Earth to Earth: Natural Burial as Spiritual Practice
a conference open to everyone
November 4 - 5, 2016
The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Suzanne Kelly
Matthew Sleeth
Benjamin Stewart
Gordon Straw
Linda Thomas

plus workshops, music, resources

Registration open:
lstc.edu/lstc-life/events/earth

supported in part by a generous seed grant from the Seminary Stewardship Alliance
Earth to Earth
Natural Burial as Spiritual Practice
*a conference open to everyone*

November 4 - 5, 2016
The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

practical resources, spirituality, inspiration

Natural burial: a movement with spiritual dimensions

North American burial practices are changing. Growing numbers of people are seeking simpler and more natural ways of returning to the earth. Today’s natural burial movement emphasizes a number of practices: dignified care for the body at the time of death, normally without chemical embalming; attention to environmental concerns when practicing cremation; burial in simple coffins or shrouds; and an intentional return to the earth, with some burials offering legal protection for ecological burial preserves.

In most traditions, natural burial is marked by deep spiritual dimensions. From ancient traditions to emerging spiritualities, the practices of natural burial ritualize the intertwined identity of humans and the earth: *ashes to ashes, earth to earth, dust to dust.* Especially with increasing awareness of ecological concerns, many people are seeking spiritual meaning through burial practices that honor the body and embrace the goodness of earth.

The conference: exploring natural burial as spiritual practice

This conference explores natural burial as a spiritual practice. With the help of a diverse group of experts and practitioners, we will pursue a number of questions:

- how is natural burial being practiced, and what are the spiritual and theological interpretations it is given?
- what resources do individuals need to plan both practically and meaningfully for natural burial?
- what steps can communities of faith take to develop or deepen ministries of natural burial?
- how can hospice, funeral providers, cemeteries, and land trusts offer services for natural burial?
- how do the spiritualities of natural burial connect to wider concerns of justice, environmental care, inter-religious dialog, theology, and human meaning?

The conference will offer participants:

- practical resources and training
- theologies, spiritualities, liturgies, and rituals of natural burial
- connections with local and national networks

Who should attend?

Anyone seeking practical resources, spiritual approaches, or offering services/ministries in natural burial. While the conference takes place at a Lutheran seminary and ample attention will be given to Christian theologies and practice, a number of different religious traditions will be represented. People of all faith — and no particular faith — are very much welcomed and honored. Because the basic practices of natural burial share some striking commonalities across lands, histories, and cultures, conference attendees will discover common motifs through which to approach a beautiful diversity of spiritualities and practices. The conference offers practical help and wisdom with many people in mind:

- interested individuals (planning care for themselves or others)
- leaders of faith communities
- pastors, social justice/eco team members, church musicians, worship committees
- scholars (especially in ecotheology, pastoral care, and ritual)
- seminarians
- funeral service providers, cemetery managers and board members
- land trust stakeholders
- hospital chaplains and health care workers
- hospice care providers
Plenary Speakers

**Suzanne Kelly**, PhD, author of *Greening Death: Reclaiming Burial Practices and Restoring Our Tie to the Earth,* organizer and chair of Rhinebeck Natural Burial Ground.

**Matthew Sleeth**, MD, Executive Director of Blessed Earth; author of *24/6: A Prescription for a Healthier, Happier Life*

**Gordon Straw**, M.Div, enrolled member of the Brothertown Indian Nation; Program Director for Lay Schools for Ministry in the ELCA; past Director for American Indian/Alaska Native Ministries, ELCA

**Benjamin Stewart**, PhD, Director of Advanced Studies and Associate Professor of Worship at LSTC; author of *A Watered Garden: Christian Worship and Earth’s Ecology*

**Linda Thomas**, PhD, Professor of Theology and Anthropology at LSTC; editor of *Walk Together Children: Black and Womanist Theologies, Church and Theological Education*

Workshops include...

- Green Burial 101
- Ritual for natural end of life care
- How to start a green cemetery in your community
- Interfaith panel: why we practice natural burial
- Cremation as an option for natural burial
- Recent immigrant communities and natural burial
- Music and song for natural burial
- Starting a natural burial ministry in your congregation
- How the Green Burial Council can help
- Adapting your current funeral rites for ecotheology and natural burial
- Caring for the body at home
- Green burial in the city: cremation, memorial gardens, and more
- Green what? How to practice green burial where there are no identified providers

Conference Schedule

**Friday, November 4, 2016**

9:00a Registration and Hospitality
10:00 Welcome, introductions
10:45a Opening plenary: Suzanne Kelly, *Natural Burial & Spiritual Communities: One Earth, One Movement*
Noon Lunch
1:00p Plenary: Matthew Sleeth, *Death Swallowed up in Victory*
2:30 Workshops 1
3:30 Coffee break
3:45 Workshops 2
5:00 Dinner
7:00 Plenary: Gordon Straw, *The Gift of Burial: Covenant, Sacrifice and All My Relations*
8:00 Social opportunities: music, poetry, refreshments, fire in the quad (weather permitting)

**Saturday, November 5, 2016**

9:30a Plenary: Linda Thomas, *Between the World and Black Bodies: Rituals for Crossing Over*
10:30 Coffee break
11:00 Workshops 3
Noon Lunch
1:00p Plenary: Benjamin Stewart, *WE’RE ALL GONNA DIE! How Natural Burial Transfigures Apocalyptic Anxiety into Holy Wisdom*
2:00 Closing Panel: Insights and ways forward
2:30 Sending ritual

Registration Information

For more information and to register online
http://www.lstc.edu/events/conferences/earth/

Location
The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC)
1100 E. 55th St.
Chicago, IL 60615
http://www.lstc.edu/about/directions/

Registration rates
Early registration: $75 (extended to October 18!)
Conference registration: $100 (after October 18, 2016)
Student/limited income registration $35.00

Conference information, questions
Benjamin Stewart, conference organizer, earth2earth@lstc.edu

On-campus housing information
Kim Ferguson, LSTC housing coordinator, frontdesk@lstc.edu
773-256-0700

rev. 12 Sept 2016