

Northern Michigan Catholics plant 12,000 trees in honor of Earth Day

MARQUETTE, Mich. - Catholic parishes across northern Michigan planned to participate in an interfaith project sponsored by the Upper Peninsula EarthKeepers to plant 12,000 native trees across the state in honor of Earth Day 2009.

On April 22, Bishop Alexander K. Sample of Marquette and other leaders of local faith communities blessed the first of thousands of white spruce and red pine trees. The trees were to be planted at numerous locations, including the grounds of churches and temples, across 400 miles of northern Michigan.

Snowy April weather delayed the planting of the rest of the trees until May 3.

All humans “are called to be stewards of God’s creation, and no matter what faith tradition we come from that responsibility lies with us human creatures,” Bishop Sample said during the blessing.

“As those created in God’s image and likeness, with intelligence and free will, human beings bear a special responsibility for the earth which God has entrusted to our care,” he added.

The EarthKeepers organization, founded in 2004, involves 10 faith traditions with more than 150 participating churches and temples. It also includes the participation of the Superior Watershed Partnership and the Cedar Tree Institute, both nonprofits, and the Northern Michigan University EarthKeeper Student Team.

“As part of God’s wonderful work of creation, trees play an important role in the ecology of our planet,” said Bishop Sample. “Not only do they reflect the beauty of

the Creator, but they also serve in the delicate balance of our earth's atmosphere."

According to experts, 12,000 mature trees can absorb 3 million pounds of carbon dioxide annually and emit enough oxygen to support 24,000 humans.

This is the fifth year the Upper Peninsula EarthKeepers organization has arranged an Earth Day project.

Last year, EarthKeepers supplied participants with a household energy conservation checklist that reduced carbon emissions by more than 3 million pounds.

Hoping to achieve the same success the EarthKeepers initiative has, other Great Lakes states are setting up similar environmental projects, said Carl Lindquist, executive director of the Superior Watershed Partnership.