

## Looking for Space

*By Tom Rehling*

2010 sounds so futuristic, but here we are. Christmas 2009 is in our rearview mirror and the Christmas decorations are, or soon will be, back in their storage space for another year. But now comes the challenging part.

Once I take down the tree, where will I put the things that have been under the tree. They are new. They don't have a place and now I have to find or make space for them.

How many Christmases before my house will be filled to capacity??? (Since I am the "saver" in our family, my wife sometimes reminds me that we are closer than I think!)

Our lives are like my house in that we also have a maximum capacity. How much can we do? How many memories can we remember? How much information can we compile in our brains? How many relationships can we nurture? How many emotions can we manage before we burst?

I believe that our lives are always at full capacity. So when something new comes into our lives, a new relationship, a crisis, a new project, the existing things must be moved down on our priority list or set aside for the time being. We can't take on anything new until we make space for it in our lives.

Have you found space in your life for the Spirit of Christmas? We work so hard to find and create it each year. It really is too good to



pack away in storage until next year.

You can continue the spirit of love that you shared with family and friends, if you make time for them in your life. You can continue the spirit of generosity and caring for others who have less, if you have room for them in your heart. You can continue the spirit of hope and joy that you felt on Christmas Eve when you lit your candle and sang Silent Night, if you make space for God in your life every day.

The Spirit of Christmas hasn't vanished - it is just looking for space in your life.

*Tom Rehling is conference minister of the Rocky Mountain Conference.*

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## *Which Came First?*

*By Peter Sawtell*

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There are two things that you don't want to see being made (the saying goes): sausage and laws.

That list is accurate, but not complete. There are many other processes where we're sure to be happier when we don't know all the gory details.

I had the unfortunate experience of delving into the processes by which chicken eggs get produced. I only read about it and saw a few pictures, but even so I'm inclined to put eggs on the "don't see it" list as well.

In spring 2005, as a speaker for the annual "Caring for Creation" conference sponsored by the Arizona Ecumenical Council, I had to do some extensive research to get to the point of being conversant on eco-justice for animal issues.

The reading -- both theological and political -- was fascinating, stimulating and challenging. There's a diversity of voices urging us toward thoughtful and faithful consideration of how humanity does -- and should -- relate to other creatures.

Theologian Jay McDaniel notes that there are different ethical issues for explicit animal abuse and exploitation, on one hand, and the more diffuse problem of habitat loss that forces species into extinction. The abuse category takes us into all sorts of unpleasant areas: sport hunting that just destroys life, medical research that does to primates what we'd never do to people, and the whole realm of factory farming -- which is where chickens and eggs come in.

Most of us don't think of abuse and exploitation in relation to the "incredible, edible egg". Chickens and eggs conjure up wholesome and idyllic images of Old MacDonald's farm where chickens wander around the barnyard, and the rooster perches on a fence post and crows at dawn.



Most eggs that make it into the retail market, though, come from a very different kind of setting. Forget about pecking for seeds and bugs in the farmyard. Industrial egg production keeps the hens in cages for their entire lives.

What's so bad about being in a cage? These hens are usually crammed into small wire cages with five or six other hens. Each chicken gets a space of 67 square inches, about three-quarters the size of a sheet of typing paper.

One way hens react to these conditions is to peck each other constantly so the industry limits the damage by beak trimming, where a hot knife is used to lop off the end of the beak.

In the huge facilities used for egg production -- with up to 200,000 birds in a single building -- antibiotics are loaded into the chicken food, which in itself is unnatural, made from a mix of grain and ground up chicken, with added hormones.

To keep egg production -- and profits -- at the highest levels, another practice ("forced molting") periodically deprives the hens of food and water for several days, and regulates the hours of light and darkness to reset their biological clocks. What with all of these factors, a hen at a "factory farm" may produce more than 260 eggs per year, twice the number Old McDonald's hen, back in 1940, produced.

Large-scale egg production is an abusive, exploitative enterprise. For the sake of profit, multitudes of God's "critters" are brutalized, manipulated, disfigured and destroyed. These living creatures are treated solely as a means for producing a marketable commodity. That is ethically wrong, whether it is inflicted on sweatshop workers or on poultry.

Other than eating oatmeal instead of eggs for your breakfast, what can you do? Exercise consumer choice when you buy your groceries. Look for "cage free" eggs. The conditions aren't as good as at Old McDonald's farm, but they're a whole lot better than six hens to a cage. You'll pay about twice as much, and it is worth every penny.

On the political side, chickens and turkeys are specifically left out of almost every US law against animal cruelty. If you're in the mood for a long but meaningful piece of advocacy work, join the struggle to get far better legal standards that will be applied to the poultry industry.

The way we "share the Earth with all God's critters" is a matter of ethical concern. Awareness and action around eggs is a small, but important, step that may lead you to even deeper commitments toward caring for all of God's creation.

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## Confessions of a Recovering Racist

By David K. Popham

I was not born a racist. I was made a racist.

The first time I heard the “n” word was outside the front doors of my childhood church as teenage boys questioned if I had ever seen a black person. The short conversation led me to understand that there was something inherently wrong with people of color, and I was ignorant for not knowing that.

Charles Stangor of the University of Maryland states: “Overall, there’s not a lot of evidence that, at least in the long term, kids get their prejudice from their parents. I would call it more of a community effect. The community fosters tolerance or prejudice.”\*

Around the fifth grade I was in a basketball game in which my team was up against a team that included boys of color. As a guard it was my task to shadow one of these boys. But something was wrong – he was black and, while I’d only had that one conversation two or three years earlier, it stuck with me. Subsequently I kept my distance.

I left that game knowing that something was wrong – I had treated another person different solely due to the color of his skin. While not the mission or vision of my home church, I had learned to be a racist in the community of my faith. My point of view was not based only on the conversation with the teenage boys. My understanding also evolved out of the muteness of my church, which never spoke against racism or for inclusion.

I had been made a racist by what was done and by what was left undone.



The basketball game was on a Saturday; the next morning in worship I heard about how the love of God was for all – no matter the circumstance. I sat in the service pondering my actions of the day before and the good news of God’s love for all people “no matter the circumstances.” I realized I didn’t particularly care for treating others differently and that if I had a choice I would choose loving people.

Ever since that Sunday I have been a recovering racist. I say “recovering” because the “community” of the United States tends to ingrain the attitude that people of color are somehow different. I am old and wise enough to understand that tolerance is not “seeing all people as white regardless of their true color.” Yet, I struggle to comprehend the nuances of intolerance and the hassle and advantage prejudice applies unconsciously across our society.

In the meantime I continue to rely both upon a church that proclaims God’s love is for all the nations and upon the members of those nations to challenge me in my blind spots.

*\*Intelligence Report, Southern Poverty Law Center, Winter 2009*

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## Ch-ch-change

*By Kathy Leftwich*

Have you gotten used to writing 2010 yet? I can't even get used to saying it—twenty-ten doesn't sound like a year. For the past nine years, we've said two-thousand whatever but before that it was 19- whatever. So it shouldn't be that different.

It is just change. No one really likes change, even though we recognize that it usually brings good. We humans are creatures of habit; we have our well-worn ruts in which we feel comfortable. Stepping out of that rut is going outside the comfort zone, but that is where we learn.

A few weeks ago, while helping on our church's build day at the Habitat for Humanity site, I had to learn a new way to hammer nails. The kindly and patient gentleman who works several times a week on the site tried to show me how to let the hammer do the work. I tried but often fell into my old habits and by mid-day was pulling more nails out than I was putting in.

At lunch, we were laughing about this as I told a similarly challenged colleague: "I couldn't decide which slogan to follow: 'try, try again and at last you will succeed,' 'the third time's the charm' or 'doing the same thing over and expecting a different result is the definition of insanity.'

Home construction was way out of my comfort zone and I did learn a lot, not the least of which was that I should probably wait until it's painting or landscaping time to volunteer again. One probably shouldn't pole-vault out of her rut, but just sidle a bit



toward the unknown.

Just as this is true for ourselves, we should recognize this fact when asking others to move out of their comfort zone. My father flat refused to learn the computer, no matter how much I tried to espouse the virtues of email and the Internet. He still pecked out letters on an ancient manual typewriter, so I would "keyboard" and print my reply to send by mail. And if I dug around in my boxes and desk drawers, I might find one of those letters with the uneven letters and his elegant signature, a lasting reminder of who he was.

Maybe not all change is good, but twenty-ten is here whether we like it or not so I have to pull out another trite slogan: Adapt or die. No matter how comfortable, even the rut eventually fails to offer what we need.

*Kathy Leftwich is communications director of RMCUCC. Although he's been gone six years, she still misses those typed letters from her dad.*

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