Environmental Fridays, such as biodiversity, pollution, and climate change to environmental health, environmental justice, and environmental poetry. These multidisciplinary topics include content from the physical, social, earth, and life sciences, as well as history, geography, and culture. The topics are dealt with at education levels ranging from high school to college and are also designed to target a lay public audience. The episodes are organized around a semester-based academic year (fall and spring), with planning and scheduling done during the summer.

Environmental Fridays’ guest speakers come from a wide variety of backgrounds, subject expertise, and life experiences across the United States, the Caribbean, and other places. They represent government and non-governmental agencies, businesses, volunteer organizations, environmental entities, and educational institutions. They have come from national and international agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency, Centers for Disease Control, and the United Nations Environment Programme. For example, there have been guest speakers from Ukraine who talked about the impact of the war on

As a public science program, Environmental Fridays provides multi-disciplinary science and humanities content about the environment or related to it. Part of the growing field of environmental communication, this online lecture series provides a platform for the public to interact with and learn directly from experts, scientists, activists, and others about the environment.

Sidebar: Principles of Environmental Fridays

1. *Life as we know it exists only in relation to the environment.* Life and the environment are intricately and inextricably co-emergent and co-existent. Out of this deep connection emerges meaning and spirituality. We are in the universe and of the universe; the universe is in us. This is a source of awe, wonder, and joy.

2. *We are a part of the environment, and it is a part of us.* We are part of both life and the environment. The environment is not “other” to life or to us. Nature is more than a tool or instrument for our utility.

3. *Life exchanges matter and energy with the environment.* Life is built on exchange, transaction, and relationship with the environment.

4. *All biogeochemical cycles are evidence of the relatedness and interdependence of life and the environment.*

5. *All fundamental particles of nature exist in relationship to one another* either through interaction, origination, or as medium.

6. *As conscious or sentient beings made from the materials of the universe, we are, in a way, the universe curious about, observing, and experiencing itself.** We are also aware of the consequences of not being aware, observant, and curious.

7. *As conscious or sentient beings, we have the capacity to protect life and the environment.* We recognize and reference this as self-preservation, self-interest, and conservation.

8. *Concern for the environment is not just theory or vague philosophy; it is real, it is health,[†] it is economic, and it is unmistakably personal.* Concern for the environment requires both

education and engagement. We are all affected by the environment and should all be proactively learning and doing more about it.

9. *The environment is inspiration, beauty, and poetry.* It is not merely material, functional, or utilitarian, nor is it just a repository of useful things. Indeed, nature is sacred.[‡]

10. *We seek to intentionally translate awareness into action.* We are animated by the hope and faith of earth’s renewal by human imagination and intervention. This is our work of environmental redemption.

* The idea that we are the universe observing and experiencing itself has been attributed first to Allan Wilson Watts (<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/226051-through-our-eyes-the-universe-is-perceiving-itself-through-our>) and repeated by scientists of note, such as Carl Sagan (<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/484665-the-cosmos-is-within-us-we-are-made-of-star-stuff>), and Neil deGrasse Tyson (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0phd1UcluQ>).

† A subdiscipline called environmental health explores the impact of the environment on human health. See Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/>) for research and resources on the environmental impact on air quality, food safety, radiation, and much more. Additional resources can be found at the American Public Health Association (<https://www.apha.org/topics-and-issues/environmental-health>) and the World Health Organization (https://www.who.int/health-topics/environmental-health#tab=tab_1).

‡ See Karen Armstrong, *Sacred Nature: Restoring our Ancient Bond With the Natural World* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Books, 2022). ISBN 9780593313404.

the environment; and there was an episode on the impact of Sargassum seaweed on Caribbean islands. Other speakers have discussed forest wildfires, biodiversity restoration, environmental justice, the impact of air pollution on children’s health and development, ecopoetry, the triple planetary crisis (e.g., pollution, climate change, and loss of biodiversity), and more.

As a public science program, Environmental Fridays provides multidisciplinary science and humanities content about the environment or related to it. Part of the growing field of environmental communication,¹² this online lecture series provides a platform for the public to interact with and learn directly from experts, scientists, activists, and others about the environment. Likewise, the series provides scientists with a means of communicating directly with the public rather than through traditional media, social media, or via inaccessible specialty journal articles. The program helps to contextualize physical, so-

cial, and life science concepts in relevant real-world and consequential circumstances, challenges, and examples.

Environmental Fridays also addresses a deficiency in American education reported in a 2018 study, which indicated only two states require environmental science for high school graduation.¹³ In addition, while most high school chemistry books have a chapter on water, they do not have chapters on the chemistry of air or soil.¹⁴ It is reasonable then to assume that this lack of exposure to fundamental environmental education leads to misunderstandings of many vital concerns such as pollution, loss of biodiversity, climate change, and our role in them. Furthermore, there is often much left to be desired in the communication of environmental facts and issues that can also account for public misunderstanding, attitudes, and interest. For our future, a greater emphasis should be placed on the intentional integration of environmental science, sustainability, and awareness across the curriculum.¹⁵

“Altar Call”

I believe that every Sabbath keeper should also be an Earth-keeper, environmentally active and proactive. These characteristics should arise from our deep beholding of the awe, wonder, and mystery of God’s works. The God of the Sabbath is the God of our environment—all of it, including us. Exodus 20:11 connects for all time God’s act of creation with the general principle of rest and restoration. Washington Adventist University Professor Olive J. Hemmings makes this observation: “Creation requires Sabbath—rest and restoration as a general principle.”¹⁶ This idea of Sabbath rest is also explicitly invoked and expressed by God for the land in Leviticus 25:4 to 7 and 2 Chronicles 36:21.¹⁷



Every Sabbath we should celebrate the blessings and pleasures of nature, intentionally and explicitly. We should have an active environmental ministry, in both words and deeds.¹⁸ We should ask, each Sabbath, the simple question, “What have I done this week to improve the environment?” We must go beyond awareness to action, and from statements and sermons to sustainable solutions.¹⁹ This should be our commitment, beyond pulpit, pew, and pedagogy to the actual practice of restoration and stewardship of God’s creation.

Furthermore, our denominational eschatology should never be used to rationalize reluctant engagement in or even abstinence from the work of restoration and stewardship of God’s creation. Environmental negligence is internally inconsistent with the fact that we do all manner of planning and stewardship for the future, individually and corporately: there’s educational and career planning, family planning, financial planning, and institutional planning throughout our schools, hospitals, conferences, and other organizational entities. We do not wait in these areas for Jesus’ return for final or complete

fixes. Thus, any reluctance or inertia to engage in environmental ministry, creation care, and stewardship based on our belief in the Second Coming contradicts what we do in multiple areas of our lives and in our church’s institutions.

I encourage us—our church, individually and corporately, to take up this mission and become global leaders, in word and deed, for the restoration, stewardship, and compassionate care of all God’s creation. We cannot afford to be Laodicean toward the environment. Rather, we must proactively affirm our faith in the sacredness of the Word of God and the Works of God. May this faith compel us to change the world, to redeem the world, and restore the meaning of nature to our very souls.²⁰ ✍

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in Science Education for Southwest Michigan, as the 2012 College Teacher of the Year for the State of Michigan, and by the American Chemical Society Accreditation Committee in 2021 for his early research initiatives.

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20. Acknowledgments of and gratitude to colleagues, friends, family, and THE JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION personnel who served as manuscript reviewers.