

SUSTAINABILITY

God intended us to have green fingers



THE SITE OF JONATHAN'S sustainable retreat and learning center on Kingston Peninsula; Jonathan during a 2013 mission trip in Kibera Slum in Nairobi.

JONATHAN HALLEWELL PHOTOS

BY JONATHAN HALLEWELL

I first met Archbishop David Edwards at the Outflow Men's shelter in Saint John. I didn't know who he was, but had struck up a conversation about sustainability, something God had been speaking to me about for a few years.

Abp. David enthusiastically informed me that sustainability was one of the five marks of mission of the Anglican Church — beginning a conversation that led to my ordination.

My interest in sustainability developed after a mission trip to Africa in 2013. In the face of the poverty we encountered, I knew that just giving money to alleviate suffering, or providing school education was not the complete solution.

I was troubled by how many in Africa aspired to a western life, although much of their suffering has been created by historic injustices by rich nations and is perpetuated through unrighteous global economic systems controlled by the west.

My response to the mission trip was to explore what kind of life would “make sense” for people wherever they lived. I believe God led me to study permaculture, a sustainable system of living and regenerative agriculture.

During COVID-19, the issues surrounding sustainability have been highlighted globally, and I believe God is the one using the highlighter pen. It is as if the creation is crying out!

In Romans 8, Paul states that all of creation is eagerly longing for the people who are in the image of their creator to be revealed.

That is, the whole of creation was meant to be run, or stewarded, by humanity in relationship with God, with God's wisdom. Creation is longing for us to do our job properly.

Everything is suffering in the wake of global mismanagement. If God and His creation are crying out, it is vital we respond.

The United Nations estimates that our current global agricultural practices will

exhaust usable top-soil within 60 years if we don't change our ways. The unimaginable consequences of this demand a response.

If our broken relationship with God is at the root of this global mess, surely one sign of a people restored in relationship to God through Jesus is that we lead the way in being good stewards in creation, and show servant leadership in these life issues.

I believe our response needs to be personal, local and global. This year, my wife and I have sought to put regenerative agriculture into practice in our own yard, which now resembles a mini farm.

We are also purchasing seven acres on the Kingston Peninsula with a vision to develop “The Sustainable Way” retreat and sustainability learning centre.

Locally our parish is looking to partner with the Fundy Gardeners to develop some year-round food gardens on our church property and offer local training workshops.

As my sense of calling in

this area has increased in urgency during the pandemic, this summer I participated in Climate Reality Training pioneered by former US Vice President Al Gore, and became a registered Climate Leader. I would love for opportunities to come to talk to congregations about responding to climate change.

During the training, I was “randomly” assigned to partner with another trainee, Samba Nixon Otieno-Omumbo, from Kisumu, Kenya. This brought things full circle, Kenya being the nation I felt most attached to on my 2013 trip.

I discovered that Samba is a Christian, leading a community organization that aims to help families with urban farming so that they can reliably grow food, feed their families and become more sustainable.

I believe this connection was not random, but divinely orchestrated. I believe it is right for us to invest in poorer nations in this way, in part because the Spirit leads us to be a blessing to all nations.

They are our neighbours

who God calls us to love, but also because the western nations are so complicit in global inequality — and this wrong needs to be addressed.

My conversations with Samba have led to planning a project to train some families in each of these communities, to establish hubs for sustainability through them.

Estimated costs for this six-month training with supporting resources are about \$6,500 CAD. As a short-term challenge, this is beyond St. James the Less alone, and I invite you to share in the blessing of helping us in this initiative in whatever way you can. You can email me for information about how to do that at jonhallowell@gmail.com.

As a child I used to sing, “He's got the whole world in His hands,” but then I grew up and learned from Theresa of Avila that God has no hands but our hands. It's time to realize that God intended us to have green fingers!

The Rev. Jonathan Hallewell is rector in the Parish of Renforth.