

April Profile: The Rev. Sally Grover Bingham

From the *New American Dream* website

Claim to Fame:

Episcopal Priest. Currently the Environmental Minister at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco and director of the Regeneration Project. Also co-director of the Episcopal Power and Light program; a commissioner of the city/county of San Francisco, Commission on the Environment; a trustee for Environmental Defense; and the Chair of the Episcopal Commission for the Environment for the Diocese of California.



Was there a particular experience in your life that led you to your work?

I grew up in a rural community with animals and wilderness in the back yard and it is there that I felt the greatest sense of the Divine. After school, marriage and three children who were on their way to adulthood, I became aware of the irreversible damage that human behavior was doing to Creation. Where was the church? These are the institutions best set up to save what God created and "called good." I decided to dedicate the rest of my life to helping others deepen their connection between their faith and ecology.

What is your greatest source of hope that society can shift to more responsible patterns of production and consumption and achieve a sustainable future?

I believe that we are a society still growing into its potential. I think the loving and compassionate heart will find its way and be our guide in the future. We were created out of Love and we are still growing. I see changes all the time to indicate that people around the world are stepping in to curb human rights abuses and environmental degradation. We are becoming a more caring and compassionate society over all and the numbers of people who are aware of the negative impact of human behavior on the planet is rapidly growing. The serious involvement of the faith community in the effort to heal the wounds of our past behavior is heartening and profoundly influential. The faith community has led every major movement in the US including the abolition of slavery, a woman's right to vote and most recently the civil rights movement. We are involved now, working for the health of Creation and I think we will succeed in creating a sustainable future. No institution is more suited to preach clean air, water and land than the institution that profess a love of God and God's creation.

What are the primary obstacles to making these changes?

The church has not been involved for long in the environmental issues of the day and the church historically moves slowly. Change is difficult for an institution with roots as old as 2000 years and in many cases longer. Some say environmental issues are political and the church should worry about people's souls. What they fail to realize is that this is a spiritual crisis that we are suffering from. The sense of the Divine, the mystery and wonder of life: respect for the sacredness of our natural resources needs to be relearned, but I see it happening as more and more faith communities get involved.

If you could wave a magic wand and implement one policy change, what would it be and why?

I'd like to see our governments, both large and small pay more attention to the common good and not special interests. A less greedy establishment and a kinder attitude towards the less fortunate

and the lives that have no voice: that includes the non-human Creation. Decisions that have longer rather than shorter term gain would help to provide a more secure future.

In terms of individual actions, what is the most notable way that you personally "walk the talk?"

I teach and preach about "walking lightly on the land." I have/drive a hybrid car, but I walk whenever possible. I have a compost in my back yard and I grow my own vegetables even though I live in a big city. I recycle almost everything and have so little garbage that the collectors don't really need to come but about once a quarter. I don't run water if I'm not using it and I use as little as possible. My heat is always "off" unless its really cold inside (below 65). I buy only what I need, never shop or visit malls (well "never" is too strong, but you know what I mean). I try to be mindful that every one of my behaviors affects another person somewhere.

What's your favorite way to sustain yourself personally and keep balance in your life?

Walks in nature, hiking in remote places, I go on retreats about once a year when I can be alone in nature for several days. But on a regular basis, I run or walk in the park near my house several times a week. I have a strong prayer life and because I work within the faith community I am inside the sacred church space all the time. However, It is in nature where I feel the closest to the Divine so I make that a priority. Our national parks are a great source of spiritual renewal and particularly the one's in the Northwest where the giant redwood trees create a natural cathedral. I can lose myself in the awesome wonder of what God created feeling as much a part of it as I am able and to remind myself that I AM a part of it and not outside it.

What is your top book recommendation?

That's a tough one. I often think that the last book I've finished is the best one I've ever read. I love books that teach me something, but I live books by well-known theologians who inspire my sermons. I love anything by CS Lewis and most recently I finished "Till we all have Faces" about Psyche and Cupid. I'm reading "The Red Tent", but I don't even know who wrote it. I think, if I have to recommend a book, I would say read the Bible, however long it takes. Every thing a person needs to know is there (and then some). It will cover the need for self help, mystery, murder, sex, and history. It will teach truth, love, compassion. One can learn everything from land restoration to healing potions. Try it, you might like it. A little at a time

<http://www.newdream.org/bulletin/bingham.html>