

## Session 24

### When the Web Unravels

#### ***The objectives of this session are:***

- to examine our role in being good stewards of the earth
- to explore how our actions and the choices we make everyday can impact the environment and our lives
- to consider the Unitarian Universalist 7<sup>th</sup> principle

#### ***Materials and supplies you will need:***

- the DVD of the movie, *The Simpsons Movie*
- DVD player and TV monitor
- several copies of the UU hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*
- Food webs/food chain - pictures of land-based and water-based food webs
- blank paper
- pencils
- stickers of plants and animals as well as some mythical creatures
- flipchart and markers (optional)

#### ***Things to do ahead of time:***

- locate the DVD and rent it from the library or video store if necessary
- watch the movie in its entirety (even if you have seen it before)
- If you will not be watching the whole film, use the DVD menu to cue up scene #9 which opens with Homer dumping the silo.
- arrange the pictures for the Looking at the Web exercise on the table before participants arrive
- Read the Leader supplement on “Intelligent Design” (at the end of this session)

#### ***Session Outline***

**Entering Activity:** Looking At the Web exercise (15 min)

**Premiere:** Watching the selected excerpt of *The Simpsons Movie* and discussion (40 min)

**Rising Action:** Exploring the 7<sup>th</sup> principle (5 min)

**Plot Point:** Can One Person Really Make a Difference? (10 min)

**Wrap Up:** Popcorn activity and Closing Words. (5 min)



#### ***Entering Activity***

Light the chalice (or invite someone to do so) and share with the group: affirmation #431, “O Spinner, Weaver of Our Lives” by Barbara Wells from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

Ask the participants to look at the food web pictures on the table. The interdependence of the populations within a food chain helps to maintain the balance of plant and animal populations within a community. For example, when there are too many giraffes; there will be insufficient trees and shrubs for all of them to eat. Many giraffes will starve and die. Fewer giraffes means more time for the trees and shrubs to grow to maturity and multiply. Fewer giraffes also means less food is available for the lions to eat and some lions will starve to death. When there are fewer lions, the giraffe population will increase. The concept of food chain looks very simple, but in reality it is more complex. Think about it.

How many different animals eat grass? One doesn't find simple independent food chains in an ecosystem, but many interdependent and complex food chains that look more like a web and are therefore called food webs. Invite the participants to make their own food chain or food web by using the stickers and the blank paper.

## **Premiere**

### **Watching The Simpsons Movie**

Introduce the video by telling the group you will be watching an excerpt from *The Simpsons Movie*. Ask if anyone has already seen it. If anyone has, ask them if they would be willing to share the premise of the film with the group. If not, introduce the video yourself by saying something to the effect of the following:

*The movie opens with Green Day hosting a concert at Lake Springfield (Singing the Simpsons theme after the opening credits). After they finish their song, they talk about the environment. The audience becomes angry and begins to throw garbage at them polluting the lake and causing their barge to dissolve and sink, killing them. The next day at church, while they have a short memorial for Green Day, Grandpa is possessed by God and warns the city of a future disaster. Marge believes Grandpa's prediction, and decides to work out the meaning of the message. Meanwhile, Lisa starts to talk about the environment, with no success. She encounters Colin, an Irish boy who shares the same passions as her. Thanks to Lisa Simpson with help from Colin, Lake Springfield is cleaned up from the pollution that once fouled it. But when Homer, who's adopted a pig (Spider-pig) and dumps a silo full of the pig's excrement in the lake causing it to become toxic, the EPA places a large dome over Springfield. The police reveal that Homer polluted the lake and an angry mob approaches the Simpson's house and torches it. The family escapes through a*

*sink hole, which expands destroying their house. The family flees to Alaska and begins to enjoy their new life.*

*Before long the head of the EPA, Russ Cargill, orders the Springfield's destruction. Marge and the kids decide that they must return and save Springfield, but Homer refuses to help the town that tried to kill him, so they set off without him; however, they're are captured by Cargill and returned to the dome.*

*Homer sets out on a journey to find his family and after a series of misadventures, Homer is reunited with them back in the doomed city of Springfield. Homer and Bart motorcycle up the side of the dome and Bart throws the bomb through the hole, blowing it up and shattering the dome. Homer and Bart land the bike at Springfield Gorge, where they encounter Cargill wielding a shotgun. As he prepares to shoot them, Maggie crushes him with a boulder. The town praise Homer, and Collin takes Lisa for some Ice Cream, Homer takes Marge on a ride on the motorcycle, and they soon rebuild Springfield and the Simpson's house. Begin the video and watch scenes #9 (Homer dumping the silo) through #17(The Simpsons start life in Alaska.) Stop the video just as Homer is floating down the river on the piece of ice.*

Consider the following questions:

Homer dumps the silo in the lake for purely selfish reasons. (i.e., to go get free donuts.)

If we as Unitarian Universalists don't believe in a vengeful god who punishes us for doing bad things, what motivates us to "do the right thing?"

Have you ever taken a stand for a cause or an issue even if it was unpopular or inconvenient for you?

When he and Bart see the mutated squirrel, Ned Flanders thanks God for this "intelligent design." Have you ever heard of this theory? What do you think it means? When the dome is placed over Springfield, the people soon become lawless. Is this a natural state for humans when under extreme stress?

## ***Rising Action***

### **Examining our 7<sup>th</sup> Principle**

Begin the discussion by reminding the group of our 7<sup>th</sup> principle. See if anyone can recite it before reciting it to the group. (We affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.)

Ask the group:

What does this principle mean to you personally?

What does it mean to be a steward of the earth?

Native American peoples have a saying: Treat the earth well: it was not given to you by your parents; it was loaned to you by your children. We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our Children. What do they think about this statement? How does this speak to your responsibility to take care of the environment?

### ***Plot Point***

#### **Can One Person Really Make a Difference?**

In the movie, it is obvious that one person's thoughtless act had a huge impact on life in Springfield. (i.e. Homer dumping the silo in the lake.) Encourage the participants to consider other ways in which one person may have an impact on the environment. Pass out the "What Can I Do?" handout, and give the participants a couple of minutes to look it over. Can they think of some other things that aren't on the list? Which of these things are they doing now? Which ones do they plan to start doing? Were they surprised by anything they read on the list? Remind the group that even one person can make a difference and invite them to share the list with their friends and family.

## ***Wrap Up***

### **Environmental Popcorn.**

Invite the participants to gather in a circle to engage in an activity known as "Popcorn." For this activity, a person pops up (either a hand or full body as they are able or choose to do) and says aloud a short statement (one sentence or less) about one thing that they are doing or plan to do to take better care of our planet.

After the first "popper" has finished his or her statement, then everyone who agrees with this statement should also "pop" up (a hand or body as desired). One of the people already "popped" can then choose to share something of their own to which the rest of the group can then "pop." This "popping" can continue as long as time allows.

### **Closing Words.**

Invite a participant to extinguish the chalice and read affirmation #557, "A Common Destiny" by David H. Eaton from Singing the Living Tradition. . You or other participants may also take turns saying these closing words:

"The "control of nature" is a phrase conceived in arrogance, born of the Neanderthal age of biology and the convenience of man."

-- Rachel Carson  
1907-1964, American Marine Biologist, Author

"When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe."

-- John Muir  
1838-1914, American, Environmentalist

In nature we never see anything isolated, but everything in connection with something else which is before it, beside it, under it and over it.

-- Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe  
1749-1832, German Poet, Dramatist, Novelist

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### ***Taking It One Step Further:***

If your group will be watching the entire movie rather than just an excerpt, here are some additional ideas to expand the experience:

### **More Discussion**

Cargill, Inc. is one of the world's agribusiness giants and one of the largest privately held companies based in the United States. It began as a grain trader and has expanded into many forms of food processing and other industries such as steel and coal. Cargill also has a less than exemplary history of environmental compliance. In 1992 the Council on Economic Priorities (CEP) said that the company had the worst environmental record in the agribusiness industry. How ironic is it that the head of the EPA in the movie is named Russ Cargill? What are some other examples of irony or satire in the movie? (One might be Mr. Burn's statement, "For once the rich white man is in control." Another could be the Disney satire when Homer & Marge are alone in the cabin after the avalanche.)

In the movie, Tom Hanks is enlisted to make a commercial for the "New Grand Canyon" because he is more credible than the government. What does this suggest about our society's attitude toward celebrities? What does this say about our trust in our government?

In the movie, Ned Flanders mentions intelligent design. How does this theory differ from the theory of evolution? How "scientific" is the theory of intelligent design?

### **More Activities**

Brainstorm some ways your group or faith community can be a more green community and reduce our carbon footprint.

Attend a meeting of the Green Sanctuary group. This group is responsible for suggesting and implementing responsible environmental strategies at our church.

Consider having the group do a beach clean-up or tree planting activity.

Consider creating a community garden project with the proceeds being donated to a local food bank or homeless shelter.

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Soil or Land



Bushes and shrubs



Grass and Flowers



Nuts and seeds



Twigs and Plant debris

deer



rabbit



mouse



pill bug



wolf



lynx



snake



toad



spider

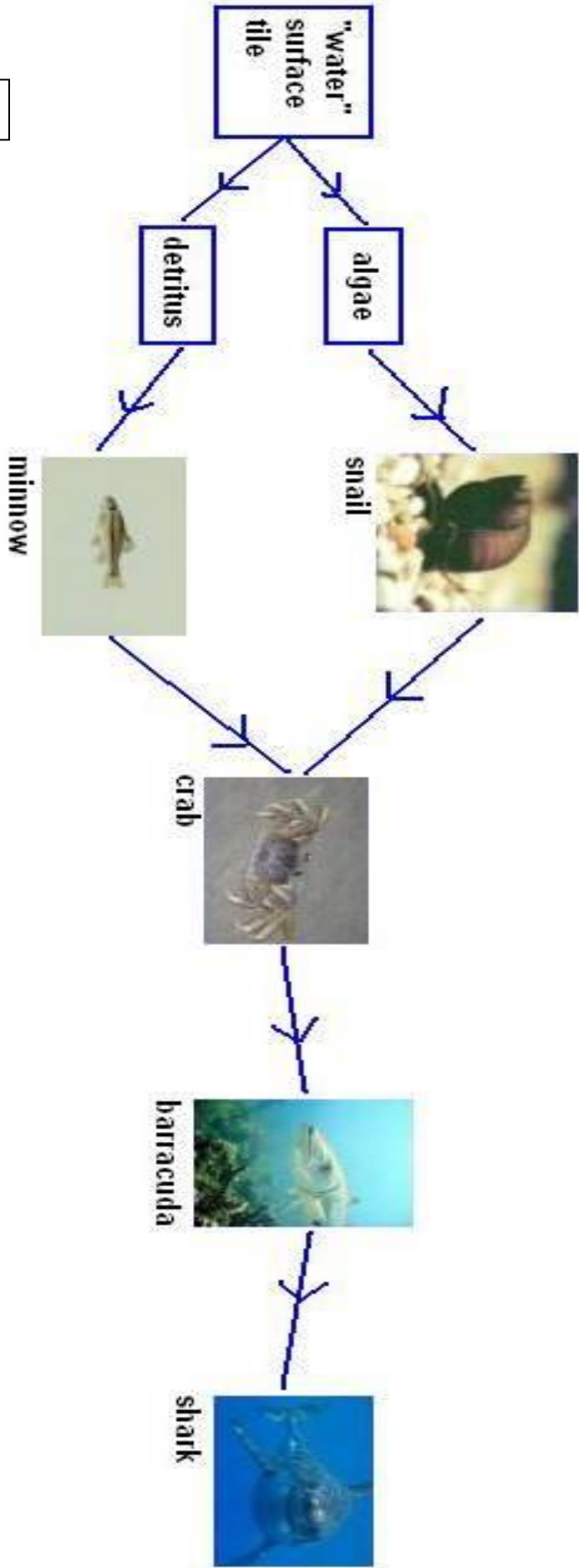


mtn. lion

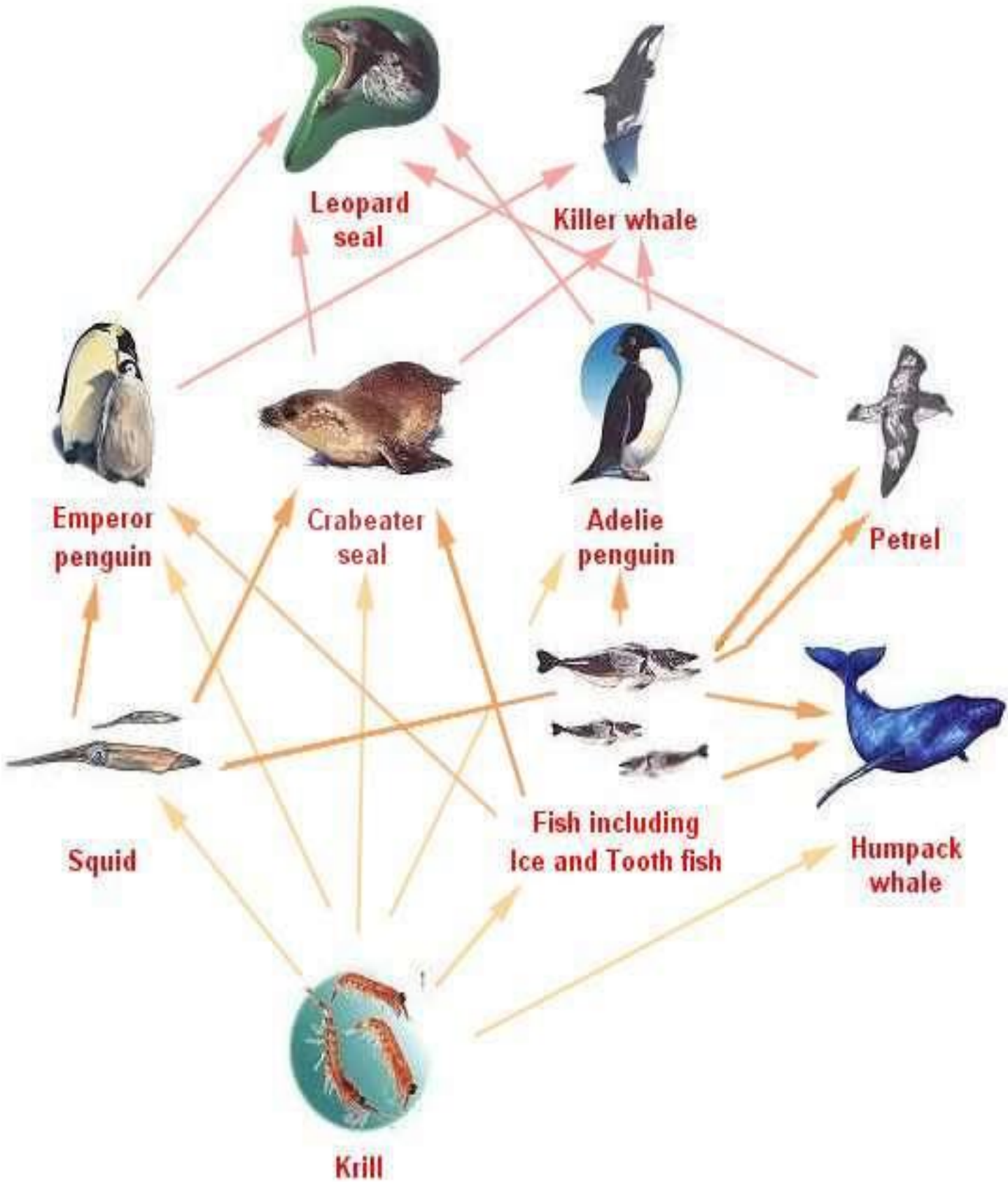


Substitute the words "may be eaten by" or "is metabolized by" for the Arrows

Aquatic Food Chain



Food Web



## Intelligent Design

**Intelligent design** is the assertion that "certain features of the universe and of living things are best explained by an intelligent cause, not an undirected process such as natural selection. It is a modern form of the traditional teleological argument for the existence of God that avoids specifying the nature or identity of the designer. The idea was developed by a group of American creationists who reformulated their argument in the creation-evolution controversy to circumvent court rulings that prohibit the teaching of creationism as science. Intelligent design's leading proponents, all of whom are associated with the Discovery Institute, a politically conservative think tank, believe the designer to be the God of Christianity.

Advocates of intelligent design argue that it is a scientific theory, and seek to fundamentally redefine science to accept supernatural explanations. The unequivocal consensus in the scientific community is that intelligent design is not science. The U.S. National Academy of Sciences has stated that "creationism, intelligent design, and other claims of supernatural intervention in the origin of life or of species are not science because they are not testable by the methods of science." The U.S. National Science Teachers Association and the American Association for the Advancement of Science have termed it pseudoscience. Others in the scientific community have concurred, and some have called it junk science.

The concept of intelligent design originated in response to the 1987 United States Supreme Court *Edwards v. Aguillard* ruling involving separation of church and state. Its first significant published use was in *Of Pandas and People*, a 1989 textbook intended for high-school biology classes. Several additional books on the subject were published in the 1990s. By the mid-1990s, intelligent design proponents had begun clustering around the Discovery Institute and more publicly advocating the inclusion of intelligent design in public school curricula. With the Discovery Institute and its Center for Science and Culture serving a central role in planning and funding, the "intelligent design movement" grew increasingly visible in the late 1990s and early 2000s, culminating in the 2005 *Dover* trial which challenged the intended use of intelligent design in public school science classes.

In *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District*, a group of parents of high-school students challenged a public school district requirement for teachers to present intelligent design in biology classes as an alternative "explanation of the origin of life". U.S. District Judge John E. Jones III ruled that intelligent design is not science, that it "cannot uncouple itself from its creationist, and thus religious, antecedents", and that the school district's promotion of it therefore violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Intelligent design is presented as an alternative to natural explanations for the origin and diversity of life. It stands in opposition to conventional biological science, which relies on the scientific method to explain life through observable processes such as mutation and natural selection. The stated purpose of intelligent design is to investigate whether or not existing empirical evidence implies that life on Earth must have been designed by an intelligent agent or agents. William A. Dembski, one of intelligent design's leading proponents, has said that the fundamental claim of intelligent design is that "there are natural systems that cannot be adequately explained in terms of undirected natural forces and that exhibit features which in any



other circumstance we would attribute to intelligence". In the leaked Discovery Institute manifesto known as the Wedge Document, however, the supporters of the movement were told:

"We are building on this momentum, broadening the wedge with a positive scientific alternative to materialistic scientific theories, which has come to be called the theory of intelligent design. Design theory promises to reverse the stifling dominance of the materialist worldview, and to replace it with a science consonant with Christian and theistic convictions."

Proponents of intelligent design look for evidence of what they term "signs of intelligence": physical properties of an object that point to a designer. \* (see: teleological argument below). For example, intelligent design proponents argue that an archaeologist who finds a statue made of stone in a field may justifiably conclude that the statue was designed, and may reasonably seek to identify its designer. The archaeologist would not, however, be justified in making the same claim based on an irregularly shaped boulder of the same size. Design proponents argue that living systems show great complexity, from which they infer that some aspects of life have been designed.

Intelligent design proponents say that although evidence pointing to the nature of an "intelligent cause or agent" may not be directly observable, its effects on nature can be detected. Dembski, in *Signs of Intelligence*, states: "Proponents of intelligent design regard it as a scientific research program that investigates the effects of intelligent causes ... not intelligent causes per se". In his view, one cannot test for the identity of influences exterior to a closed system from within, so questions concerning the identity of a designer fall outside the realm of the concept. In the 20 years since intelligent design was first formulated, no rigorous test that can identify these effects has yet been proposed. No articles supporting intelligent design have been published in peer-reviewed scientific journals, nor has intelligent design been the subject of scientific research or testing.

\* - A teleological argument, or argument from design, is an argument for the existence of God or a creator based on perceived evidence of order, purpose, design, or direction — or some combination of these — in nature. The word "teleological" is derived from the Greek word *telos*, meaning "end" or "purpose". Teleology is the supposition that there is purpose or directive principle in the works and processes of nature.

## *What Can I Do?*

You can help to reduce the demand for fossil fuels, which in turn reduces global warming, by using energy more wisely. Here are 12 simple actions you can take to help reduce global warming and save water and other precious resources.

### **1. Reduce, Reuse, Recycle**

Do your part to reduce waste by choosing reusable products instead of disposables. Buying products with minimal packaging (including the economy size when that makes sense for you) will help to reduce waste. And whenever you can, recycle paper, plastic, newspaper, glass and aluminum cans. If there isn't a recycling program at your workplace, school, or in your community, ask about starting one. By recycling half of your household waste, you can save 2,400 pounds of carbon dioxide annually. According to Go Green Initiative, by recycling just one glass bottle, you save enough electricity to power a 100-watt bulb for four hours. By recycling one aluminum can, you can run a TV for six hours on the electricity saved. On a little larger scale, recycling one ton of paper saves 7,000 gallons of water, 380 gallons of oil and enough electricity to power an average house for six months.

### **2. Use Less Heat and Air Conditioning**

Adding insulation to your walls and attic, and installing weather stripping or caulking around doors and windows can lower your heating costs more than 25 percent, by reducing the amount of energy you need to heat and cool your home.

Turn down the heat while you're sleeping at night or away during the day, and keep temperatures moderate at all times. Setting your thermostat just 2 degrees lower in winter and higher in summer could save about 2,000 pounds of carbon dioxide each year.

### **3. Change a Light Bulb**

Wherever practical, replace regular light bulbs with compact fluorescent light (CFL) bulbs. Replacing just one 60-watt incandescent light bulb with a CFL will save you \$30 over the life of the bulb. CFLs also last 10 times longer than incandescent bulbs, use two-thirds less energy, and give off 70 percent less heat. If every U.S. family replaced one regular light bulb with a CFL, it would eliminate 90 billion pounds of greenhouse gases, the same as taking 7.5 million cars off the road.

### **4. Drive Less and Drive Smart**

Less driving means fewer emissions. Besides saving gasoline, walking and biking are great forms of exercise. Explore your community mass transit system, and check out options for carpooling to work or school.

When you do drive, make sure your car is running efficiently. For example, keeping your tires properly inflated can improve your gas mileage by more than 3 percent. Every gallon of gas you save not only helps your budget, it also keeps 20 pounds of carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere.

### **5. Buy Energy-Efficient Products**

When it's time to buy a new car, choose one that offers good gas mileage. Home appliances now come in a range of energy-efficient models, and compact fluorescent bulbs are designed to provide more natural-looking light while using far less energy than standard light bulbs. Avoid products that come with excess packaging, especially molded plastic and other packaging that can't be recycled. If you reduce your household garbage by 10 percent, you can save 1,200 pounds of carbon dioxide annually.

## **6. Use Less Hot Water**

Set your water heater at 120 degrees to save energy, and wrap it in an insulating blanket if it is more than 5 years old. Buy low-flow showerheads to save hot water and about 350 pounds of carbon dioxide yearly. Wash your clothes in warm or cold water to reduce your use of hot water and the energy required to produce it. That change alone can save at least 500 pounds of carbon dioxide annually in most households. Use the energy-saving settings on your dishwasher and let the dishes air-dry.

## **7. Use the "Off" Switch**

Save electricity and reduce global warming by turning off lights when you leave a room, and using only as much light as you need. And remember to turn off your television, video player, stereo and computer when you're not using them.

It's also a good idea to turn off the water when you're not using it. While brushing your teeth, shampooing the dog or washing your car, turn off the water until you actually need it for rinsing. You'll reduce your water bill and help to conserve a vital resource.

## **8. Plant a Tree**

If you have the means to plant a tree, start digging. During photosynthesis, trees and other plants absorb carbon dioxide and give off oxygen. They are an integral part of the natural atmospheric exchange cycle here on Earth, but there are too few of them to fully counter the increases in carbon dioxide caused by automobile traffic, manufacturing and other human activities. A single tree will absorb approximately one ton of carbon dioxide during its lifetime.

## **9. Get a Report Card from Your Utility Company**

Many utility companies provide free home energy audits to help consumers identify areas in their homes that may not be energy efficient. In addition, many utility companies offer rebate programs to help pay for the cost of energy-efficient upgrades.

## **10. Encourage Others to Conserve**

Share information about recycling and energy conservation with your friends, neighbors and co-workers, and take opportunities to encourage public officials to establish programs and policies that are good for the environment.

## **11. Don't Waste Water**

Turn off the water when you brush your teeth and save 3 gallons per day.

Shorten your showers by one or two minutes and save 5 gallons per day.

Fix leaky faucets and save 20 gallons per day.

Wash only full loads of laundry and save 15 to 50 gallons per load

Talk to your family and friends about saving water. If everyone does a little, we all benefit a lot.

## **12. Don't Buy Water in Small Plastic Bottles**

More than 8 billion gallons of bottled water is consumed annually in the U.S. -- an 8-ounce glass per person per day -- representing \$11 billion in sales. The Earth Policy Institute estimated that to make the plastic for the bottles burns up something like 1.5 million barrels of oil, enough to power 100,000 cars for a year. Nearly 90 percent of the bottles are not recycled. According to FilterForGood.com, the average American used 167 disposable water bottles in 2006 and only recycled 38. If just one person stopped buying disposable water bottles, they would be saving 129 bottles from ending up in landfills a year.

These 12 steps will take you a long way toward reducing your water and energy use and your monthly budget. And less energy use means less dependence on the fossil fuels that create greenhouse gases and contribute to global warming.