



**Faith  
and  
the  
Land:  
Conversations  
about  
Spirituality  
and  
Wilderness**

January 25, 2009  
Christ United Methodist Church

## Introduction

Despite a winter blizzard blowing outside, members of Christ United Methodist gathered together on the evening of January 25, 2009 to share their perspectives about why Utah's wild places are important to them spiritually, and to talk about how the teachings and traditions of the Methodist Church call on us to care take the natural world.

The evening of dialogue was part of an exciting new effort sponsored by the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance (SUWA) to create an inter-faith statement about the importance of wilderness preservation to Utahns of all faith traditions. As a first step in that process, SUWA is convening conversations between members of different faith communities. Later, SUWA will bring people together across faith traditions to craft a compelling statement that weaves together the reflections, perspectives and ideas captured in these conversations.



The “Faith and the Land” initiative is based on the belief that Utahns from all religious traditions, as well as Utahns from no particular faith tradition, value Utah's wild lands as places of spiritual inspiration, connection, renewal and solace. It is also based on the belief that coming together to share what is important to us individually and collectively will reveal collective wisdom that can help guide the wild lands we love.

Below are highlights of the conversation:

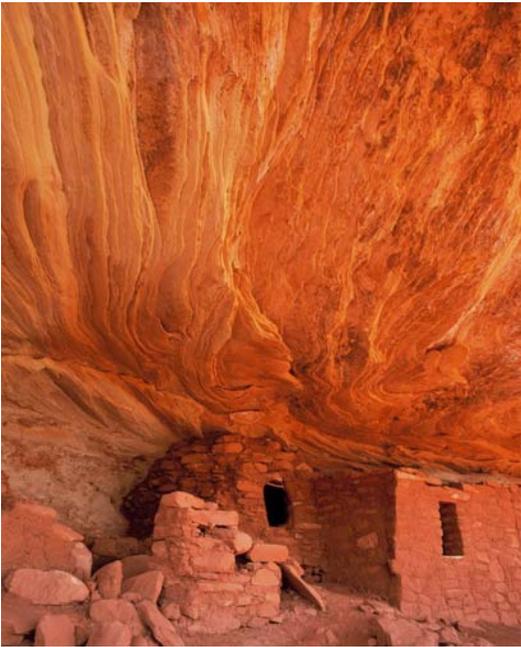
## How are Utah's wild places important to you spiritually?



> The mountains are a place to find my inner peace; they are a refuge from the rigors of daily life.

> In my family, wilderness has always been a place where we spend time. As I grew up, the mountains became place to get away from stress of life. To sit by a stream, mull over the loss of someone. For me, the wilderness is a place of connection, a place to find that inner peace that gets lost sometimes in daily life.

> I have always seen wilderness as a benchmark of what God has made, as compared to everything surrounding us that man has made. Blue berries and pine trees as compared to computers and airplanes. As we raised kids, we found that the only time we got away from the franticness of the "man made" was when we were hunkered down in a tent together. There is something about being in places that man has not had anything to do with that is really attractive to me. I've found peace in wilderness.



> Utah's wilderness is important to me because it's a part my life. I got married by a stream in Big Cottonwood Canyon. It will always be a special place to me.

> Being in wilderness is a renewal. I appreciate the beauty of it all. When I moved to Utah, I grew to love the outdoors even more. You can escape and be all by yourself.

> I grew up in Illinois, and moved here for a job. I love it here in Utah. It is so good to go up in the mountains, even if it is just to Big Cottonwood Canyon. I especially love the side canyons where I can be by my self, and sometimes see a deer or a moose.

> When I'm in the wilderness, I appreciate the clean air and vigorous activity; I take the time to take in the grandeur.

> I grew up in Switzerland and going to the mountains is what we did. If there was a mountain nearby, you just had to climb it. My husband has always said: Why do you want to go up there? And I have always answered: Because it's there. Going to the mountains is a way to get away from things.

> I grew up in the Long Island Sound. Now that I live in Utah, I appreciate all of the interesting exuberant plant life and redrock. The scenery is absolutely amazing. It is a source of spiritual healing.

> The wild lands of Utah are dynamic and dualistic. They are a place of healing and wholeness. When I'm in the wilderness, it fixes things that have been broken in my heart. It is a deeply spiritual place to be.

> The mountains are a place for me to escape the stress of life. To figure out loss and think about relationships. It helps for finding God.



> Wilderness “uncomplicates” your thinking process and opens up your spirituality in ways that being busy inhibits. When I become too busy, when I need to deal with the loss of people, I go to the mountains and sit quietly. When I do, it always brings tears to my eyes. Being in wilderness works to cleanse me and make me thankful. It heals me.

> Utah's wild lands remind me that we need to get used to using less energy, no matter where it comes from. We have to protect the beautiful lands that we are blessed to have.

> God gave us the resources that we need. Being in the wilderness reminds me that we must find a balance in our use of them and save some for future generations.



> Our family will always be grateful for our time in the outdoors. I took my daughter down to Natural Bridges. She had never been camping before. She saw the Milky Way for the first time – now that’s a spiritual experience! Beforehand, we were staying in Moab at a hotel with a swimming pool and we go to this place where there is no pool, no restaurant, no fast food. And all she had to say was, “That is just wonderful!” I believe that the wilderness is just plain spiritually refreshing and renewing. Wilderness is something you don’t want to lose.

> I think you feel closer to God when you are in nature. And here in Utah, you don’t even need to go very far to escape into nature. A short hike into the mountains and you feel like you’re on top of the world! I get closer to God by getting away from the hustle of daily life.

> Wilderness acts as a reminder that there are forces that are bigger than all of us. When you are surrounded by a concrete jungle, it is hard to notice some of those spiritual things. Nature reminds me of the order of things.

> When I see the mountains, I think: Who was the contractor who built all this?

> Nature puts you into a frame of mind to feel the spirit and relate to spiritual things. It helps you to deal with the hardships of life. Nature allows you to heal and be made whole. I feel thankful that I’m alive! I have so much gratitude for our wonderful natural beauty here in Utah. I have been blessed.



## How do the teachings and traditions of the Methodist Church call on us to care take the natural world, including our wild land heritage?

> To try and talk of a Methodist creed is an exercise in futility. The Methodist tradition is one of inclusiveness. This inclusiveness translates to all things, not just humans. So in the same way that I give respect and love to all the people in this room, I give respect and love to all parts of the natural world. As every person I meet is a gift of grace, so every desert landscape I see, every mountain I climb, every sunset I marvel at, is a gift of grace.

> The Methodist tradition is predicated on reason, prayer, tradition, and scripture. You can find what you need to guide you and how to treat the earth in scripture. There is an entire section of social principles that speak about the natural world and what we as Methodists believe. But what stands out for me is reason. That is because reason allows each one of us to develop our own interpretation as to our relationship God and the environment. I'm fairly far over in how I think about that. I believe the earth is a resource we've been entrusted with. In part, this is a futuristic standpoint – we need to act in a way that ensures we still resources for the future. In part, this is a philosophic view. We have been entrusted with these gifts from God. We need to preserve wilderness because, as Wallace Stegner said, it is one of the ways that we remain civilized. We must have humility and maintain our wilderness with other people in a social contract of respect.



> Life is a journey to develop a relationship with God and our community. We hope to grow in our relationship and the One all encompassing God. Our God is the same as the God of Abraham, Islam, Judaism and even Hindu. The community includes the environment. As people of faith, we have an enduring respect for all people and all things.

> We have a responsibility to take care of wild places and to the earth as a whole. I don't know exactly why, I just believe it!

> Methodists believe that we must take care for future generations, so that they may enjoy the wonderful wild things that we have enjoyed.

> I feel the Methodist tradition has taught me an awareness of how what you do affects others and future generations. It helps me to aware of my humanity. Simple things can affect somebody's life in a great way. For example, simply showing someone a moose on the side of a trail. There is a relationship between all things, small and large – an interdependency. One thing falling out of place can have a huge impact. We must be aware of our place and our duty to all things and all people.

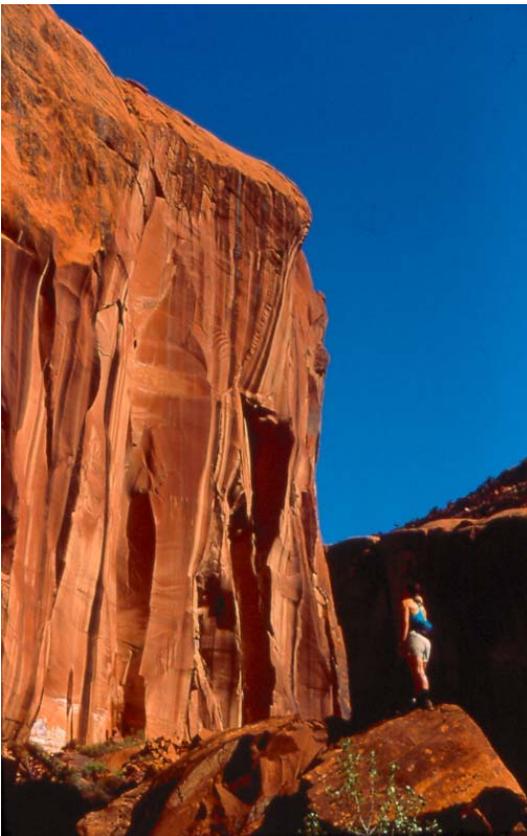
> We have hiking and camping groups here at our church. They are very active. We talk about being good stewards to our planet and enjoying nature. We must protect the air, water, and land from which we are sustained.

> I can't really think of God without thinking of Nature. We are to believe that He created all this and the whole universe. I don't believe in God as an old man sitting up there in the heavens. My spirituality tells me that natural world *is* God.

> I've heard a lot of comments are about what we get out of Nature and about what we are able to share with others when we are out in the wilderness. I want to put a marker down for wilderness by itself -- without any use by man. There is value in wilderness just for itself. Even if you are never in wilderness, it is something you can appreciate from afar. You can know value in it just because it exists. And I think that's part of our faith tradition because the height of faith is to believe in something that we don't know empirically.

> God created this world with all its resources. And God gave us the responsibility to be stewards. That means finding a balance, not squeezing everything out of it to serve ourselves. It is not responsible to say that God gave us all these resources, let's use them all or let's not use them at all. It's our responsibility to find a balance.

## **A word or phrase that reflects what you are taking away from this evening**



I'll be taking home the fact that wilderness *is* a faith issue.

A reminder to go out! Don't paint the room. Take a hike!

I'm not alone! Others care as deeply as I do about the future of wild places.

Fellowship with those that have a passion for nature. It's a great feeling.

A deep feeling that lets me know I'm connected.

A reminder about what I have.

We must save these things for generations to come. Gratitude for the efforts to save wilderness.

Passion!

Glad to see such enthusiasm for preserving nature. Energized – ready to do something!

I can't believe we have not done this more often. I'm impressed that we all came here to do this

