

Love and care of creation in local ecologies

Rose Marie Tresp, RSM; Institute Justice Team

I recently attended the day-long “Fourth Annual Lake James Watershed Symposium”. The Lake James watershed includes the local area in North Carolina where I live. Our area is called the Catawba River Basin; I have been a member of the Catawba Riverkeeper Organization for several years. Catawba Riverkeeper is the only non-profit, on-the-water advocate for the entire 8,900 miles of waterways in the Catawba-Watauga River Basin that provides accurate, science-based information about our water and the issues affecting it.

The Symposium was held at the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics in Morganton, NC about an hour’s drive from here. Generally, the programs I attend and the work I do are either on the macrolevel of climate change, its causes and alleviation, or the focus is on the microlevel of personal and organizational practices with the mantra of reduce, reuse, and recycle. But this symposium was quite different as its focus was on the middle level of conservation research and practices. There were several short presentations on research about conserving and protecting the local ecology. One presentation was on the design of hiking trails. A bad hiking trail is one that leads to erosion and flooding. Another presentation was assessing and changing the route of streams since some streambed routes can cause more erosion and flooding. Another presentation was on the design of a local park so that heavy rains do not flood the housing development below the park. I really had never thought of these issues. I thought hiking trails just happened where it was convenient.

I also found it interesting that no one talked about or mentioned climate change. Clearly these people loved the land and volunteered in different ways to protect and conserve the land and water. Programs were designed and carried out to involve the youth in conservation. But maybe some of those attending really were not sure about climate change.

The themes of this symposium can remind us of a passage in *Laudato Si’*:

The entire material universe speaks of God’s love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God. The history of our friendship with God is always linked to particular places which take on an intensely personal meaning; we all remember places, and revisiting those memories does us much good. Anyone who has grown up in the hills or used to sit by the spring to drink or played outdoors in the neighborhood square; going back to these places is a chance to recover something of their true selves. (84)

I am very glad that I attended this symposium; I will try to attend next year’s symposium. I learned a lot about the local ecology that I live in. I encourage everyone to seek out and support the local, non-profit conservation organizations in your area.