

ST. THOMAS à BECKET CHURCH
Care for Our Common Home Ministry
December 7, 2021 Minutes

MEETING ALTERNATIVE

Instead of our regular meeting on this day, a group of CCH members visited Trace – the zero-waste store in Vienna. We were greeted by owner Mala Persaud who told us the story behind opening this store.

Mala has lived in Vienna for fifteen years, and earlier was employed by the London Bureau of the Dateline magazine show. From there, she began to focus on global health, global development, and environmental issues. She was inspired by a New Jersey zero-waste store owner who posed the question, to people who use paper towels and napkins, “why are you buying your trash?”, and by online videos about Europeans who fit a year’s worth of trash into a mason jar. To achieve such a near zero-waste profile requires conscious life-style choices and an emphasis on avoiding plastics and wasteful packaging.

Mala decided that Vienna would be a good place for a zero-waste store. It took about three years, but after doing pop-up markets and connecting with 350 Fairfax and FACS, she was ready. The store, Trace, opened in September 2021. Despite COVID, Trace was busy in November, and it continues to bring in new customers. Mala hopes that people will see the store not as a gift store, but as a place to regularly buy zero-waste household items.

Presently balancing her outside work and the store, plus family obligations with her sons and aging parents, Mala is building a successful business while promoting her zero-waste message. She has eyes on opening another store somewhere – ‘maybe’.

OBSERVATIONS AND CONVERSATIONS

Topics of discussion between members and Mala:

Cost of compost and trash bags is increasing, especially evident in eco-conscious businesses like Harriet’s family’s restaurant, The Wicket Door Pub.

Margins in small businesses are so tight, and shopping bags increase the cost of doing business.

Fairfax no longer dumps trash in a landfill, but the county incinerates most un-recyclable trash at the Covanta site near Lorton. Burning our trash is not entirely without problems. By cutting down on our trash we can make a positive impact on our environment.

Mala sells unpaper towels to boil wash and re-use. Betty pointed to the laundry detergent sheets that were mentioned in our last meeting. Trace carries a further laundry enhancement, dryer balls, felted wool balls – to use instead of chemical dryer sheets.

Harriet recalls growing up when everyone used cloth, and simply washed it out and re-used it. She added that older persons can share their purchases, shopping and buying less.

Considering the wise use and storage of foods, Mala did some online research and learned many tips for saving money by keeping fresh foods fresh longer, e.g., scallions can last two weeks if washed, rinsed and placed in a take-out container with a damp cloth, broccoli keeps very well when put in a silicone Stasher bag. Like most of us who do not have money to throw in the garbage, she is learning to store foods right. Several more tips were shared.

Some of us learned a new word – ‘tare’ – which means the weight of a vehicle or container when empty. In the store, tare weight is subtracted from the gross weight of container and contents to determine the net weight.

Silicone covers for food bowls, open tins, are very practical – and work better when cover and bowl are dry.

Many other products, some in dry or liquid bulk form, fill out the store’s shelves, and offer assurance that packaging will not need to be turned into trash.

Recycling is a key to zero waste, and new products require an adjustment. Mala advises “do the best you can, maybe it doesn’t work for you”. There may be some things that really do work for you, so we will keep encouraging awareness and good choices.

NEXT MEETING – short Zoom meeting Tuesday, January 18th 7pm. A link will be sent to all CCH email list members, and contact info will be in the Bulletin. Patti’s alternate email is Kaiser.Patti@gmail.com.