Review of *The Hidden Life of Trees: How They Feel, How They Communicate*. Peter Wohlleben. Greystone Books. 271 pages. 2015. Translation by Jane Billinghurst, 2016.

German forester, Peter Wohlleben, manager of a forest in Eifel mountains, wrote *The Hidden Life of Trees* in 2015 not as a warning about climate change as much as a tool to help us understand that our planet is an ecosystem and that when one part is altered or fails, the other connected parts are affected. *The Hidden Life of Trees* could be read as a companion to the recent Climate Letter produced by the Clergy Letter Project. The introductory sentence of the Letter restates that we human beings are complicit in causing global climate change: "*A multitude of human activities including the use of fossil fuels, large-scale agriculture, and large-scale land clearance have modified the natural processes that sustain life in every ecosystem and culture on the entire planet*." It can be argued that the time for debating the reality of climate change is past as science demonstrates that global warming affects all living creatures. Wohlleben's work, explains how plant life is harmed by changes in our world's climate and at the same time he explains that plant life can be an aid in combatting these changes.

*The Hidden Life of Trees* opens like a basic book on botany with a thread of poetic description woven through the first chapters as Wohlleben speaks of trees that "communicate" (p.6), "mount their own defense" (p. 9), their "reproduction is planned" (p. 19) and they "budget their strength" (p. 25). He describes how trees take on the role of "mother" with their children. These are common functions and events occurring in the botanical world. Readers are taken deep into the world of the forest where the importance of the life of trees becomes acutely obvious. We are invited to walk into the ecosystem of the forest that "is held in a delicate balance" (p. 219) and to understand that the forest is a "matter at a more fundamental level than most of us realize" (p. xi).

The news of the day is that economics influence how we care for our planet. Wohlleben calls to account lumber companies and how their harvesting practices interrupt the life cycles of the forests. "Forests are not lumber factories" (p. 244) and yet the companies do not allow trees to mature beyond their usefulness as building material. There is some resistance to the practice as "Countries around the world are enacting legislation to protect what remains of their original forests. In the United Kingdom, the designation 'ancient woodlands' affords some protection to woodlands that have existed continuously since at least the 1600s." (p. 233). "If we want to use forests as a weapon in the fight against climate change, then we must allow them to grow old, which is exactly what large conservation groups are asking us to do" (p. 98).

Trees are an integral part of the planet's ecosystem and affect the health of the climate. The geographic location of forests is vitally important as the forest is the "water pump" that carries water into the interior spaces of the continents. The process begins as moisture rises from the seas and moves toward land raining on the first 400 miles of the coast. A coastal forest receives and holds the moisture that then rises to become clouds that move farther inland, watering interior forests that repeat the process. "Coastal forests are the foundations for this system. If they do not exist the system falls apart" (p. 106) resulting in the development of deserts. "The fallout is already apparent in Brazil, where the Amazonian rain forest is steadily drying out" (p. 107) as the coastal forest is being destroyed for crop land and lumber harvesting.

The forest functions as a carbon dioxide vacuum (p. 93). Wohlleben admits it is complicated process and concludes that "over the course of their lives [trees] store up to 22 tons of carbon dioxide in their truck, branches, and root systems. . . and eventually finds its final resting place in the form of humus" (pp. 93).

The reader will be introduced to the small and large inhabitants of the forest: deer, birds, insects, fungi, molds, all of which are part of the ecosystem of the forest and create a "delicate balance" (p. 113). "As foresters like to say, the forest creates its own ideal habitat" (p. 100). Some of the inhabitants take more than they should or that is healthy for the forest. Wohlleben's words just might describe us, an organism in the planet's ecosystem: "An organism that is too greedy and takes too much without giving anything in return destroys what it needs for life and dies out" (p. 113).

Rev. Dr. Joseph W. Shook Albany, New York February 13, 2020