

Dear CLP Members,

I am an Astronomer at the Adler Planetarium and Associate in the Department of Astronomy & Astrophysics at the University of Chicago. I am also a scientific consultant for the CLP, and, as some of you know, I've been working with Michael Zimmerman to fund a large-scale initiative that would create a nationwide professional network of scientists, clergy, and educators dedicated to helping people form "conscious and strategic bridges" between their religious and scientific understandings of the cosmos. We're not quite there yet, but I have been granted a small amount of funding through NASA's Illinois Space Grant Consortium to help the Adler Planetarium maintain this e-list and to write a series of short, monthly articles on Astrobiology for the CLP.

Astrobiology is the study of the origin, evolution, distribution, and future of life in the Universe. It is the ultimate example of a multidisciplinary field that brings together physical and biological scientists, as well as experts in many other fields such as engineering and technology, to address three fundamental questions: How does life begin and evolve? Is there life beyond Earth, and, if so, how can we detect it? What is the future of life on Earth and in the Universe? Because of philosophical, ethical, and theological implications associated with these questions, the American Association for the Advancement of Science's Dialogue on Science, Ethics, and Religion (DoSER) has held workshops exploring the social implications of Astrobiology, and, in 2005, the Vatican Observatory Summer School hosted a course on Astrobiology.

In the coming months, your monthly CLP newsletter will include brief pieces exploring how what we are learning about life on Earth and conditions on other planets (even moons...) – including planets that orbit stars other than our Sun (known as 'extrasolar planets' or simply 'exoplanets') – informs the search and prospects for life beyond Earth. In a few months, we will solicit information from the CLP on (1) whether this information is helpful to you; (2) whether and how it is being used with your congregations (incorporating content into sermons, adult or youth programs, etc); and (3) what scientific themes you might like to see explored in the future.

Your feedback will be essential to us in designing future efforts and helping us secure funding for larger efforts! As both a scientist and a member of a community of faith myself, I know that general theological illiteracy is as frustrating to many clergy as scientific illiteracy is to scientists, and these two issues are strongly related. The all-too-pervasive message that science erodes faith and spirituality not only threatens the integrity of science education in public schools, it prevents many people of faith, both young and old, from considering how science might empower them to affect positive changes in their communities and around the world. Along with many others, I feel it is absolutely essential that science and religion work together to address the many challenges that face us in the 21st century.

For information on the scope of NASA's Astrobiology Program, check out <https://astrobiology.nasa.gov/about-astrobiology/>.

Thank you for your continued interest in, and support of, having this conversation!

Until next month,

Grace Wolf-Chase, Ph.D.