

The Story of the First Oregon Academy: Abraham's Tent—Guardians of the Earth

28 July, 2015

by Pamela Vergun, PhD, MPA

Introduction

Tuesday, the 28th of July, 2015, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim students at the Interfaith Camp Abraham's Tent participated in the first Academy in Oregon. Supported by nine religious organizations, particularly the P'nai Or Jewish Renewal Congregation, the Academy was led by Michael Foster, Pam Vergun, and Ambassadors Miko and Isaac Vergun, who put in many hours preparing their first Academy.

Eleven students aged approximately 11 to 17 from at least three Oregon cities (Beaverton, Portland, and Tigard) represented at least seven schools: The International School of Beaverton, Tigard High School, Fowler Middle School, Northwest Academy, Sellwood School, Portland Waldorf School, and Trillium Charter School. Among the entering 6th to 12th graders, one started [Two Green Leaves](#) to blog about Climate Change.

Sponsors and Supporters

Volunteer Harriet Cooke arranged for the P'nai Or Congregation to buy most of the ingredients that were then made into delicious meals and snacks. We contacted local officials and received help from Ian Eveleigh at Plant-for-the-Planet. 350PDX endorsed Plant for the Planet, and [350.org](#) helped with publicity! Videographer Ron West of WorkPrint Productions and Looking Glass Digital filmed the Academy and will be producing videos for us, and *Oregon Jewish Life* published an article available through our website [ClimateChangeRecovery.org](#).

Parts of Our Day

Welcome, Ambassadors' Presentation, Q & A, & Break

Michael introduced Plant for the Planet connecting it to the morning Jewish service. We watched “Now We Children Save the World!” Miko and Isaac gave the presentation.

One of the best moments was when the billion tree goal was mentioned and a listener sounded like she thought that wasn't realistic—until she learned that the goal was exceeded by 13 billion and so replaced by the new tree-planting goal of 1,000 billion. It gave everyone a taste of how what seems impossible can happen. Then, we took a break in the garden.

World Game, Public-Speaking Training, & Lunch Break

We played the World Game, followed by even the most shy taking turns reading a story of Climate Change. We discussed what makes a speech effective and gave out the slides. We all enjoyed the delicious food that had been prepared.

Planting Party, World Café, & Preparing to Give the Presentation

In the orchard where we ate, the children learned how to plant trees to help them to survive the drought. We named the fig tree “Isaac Newton” and blessed it. Our World Café happened informally over the days before and after the Academy.

In order to get all ready to go out in the community, everyone teamed up, practicing to present that afternoon.

Afternoon Presentation & Graduation

Our audience included friends from P'nai Or and Board Secretary Rick Brown from 350PDX.

We learned to make sure that everyone knew they would be presenting without notes, but the presentations overall were good. Students had worked together to personalize their shirts with phrases like “sHell No!” and “Two Green Leaves”,

making a vibrant concluding presentation. Having everyone present in teams worked well.

Michael and Pam awarded the students' appointments as Climate Justice Ambassadors, giving them certificates, *Tree by Tree, Everything Would Be Alright*, and 350PDX buttons, and then we celebrated with a reception.

The Rest of the Week

Later that week, the Ambassadors created a slideshow for Interfaith Council of Greater Portland and the community about clearing invasive species and becoming Ambassadors.

Thank You

We would like to thank all those involved in this wonderful Academy. The Ambassadors said they were grateful for the dedication of Michael and Pam. Everyone agreed that Miko and Isaac did an awesome job singlehandedly leading their first Academy.

We deeply appreciate the kind donation of \$100 by P'nai Or's Council Members toward food and their support and that of Rev. Dr. Barbara Campbell.

More academies in Oregon are being planned for 2015. Upcoming Academies will be announced on the Plant-for-the-Planet website, <http://climatechange4families.com>, and at our local site: ClimateChangeRecovery.org.

Postscript—

Becoming a Tzedakah (Justice) Partner and Our First Oregon Plant for the Planet Club Meeting the Next Week!

Together with Rob, Miko and Isaac's dad, we were able to get P'nai Or to choose Climate Change for Families as this year's Tzedakah Partner so that we will have even more help in this work. The Friday following the camp, the Ambassadors were invited to the first club meeting at the Verguns'. We discussed many excellent approaches we can use to make a difference, as well as how to fit in the work around school and other activities. By bringing us together, it makes us stronger and gives us the hope to do the work we need to do.



10/30/15