

**Training Manual**

**For**

**The Green Congregation Program**

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**Sponsored  
By**

**The Web of Creation ([www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org))  
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago**

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# **GREEN CONGREGATION TRAINING MANUAL**

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The Web of Creation offers on-line environmental resources for faith-based communities. The site is located at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and is dedicated to work with congregations to incorporate care for creation in all aspects of life together. The staff, headed by David Rhoads, will provide guidance and resources for congregations to move through this process. (262-633-5438) [drhoads@lstc.edu](mailto:drhoads@lstc.edu)

# PART 1: GETTING STARTED AND KEEPING GOING

## THE OVERALL PLAN

These materials are designed to train a small group of lay people and clergy to bring care for creation into the full life and mission of your congregation. You may use this manual in different ways, doing some or all of the processes and projects suggested here. For the program to work well, you may want to follow the steps suggested and the principles recommended.

In brief, the following steps represent the procedures to become a Green Congregation.

1. Gather a small group of people (2 to 8) to serve as a Green Team.
2. Become familiar with the Green Congregation program.
3. Inform/involve the pastor(s)/staff as to your interest and commitment.
4. Approach the church governing board for authorization to proceed.
5. Develop an Action Plan for the congregation in several areas
  - a. Worship
  - b. Education
  - c. Building and Grounds
  - d. Discipleship at Home and Work
  - e. Public Ministry
6. Work with the appropriate committees/ individuals to carry out the Action Plan.
7. Promote with members your identity as a congregation that cares for creation.
8. Meet regularly (monthly) to follow the Action Plan and to develop new projects.
9. Consider a congregation project to benefit the community/ city of location
10. Find structural ways to assure the long term life and activities of the Green Team
11. At some point, apply to be certified as a Green Congregation and request that the governing board adopt the Green Congregation Mission Statement.

In the following pages you will find many resources and suggestions for taking each of these steps. You may begin anywhere in the manual. Gravitate to what motivates you. However, we encourage you and members of your Green team to read the manual through one time and to do so every year or so in your work. Make it available to new Green Team members. Many more resources are available at [www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org).

## **The Green Congregation Program (Summary)**

- 1. Why should Christians care for creation?**
  - a. The environmental state of the world: climate change, ozone depletion, loss of bio-diversity, depletion of forests/ arable land, waste, population.
  - b. All people, particularly the poor, people of color, and third world countries, are affected by these conditions.
  - c. The biblical view that creation is good and the biblical mandate for humans to take responsibility to care for creation—all of earth community
  - d. The theological understanding that God is present and active in the ongoing creation of the world.
  
- 2. What is the larger purpose of the Green Congregation Program?**
  - a. To contribute to the transformation of society so that humans live in harmony and justice with all life and preserve earth for future generations.
  - b. The more immediate goal is the transformation of the congregation to be an intentional community celebrating and restoring creation.
  
- 3. What is the goal for the congregation?**
  - a. To revitalize the identity and the mission of the congregation by integrating care for creation as part of all the congregation is and does.
  - b. To make a difference as individuals and as faith communities.
  
- 4. What is the function and role of a Green Team (or Earth Ministry Team)?**
  - c. A Green Team is a catalyst in the congregation for the transformation of the congregation to care for creation.
  - d. A Green Team seeks to promote care for creation in every part of the life and mission of the congregation.
  
- 5. How does the Green Team work?**
  - a. Share concern for environmental justice, explain the program, invite dialogue about ideas and concerns.
  - b. Approach the church council for authority to proceed
  - c. Seek to make care for creation part of the task of all committees, activities, staff tasks, and decisions.
  - d. Listen to concerns and be pro-active in fostering open communication
  
- 6. How does the Green Team make a plan of action and move ahead with some projects?**
  - a. Use the Five-Part program to set goals in each area (worship, education, building and grounds, lifestyle at home and work, and public ministry). See [www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org).
  - b. Make a plan to implement each project. Identify the committee or group you think will be responsible for the project, and plan how to promote it.
  - c. Seek ways to maintain each change for the long term.

## The Green Congregation Action Plan (Short Version)

The goal is to make a difference 1) by transforming attitudes and commitments, and 2) by embracing concrete actions that reduce human ecological impact on the earth and contribute to justice for people affected by environmental degradation. Choose projects likely to succeed, institutionalize them, and then move on to others.

- 1. Transformation through Worship: Let all creation praise God”**
  - a. For four Sundays in September, observe a four-week *Season of Creation* as part of the church year, with liturgies, sermons, scripture focusing on a relationship with nature ([www.seasonofcreation.com](http://www.seasonofcreation.com))
  - b. Observe Earth Day Sunday in April (for resources, see NCC website)
  - c. Have a Blessing of the Animals. ([www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org) under Worship)
  - d. Incorporate earth-keeping confessions, intercessory prayers, hymns, and sermons into weekly worship throughout the year.
  - e. Appoint each sanctuary with care for creation banners, greenery, and art.
  
- 2. Education: “Know your tradition and your world”**
  - a. Study your denominational Social Statement and the “Earth Charter.” ([www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org) under Religious Education)
  - b. A class/forum to study the biblical, theological, and ethic resources in the Christian faith for eco-justice ministry.
  - c. Forums with local experts on environmental issues and resources.
  - d. Hold a retreat in a natural setting for a cluster of churches/councils.
  
- 3. Building and Grounds: “The church as an alternative community”**
  - a. Carry out a comprehensive environmental audit and develop a plan.
  - b. Retrofit church lighting; develop a recycling program; reduce paper use.
  - c. Make use of grounds as community garden, prairie,
  
- 4. Discipleship at home and work: “Love your neighbor and Care for Creation”**
  - a. Recruit members to do an audit of their homes and/or work places.
  - b. Provide an opportunity for members to make a “Covenant with Creation” listing the eco-justice practices and disciplines (See [www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org) under Lifestyle at Home and Work)
  - c. Offer a study/support group using the book *Simple Living, Compassionate Living*. (Earth Ministry: [www.earthministry.org](http://www.earthministry.org))
  
- 5. Public Ministry/ Political Advocacy: “The church exists to serve the world”**
  - a. Notify members with periodic action alerts about local, regional, and national environmental issues.
  - b. Do a hands-on project in the area of the church: restore a habitat, clean up trash, plant trees, or protest pollution causing ill health.
  - c. Seek ways to maintain the projects and programs over the long term.

For more information, contact [webofcreation@lstc.edu](mailto:webofcreation@lstc.edu).

## **The Green Congregation Program Task Descriptions for the Congregation**

### **Initiating group:**

Takes Green Congregation plan to the council  
With a willingness to follow through and establish Green Team

### **Contact Person:**

Green Team leader as Congregational liaison to the Green Congregation Program

### **Church Council:**

Authorizes the Green Team to proceed and provides support  
Approves the Green Congregation plan

### **Green Team:**

Gives information to whole congregation  
Brings ideas and resources to the appropriate committees/people for action  
Follows through on action plans  
Assesses the results

### **Standing Committees of the Congregation:**

Participates in suggesting projects for Greening the Congregation  
Where feasible, adopts plans recommended by the Green Team

### **Pastor(s)/ lay professionals**

Support the Green Team and the Green Congregation Program  
Give general guidance to plans and programs  
Carry out plans that relate to pastoral functions, such as worship or education

### **Office and maintenance staff.**

Support the Green Team and the Green Congregation Program  
Work with the Green Team to suggest and carry out green projects

### **Whole congregation:**

Embrace the Green Congregation Program  
Carry out plans and projects as appropriate at church, such as recycling.  
Embrace care for creation as appropriate at home and work

### **The Green Congregation Program/ Web of Creation: [www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org)**

Provide training and consultation for the process  
Provide resource materials

# **The Green Congregation Program**

## **How to Proceed**

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

This section is designed to help Green Teams know how to take the next steps in the Green Congregation Program. This is basically a briefing on “community-organizing” in your congregation. Here are some of the questions that give focus to the training

- 4. Why Christians should care for creation?**
  - a. The environmental state of the world: climate change, ozone depletion, loss of bio-diversity, depletion of forests and arable land, waste, population.
  - b. All people, particularly the poor, people of color, and third world countries, are affected by these conditions.
  - c. The biblical view that creation is good and the biblical mandate for humans to take responsibility to care for creation—all of earth community
  - d. The theological understanding that God is present and active in the ongoing creation of the world.
  
- 5. What is the larger vision and purpose of the program?**
  - c. To contribute to the transformation of society so that humans live in harmony with other life and preserve earth for future generations.
  - d. The more immediate goal is the transformation of the congregation to be an intentional community celebrating and restoring creation.
  
- 6. What is the goal for congregation?**
  - a. To revitalize the identity and the mission of the congregation by integrating care for creation in what the congregation is and what the congregation does.
  - b. To *be different* and to *make a difference*.
  - c. Personal spiritual transformation to a new relationship with God and with all creation.
  - d. To be actively promoting (outside the congregation) ecological justice for earth community.
  
- 7. What are some key principles and strategies to keep in mind?**
  - a. Care for creation is a religious issue and a religious practice.
  - b. Obstacles may be theological, political, financial, or strategic.
  - c. Working with other groups and other congregations strengthens everyone and increases our impact.
  - d. For more key principles, areas of concern, and strategies visit [www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org)
  
- 8. What is the function and role of a Green Team (or Earth Ministry Team)?**
  - a. A Green Team is the catalyst in the congregation for transformation.

- b. A Green Team seeks to promote care for creation in every part of the life and mission of the congregation.

**9. How does the Green Team work with the pastor(s) and lay professionals?**

- a. Involve pastors and lay professionals insofar as they are able to participate.
- b. Share your concern for environmental justice, explain the program, invite dialogue about ideas and concerns.
- c. Take responsibility as lay leaders for initiating and following through with the program
- d. Discuss how you can support the pastor/staff supporting you.
- e. Address concerns: possibility of controversy, the pastor is already overextended, how controls can be maintained, among others.
- f. Listen to concerns and be pro-active in keeping lines of communication open.

**10. How does the Green Team work with the church council?**

- a. Approach the church council as a group. Discuss it beforehand with the pastor, the church council president, and the executive committee.
- b. Present your concern for environmental justice, the goals of the Green Congregation Program, and your commitment to follow through.
- c. Seek to show how the program fits into the mission of the congregation. If it is not explicitly stated, ask if care for creation could be made a part of the church mission statement.
- d. Address concerns: financial cost (some grant money may come, and all other decisions involving financial commitments will be approved by the appropriate group); whether this will drain volunteers from other tasks (only a few are needed, and the program may bring in other members not otherwise active); how will the committee report to the council (that can be up to the council); and so on.
- e. Ask the council for authority to approach church committees/committee chairs with ideas and resources and to work with other staff of the church.
- f. Listen to concerns and be pro-active in keeping lines of communication open.

**11. How does the Green Team work with committees?**

- a. Seek to make care for creation part of the task of all committees, activities, staff tasks, and decisions. Build it into job/committee description.
- b. Meet with committee chairs and committees: share your concerns, explain the program, invite their input, suggest a project or two (brainstorm about others), provide resources to do the projects, offer to be helpful if needed.
- c. Follow through with each committee and each project in order to provide support and accountability.
- d. Publicize and celebrate the work of the particular committee. Thank them after the project is completed.

- e. Listen to concerns and be pro-active in keeping lines of communication open.

**12. In what ways might the Green Team assess the congregation—interest, assets, needs, opportunities, and support?**

- a. “Asset/interest” based assessment in which you draw on the resources and commitments in the congregation to develop plans and programs.
- b. “Opportunities/needs” based assessment in which you look to the programs, possibilities, and eco-justice crises of the community in which the congregation is located.
- c. “Gauging support” for various projects, whereby you survey the congregation with a list of possible projects, costs, and payoffs, as a means to see what support there is for each project.
- d. A “comprehensive environmental” audit by which you assess every aspect of the building and grounds: what comes in, how it is used, where it goes. Develop an action plan to address the issues raised by the audit.

**13. What strategies might the Green Team use to make the congregation aware of the Green Congregation program?**

- a. Clarify the message and say it in seven different contexts/media: worship, education, newsletter, personal contacts, bulletin board, bulletin announcements and inserts, e-mails.
- b. Choose different projects that get everyone involved at some level.
- c. Symbols, signs, actions, banners, and slogans that bring the issues before the congregation.
- d. Plan education/ worship/ projects/ changes so that they can be public teachable moments for the congregation.

**14. How do you deal with obstacles and resistance?**

- a. Be proactive in talking with people. Share your concerns about the environment and explain the source of your Christian commitment to care for creation. Give reasons/evidence to support your ideas.
- b. Listen, learn, work constructively to address the issues/ differences, seek a consensus, and compromise where necessary. Seek to avoid confrontation and pressure tactics.
- c. Explain and keep on going with the things that can be done.
- d. As you keep working at this, you will get to various thresholds and critical masses of support—after which things you already do are easier and new things are possible.

**15. How does the Green Team make a plan of action and move ahead with some projects?**

- a. Use the Five-Part program to set goals in each area (worship, education, building and grounds, discipleship at home and work, public ministry)

- b. Brainstorm about a special project of the whole congregation for the community. Will be chosen later in conjunction with the whole congregation.
- c. Make a plan to implement each project. Identify the committee or group you think will be responsible for the project, and plan how to promote it.
- d. Meet and/or communicate regularly (monthly?) as a Green Team to keep plans alive, hold each other accountable for commitments, and set up new projects.
- e. Seek to institutionalize each change as a regular integral part of the life of the congregation.

**16. Other steps**

- a. Seek partners among community agencies and other congregations to do projects that would be difficult to do alone.
- b. Keep in touch with denomination at local, regional, and national levels to seek resources and connect with happenings elsewhere.
- c. Make use of the materials at [www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org) and the links to many other faith-based environmental sites available on Web of Creation.
- d. Make your Green Team meetings fun with healthy snacks and meals, walks in nature, poetry selections, or occasional trip to environmental site.

## **Getting Started: Strategies and Principles**

There are many strategies that can be pursued in the course of greening a congregation. What follows are some suggestions to consider as you chart your own course most relevant to your congregation and most appropriate to your assets and opportunities.

**Keep the larger purpose in mind.** Any effort to green the seminary is related to the degradations of the eco-system of Earth and the human efforts to restore rather than to destroy our Earth habitat. As Christians, we are called to be servants and keepers of God's whole creation. In your Green Team meetings, include a brief educational/devotional component that centers everyone to their larger purposes in meeting.

**You are not alone.** Congregational efforts are part of a larger ecclesial movement to incorporate care for creation into the life and mission of the church. There are many religious faiths working for the environment—the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, The National Council of Churches Eco-justice Working Group, the National Catholic Conference, the Evangelical Environmental Network, and the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life. There are numerous para-religious groups (see links at [www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org)).

**Double your commitment to human justice.** Every ecological problem affects the human community, usually having the greatest impact on the most vulnerable—the poor, people of color, third world countries, the elderly, the disabled, and so on. Every human justice problem is exacerbated by the degradation of creation. It is sometimes thought that social justice and care for creation undercut each other. The truth is that we desperately need commitment to both causes as one commitment, because the concerns are inextricably intertwined. Therefore, as you articulate your care for creation, double your commitment to human justice as an integral part of caring for creation, because the recognition of the role played by the environment will give you an awareness of the full extent of the injustice. *So, as you plan activities, ask: How does this further the care for all creation?*

**Keep the immediate goal in mind.** The immediate goal is to transform the life and mission of the seminary so that care for creation is incorporated into every aspect of the seminary. *The key here is that the “environment” is not one more issue among others. Rather, as we define it, the care for creation is fundamental to what it means to be human.* It is as fundamental as “Love God, love your neighbor, and love creation.” Hence, the approach is to make the care for all creation an integral part of every aspect of the life of the congregation.

**Seek to act out of gratitude and grace.** In response to the ecological state of the world, it is natural for people to be motivated by fear or grief or guilt or outrage. While these emotions are indeed appropriate responses, they are not a solid basis to make wise decisions, and they will not sustain one's efforts in the long run. This is true both for your own sources of life-giving support and for the motivation you seek to engender in others.

Be alarming without being alarmist. Do not become the environmental police. Avoid raging against the powers that be. This in no way means we should minimize either the problems or our part in them or the urgency of the situation. *We should seek to work positively and constructively out of the deep reservoir of God's grace present in nature itself.*

**You are not starting from scratch.** There are many different ways to get a started on the process of transforming your congregation into a community that cares for creation. It is likely that there are already a number of people who recycle and reuse. There are probably people who read about environmental issues but have never connected them to their faith or parish community. There may or may not be a lot of people willing to jump in and take a leadership role in getting the congregation involved; but that does not matter, because it only takes a few folks to make a lot happen for everyone. Make use of commitments already there.

### **Different Levels of Commitment.**

The key to understanding how this works is that you want to think about different levels of commitment. Do not assume everyone will be involved at the same level. Some people may take leadership roles in initiating programs and ideas. Others may be part of the church governing board to authorize or approve plans and related budget items. Others may be members of committees (such as the property committee) that would carry out a project. Still others may teach children, youth or adults in one class or another. Virtually everyone may be involved simply by participating in the bulletin recycling program after worship or by turning out lights in the bathroom when they leave. Celebrate the level at which everyone does their part, without expecting everyone to be involved at the same level of commitment.

### **It Only Takes a Few**

So you may need a few people to get the ball rolling. This can be done whether you are a pastor or a lay leader or an interested parishioner. If you are a pastor, you may be in a position to give some impetus or direction to the process of becoming a creation-caring community. If you are a lay person, you may want to ask permission or inform the church council that you are planning on initiating some of these efforts in the parish, or you may wish to seek out others in the community who would be interested in offering some leadership on these issues with you. If you are in a position to get a formal committee or subcommittee established, all the better. You may talk personally with others who may be interested or you may want to put a notice in the bulletin or newsletter inviting anyone interested to a meeting. There may already be a standing committee of social concerns where it is appropriate to initiate eco-justice concerns. It is best to keep the process as open as possible and let the leadership and the congregation know what is happening and what is being planned. There may be people who object to the presence of this issue in the church; however, it is not necessary to achieve consensus in order for those who wish to go forward to do so. In the paragraphs below, we outline several first steps that may be taken.

### **Small Group**

A small group or committee may form in the congregation in an ad hoc way and begin to serve as leaven for the rest of the congregation. The group may carry out projects on their own, propose projects for the church council to approve, and promote ecological concerns through education and other promotional means. The task before you requires only a small group of dedicated and committed people who are willing to grasp a vision for the congregation and to stay at it for the long term. One individual or a small group of people can do the planning together and to recommend the projects to other groups from year to year. Seek to diversify involvement in terms of gender, ethnicity, age, and occupation. Always have open meetings promoted so that all who wish to participate may do so.

**Get Authorized.** It is so important to locate the committee in the congregational structure. It may stand on its own, for example, under the aegis of the governing board. Or it may serve as a subcommittee of another committee, with a member of the oversight committee serving as a liaison member. It may simply be necessary for the small group of people working to green the congregation to let the pastors and governing board to know of their work and seek their blessing or authorization to proceed. Report regularly to those to whom you are accountable and let your activities be known to the whole community.

**The strategy of the Committee is to green the whole congregation.** It is crucial to recognize that the purpose of a committee is not to do all or even most of the “care for creation” activities but to serve as leaven to green the congregation as a whole. *The committee functions as a catalyst to lead other committees and employees of the church to incorporate eco-justice concerns into their arena of responsibility.* In this way, everyone participates and takes ownership at different levels and in different ways. *The committee serves the whole congregation, such that care for creation becomes part of the ethos of entire life of the congregation.*

**Develop an Action Plan:** It is important to have a plan for greening your congregation. Otherwise, the process will be scattered-shot and haphazard. *It is also important for the plan to be comprehensive.* Otherwise the actions will be quite limited. We recommend the following model to use when making an action plan. It has five areas: Worship, Education, Building and Grounds, Discipleship, and Public Ministry ([www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org)). We encourage you to keep coming back to this action plan regularly so that you keep the larger picture before you and that you keep the process of brainstorming and planning as an ongoing part of your work.

**Make it policy:** Institutionalize and regularize the actions as quickly as possible. This way, it will not depend on the committee to suggest them anew each year. For example, if you celebrate Earth Week one year, seek to make it a regular part of the worship schedule for every year. If you purchase green cleaning products, make that a standard procedure. *Do not reinvent the wheel each year!*

**Do not try to do it all at once:** Do not be overwhelmed by all that there is to do or all that could be done. The idea is to choose projects that are manageable and that have a good chance of coming to fruition. You cannot do all of them at once. So pick and choose. You will find that there are good starter projects. Then, as you reach a threshold of interest and support, other more ambitious projects will be possible. *Celebrate what you get done without worrying about what does not get done. You can only do what you can do!*

**Work cooperatively and realistically.** One goal of the committee is to foster eco-justice decisions and events among all activities and offices of the seminary. You may want to promote care for creation worship with the Worship Committee. Or you may want to promote Earth friendly lawn care with the custodian. Or you may want to develop a relationship with the Education Committee to suggest a creation theme in the next Vacation Church School. Look around to see assets and opportunities. The role of the committee is to suggest, encourage, support, and offer resources—rather than to take over any decision-making or job belonging to another. Again, do not try to do too much at once. Work realistically and cooperatively with people. In a small, close-knit community like a congregation, there is little place for pressure or protest. *Invitation, cooperation, influence, and support will go a long way.*

**Assess assets and opportunities.** Find ways to identify the people who are already committed to eco-justice and seek to determine the nature of that commitment. *The congregation is a busy place. People are already committed to tasks in the congregation. So, as much as possible, work with the committees already present. Encourage people not to add on new tasks but to incorporate care for creation into the tasks they already have.* Build a green congregation around the opportunities at hand.

**Get everyone involved at some level.** Strategize how to get everyone involved in some aspect of the greening of the congregation. *Only a few people need to join the committee. Engage people at the level of their involvement, in relation to the things they already care about—some in worship, some in teaching, some in community activism, everyone in recycling and conserving energy, and so on. Try to identify the nature of everyone's potential involvement and then challenge them in that commitment.*

**Keep care for creation before the attention of the community.** Through worship, educational programs, bible studies, green notes in the bulletins and newsletters, with displays, and so on, let people know the importance of the work of becoming earth-keepers who care about ecological justice. Because the congregation grows, make care for creation part of the training for new members. A brochure may help in this endeavor. *If one goal is to shape the ethos of the congregation, then care for creation needs to be part of the atmosphere!*

**Provide practices and events that are repeated each year.** Devise a strategy that keeps the commitment going and keeps the concern before the community. For example, the committee may seek to foster some key events each year, such as:

Presentation in worship at the beginning of each fall.

Worship service in which members make a “covenant with creation.”

Celebrate the Season of Creation.

Blessing of the Animals on St. Francis Day (October 2)

Open committee meetings with an educational component

One or two adult forums for the community with guest speakers

An event with the youth, with the women’s group, with the older members.

Earth Week worship

*Such a structure will give a familiar pattern to the program from year to year and engage committee members in keeping the care for creation before the community. Delegate the responsibility for each of these events to the appropriate groups/ committees. Plan only those activities that you have resources and energy to carry out.*

**Seek to be in touch with nature.** The feelings of closeness to nature are crucial for the commitment to care for creation. Nurture this relationship for the community—whether through greening the chapel with plants or getting a naturalist to show you the area of your congregation or providing retreat opportunities for the council or the congregation. We seek to restore nature by being in solidarity with all creation rather than manipulating it from above. We are called to love creation as God does. *We will not save what we do not love.*

**Develop a description of the tasks of the Green Team.** It might include items such as:

Work to green every aspect of the life of the seminary

Prepare an action plan and carry out the plan

Network and cooperate with the offices and programs of the seminary

Organize and sponsor meetings, lectures, workshops when feasible

Promote care for creation among the members in their homes and work

Update the description each year.

**Publicize, publicize, publicize.** Community organizers say that in order to promote effectively a movement or an event, you must do so in seven different media. Try e-mail, bulletin blurbs, newsletter articles, posters, personal contact, phone trees, announcements, bulletin boards, a brochure, among others. Even if fewer people than you had hoped show up for an event, the whole community knows what is happening.

### **Education**

You may wish to have a series of classes in the evening or a series of forums on Sunday morning (perhaps coupled with sermons on our responsibility to creation). There are many resources available for such classes. Here are some ideas:

- Explore Biblical passages dealing with our human relationship with creation
- Study your denomination's social statements on the care for creation and on environmental justice
- Look at the local church resource center or church press catalogues for curriculum on caring for creation. (See our listing for youth and adults.)
- Watch one of the many videos available for such a forum. (See our annotated video listing.)

- Get speakers from a local high schools or colleges who have expertise in environmental issues.
- Get speakers from local agencies that deal with eco-justice issues.
- Do a series of case studies on the environment.
- Get in touch with your denominational office responsible for environmental ministry and ask about resources and speakers.
- Identify other churches in the area who have done environmental ministry and ask them to share their experiences.

The educational process may enable you to find out who has a commitment to do further work with environmental ministry in the congregation. The group may plan a project or suggestion further steps. One congregation that held a six-week study on Sunday mornings decided at the last session to do a project retrofitting all the lights in the building!

### **Retreat**

It may be that you want to invite interested persons on a retreat for a day or two to a place in the countryside. The retreat might include:

- discussion of people's concerns and experiences;
- input from an informed person about the environmental state of the world;
- opportunities to discuss particular local environmental problems;
- the relationship between environmental and justice issues;
- study of an eco-justice manual for congregational life;
- formulation of a plan to continue the process.

There are educational resources available in video format or church school curriculum that may be used to plan the retreat. It may be possible for the members of the retreat to commit themselves to a project, then meet again for another retreat in six months to report on the success of the project, and to plan another project, and so on; or you might formulate a plan for the next steps to engage the whole congregation.

### **Church Council**

Plan a retreat for the church council or plan a presentation that would inform the congregation about environmental ministry as an important part of parish life and mission. From there, you may want to form a task force or standing committee or a subcommittee of the Social Concerns committee to begin the process of environmental ministry.

### **Survey**

Do a survey of the congregation to determine who is interested, who has a commitment, what concerns people have, how they view the environmental state of the nation and the world, what experiences they have had, what expertise they may have, and so on. From the responses, plan a retreat or form a committee in order to share the results of the survey and to set a direction for the group and the congregation.

**Keeping a Log.**

It would be helpful if one person was willing to keep a record of what was considered and how it was done and what the outcome was. This record will serve well in drawing others into the process who were not there from the beginning. It will also track all that you do so the congregation can begin to build an identity as a community that cares for creation.

**What's in a name?** It is important to name your endeavor or identity. *People will respond to a name and remember what your congregation is doing in becoming green.* You will want a name that refers to the whole congregation: Green Congregation, Green Zone, Eco-justice Center, Care for Creation Congregation, and so on. Draw on the symbols and ideas from your tradition to connect your efforts to your denomination. Develop a logo that reflects your purpose. You may want to name the committee accordingly or have different name. It might help to call it a “team” (such as The Green Team or The Eco-justice Working Group or The Creation-Care Group) rather than a “committee”—as a means to emphasize the idea that it is not one committee among many but a catalyst and leaven for all the committees and programs.

**You will need people resources.** To a greater or lesser degree, you will need both persons and money to carry out activities of the action plan. To identify persons, it might help to send out a survey or request a survey response at several worship services. The survey might assess interest, skills related to environmental projects (such as a garden or publicity), environment-related occupations, desire to be on the Green Team, the willingness to participate in one environmental projects, the eagerness to give financial support to the program, and so on. Follow through with positive responses.

**You will need financial resources.** Of course, there are many activities and events that do not cost the committee or the congregation. However, it may be possible to get a line item in the budget. Or the committee could apply for a grant from local or national church organizations. Your committee may be able to cooperate with other groups or organizations that have funds. Fund raisers are very helpful. Make sure the kind of fundraiser you embrace furthers the environmental efforts, such as selling compact fluorescent light bulbs or fair trade products.

**Seek accreditation as Green Congregation.** The committee and the congregation may wish to seek accreditation from the Green Congregation Program. *Such a program will give focus to your efforts. The achievement of the accreditation will also give publicity and a boost to the efforts.* And there will be incentive to develop ongoing plans as means to maintain the accreditation.

**The success of the program will draw new members.** Prospective members who learn about your environmental activities and the greening of your parish will often consider this an important factor, perhaps even the decisive factor, in their choice of a church home.

**Be visionary.** Instead of thinking about change as incremental in relation to what now exists, imagine the congregation as it might be 50 years from now in an ecological age when every aspect of the life and activities of the culture will be ecologically restorative—a place where the love for all creation and the care for all human and non-human creatures is obvious. *Such a vision may lead you to make a leap forward in some areas and act in prophetic ways to live out our call to be servants and keepers of the Earth.*

**Conclusion.** These are some ideas and suggestions for your consideration when setting up your own program. You will find what works best for you and what the pitfalls are as you go. The helpful thing is that when you have done a certain number of activities, you will attain a threshold of support that will enable you to do things you could not do before. Make the best use of these moments. Then when you have done further activities, you will attain another level that thrusts you forward even further. Before long, there is a climate in the congregation, a sense of identity, that empowers you to generate personal and institutional commitments that were not otherwise possible.

**Seven Strategies to Engage the Whole Congregation**  
*What Steps to Take to Involve Many Members of the Community  
at Different Levels of Commitment*

Here are some ways to think about getting the larger congregation engaged in the project or program of entry.

**Strategy One: Brainstorming as a Basis for Action**

A small group or governing body may want to brainstorm about what your particular congregation might do to care for the earth. It might help to work with a model (LINK) or list of ideas (available from many eco-justice workbooks on the parish - ie parish pages? LINK? MANUALS?) as a basis for suggesting possibilities. The idea or ideas might be presented to the church governing body for approval and delegation to carry out. The proposal should include cost, the people or committee to carry it out, timeline, and specific suggestions for whatever might be needed to complete the project. It might be good to begin with projects that have the greatest chance for success.

**Strategy Two: Learning as a Basis for Action**

This approach provides an opportunity for many people in the congregation to learn about care for the earth as an entry into possible organizing or taking action. The idea would be to have a forum or series of adult forums or a six week class focused on care for creation. There are many resources available for leaders to draw upon as a basis for such a forum -- congregational handbooks, denominational printed resources, denominational representatives, books oriented to lay people, internet sites, and local people with expertise in some issues.

The group may consist of people who are already committed to the environment or others who have not thought much about it. Together they can perhaps come to some understanding that would enable the congregation to move forward. From this larger group engaged in learning, there might come a core group of people eager to take leadership in enabling more to happen. This smaller group could then meet to plan the next steps.

**Strategy Three: Action Based on Needs or Crises**

This is an approach that assesses the needs perceived in the congregation and its members around which resources are marshaled to address the problem. Here the congregation can look at many things at different levels:

- *The Parish:* If there is a need to save money, the congregation may look at energy costs and determine a comprehensive approach to addressing them -- insulation, boiler maintenance, heat distribution, a grant for starter to money to get energy efficient lighting, and so on.
- *The Community:* Perhaps a nearby stream has been polluted and is causing health problems for the community; so, you organize to engage in habitat restoration or urge the local government to address the issue. Maybe an incinerator is causing health problems or a local factory is exceeding federal standards of emissions and

- causing local health problems or the water supply is being gained by runoff pesticides. The parish can provide leadership in community organizing to address these problems.
- *State & Nation:* Many in the congregation might be concerned that federal standards for clean water or clean air are being eroded and desire to engage in letter writing or phone campaigns to express their concerns and urge action. This can also be true for other issues (e.g. smog, ozone, water conservation, logging, etc.)
  - *Global:* The effects of global warming loom large and the congregation can marshal its resources to bring pressure on government representatives to address the issue. Some in the congregation may be aware of global efforts to address problems such as population, and so forth. There may be a desire to learn more about international conferences or treaties, and so on, and to urge our government to participate in them.

#### **Strategy Four: Action Based on Opportunities**

Opportunity-based organizing involves acting on an opportunity that does not necessarily involve a specific need. For example, you have property that is not well-developed and you can make a nature sanctuary area; or, you are building an addition or a new building and have the chance to incorporate many eco-design concerns into your new building. Your grounds lend themselves to establishing a community garden, so you seek to gather people who might organize and lead the community to develop and care for such a garden, perhaps to benefit the poor in the neighborhood. Perhaps the youth group is looking for a service project... the opportunities are endless!

#### **Strategy Five: Action Based on Congregational Assets**

This approach draws upon the assets of the congregation. Instead of trying to identify needs and see how they can be met, this approach looks to assess all the resources available among members of the congregation as well as the assets of the congregation as a whole, then develops a way to move forward making use of these assets.

You will find many people already committed to care for the earth in a variety of ways -- people who read about environmental issues, people who are recycling or composting as an expression of their commitment, or people who are concerned about the issue but are not sure how act on their concern. Some folks may already have seen their concerns as a religious issue, while others may never have made the connection between their faith and their care for the earth. Now is an opportunity to encourage such people to transform their concern into a religious practice or discipline. People who already have a commitment to the environment may be the greatest resource, and their commitment -- once expressed -- can be contagious for others.

In addition, many resources/assets in the congregation will come from people already doing environmentally-related activities in their jobs, people who may have ideas and expertise that would generate many actions and much learning for the congregation:

- Salespersons who sell energy saving appliances/ heating and air-conditioning units
- Engineers who promote energy efficient lighting
- Nurses who know about healthy diets that relate to and could promote eco-concerns
- Farmers who are committed to environmentally safe farming practices
- And many more!

Such people can serve as consultants for decision-making, offer forums on relevant topics, or just be part of a discussion group.

In addition, there will be people who have skills and interests that can be very helpful in enabling the congregation to become a creation-caring congregation. Those interested in gardening can develop a community garden on the grounds -- for the benefit of food pantries and needy families. Abilities and interests from boiler maintenance, to landscaping, to bringing greenery into the church, to insulating windows, to carpooling to church can be a part of your congregation's environmental mission. Once people see the vision for their parish, many interested people may come forward.

Finding out about the resources can involve a survey shared through the church newsletter or distributed at a service or congregational meeting. This can also be done by phone pools or internet forms. Questions could include:

- How would you state your concern or commitment to care for creation?
- What eco-friendly practices do you do? Recycling, reusing, avoiding certain products, etc.
- Do you have a job that relates to environmental issues (list examples)?
- Do you have interests or hobbies that might be helpful (list examples)?
- Have you related these concerns to your faith and faith community? If so, how?
- Would you be willing to express/ act on your concern and gifts as Christians?
- Would you be willing to meet and express what our parish could do?

Based on the gathering of information about these resources, some suggestions for action could be made that reflect the interests, commitments, and gifts of the people. Bringing a group of folks together around these issues might lead to some concrete decisions.

### **Strategy Six: Action Based on Consensus**

Here is an opportunity to survey the church or a group meeting to assess what people would be willing to do by consensus. A small group would prepare information about a range of things that could be done to care for the earth. For each item, a description is given, then the cost, payback possibilities, who would do it and how, etc. (Be sure to include some items that people would be likely to support!) Then, people would check if they would support enthusiastically, support provisionally, be cautious about, or outright oppose each item. Space should be given to allow people to explain their reasons (objections which could perhaps be addressed). Here are some project ideas:

- Recycling bins for the church
- Nontoxic cleaning supplies
- Retrofitting the lighting in the church
- Incorporate creation concerns into the worship life
- Circulate a petition supporting efforts to ease global warming

It is best to determine your own list based on needs and opportunities in your congregation and the larger community, and on the relative commitment of parish members.

### **Strategy Seven: Join Forces**

You may want to proceed by getting involved with folks from a nearby church or people from another religious tradition. Some congregations naturally yoke well together. There may be a community project that needs the commitment of several organizations and more people. The cooperation may enable projects done in common to benefit from the low prices of contractors. Cooperation among several congregations may enable financial resources that would not be available from only one parish. A project in the community, such as habitat restoration or opposition to an incinerator, might best be done by as many local organizations and groups as possible. Finally, the cooperation with people from other traditions gives an opportunity learn from each other's ways of addressing the environmental situation theologically, spiritually, and ethically.

### **Conclusion**

We suggest all these strategies not to overwhelm you with possibilities but to affirm that there are indeed many ways to proceed. The idea is to find what might be best for your congregation, given the interest you already have, given the personality of the congregation, and given the particular organization and procedures for decision-making.

## Names & Symbols

Names and symbols are important because they give a sense of identity and serve as reminders of the community's responsibilities for creation.

**Naming the parish as a place to care for creation:** Give the church an identity as a place where people care about all of life. Here are some possibilities:

- Creation Awareness Center. This is the phrase used by the National Council of Churches for congregations that covenant to model care of the earth. It emphasizes the church building as a place where the people and the buildings/grounds manifest an awareness of all creation and the human responsibility for it.
- Covenant Community. This is a different version that identifies the members of the congregation as people who are committed to all of God's creation. What about naming a new church the "Creation Methodist Church."
- Earth-Keeping Center or Earth-Healing Center. Some congregations already think of themselves as healing centers, and so their identity can be expanded to include not only the healing of persons and communities but also a commitment to the regeneration of nature.
- Eco-Justice Community. This phrase emphasizes the integral relation between ecology and justice, including the relationship between degradation of the environment and the exploitation of women, minorities, the poor, and third world countries. It identifies the community as a place where concerns for the environment are related to the concern for justice among humans -- a community of advocacy and action.

Green Zone. This is a concept that is less explicitly religious in orientation, but emphasizes the area as a place safe for the environment and therefore also for humans -- similar to a drug-free zone as a place safe for children, or a hospital zone as a place dedicated to the healing of persons. A Green Zone is a place where the geographical area of the church, along with the community that gathers there, is a

- place that is earth-friendly. The advantage of this concept is that it can easily be applied also to homes and neighborhoods and businesses.
- Other Names. You may come up with biblical images, such as the garden or the tree of life. You may come up with a name that relates to your region or area of the country. Whatever it is, it should be a reminder to the congregation of their commitments and their mission.

**Naming the committee is also important.** It should be a name that does not alienate some while it draws others. Seek to find a name that anyone can identify with.

- Green Team
- Environmental Concerns Committee
- Eco-Justice Concerns Committee

- Environmental ministry Committee
- Creation Awareness Committee

If the committee promotes the whole congregation by a certain identity, then the name should perhaps reflect this:

- Committee for Christ Presbyterian Church as Creation Community
- Committee for the parish as a Green Zone

**Perhaps you prefer to name a program rather than a committee.**

- Care for Creation
- Care of the Earth
- Restoring Creation
- Healing Creation

If the community is engaged in a local or regional advocacy program, you may want to establish a temporary name for the program during the period in which the advocacy is in effect.

**Choosing symbols.** It may also be helpful to have one or more symbols of your commitment to the care of the earth. A symbol can be a very meaningful expression of environmental ministry. The symbol could be displayed as a logo or given artistic expression.

- The tree of life
- Earth as seen from space
- Water of life

A public symbol can also give the congregation an identity with the larger surrounding community. Some of these symbols may display actual practices that are prophetic signs of future practices in a sustainable world. Here are some ideas:

- Create a community garden on your property. Make participation available to people in the neighborhood, especially the poor, or give to a local food pantry.
- Create an orchard on the property. Share the produce with needy families.
- Plant many trees and shrubs for the protection of the building from the cold wind in winter and the hot sun in summer.
- Create a small natural sanctuary on the property with trees and shrubs and flowers. It may have a small path with benches. This would be a place for people in the church and the neighborhood to sit quietly and meditate.
- Put up some wind mills to power one of the classrooms.
- Put up solar panels to power the outside lights.
- Create an eternal light in the sanctuary that is powered by the light from the sun.
- Surround the baptismal font with a garden of life. Perhaps include a waterfall for the font of running water made possible by solar power.

- Put plants in the church building and sanctuary so that worship is always held amidst the praise of all God's creation.
- Where there are wall to ceiling windows and the climate permits, plant the same trees, shrubs, flowers, and other plants inside as there are outside, so that the artificial separation from creation is overcome.
- Use recycled materials to build your church or some outside furnishings or a sculpture for the church yard.
- Your building itself can be a symbol.

The symbols you choose may come from the Bible or from your religious tradition or from the region or from nature itself or from technology or from your imagination!

**Display your identity.** You may want to display outside or at the entrance or on the wall a statement of your commitment in the form of a certificate and the name of your community. The testimonial could be in the form of a framed certificate or a printed announcement/sign or a plaque. Examples:

- First Baptist Church is a Center for Healing Creation
- Community Church is a Green Zone
- Christ Methodist: A Creation Awareness Center
- Commitment to Care for the Earth: St. Luke Episcopal Church
- This is an Eco-Justice Community
- Dedicated to Environmental Ministry

A Certificate of Commitment is available from the National Council of Churches as part of their program to make churches become Covenant Communities or Creation Awareness Centers.

**Church Newsletter.** As a means to keep before the parish a commitment to eco-justice concerns, consider the inclusion of regular reminders of concern for creation in the church newsletter. These can involve facts about the environment, sayings and proverbs about your commitment, reference to local, regional, national or global opportunities for advocacy, some effort that has been made to restore and protect the environment, or some suggestions for incorporating environmental practices in life at work and in the home. If you have developed a name or logo or phrase that captures your care for the earth, perhaps it can become part of the mast for your newsletter. If you have the congregation on an e-mail list-serve, use this means of communication to keep environmental issues before people.

**Incorporate care for creation into the mission statement of the congregation.** If your congregation has a mission statement, it is important to include your commitment to the environment in it. Including creation care in your documents of purpose serves to keep before you, at the most fundamental level, your ongoing covenant to serve and protect creation as part of your mission. Yearly planning will then be sure to include this vital

dimension of religious life. If you do not have a congregational mission statement, perhaps now is the opportunity to adopt one.

## **Using a Parish Model**

*How to Use the Comprehensive Model Presented Here in the Parish Pages*

In embracing care of the earth, it is important to work with a vision of what the parish as a whole might become. Otherwise, you might do one project, such as retrofitting lights or getting rid of Styrofoam, and think you have greened your parish entirely! The whole idea is to change the underlying ethos, to incorporate concern for creation in every aspect of parish life.

These pages represent one possible model. As we have shown, the model has five areas for transformation: (1) worship; (2) education; (3) building & grounds; (4) home & work; and (5) public ministry. The idea is to keep the whole model before you as you address one area or another.

In no way is it possible to address all areas at once or to complete the vision in a brief period. However, unless you have a comprehensive picture before you of what is possible and desirable, the transformation will fail for lack of imagination.

What follows is a brief picture of the model to work with: the five areas, plus some ideas to implement in each area. You may want to jump in and do some dramatic things that will engage everyone immediately in the whole process, or you may want to work more gradually. As you set goals for each year, determine which areas you wish to address. These may be based on needs or opportunities or an expression of the gifts and interests people bring to the task for that year.

## **Using a Parish Model (Page 2)**

*How to Use the Comprehensive Model Presented Here in the Parish Pages*

### **An Example of a Model: The Parish as a Green Zone**

It is helpful to have a model or a name for your parish as a place to care for the earth. The model we are using here is that of a **Green Zone**. Having a model fosters creativity in thinking about how to deal with our impact on the environment. It encourages us to think comprehensively about the environment in relation to every area of parish life, so that we may work toward a holistic approach to the environment. This is not an agenda, but a visionary document identifying things you have done or might do in the future.

A Green Zone is a geographical area in which lifestyle and activities promote a healthy environment and where the people are committed to healing creation. Activities in a Green Zone have a fivefold thrust (following).

#### **1. Seek Transformation Through Worship:**

1. Introduce concerns for creation into every area of communal life.

2. Incorporate concerns for creation into worship: confession, forgiveness, thanksgiving, intercession, preaching.
  3. Create rituals for tree plantings, litanies over our despoiling of the environment, petitions for endangered species, blessings of the animals and trees, and so on.
  4. Make banners and decorate worship with reminders of our life for creation.
  5. Provide resources for personal devotions that foster creation spirituality.
2. **Seek Transformation Through Education:**
1. Teach care of the earth in classes for all ages.
  2. Provide forums and workshops on the problems of the environment and what we can do: Bring in speakers from local organizations.
  3. Provide information about local recycling centers and disposal sites.
  4. Expose attitudes which lead to damage of the environment, and teach theologies and resources which foster healing.
  5. Introduce people to ethical issues which we will be facing in the struggle over scarce resources, job losses, and environmental damage.
  6. Help people to love the natural environment, and develop a spirituality rooted in creation.
  7. Connect people to nature with retreats, nature walks, outings, awareness of nature around the church.
  8. Inform people about local, national and world issues on the environment.
  9. Provide symbols which enable people to identify with issues of creation awareness.
  10. Provide books and periodicals in the library. Promote them in newsletters.
3. **Make the Geographical Area of the Parish Into a "Zone" Which is Safe for the Environment.** Do a comprehensive "environmental inventory" for a) everything which comes into the building, b) the use of everything in the building, and c) everything which goes out of the building.
1. Everything that comes in:
    1. Where feasible, bring fewer resources onto the property and into the building: less energy, less water, less paper.
    2. Where feasible, purchase recycled stationary, bulletin paper, towels, toilet paper, as well as products which will be safely used and safely disposed.
    3. Consider, where workable, using no pesticides, prohibiting smoking, using cloth napkins (no paper cups, plates, tablecloths).
    4. Where feasible, provide as much of your own resources as possible: plant gardens and fruit trees, use water from drainage, plant trees near buildings for shade.
    5. Consider wind mills, solar energy, and so on (even when only symbolic of what can be done in the future.)
  2. The efficient and full use of everything:
    1. Use products efficiently. When buying new equipment, look for furnaces and appliances which are energy efficient.
    2. Where appropriate, provide insulation (weather stripping, caulking, storm windows, shutters, thermal curtains, tinted glass, trees).
    3. Where workable, use less water by means of toilet dams, tap shutoffs, energy saving faucets, the use of drainage water, and limited lawn watering.
    4. Seek to avoid unnecessary use of paper. Try using office paper completely and efficiently.
    5. Where possible, use only safe products and use them up.
    6. Consider providing plants inside which purify the air.
  3. Everything that goes out:

1. Recycle as close to 100% of the waste as possible: paper, bulletins, containers, cans, aluminum, plastic, furniture, appliances, batteries.
  2. Where possible, take toxic waste to proper disposal sites. Study the waste baskets and garbage cans periodically in order to see where you can recycle better or avoid products which produce such waste.
  3. Where feasible, compost food, grass clippings, leaves and other organic wastes.
4. **Promote a Personal Lifestyle Among Members Which Fosters a Healthy Environment.**
1. Encourage people to treat their houses, businesses, industries, and other public arenas as Green Zones.
  2. Provide the tools for people to do an "environmental inventory" of their homes and places of work.
  3. Provide a "covenant" with creation in which people commit themselves to certain actions on behalf of the environment. Pledge and renew the covenant annually at a special worship service.
  4. Encourage people to consider ecological concerns in diet, transportation, gift-giving, and so on.
  5. Provide books which list things people can do for the environment and work through the list together.
  6. Provide interest or support groups to foster change and develop habits.
  7. Get rid of junk mail.
5. **Advocate in the Political Sphere.** Promote a commitment to action on behalf of the environment in the local, state, national and global arenas.
1. Become informed about local, national, and global issues. Make your views known to governmental representatives and corporate officers.
  2. Seek to be advocates and reconcilers in controversy, pursuing creative and forward-looking solutions.
  3. Provide support groups for people affected by environmental issues.
  4. Engage in educational programs in your community. Organize grassroots environmental projects.
  5. Cooperate with other seminaries and churches and with environmental groups.
  6. Involve groups in the church in action programs in church and community.
  7. Conduct a letter-writing campaign. Write "letters to the editor."
  8. Encourage people to join environmental organizations and to participate in local and regional environmental committees.
  9. Give recognition to people who care for creation in outstanding ways.

*How to Use the Comprehensive Model Presented Here in the Parish Pages*

**Be Visionary**

The key to a Green Zone is to think comprehensively and creatively. View every external and internal obstacle as an opportunity to learn how we can move toward a new world. Think what a church might be like fifty years from now, a church which is an ideal place to care for the earth. Out of such a vision of possibilities, begin step by step to fulfill the hopes that will make your space a place where all God's creation is loved and celebrated. Insofar as we are able to do that, the kingdom is now.

This then is an example of a model. It needs to be adapted to your situation and filled with possibilities, issues and concerns appropriate to your situation. Always keep in mind

that every issue related to the environment has human costs and consequences. That is to say, every issue of the environment is also always an issue of human justice. These ethical matters are extremely complex and may require openness, learning, sacrifice and risk.

The key is to address several areas of this model at once so that it is clear this has to do with the whole life of the parish. Also, it is important to make changes in such a way that they get incorporated into the ongoing life of the congregation beyond the year. Institutionalize changes: establish ongoing recycling, make a policy of using safe cleaning products, regularize educational programs, determine set Sundays each year to celebrate and express concern for nature, found a committee to keep advocacy issues before the community, and so on. Doing something once may help in the short term, but if you seek to transform the community, the changes must have some sense of permanence or continuity to them.

The model helps to keep the larger picture before you. Fill in the areas of the model with your own accomplishments and projects in process and goals to achieve.

### **Sustainability**

Finally, keep mind the larger goal, namely to generate a lifestyle that sustains life for the next generations. In regard to each action, then, consider the three pegs that hold up the stool of sustainability: ecological, economic and communal.

1. Does the project and the way it is done sustain the natural environment?
2. Does the project and the way it is done sustain the economic support of the people with fair and equitable distribution?
3. Does the project and the way it is done sustain the community? That is, can the project be thought of as a way to build and strengthen the community?

The issues involved in our transformation to creation-caring communities are matters of life and death. We are choosing to secure the future for our children and grandchildren by acting so as to sustain life, restore nature, and build hope that our environment will support those who come after us. What we do and how we do it are of utmost importance.

## **What Church Leaders Can Learn about Caring for Creation**

1. The environmental state of the world—basic principles of ecology, information about critical issues (such as global warming, ozone depletion, loss of diversity, deforestation, desertification, waste, toxic waste, and overpopulation), the human/ natural causes of these conditions, and the potential consequences of their continuation.
2. The human justice issues involved in every aspect of environmental degradation: environmental racism, impact on the most vulnerable, rural/urban issues, global dynamics of poverty and underdevelopment, and neo-colonial exploitation of peoples and earth.
3. The systemic changes we need to make in the social, cultural, political and economic structures of our nation, corporations, institutions, and global patterns of interaction in order to address environmental crises and to create conditions for a sustainable world.
4. Familiarity with national laws and policies (Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, etc.) and global conferences and treaties (Montreal Treaty, Rio, Kyoto Protocol) and effective means to advocate for strengthening these measures so as to give voice to the human/non-human beings most affected by these matters.
5. Knowledge about environmental ethical issues, the movement to create a global ethic (The Earth Charter), and the means to become part of this effort.
6. Awareness of Christian and denominational traditions that have contributed to Earth's problems, what theological and ethical resources might help us, and how we can think creatively about environmental situations.
7. What congregations can do to incorporate care for the earth into their identity and mission—worship, education, property, discipleship at home and work, and public ministry—and the organizing tools and leadership skills to bring about those changes.
8. How congregations can be places of moral deliberation for issues that face the larger community, assisting people to work together to address social conflicts over choices of justice and ecology—and to model how this might be done.
8. What lifestyle changes are necessary to counter the consumer culture and to live simply—in ways that minimize our impact on Earth and serve to restore creation.
9. How personally to work through fear, guilt, grief, and anger so that we are fed by God's grace and love, which enables us to make environmental choices with joy and commitment.
10. How to get in touch with nature so that a foundational experience with the natural world leads us to love creation. We will not save what we do not love.

## Green Congregation Certification Program

The Green Congregation Certification Program (GCCP) seeks to encourage, guide, and recognize congregations that significantly engage in the process of incorporating care for creation into the life and programs of their congregation. Here are the steps to become certified.

1. **Develop an Action Plan:** Use the materials in the Green Congregation Training Manual to develop an action plan. A form is available there for this purpose. The plan will follow a model of action in five areas: Worship, Education, Building and Grounds, Discipleship at Home and Work, and Public Ministry. The plan invites you to choose one or more options from each area. When you have completed the planning process, submit a copy of the Action Plan with the letter of request.
2. **Make a request:** Submit a letter of request to become a candidate to be certified by the GCCP. This letter should be signed by a pastor/staff person, the chair of the governing board, and the Facilitator of the Green Team. The Facilitator of the Green Team will serve as contact person with the GCCP. Provide all contact information. The Action Plan is to be submitted with the letter of request.
3. **Receive Certification:** The GCCP will issue a certificate for display certifying that the seminary has qualified to be named a Green Seminary. Proceed to carry out the Action Plan
4. **Adopt the Green Congregation Policy Statement:** As an expression of your commitment to be a Green Congregation, request that the governing board and/or the whole congregation adopt the Green Congregation Policy Statement.
5. **Maintain Status:** In the early fall of each year, the Green Congregation will submit the GCCP a brief report of the actions of the previous year along with an Action Plan for the coming year. Employ the same forms used to develop the Action Plan as the means to report the results.

To request further information and to submit a letter of application for certification by the Green Congregation Certification Program, please send to David Rhoads, Director, Green Congregation Program, at [webofcreation@lstc.edu](mailto:webofcreation@lstc.edu). Be sure to provide all contact information, including names, e-mail addresses, phone numbers, and mailing address.

The GCCP is in process of establishing levels of recognition in this program.

1. “Seedling” = Entry Level: We are getting started.
  2. “Sapling” = Progress Level: We are getting in gear with many actions
  3. “Oak Tree” = Established: We’ve been in it for several years and achieved much
  4. “Sequoia” = Flagship Level: Our whole life and mission manifest eco-justice
- More information will be available as we develop this program.

## Green Congregation Mission Statement

As a congregation committed to care for creation, we affirm the creation in all its glory and beauty. We acknowledge God as the source of all things. We acknowledge Christ as the redeemer of all things. We acknowledge the Spirit as the sustainer of all things. As a result, we strive to respect all of life as sacramental. We accept our vocation as earth-keepers who care for creation. We see ourselves as part of the covenant of Noah that God made with humans and with all the animals of the land, sea, and air. We accept our responsibility to live justly in relation to our fellow human beings in ways that all creatures may mutually thrive together.

**Worship:** We seek to worship throughout the year so that we express our gratitude and praise to God the creator and so that we glorify God intentionally together with all creation. In worship, we will celebrate creation, confess our sins against creation, grieve the losses of creation, and commit ourselves to care for the earth.

**Education:** We seek to learn about the biblical, theological, and ecclesial traditions concerning creation, including the biblical mandate from God for us to care for the earth. We will seek also to learn about the present degradations of creation due to human activity, how these degradations are related to human exploitation and oppression, how we as religious people are implicated in these matters, and what we as Christians can do to heal and restore creation for future generations. We will seek to train people to be leaders in the congregation and the community in our cooperative efforts to care for creation.

**Building and Grounds:** We agree to assess the destructive impact that our activities and the use and maintenance of our property may have upon creation—in such matters as energy use, toxic products, paper use, water use, waste, transportation, among others. We will strive to make choices that lessen our negative impact on the earth and that serve to renew and restore earth community.

**Discipleship as Home and Work:** We encourage ourselves as individual members of this congregation—at whatever age, economic level, ethnic group, or walk of life—to care for creation in our personal lifestyle, in our homes, and at our work—knowing that our habits and practices can contribute significantly to care for creation. We seek to foster a closer relationship with nature so that we can live simply and walk lightly upon the earth.

**Public Ministry:** We seek to change the systems that foster the degradation of creation and to rectify the injustices that result from it. And we seek to alert our members to environmental legislation that protects creation and to encourage their active participation in the development of public policy. We encourage members to participate in civic activities that foster environmental health. We seek to let our care for creation be known to others.

Because we desire to leave the earth a better place for our children, we will promote love and respect for creation in our youth, teach them responsible earth practices, and engage them in projects that restore creation. We will explore the implications of these provisions together. We

will pursue them in a graceful and non-legalistic way, seeking to find hope and joy in the commitments and sacrifices these provisions may entail and in the restorations they engender.

# Green Congregation Covenant

Sponsored by

## The Web of Creation

We accept our responsibility to be Stewards of the Earth,  
and we pledge ourselves to act accordingly.

We will ...

- Choose to participate in the Green Congregation program.
  - Designate a group or an individual to provide leadership and oversight of this pledge, and to work with partnering groups for its fulfillment.
  - Set specific goals in these areas:
    - Worship in ways that celebrate and foster care for Creation
    - Educate adults and children in ecological issues and practices.
    - Green the buildings and grounds of our facilities.
    - Promote earth-friendly lifestyle of members at home and work
    - Community involvement in caring for the environment.

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Name of Congregation

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Address

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Contact signature

---

Contact information (e-mail and phone)

---

Pastor Signature

---

Church Council Representative

*Please mail a copy of your covenant to*  
Web of Creation. ATTN David Rhoads  
Lutheran School of Theology  
1100 East 55<sup>th</sup> Street  
Chicago, IL 60615  
[webofcreation@lstc.edu](mailto:webofcreation@lstc.edu)  
[drhoads@lstc.edu](mailto:drhoads@lstc.edu) 773-256-0774

# PART 2: ACTION PLAN

## Action Plan Instructions

**Have a Plan:** It is important to have a plan for greening your congregation. Otherwise, the process will be scattered-shot and haphazard. It is also important for the plan to be comprehensive. Otherwise the actions will be quite limited. We recommend the following model to use when making an action plan. It has five areas: Worship, Education, Building and Grounds, Discipleship at Home and Work, and Public Ministry. *Be visionary!*

**Be a Catalyst** We remind you that it is not the work of the planning committee to carry out all of the actions. Rather, it is the goal of the “Green Team” to be a catalyst for the whole community to become engaged. Work with the various people responsible in different committees of the congregation—provide ideas, resources, and support—so that they incorporate care for creation into their arena of responsibilities. *This way, the work is shared and many people take ownership for the greening of the congregation.*

**Make it policy:** Institutionalize and regularize the actions as quickly as possible. This way, it will not depend on the committee to suggest them anew each year. For example, if you celebrate Earth Week one year, seek to make it a regular part of the worship schedule for every year. *Do not reinvent the wheel each year!*

**Do not try to do it all at once:** Do not be overwhelmed by all that there is to do or all that could be done. The idea is to choose projects that are manageable and that have a good chance of coming to fruition. So pick and choose. You will find that there are good starter projects. Then, as you reach a threshold of interest and support, more ambitious projects will be possible. *Celebrate what you get done without worrying about what does not get done. You can only do what you can do!*

**Use the Action Plan Forms.** Use the descriptions of the action plan in the five areas to fill out the Action Plan Form to establish the projects and events you hope to accomplish. Then follow through.

1. Transformation through Worship
2. Transformation through Education
3. Building and Grounds as Model
4. Discipleship of the Community Members (at home and at the office)
5. Public Ministry/Political Advocacy

**Revisit the model:** We encourage you to keep coming back to this action plan so that you keep the larger picture before you and that you keep the process of brainstorming and planning as an ongoing part of your work. *Keep the vision alive!*

# 1. Transformation through Worship

## Reflection

Worship is the central recurring event in the life of a Christian community. Worship is a ritual. In ritual, we participate by immersion in a communal process that changes us by placing us in right relationship with God and with our fellow human beings. Worship is also an event. The call to worship, the proclamation of the Word, and the offer of Christ's body and blood in bread and wine are actions of God that generate changes in our lives. They are events by which we as a church are transformed and renewed.

It is in the gathered community at worship that we celebrate our life together and affirm our identity as children of God and followers of Jesus. Worship is the place where we can be transformed anew each week as we seek to return from the struggles and vicissitudes of life in the world to restore our spiritual and moral rooted-ness in the life of God. Worship is also a central place where we articulate our fundamental beliefs and values. Therefore our love of God's creation and our commitment to care for God's creation should play an integral role in our worship life.

### **Worship as Re-Orientation.**

One way to look at worship is to say that it is the place where we can express with the larger community the Christian life we have nurtured at home and work throughout the week.

Another way to look at worship is to say that it is about reinstating our proper place in relation to God, ourselves, and other people when we have had difficulty maintaining these relationships through the week. It is like being lost in the woods and then stopping to orientate ourselves to the directions by means of a compass and our nearness to the edge of the forest—and then finding our way home. It is like being lost at sea and then stopping to locate ourselves from the stars in the sky so that we know where we really are—and then returning to solid ground. It is like using a global positioning locator to know just where we are in relation to everything else—and then being moved into the right position. Worship is a matter of getting/keeping our bearings and being situated in our rightful place in the universe. In this process, it is important to emphasize that it is not we ourselves who get our bearings. Rather, we put ourselves into a position to allow God to give us our bearings, to restore us to our rightful relationships.

***Restoring relationships with God and one another:*** Through the rituals and events of worship, we find ourselves restored to right relationships. Through worship we are oriented to wholeness and our true purpose in life by being brought back into proper relationship with God, ourselves, and others. For example, by praise of God, we restore God to God's rightful place in our lives as the one who created and sustains us. By thanksgiving, we recognize our human dependence on God for life and health. By confession and forgiveness, we seek to overcome our self-alienation and the brokenness of our relationships. By hearing the word of grace and challenge, we rediscover a proper sense of direction and our purpose in life. Through the offering, we give ourselves and our resources to this renewed vocation. Through prayer, we express a longing for all people who are lost or broken to be restored to a place of wholeness in relationship. By communing together, we return from alienation to a harmonious connection with others of the human community. With a blessing and a benediction, we go out with a renewed sense of who

we are, where we are, and where we are going. We have become orientated. We have found our bearings, and we have reaffirmed who we truly are and whose we truly are—and, in so doing, we have found our home, our place of belonging in the world. Of course, it is our responsibility to seek to remain in these relationship from communal worship to communal worship.

***Restoring our Relationship with nature.*** Unfortunately, our restoration/reorientation to place often leaves out an important and, indeed, crucial relationship. We reorient to God, self, and others, but often without restoring our relationship to nature. Yet nature is the web of life out of which we have come and where we will go. Nature is the inextricable matrix in which we live and move and have our being. We are a part of nature. Along with all other living beings and non-living things, we *are* nature. And if we are out of sorts with the rest of nature, if we are displaced from harmony with the creation of which we are such an integral part, if we are sinning against the natural world from which we ourselves have emerged, then we cannot fully find our bearings or our place.

If God created the world as a place in relation to which human life is inextricably woven, then we need to make the whole natural world an integral and important part of our worshipping experience. If worship is restoring ourselves to our proper place in the world—to recall who we are, where we have come from, the things upon which we depend, and that for which we are responsible—then worship must be a celebration of *all life* and an orienting of ourselves to our proper place within it. Nature can and should be such a fundamental dimension of the Christian life that we reflect the triad: Love God, Love your neighbor as yourself, and Care for creation.

***Worshipping with Nature.*** To be fully into right relationship, we are called not only to restore our relationship with nature, but also to experience our *solidarity* with nature in relationship with God. That is, we humans are to worship and praise God *with* nature. Remember that the Psalms call for the hills to clap their hands and the trees to shout praises, along with animals and sea creatures, the seas and the soils, the trees and the grain—thus calling: “All creation, praise the Lord.” Hence, we can think about nature as our partners in worship. Nature itself is part of our worshipping community. It is important then that we are both in nature and with nature in our worship.

***Worship as Counter-Cultural.*** Restoration to relationship with God, others, and nature is not the same as accommodation or assimilation into the society and culture around us. In fact, it may be quite the opposite. Reconciled relationships with God will orient us to values, actions, and structures that may go against the grain of the world around us. Reconciled relationships will place us in an alternative community that reflects the vision of God for human life. Reconciled relationships with others may set us at odds with the injustices, oppressions, neglect, and discrimination of groups and individuals not sharing the values of the church. Similarly, reorienting ourselves to love of nature and care for creation may lead us to resist and oppose the practices of local and national government, businesses, corporations, and others who may contribute to the flagrant degradations of Earth’s natural systems and life. Worship can be quite radical in its call for discipleship. Worship can be subversive of the culture and an expression of counter-cultural thinking and acting. It can lead us to advocate for public policies and laws that foster love of neighbor and care for creation. At the same time, our re-orientation

in worship may lead us to affirm many movements and actions in the culture that further the values and behavior fostered by our Christian way of being in the world.

### **Care for Creation in Worship.**

There are many ways in which we can enhance our experience of nature, our connectedness to it, our solidarity with it, and our advocacy for it. It is helpful to think about the elements of worship and the seasons of the church year as contexts for incorporating care for creation. Following here are some reflections about this process.

***Elements of Worship.*** The rituals of worship can integrate the place of all God's creation with every part of worship and thus help to restore us fully to our place of health and wholeness.

- *Invoking the Presence of God:* We can name not just the church but the whole of creation as the sanctuary wherein we worship. "The whole earth is full of God's glory."
- *Call to Worship:* We can call to worship not only the human community but also we can invoke all creation as part of the worshipping community.
- *Praise:* In worship we can celebrate the wonder of creation and marvel at God's handiwork. We can praise the God who created the blue jay and the raccoon, the poplar and the gardenias, the mountain spring water and the rich soil of the field. There are many Psalms that celebrate creation. These Psalms also invoke the praise of all creation in worship of God.
- *Thanksgiving:* We can give thanks for the air we breathe and for the water we drink and for the provision of food—and for the beauty and majesty of it all. We can give thanks for the whole of nature upon which humans depend. We can delight in all plants and all creatures for their own sake. We dare not take the rest of nature for granted.
- *Hymns:* We can include hymns that express praise for God the creator and our relationship to the rest of nature. There are many traditional hymns as well as new hymns and hymnals that deal with the love of nature.
- *Litanies of confession:* We can confess the greed and indifference by which we humans have despoiled and exploited the earth and other human members of earth community. We can incorporate into our litanies some specific confessions concerning our pollution of water, our defiling of the air, our arrogant use of creation without respect and limitations.
- *Litanies of concern:* these can always include expressions of our longing for creation to thrive, as surely as we pray for peace among human creatures.
- *Declaration of Forgiveness:* We can seek pardon for our violation of the hills through mining or our degradation of the air and water through pollution or our threat to the ozone layer and to the species whose survival is uncertain because of our human actions or for the human contributions to the global warming that may change the cycles of nature upon which we have come to depend. We can acknowledge how our actions have affected vulnerable human communities. Forgiveness can free us to act out of compassion rather than guilt.
- *Scripture Reading and Preaching:* Through the Word proclaimed, we can announce the love of God for creation, the grace that God offers, and the mandates that God gives as means to address the eco-justice problems of our age. We can see the human harm we do when we exploit the earth, we can be reminded of the common graces of nature, and we can be summoned to the challenge to care for the Earth.
- *Prayer and Petition:* We can pray for the capacity for all God's creatures to thrive together on earth. We can intercede for endangered species, threatened eco-systems, and changing

global conditions. We can grieve nature's losses and destruction. And we can pray for the courage and wisdom to act.

- *Offering*: In the offering, we can offer ourselves to the care and redemption of all that God has made—as agents of God to be guardians of nature, stewards of its resources, lovers of life, earth-keepers, and caretakers of the land.

- *Blessing*: We can go out from worship with a blessing to till and tend this garden Earth on which we “live and move and have our being.”

Hence, in order for us to be truly oriented by our worship, we can incorporate love for, celebration of, concern for, prayer for, and a commitment to care for all creation into each dimension of worship. If worship is a transformation restoring us to wholeness by restoring our proper relationships in life, then our relationship with the rest of nature needs to be an integral part of that power of worship to change us.

***Care for Creation in the Seasons and Days of the Church Year.*** Also, each season of the year lends itself to the thematic development of our relationship with all creation:

- *Advent Season*: all creation groans together as we await redemption and restoration of all of life. Advent is a time to repent in preparation for a new age in which the leaves of the trees will be “a healing for the nations.”

- *Epiphany Season*: here we celebrate the manifestation and glory of God not only in the arrival of the Christ child but also in the light and glory present in the whole natural order of life.

- *Lenten Season*: During Lent, we recognize our complicity in sin, not only in relation to one another but also in our individual and corporate actions that have degraded the rest of nature. We grieve the losses to God's creation and reflect on the sacrifices we can make to stop our sins against creation.

- *Easter Season*: We celebrate the resurrection of human life and envision the restoration/regeneration of all of life.

- *Pentecost Season*: We reflect on the spiritual wisdom we need and the actions we can take—as individuals, as congregations, and as a society—to live a life in which all human and non-human creation can thrive together.

- *Season of Creation*: We focus on God as creator and the wonders of creation, all designed to help us love creation as God does and commit ourselves to care for it.

- *Special Days*. here are many special occasions in the year when it is especially appropriate that care for creation becomes the focus of the whole service, such as St. Francis Day and Rogation Day. There are also days in the life of the US culture for celebrating creation, such as Thanksgiving Day and Earth Day Sunday. Special services might include a Blessing of the Animals, a tree planting ceremony, the greening of the cross, among others.

In all of these seasons and days, there is the opportunity to include all of God's creation in our observances and celebrations. Seasonal decorations, banners, and sayings can keep this message before the congregation throughout the year. Furthermore, we can enhance the experience of worship to bringing nature into the sanctuary: worship outside, place greenery/flowering plants into the church, give people seeds or seedlings to plant, decorate the sanctuary with natural art, and opening the sanctuary to natural light through windows and skylights. In all these ways, we can create an ethos in the congregation that will pervade worship with a care for creation and an experience of nature itself. .

## **Sacraments.**

The sacraments are occasions to reflect on human relationships with the rest of creation. Different Christian communities recognize different sacraments. We will reflect here on the two most common sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper. The presence of an element of nature and the pronouncement of a word in relation to the offer of the element of nature assure us that the reality of Christ/God will be present in, with, and under the elements and the whole event, so that they are sacramental—capable of bearing the holiness and grace of God into our lives so as to transform us.

We often focus on the symbolic meaning of the elements used in sacraments: water, bread, and wine. But in the context of our concern for the environment, we can focus on the elements themselves. Notice how the status of grapes and grain and water as vehicles of the divine can in turn serve to give meaning to and to enhance our experience of these tangible realities of life for their own sake. For example, as a Eucharist or “thanksgiving,” Holy Communion can be an opportunity to express gratitude for all the natural order that sustains life at a material (and a spiritual) level, leading us to delight anew in the creation. To see the natural elements of both sacraments—water, grain, and grapes—as vehicles of grace is to realize that the finite can indeed bear of the infinite to us. This in itself elevates the goodness of nature as worthy and capable of being the means by which we establish a relationship with God and by which God establishes a relationship with us.

***Baptism.*** Traditionally, baptism involves water for cleansing and for judgment or it symbolizes death and resurrection. However, what about also exploring the richness of the symbol of water in new ways in light of our contemporary knowledge and experience of water? We now know that water is the primordial context out of which life emerged and evolved to its present state. Why not connect this with the new creation at baptism? If baptism symbolizes a new beginning to life, then we can reflect on the new beginning to humanity that comes by immersing ourselves in water—so that we can, in a sense, re-emerge from water as a renewed humanity or as renewed life in all its manifestations—and in solidarity with all the life forms that led to human evolution.

Or could we not emphasize how vital water is to life—how our bodies are 90% water and we cannot live long without it? In this way, the water of life in baptism reinforces our gratitude for the water upon which we depend for life and health. Or baptism may remind us of how tragic it is to consider being baptized by water that is polluted rather than the pure living water that God created. Such a connection could lead us to see anew our vocation as baptized people to preserve clean water on the Earth. Or by baptism in water, we may acknowledge how much of the whole earth is comprised of water. In this way, the very fact that we are declared a child of God by immersion into nature itself can serve to get us in touch with our embeddedness in nature as human beings. In all these ways we may re-connect the water of baptism to the water around us in nature.

***The Lord's Supper.*** The sacrament of Holy Communion is another opportunity to realize how integral is our human embeddedness in nature. In the Eucharist, we are using natural fruits of Earth as a vehicle for God's presence: wine from grapes and bread from grain. But it is more than that. Grapes grow from the vine that brings it forth, the ingredients of the soil, the water that nourishes the soil, the beetles that aerate the soil, the sun that shines on the plants, the air that surrounds the plant—and the composition and the combination of these elements is unique

to the particular area or region where the grapes are being raised. Add to these factors the wood from the trees used to make the barrels in which the wine was stored and the ingredients employed as fermenting agents. We can reflect in a similar way on the bread used for communion. Some congregations use organically-grown, whole grain bread. Some congregations use bread made of multiple grains originating from several continents. In these ways, the elements of the Eucharist get us in touch with all of nature.

In addition, the Eucharist is connected to all of life in another way. It is a reminder of the death of Jesus, a recollection that all of life is a cycle of living and dying and resurrection. This is not to reduce the particularity of Christ's death or the efficacy of it for salvation to the processes of nature. Rather, it is simply to recognize that the death of Jesus is an analog to the natural order in which death gives birth to life. The deaths of trees and other plants and the death of animals over the life span of the planet have made the earth into a great store of energy and one great compost heap that is the source of life and energy today.

***The Sacramental Presence of God/Christ everywhere.*** Finally, it is important to observe that the elements of the sacraments are “common” elements of life—elements of food upon which we depend for life—assuring us that if God can be present in and through such common elements as bread and wine, then surely God is present to us everywhere in life. What difference does it make to our view of the daily food we eat and the daily drinks we drink knowing that bread and wine are sacramental? What difference does it make to our experience of water and soil and air, knowing that water is sacramental? The Eucharist is meant not only to lead us to experience the particularity of its symbolic meaning in the communion meal. It also leads us to think differently about all common elements of life—in such a way that our common experiences of them also become sacramental. That is, *all* elements of nature may convey for us the grace of God, that dearest freshness that lies deep down all things. As Martin Luther wrote, “God writes the Gospel, not in the Bible alone, but also on trees and in the flowers and clouds and stars.”

When we see all of life as sacramental, it changes our relationship to and our responsibility for creation—concern for pure water, our desire not to waste food, the problems with pesticides on grain and grapes, and a host of other ecological problems to which humans have contributed. We re-dedicate ourselves in worship to stop our actions that degrade nature and to find ways to restore God's creation.

### **Preaching the Word.**

Whether following a lectionary system or doing thematic preaching, here are some subjects that could and probably should be included in preaching: Human responsibility to care for the earth; Our proper human role/place in relation to the rest of creation; Our human degradation of creation; Reasons why we fail in our responsibility to care for creation; Reasons why we ought to care and act on our convictions; The inter-relationship between human justice and environmental problems; The scriptural connection between human sin and the languishing of Earth; Celebration of God as creator; Celebration of all of life for its own sake; The extent of human dependency on life around us; Gratitude for life; Exploration of Christian symbols that are rooted in nature; Connecting the sacraments to the realm of nature; New ways of thinking about God that foster our change of attitude and action; Proclamation of God's enduring grace in and through creation; The extension of the efficacy of Christ's death and resurrection to all life.

### **Personal Devotions.**

It is important for Christians to incorporate their relationship with nature not only into corporate worship but also into their private devotional worship. We cannot depend on worship alone to rescue us each week from the fractured relationships that result from the vicissitudes of life. Rather, we are called to nurture and maintain our love of God, our love for others, and our care for creation on a daily basis. There are many resources available—devotional books, collections of prayers, poetry, selected scripture passages, exercises and experiences, among others—that can give our community members a daily experience of closeness to nature, the nourishments of its common graces, and the sense of responsibility for it that are so important in the world today.

### **Conclusion.**

In order for us to be truly reoriented/confirmed by our worship, we should incorporate love for, celebration of, concern for, prayer for, and a commitment to care for all creation into every dimension of our worshipping experience. If worship is a transformation restoring us to wholeness by restoring and securing our proper relationships in life, then our relationship with the rest of nature needs to be an integral part of that power of worship to change us. Just as we cannot imagine worship without praise of God or prayer for those in need, so too we should not be able to imagine worship without expressions of our love for and our commitment to care for God's creation.

By immersion and by osmosis, the weekly connection with nature through words and symbols and ritual actions and the presence of nature itself in and around the sanctuary will work a salutary effect on the worshipping community. A transformation can occur that leads people to see our profound connection with all God's creation and that enables people to come to a place of renewed gratitude for nature and a sense of responsibility to care for creation as part of our vocation as humans and as God's people.

# 1. Transformation through Worship Action Plan

**Commitment:** We seek to worship throughout the year so that we express our gratitude and praise to God the creator and so that we glorify God intentionally together with all creation. In worship, we will celebrate creation, confess our sins against creation, grieve the losses of creation, and commit ourselves to care for the earth.

**People:** The pastor, the director of music, the organist, the worship committee, leaders of worship, the choir, and the whole worshipping community. It will be helpful to bring everyone on board, seeking guidance and leadership from them and providing resources and training where appropriate.

**Goal:** To make “care for creation” worship an integral and ongoing part of the policies and practices of congregational worship.

**Actions:** Here are some ideas to carry out these commitments:

## **A. Celebrate key worship services throughout the church year with a focus on creation.**

**1. A Season of Creation:** Celebrate a season of the church year, called a *Season of Creation*. The church year is based on the life of Jesus (*Advent, Epiphany, Lent, Easter*) and the life of the Holy Spirit (*Pentecost*). Of course, we celebrate God in every aspect of the church year; and yet there is no season in which we focus on God the creator and the life of the created order. Now there is an optional “*Season of Creation*” available for use by congregations. There are alternative lessons and suggested liturgies for four Sundays (recommended for the four Sunday in September leading up to World Communion Sunday and Saint Francis Day), including Bible studies, suggested spiritual practices, and “care for creation” actions celebrating various aspects of God’s creation.

For four weeks out of the *Season of Pentecost*, observe this four-week *Season of Creation*. For all the relevant materials, go to [www.seasonofcreation.com](http://www.seasonofcreation.com). If you do not celebrate the full four weeks, choose one or two of the liturgies to use in worship at this time or at other times throughout the year. For guidelines, see the section on Season of Creation at [www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org).

**2. Greening of the Cross:** During the *Season of Easter* or the *Season of Lent*, have a Greening of the Cross service in which worshipers put greenery on a wooden cross to show how Jesus’ death renews all creation.

**3. Holy days:** There are other Sundays and saints’ days that can be occasions to focus on care for creation. See the calendar of Holy Days on the Web of Creation site for such times of commemoration in the church year, such as Thanksgiving Day, Rogation Day, and St. Francis Day.

[[www.webofcreation.org/Worship/index.htm](http://www.webofcreation.org/Worship/index.htm)]

**4. *Blessing of the Animals*:** At some point in the year, perhaps around St. Francis Day (October 2), have a Blessing of the Animals service. Some congregations do it with the pets of members of the congregation. Others bring in animals from nearby zoos or police horses or other animals to which they may have access. The Blessing of the Animals is an opportunity to hold the service in an outdoor location (on church property or another public area) and to invite the local community to participate. Consider blessing the human animals as well!

[[www.webofcreation.org/Worship/services/blessinganimals.htm](http://www.webofcreation.org/Worship/services/blessinganimals.htm)]

[[www.seasonofcreation.com/liturgies/blessing.htm](http://www.seasonofcreation.com/liturgies/blessing.htm)]

**5. *Celebrate Creation in All Seasons of the Church Year*:** There are lectionary lessons and themes throughout the church year when it would be appropriate to devote the entire service around creation themes. As you plan worship for a season, keep this possibility in mind. There are many resources for general services that celebrate creation.

[[www.webofcreation.org/Worship/index.htm](http://www.webofcreation.org/Worship/index.htm)]

[[www.earthministry.org](http://www.earthministry.org)]

## **B. Celebrate key worship services to observe national commemoration days.**

**1. *Earth Day/Week*:** Observe Earth Day in April, along with special worship services or educational programs throughout the week. Many churches hold adult forums, outdoor worship services, habitat restoration projects, and opportunities for members to commit themselves to earth-keeping disciplines in their homes and work places. There are worship materials for each Earth Day at the National Council of Churches website, with educational resources and ideas for action from the Eco-Justice Working Group. You will also find an archive of worship and educational materials from previous years.

[[www.ncecojustice.org](http://www.ncecojustice.org)]

**2. *Thanksgiving*:** An opportunity to express gratitude for all creation.

## **C. Celebrate services special to the congregation.**

**1. *Covenant with Creation*:** Near the beginning of the school year, perhaps in September, offer a worship service in which community members have an opportunity to sign a “Covenant with Creation” to establish their commitment to do their part in the Greening of the Congregation. Have members make their covenant as an offering. Consider offering the covenant within a brief liturgy to be done during a regular worship service.

[[www.webofcreation.org/GettingStarted/samplecovenant.htm](http://www.webofcreation.org/GettingStarted/samplecovenant.htm)]

Litany: [[www.webofcreation.org/Worship/services/covenantwithcreationlitany.htm](http://www.webofcreation.org/Worship/services/covenantwithcreationlitany.htm)]

**2. *Planting of trees*:** Some communities regularly enhance their property, sometimes by commemorating the death of a member of the community with a planting and dedication of a tree in their honor.

[[www.webofcreation.org/Worship/services/tree.htm](http://www.webofcreation.org/Worship/services/tree.htm)]

**3. *Blessing of Creation-Care Projects:*** Bless the land where your church is located! Or consider brief rituals of dedication for your community garden, plants in the sanctuary, and the development of a native prairie on the property.

**4. *Christmas Tree Ceremony.*** Some congregations have a service of the burning of Christmas trees on Epiphany. Instead, why not have a service of recycling and rebirth as the trees are prepared for composting?

## **D. Incorporate earth-keeping confessions, intercessory prayers, hymns, and sermons into worship services throughout the year.**

**1. *Worship resources:*** Many resources for worship are available through diverse websites—liturgies, prayers, hymns, litanies, confessions, intercessions, and so on. See the “Seven Songs of Creation” at [seasonofcreation.org](http://seasonofcreation.org).

[[www.webofcreation.org/Worship/index.htm](http://www.webofcreation.org/Worship/index.htm)]

[[www.seasonofcreation.org](http://www.seasonofcreation.org)]

**2. *Lectionary Resources:*** There are care for creation ideas based on the lectionary readings available for each Sunday of the three-year cycle of the church year.

[[www.env-steward.com/lectnry.htm](http://www.env-steward.com/lectnry.htm)]

**3. *Preaching Green:*** There are two sites that provide care for creation reflections for preaching on the lessons of the three-year lectionary cycle. The first, the Christian Ecology Link, is a multi-denominational organization from the United Kingdom for people concerned about the environment. They have provided Ecological Notes on the Common Worship Lectionary by Keith Innes. The second, the Environmental Stewardship Commission of the Episcopal Diocese of Minnesota (MEESC), has collected environmental and earth-centered reflections, sermons, and commentaries on the lectionary readings. See also the collection of sermons in *The Best Preach on Earth: Sermons to care for Creation*, edited by Stan LeQuire (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1994).

[[www.christian-ecology.org.uk/econotes-index.htm](http://www.christian-ecology.org.uk/econotes-index.htm)]

[[www.env-steward.com/lectnry.htm](http://www.env-steward.com/lectnry.htm)]

**4. *Include hymns that celebrate creation:*** Keep a separate list of hymns from denominational and ecumenical hymnals that express themes related to care for creation. Then draw upon this list when planning worship. For Lutheran hymnals, see [[www.webofcreation.org/Worship/liturgy/hymns.htm](http://www.webofcreation.org/Worship/liturgy/hymns.htm)]. Other composers have focused on creation care; look for hymns by Ruth Duck, Carolyn Winfrey Gillette, and Norman Habel. Also, Earth Ministry has a detailed list of hymns:

[[www.earthministry.org/Congregations/song\\_bibliography.htm](http://www.earthministry.org/Congregations/song_bibliography.htm)]

## **E. Appoint the chapel with appropriate banners, greenery, and art that keeps before the congregation their earth-keeping identity and mission.**

All of these adornments make excellent gifts from groups in the congregation, as commemoration gifts, and from other donors.

**1. Plants:** Green the worship space with living plants/trees and provide them elsewhere in the church as a sign that the whole creation is the worshipping community. Where possible, highlight the relationship between inside and outside the church building as a sign that all of Earth is the sanctuary in which we worship. Some plants also purify the air!

**2. Bring other life into the church:** Consider placing in the church an aquarium, a cage for hamsters, a bird cage, or other appropriate animals, as a way to show that all of life is the worshipping community.

**3. Banners:** Place banners at the entrance or inside the sanctuary as a reminder of your commitment to creation, such as “Let all Creation Praise God” or “The Whole Earth is full of God’s Glory.”

**4. Art:** Place artwork in the chapel that celebrates God the creator and creation. Stained glass pieces, for example, may be commissioned with this in mind.

**5. Solar-powered light/font:** Consider providing an “eternal light” or running water in the baptismal font that is powered by the natural energy of the sun.

## **F. Green your worship practices:**

Here are some ideas to make your worship practices more earth-friendly:

- Use beeswax candles instead of oil-based candles.
- Place plants on the altar instead of cut flowers; send them home for planting.
- Use local wine that does not require transportation from a distance.
- Provide organic, whole grain communion bread.
- Use recycled paper for printed materials.
- Purchase furniture with certified wood and non-toxic fabric.
- Reduce/reuse/recycle or eliminate bulletins.
- Place basket to recycle printed materials at the exits.
- Practice intinction or provide reusable glasses (not plastic) for communion.
- Wash worship utensils/communion vessels in eco-safe dish-washing detergent.
- Purchase fair trade palms for Palm Sunday.
- Consider the origin of material used to make paraments.
- Use a live tree(s) for Christmas, then plant it in the church yard.

## 2. Transformation through Education Reflection

It is absolutely crucial that education becomes an integral component in our efforts to become communities that care for creation. We cannot assume that people discern the urgent nature of the ecological issues. We cannot take for granted that they understand the dynamics of global warming or the deterioration of the ozone layer or the loss of biological species. We cannot assume that people will see how some biblical interpretations and some theological points of view have in fact been contributing to the mentality that degrades the Earth. Nor can we expect that most of us to be aware of the ways in which our own actions, choices, and lifestyles have an impact upon the well-being of creation. Learning about these things is essential to becoming part of the movement in the church to care for the earth. We must learn how these things work, why they are important, how we need to think, what we need to do, and how we need to do it

### **The Power of Education**

We underestimate the power of education if we think it cannot transform us. Remember some words you heard about life that you will never forget or an insight that has shaped so many of your subsequent attitudes and decisions in life. Just think about pieces of information you have gotten at one time or another that completely changed your mind about something and enabled you to see things in a new way. Or recall how the learning of some skill or method opened up many possibilities for your life. Or ask yourself how certain life experiences have “taught” you the capacity to cry or to wonder. Think of the story you heard or the novel you read or the magazine article that has led you to take a course of action or to take up some cause or concern in life. Try to take in the accumulative impact of teachers and Sunday schools programs that cared about you and taught you basic things about life that inform the way you live today.

Add to this the influence of Jesus in his role as teacher—offering such unforgettable sayings and such memorable proverbs, telling parabolic stories that led people to think in entirely new ways, and offering insights with life-changing reflections on morality and our relationship with God. Jesus fulfilled the role of a sage—sharing unconventional wisdom that challenged the core values and the common ways of his audiences. Jesus’ words were actions that produced results. They were events that opened up new worlds for those who had ears to hear. Jesus the teacher has been the model for so many Christian teachers to follow and so many of the educational programs of the church—as means to create and train faithful disciples.

***Learning as Transformation.*** How can learning about the environment transform us? I know many people who have been forever changed because of some insight that led them to see, in an instant, a whole new sense of relationship with the rest of nature and a sense of responsibility toward it. Many people can identify the words they heard or the life experience they had that turned them into someone who cares for creation. For some, it was learning about the extent of the effects that human activity is having on the planet. At first, they may become overwhelmed by this information, but then they begin to see what we humans have to do now to change this human activity. Others are transformed by a re-reading of the Bible in a way that awakens their awareness of God’s love for creation and our responsibility to care for this garden Earth. Still others are horrified by the human injustices that are inextricably interwoven with our exploitation of earth and its resources.

As a result of learning, people are led to profound repentance, a turning around, an abandonment of attitudes and actions that are cavalier toward nature, and an embracing of actions that tread lightly on the Earth. Through an awareness of political decisions that erode our clean air or clean water, people are led to a stance of advocacy. A report of what is being done to address certain ecological problems leads to hope. Learning what difference our collective actions can make leads to a renewed sense of Christian vocation as we develop spiritual practices in our daily lives. In all of this, it becomes clear that education can transform us, and it can empower us for action.

Part of the reason why we are not always transformed by learning is the simple fact that we do not expect to be changed. We think of education as adding on facts and information rather than learning ideas that will change our minds. We think of education as someone else's opinion, which we listen to as we think of rebuttals for our own point of view, rather than expecting to be altered by someone else's real life experience. Or we think of education as passive activity in which a teacher pours facts into our heads, rather than the acquisition of insights that will subvert our present stance and that will generate new interests and activities. If we come to education with an open and a ready mind, expecting to be changed by what we learn, we will probably experience some of the transformation that learning promises to bring—transformation that the Christian tradition promises to bring us!

***Teachers of Transformation.*** If we are to pursue education on the care of creation, we need teachers who have the commitment and the resources to educate for transformation. These will be people who are themselves open to change in the very course of preparing to teach others! By a variety of means—lecture, discussion, stories, hands-on experiences with nature, inspirational anecdotes, proverbs and famous quotations, the creation of life experiences, and so on—teachers can change minds, strengthen convictions, evoke feelings of attachment to nature, enable people to be aware of things they never thought about before, awaken an experience of awe and reverence, empower for action, and foster a sense of solidarity with others who care for creation. It helps to be clear about the results you want to achieve: attitudes beliefs, values, actions, passion, and advocacy. In this way, we can seek to teach in a way that will provide the best chance to enhance our Christian discipleship. The possibilities are endless, limited only by our capacity to see them. If we do not underestimate the possibilities for Christian education but open ourselves to all that can happen as a result of learning, we can then quicken our imagination to think of new ways to teach and learn.

### **The Curriculum.**

What do we need to learn about? There are many possibilities here. Do not plan to engage in all the possible learning activities that you may think of, at least not all at once! Rather, take the opportunity to use your ideas at the place of the greatest interest or the most need for learning or the place you think will have the best impact. The subjects are many, and there are resources available for all of them:

- The principles of ecology and how to think environmentally
- The state of creation at a local, regional, national or global level
- What is being done to address the problems at these various levels
- The connections between ecological degradations and human (in)justice
- The biblical, theological, and spiritual foundations for care of the earth
- The place of humans in creation and our vocation to care for it

- The actions that we can take and the practices we can adopt to care for the earth
- First-hand experience with the wonders of nature
- First hand experience of the human threats posed against nature

In developing these possibilities, you may want to include elements of “action and reflection” in what you do. Explain to people at the start that you want them to be open to change and action. Then, after the learning experience, ask how they may have changed their ideas or attitudes or beliefs or values as a result of the learning. Ask also what they may be led to do as a result of what they have learned. Then, at a later time, ask the same people to reflect on what difference their new attitudes and new behaviors have made on them and others and the world around them.

***Methods of teaching/learning.*** There are many approaches to style and method of teaching. We tend to think of lecture as the main means to present ideas. Here the expectation is that the lecturer knows and the listeners are learning. But there are many ways to de-center the teacher and engage everyone as learners. What about quotation/reactions, in which the leader provides some provocative passages from important books and authors and then invites the group to discuss their responses to them? What about asking participants to take different sides of a debate about the environment, for example, in a conflict between species-preservation and job-preservation? Or consider a book-talk, in which all participants read the same book and take turns leading the discussion. You could assign a different biblical passage to each participant and ask them to come to the next meeting prepared to share their reflections on it. Guest speakers or a panel of folks can be stimulating. Or ask a guest to do a demonstration, such as how to compost food scraps. Showing slides with time for reactions—say of the effects of global warming or a catalogue of endangered species—can be very illuminating. Each of these might take some preparation and planning, but they open up the means of learning to include/engage the whole class and at the same time give everyone responsibility for their own learning. Even though some methods may already be familiar to people, if they are pursued in a new way with the expectation of change and transformation and action, they will be a fresh means to learn and grow. Be imaginative!

***Education for all ages.*** It is important to think about a curriculum for all ages—from the youngest to the eldest and all together. Intergenerational experiences can be very important, in which the wonder of childhood can be brought together with the wisdom of age. After all, the whole point of our caring for creation is for us to leave this planet for the next generation at least as healthy as previous generations entered it. It is so important to teach the children—in Sunday school, at worship, in vacation church school experiences, and at home. Often, it is the youth who bring their parents to awareness and to a change of behavior. We can build on the experiences children are having in their school ecology programs. There are many hands-on programs for the youth of the congregation, programs that make a significant environmental difference for the church or the community. Summer youth programs and support for youth to go to church camps can also be a means to generate “earthkeepers.” Adult programs of education can take many form—forums, classes, book studies, field trips, retreats, workshops, and so on. Incorporating creation-care into the programs and opportunities for the elderly are so crucial for drawing upon the advice and energy of retired folks in this crucial work.

***Collaborative teaching and learning.*** It is always helpful to have partners in teaching and learning. Consider several people teaching a class together. The impact of the learning on others will be greater. The learning will be enhanced by the mutual relationships. And the message is given that no one of us has all the answers. Only together can we gather the wisdom necessary for the environmental tasks before us. Or consider cooperative learning projects. Could we not ask two or three people in a class to investigate something together—local pollution, a nearby agency that restores habitats, the benefits of getting rid of Styrofoam, the trees that could be planted on the church property, or other such matters of interest to the work of the congregation—and report back the next class time. Any time we engage people in the learning process, people take responsibility in a new way for what they have learned and for what they need to do about what they have learned. Collaborative teaching and learning is effective teaching and learning.

***Teaching Moments.*** Many opportunities that arise can serve as “teaching moments.” Look out for them. They may be related to actions and decisions of the congregation: time to purchase coffee for the coffee hour, approval of the budget, the appointment of a new worship committee chairperson, the need to repaint several rooms, or spring clean-up. All these moments represent opportunities to make changes in purchases and practices—along with the opportunity to learn why it may be important to do things a different way. Some of the teaching moments may come from outside the congregation: the latest news about global warming, some legislation on the docket related to protection of species, a new book on ecological theology, a statement on care for creation from a national church, a local news item on environmental injustice, or an article in a popular magazine. Any of these can provide educational opportunities about care for the Earth before the congregation—in forums, classes, newsletters, prayers, and conversations. Education is not always prescribed by a curriculum. Sometimes, the best learning takes place in those opportune times when the situation is ripe for learning.

***Experiential Learning.*** Hands-on experiences can be invaluable. Education is not just ideas and mental learning. It is also a matter of experience. One approach is to see for oneself the ecological devastation human beings are doing to nature. Members can arrange a field trip to local habitats such as polluted streams, lost prairies, industrial waste sites, non-regulated factories, and places of logging and strip mining. You can talk with people in neighborhoods with high cancer rates or a high percentage of lung ailments. You can see the effects of urban sprawl. At the same time, it can be a wonderful experience to visit projects of habitat restoration, community organizations that challenge our current lifestyle, or a tour of businesses that have “greened” their practices.

Furthermore, many doctors and therapists now believe that a personal relationship with nature is an important part of health and well-being. More and more people are being restored to health or discovering a balanced life or maintaining wellness in their life by communing with nature. Such a relationship cannot be a substitute for a relationship with God, but it can enhance a relationship with God and be a vehicle through which one experiences God. Ask any group of ten people, and most if not all will be able to relate a special experience in nature when they felt close to God. Such direct experiences with creation—both its wonders and its problems—can also increase our sense of solidarity with creation, our responsibility for creation, and our willingness to advocate to protect it.

## **Discipleship Training**

Sometimes, the efforts suggested above can seem scattershot, doing one thing here and another thing there. What might give the educational program some coherence and increase its impact would be to organize these programs in such a way as to foster a sense of discipleship among members. A sequence of educational opportunities would give a sense of growing understanding and commitment among members. Another strategy might be to invite people to join a small group with a commitment to care for creation in an intentional and comprehensive way—and to learn the information, skills, and actions that would enable them to do this. It may be that a group of people would be willing to go through a year-long training process in which together they learn about the environmental state of the world, ecological justice, biblical roots of care for creation, theological concepts, a spirituality of place, and practical choices at home and work. Perhaps those who have gone through such a program might then become leaders of further groups in the congregation, so as to develop a network of earth-keepers across the congregation.

## **Conclusion**

The idea of all these efforts is to incorporate care for creation into the educational programs of the church so thoroughly that it becomes part of the ethos of the life of the congregation. In a sense, the entire life and activities of a congregation can be a source of education for environmental responsibility. The appearance of the church as a place that obviously cares for creation can itself be educational. Furthermore, all occasions can be an opportunity to educate: the use of personal mugs rather than Styrofoam cups at meetings; the nature of the food and its preparation for communal meals; the practice of recycling bulletins at services; the choice of cleaning materials for church clean-up days; plans for building projects; and so on. In this way, the building/grounds and the activities themselves become a learning laboratory for ecological responsibility. In the end, the atmosphere of the life of the congregation becomes one in which people *naturally* assume attitudes and take responsibility for celebrating creation and caring for it.

## 2. Transformation through Education Action Plan

**Commitment:** We seek to learn about the biblical, theological, and ecclesial traditions concerning creation, including the biblical mandate from God for us to care for the earth. We will seek also to learn about the present degradations of creation due to human activity, how these degradations are related to human exploitation and oppression, how we as religious people are implicated in these matters, and what we as Christians can do to heal and restore creation for future generations. We will seek to train people to be leaders in the congregation and the community in our cooperative efforts to care for creation.

**People:** Pastors, lay professionals, director of Christian education, education committee, teachers, vacation church school staff, children, students, youth leader, youth groups, senior groups, adult participants in educational experiences—everyone.

**Goal:** To incorporate “care for creation” into the educational opportunities of the congregation.

**Actions:** Here are some actions that may help to carry out these commitments.

### A. Learn about many aspects of ecological justice.

**1. Learn about our biblical traditions:** Traditions that show God’s love for creation, that mandate humans to serve and keep the earth, and that show the relationship between human injustice and the degradation of nature. There are books available highlighting the Bible’s view of creation. Or, you may want to study a series of biblical passages that talk about the earth/creation.

[[www.webofcreation.org/ReligiousEducation/Forums/reading.htm](http://www.webofcreation.org/ReligiousEducation/Forums/reading.htm)]

[[www.webofcreation.org/Worship/preaching/ecoexegetis.htm](http://www.webofcreation.org/Worship/preaching/ecoexegetis.htm)]

[[www.webofcreation.org/ReligiousEducation/quotes.htm](http://www.webofcreation.org/ReligiousEducation/quotes.htm)]

[[www.creationcare.org/resources/scripture.php](http://www.creationcare.org/resources/scripture.php)]

**2. Learn about the environmental state of the world:** global warming, ozone depletion, deforestation, desertification, loss of species diversity, proliferation of waste, over-population, and so on. There are many books, videos, and articles available for this purpose, such as general treatments of the environment or the annual *State of the World* put out by the World Watch Institute.

- *Plan B*, by Lester Brown (ISBN: 0393328317)
- *An Inconvenient Truth*, by Al Gore. (ISBN: 9781594865671)
- *Red Sky in the Morning*, by James Gustave Speth (ISBN: 0300102321)

**3. Learn about the dynamics of ecological justice:** the relationship between the exploitation of the earth and the most vulnerable—those who are most affected by ecological devastation. Learn about environmental racism, the disproportionate effect of

degradation of the environment on people of color. Learn what the ecological problems are in different countries and continents. Ask how your country may contribute to these problems.

[[www.ecojusticecollaborative.org](http://www.ecojusticecollaborative.org)]

- *Earth Habitat: Eco-Justice and the Church's Response*, edited by Larry Rasmussen and Dieter Hessel (Fortress, 2001)
- *Christian Environmental Ethics: A Case-Study Approach*, James Martin-Schramm (Orbis, 2003)
- *Confronting Environmental Racism* and other books by Robert Bullard.

**4. Learn how you can make a difference:** Find out your ecological footprint on the Earth by your lifestyle and your actions and determine specifically what you can do to make a difference.

[[www.footprintnetwork.org](http://www.footprintnetwork.org)]

**5. Study your denominational social statement on the environment:** Every congregation should study their denomination's environmental social statement. Reflect on the statement of the ecological problem, the theological analysis, and what is proposed to address the situation. Most denominations have study guides available for their statements.

[[www.webofcreation.org/Links/denominations.htm](http://www.webofcreation.org/Links/denominations.htm)]

**6. Study the "Earth Charter":** There are study guides available for use with this statement prepared by representatives of many nations seeking to find a common ethic to address the social, ecological, and international crises and conflicts of our time.

[[www.earthcharter.org](http://www.earthcharter.org)]

## **B. Incorporating eco-justice education in the Christian Education program**

**1. Offer adult classes:** Class could cover an introduction to all the basics: ecology, theology, ethics, biblical resources, green worship, organizational skills, and greening the parish. Make a list of "what every Christian should know about care for creation" and go about incorporating those things into the educational program.

**2. Forums and speaker programs.** There may be experts available in your area: community organizers, local farmer, scientist, corporation representative, science and technology, victims and social organizers, theologians and religious activists, people from local groups committed to ecology and religion, naturalists and biologists. Invite a local representative of an environmental organization, such as the Sierra Club. Discuss an article on the environment from a national magazine. People could be encouraged to surf the internet and share their findings.

**3. Care-for-Creation across the parish curriculum:** Encourage all teachers to incorporate care for creation into every class. Establish this as part of the teacher training program. The confirmation program should also have a component of creation-care.

**4. Youth programs:** Engage youth in care for creation programs. Draw and build upon what children are learning in school. Engage in an environmental service project at the church or in the community. Encourage youth to attend summer camp.

**5. Older adult groups:** Plan for programs in the gatherings of older adults relating to the environment or your role as a creation-care congregation. Develop intergenerational eco-projects.

**6. Vacation Church School:** There are now materials available to make nature a focus of summer programs for children. Or develop your own. If you have a community garden at your church, caring for the garden can be an integral part of every vacation church school.

**7. Create a book/poetry discussion group:** Look for books and novels about the environment that would be of interest to a green church. Share environmental/nature poetry. Consider works by Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry, among others.

**8. Show films or videos:** Congregations can arrange for showings of certain films on the environment. There are also many videos available for viewing and discussion by secular and religious groups.

**9. Workshops and Training Sessions:** Provide workshops introducing care for creation or training to green congregations. Consider the educational materials for small groups available from the Northwest Earth Institute ([www.nwei.org](http://www.nwei.org)). Consider a council retreat with training in the environment, along with opportunities to commune with nature. Use each meeting to do a devotional related to the environment.

### **C. Educational opportunities for many occasions:**

**1. Newsletters and bulletins:** Make use of parish printed materials to promote creation-care—with articles, relevant scripture quotes, excerpts from books, environmental tips, announcements of events, and reports of environmental actions by the congregation.

**2. Meetings of the Creation Care Committee:** These can be open to anyone and include an educational component.

**3. Explain ecological actions and innovations:** If you organize a vegetarian potluck, explain its importance. If you change from paper to ceramic at coffee hour, be sure to give the environmental benefits for such a switch.

**4. Library resources:** Keep relevant environmental books, periodicals, curricular materials, and videos in the church library offerings. Then promote the offerings in bulletins and newsletters. For a secular periodical that has news, practical articles, and resources, subscribe to “E” magazine. For religious periodicals, the newsletter from Earth Ministry is inspirational.

[[www.emagazine.com](http://www.emagazine.com)]

**D. Hands-on experiences (action/reflection):**

**1. Retreats:** Where appropriate, hold meetings or retreats in a natural setting and use the opportunity to connect with nature. There may be an opportunity for the governing board or a committee or other group to have a spiritual retreat at a site that enables the natural world to be an integral part of the retreat experience. Invite a naturalist to lead you in a nature-focused exploration of the church grounds and the neighborhood or an interesting natural site near you.

**2. Field trip:** Arrange to visit a site in your area where nature has been degraded, such as a polluted stream or a brown-field. Meet with someone who is working on a restoration project. Visit an agency that works with eco-justice issues. Ask someone to give you an eco-tour of such sites in your area. Discuss your experiences.

**3. Community project:** Join a group to restore a stream or prairie area, or to clean up a vacant lot for use as a community garden. Then follow it with a discussion and an opportunity to share your experience with the rest of the congregation.

**4. Sponsorship:** Establish a fund to send members to attend an ecological seminar or conference as a source of inspiration and find ways for them to share with congregation what they have learned. Send delegates or representatives to workshops on congregational care for creation or eco-spirituality. Provide scholarships for individuals or families to go to church camps for a week or a weekend which is focused on care for creation. Offer a small grant for people to do a restoration project at home or at work.

### **3. The Building and Grounds as Model Reflection**

Christians are earthy. We have great understanding of the harsh realities of life and great appreciation for the common graces of world around us. We believe in God who created this material world. We believe that what God created was good. We affirm the importance of gratitude and responsibility for all that God created. We believe that the finite can bear the infinite, that the ordinary elements such as grapes and grain and water—and therefore any matter—can actually be vehicles for us to experience divine realities. We hold material reality in high estimation. We know that we love God and are loved by God through our relationship with our neighbor. We also know that we love God and are loved by God through our relationship with the rest of nature, through our love of and care for the creation. So let's get earthy. Let's talk concretely about our commitment to care for the church building and grounds—the bricks and paints and chairs and soil and grass and trees—as part of our Christian, indeed human, commitment.

#### **The Church as Alternative Community.**

Ideally, the physical plant of the parish and its grounds should serve as a model for ecological responsibility. This concept of model is rooted in the vision of the church as an alternative community. In contrast to an understanding of the church that fits into the culture around us, we argue for an understanding of the church that would make the church a model for an alternative way of life. If the society believes we can use pesticides without harming people, the church will face up to such a denial of responsibility and do something about it. If the society is willing to put comfort and ease above the need to limit emissions that increase global warming, the church will seek earth-friendly alternatives. If the society believes that we can be a “use and waste” society, the church will seek to approach 100% recycling/reuse of its waste. The contrasts can be proliferated further, but the point is clear. The church will make moral and theological reflections on its ecological responsibilities and then choose to be a community that is alternative to the prevailing popular wisdom.

The theology of an alternative community asks what it would mean to make our lifestyle sustainable for future generations. It would be based on the ecological principle that “everything is connected to everything else.” Our ecological choices affect others, especially the most vulnerable among us both locally and in the larger global community. Injustices against the vulnerable now also include injustices against the rest of nature—the endangerment of animal species, the exploitation of animals, the rape of earth for ores and metals, the stripping of land for trees, the destruction of ecosystems, the pollution of air and water, and much more. Yet our commitment is not limited to the rest of nature or even to the people presently alive who are affected by ecological injustice. Our ethical commitments extend to those who will be living on this planet many generations from now.

Our society tends to have short-term plans, many lasting only as long as the next election. But we can no longer afford to follow that trend. We have to be visionary about establishing a style of life that will preserve the planet from actions and behaviors that would jeopardize the lives of millions of people who will be alive fifty years or a hundred

years or more from now. We can longer be cavalier about the effects that our behavior will have on future generations. We need alternative communities that show us what it will take for humans to live in such a way that they secure the future of the planet for our great, great, great, great grandchildren.

Our hope is that as an alternative community, others will see the wisdom of what we do and emulate it. The goal is for the whole society and for humanity as a whole to carry on in a way that is sustainable for the whole planet, a lifestyle that will enable our ecosystem—Earth—to sustain us for the long haul and that will provide food and well-being for all. Even if such a lifestyle seems far off, for us it is only as close as our next set of decisions and actions. As an alternative community, we are not waiting around for others to take the lead so we can follow along. Rather, we have a commitment to act unilaterally—whether others follow suit or not. We cannot be sure it will be effective, but we know it is the right thing is to do and so we will do it—regardless of the lack of action or the failed commitment of others.

### **A Prophetic Witness**

In this regard, a theology of alternative community will be prophetic. We believe that the whole society will have to change if we are going to have a lifestyle that is sustainable. But are there any communities that show us what this lifestyle might be like, say, fifty years from now? What if we imagined what the building and grounds of a congregation might be like fifty years from now when the whole society is oriented toward ecological sustainability? What characteristics might a church in that society have? Imagine this:

- The building itself is made of predominantly recycled materials and has furniture that is made from recycled materials and certified wood. The carpets and fabrics produce no toxic emissions. The building is insulated and designed for conservation of energy, including the use of natural light and heat.
- The building uses renewable energy such as wind and geothermal energy, with the result that there is no further exploitation of resources and no green house emissions.
- The lawn is a grass mixture that requires little water and less maintenance. Mowing is done by hand or by solar powered mower. No harmful pesticides or herbicides are used. The parking lot has a permeable surface and appropriately placed trees.
- Trees next to the building moderate the temperature inside the building. The flat roof has a rooftop garden for conserving energy.
- There is a large community garden on the property to provide food for local food banks. A small apple orchard stands on a side lot. Drainage and a collection system gather rainwater for use in watering the garden, the orchard, and the plants inside the church. The back lot has been restored to natural prairie. There is a little tree stand with benches around a labyrinth.
- The church itself is designed to overcome the distinction between inside and outside, with some floor-to-ceiling windows and the same plants inside and outside. Plenty of natural light in the building allows plants to grow in the sanctuary and elsewhere in the building.

- Only post-consumer paper products are used in the building—for the bathroom, the kitchen, the office, and packaging. There are office guidelines for the thorough use of paper. Most transactions are electronic.
- The community seeks to minimize garbage. Garbage is carefully analyzed to enable as much as possible to be recycled—paper, packaging, cans, bottles, plastic, batteries, computer equipment, cell phones, plastic bags, and so on. All items that can be reused are reused, either within the church or through donation to an appropriate charity—furniture, clothing, building materials, and so on.
- Cleaning/ maintenance products are safe and free of toxins. All toxic products that cannot be avoided are disposed of properly.
- The kitchen has a mug rack (in place of paper or Styrofoam cups), uses cloth napkins and tablecloths, has high-efficiency appliances, and cleans dishes and napkins with non-toxic detergents.
- Coffee hour serves fair trade coffee, juices, fruit pieces, and whole-grain muffins and cookies.
- There are gentle reminders everywhere for people to turn off lights, close doors, recycle, use paper fully, and conserve water.
- There is a bicycle rack to encourage those who can to cycle to church. Bus routes are posted at church. Carpooling is encouraged, with sign-up sheets available in the narthex. The youth check tire pressures of the cars in the lot and alert the members when pressure is low.
- The building is flexible for use as a gathering place for worship and a neighborhood center for the community. The church works with the community to address questions of eco-justice and to make the surrounding area a safe and attractive place to live.
- You can add other ideas of your own about an eco-justice parish of the future!

Once we have this vision of the future, we can begin to live it out, *now*, in the present. That is what it means to be prophetic. We are called to be ahead of our time, to be prophetic about what all of society needs to become and can become. Insofar as we are capable of enacting as much of this vision as possible, the future becomes the present and we are living a community that is a counter-cultural alternative out of the future. How many of the things listed above (among other suggestions) could we make happen now, in the present? For the most part, they require resources of time and effort. But the main ingredient is the willful commitment to do them. With the determination to carry these things out, many, if not most, could probably be done now.

The goal for the church as an alternative community is to live out our responsibility to creation in a radical, thoroughgoing way as a prophetic sign to the culture of what the whole of humanity needs to do if we are to sustain life for the future. As an alternative community we are called to live life as a model for the world. Unfortunately, for most moral advances in the world, the church has been behind the society. In matters of racism, sexism, and anti-Semitism, for example, the church was dragged into the modern world. Can we take action about the environment in such a way that we will *lead* people into a new era at the beginning of the twenty-first century? Here is our opportunity to do it!

## **A Theology for Buildings and Grounds**

So we have a theology of the church as an alternative community, but what does it mean to have a theology for the buildings and grounds? Despite our “earthiness” as Christians, we are used to thinking of theology and ethics in relation to other people, but we are not used to thinking of a theology of physical realities like building projects or choices of furniture or property maintenance. True, when new churches are built, we think about the theology of the design of the sanctuary: is it in the shape of a cross? Does it invite participation? Is the sanctuary oriented around the baptismal font or the Eucharistic railing? Is the altar in front or at the center? What will be the theme of the stained glass windows? And so on. These are important questions; yet they only begin to reflect the theological and ethical choices around the building and its use and the landscaping of its grounds.

When we realize that buildings are not neutral, that they have an impact on the environment, and furthermore that the environment has an impact on people, then we know that *every* choice we make has implications for our responsibility to care for the Earth and all creatures who inhabit Earth—humanity included. If there is remodeling or construction on the site, how will the discarded materials be made available for recycling or reuse? Will the building materials be made locally or will they be hauled long distances by truck or train, with significant expenditure of energy? Will the building be made of recycled materials? What will the insulation level be? What about the tightness of the building? How much natural light will be available? What will the placing and energy efficiency of the lighting be like? How about the efficiency of the furnace and the air conditioner? Will alternative energy sources be employed? Will the paint used or the fabrics for chairs or the carpets give off toxic emissions? What about the use of native grasses and plants, which require less maintenance? All these choices—and many others—are ethical choices that have implications for the environment and for human justice, all of which determine whether your congregation will leave a heavy or light ecological footprint on the Earth.

A theology of buildings and grounds would be based on the ecological principle that “everything is connected to everything else.” It would be rooted in the sacredness of all of life as God’s creation. In short, it would be based on the sacramental nature of all life. We would realize that the whole earth is our sanctuary, not only but including our church building! If the whole Earth is our worshipping sanctuary, that fact leads to a different relationship with nature and to a different ethical responsibility toward Earth-community. And such a theological proposition would be followed by the human responsibility to be *aware* of our impact on all God’s creation. Therefore, it would include the commitment to care for God’s earth in all our decisions and practices. It would include the commitment to provide and maintain buildings and grounds that sustain life and do not deplete it. It would also include a commitment to eco-justice where choices have a positive and not a negative impact on the human community—locally and globally.

### **Thinking Comprehensively: Church Property as a Green Zone**

If we are to become morally responsible, if we want to make the church property and practices into a “green zone,” a safe area for the environment, then we must be comprehensive in our understanding of the aspects of the building and grounds that have an impact on the environment. Otherwise, you may get the notion that if you have done

one or two things, then you have “greened” the church—retrofitting the lights or eliminating Styrofoam cups or recycling bulletins or doing an energy audit. By contrast, a comprehensive model will enable the congregation to see specific changes within a larger vision of what the building and grounds *as a whole* can become.

One way to think comprehensively is to do an environmental inventory. This is similar to an energy audit, and indeed it includes an energy audit, but it covers everything of ecological concern—anything in/on the building and grounds, including the practices of people who gather there that make an impact on the environment. The idea is to think of the property of the church as a “Green Zone,” an area that is creation-friendly. In this green zone, we seek (1) to identify everything that comes into/onto the buildings and grounds (in order to minimize harmful things from entering); (2) to assess how efficiently everything is used when in/on the building and grounds (to make sure nothing is wasted); and (3) to identify where everything goes when it leaves the zone (in order to reuse, recycle, minimize waste, and dispose of waste safely). Here is a checklist of things to consider:

● **Everything that comes onto the property.** Here we are aware that we can avoid bringing some things in (pesticides) and minimize other things (packaging, etc.). Here is a checklist:

- Natural lawn care products rather than pesticides or herbicides
- Environmentally safe cleaning products rather than toxic cleaning products
- Environmentally safe dishwashing/laundry powder or soap
- Limit gas for powering lawn mower, snow blower, or other machinery
- Recycled/post-consumer waste paper for office paper, bulletins, newsletters
- Recycled/post-consumer waste paper for towels, toilet paper, napkins
- Less electricity for lighting or powering appliances
- Natural sunlight rather than energy for artificial lighting
- Alternative energy sources:
  - Wind power,
  - Solar power (eternal light),
  - Geothermal power
  - Solar powered lawn mower
- Water
  - Rainwater
  - Well water
- Limit packaging and eliminate Styrofoam cups/paper cups/ paper plates/napkins

● **The efficient use of resources in buildings and on grounds.** Make use of the most efficient appliances and make the most thorough use of products.

- Use mixture of lawn grass that requires the least maintenance
- Mow lawn less often
- Clean less often
- Use church bus to bring some to church
- Carpool as a service to elderly or children
- Partner in order to carpool to church
- Ride bikes to church

- Use all products completely before purchasing new ones.
  - Use both sides of paper for drafts or notes
  - Use electronic messaging and communications where feasible (newsletter)
  - Use blow dryers rather than paper towels
  - Use cloth napkins rather than paper napkins and tablecloths
  - Use mug rack rather than Styrofoam cups
  - Insulation of doors and windows
  - Insulating curtains on windows
  - Boiler adjustments to lower gas/oil use
  - Climate control at different times of day and in different parts of the building
  - Insulation in walls
  - Turn down water heater
  - Turn down thermostat for heat
  - Turn up air conditioning level
  - Use most energy-efficient air-conditioning units, dishwashers, refrigerators, water heaters, and so on.
  - Retrofit lights to lower energy use
  - Use upgraded fluorescent lighting to lower energy use
  - Disconnect lighting where more light is provided than is needed
  - Automatic lighting with motion sensitive switches for bathrooms and elsewhere
  - Encourage the practice of turning off room lights when not in use
  - Produce your own air purity with plants
  - Use rainwater for lawn, garden, and indoor plants
  - Efficient operation of machinery for least use of gas or oil
  - Use hand power for shoveling or trimming and mowing where feasible
- **Everything that goes out of the building.** Here, aim for reuse or recycling or for safe disposal. The idea is to work toward 100% recycling of disposable materials. Examine your trash to find out where you can do better. Work with local agencies to find the best places to recycle products.
- Recycle office paper, bulletins, church school materials, art materials, newsprint
  - Recycle plastic, aluminum, glass, tin, and so on
  - Toxic recycling and disposal
  - Recycle oil from machines, recycle batteries
  - Use care in discarding paints
  - Hold a clothing drive to reuse clothing and other items

Do not be overwhelmed by this model. Do not try to do everything at once. Take one or several things at a time. Do what you can do and celebrate that! Some simple things can be done with little cost. More complex things can be done with minimal cost. Consider things with no cost or things with an initial cost that bring a payback. Do not limit yourself just to what is financially profitable. Make an assessment for each thing you consider, an assessment that includes both financial and environmental costs and savings. There are always tradeoffs; yet everything we do for the environment is an investment in our future. Consider doing some things that are prophetic. They will help to give you an identity that will lead to other things.

## **Public Blessing**

As a community, consider your commitment and your practices as a spiritual discipline. Do Earthkeeping with joy and care. Do not fret about what does not get done. Rather, celebrate what does get done and take pleasure in your choices to be thoughtful and committed to justice in your behavior. Know that you are carrying out the biblical mandate to “serve and to keep” the Earth. Know that each choice and each change of practice makes a difference—both in your own spiritual life and in the larger world around you.

When you make changes in the church and its buildings and grounds, be sure to have a rite as part of a worship service in order to celebrate what you have done and to seek God’s blessing on your work. The public acknowledgment will help to solidify the identity of the parish as a community that cares for creation and will perhaps inspire other faith groups and secular organizations in your community to follow suit. And as you carry out these commitments in the parish, you will also be serving as a model to your own members—to make similar changes in their own lifestyles at home and at work.

## **Conclusion**

It is not enough for us to talk the talk in our care for creation. We must also walk the walk. It is not enough to be transformed through worship or transformed by education, we must act in ways that truly make a difference in our world. There are very serious and urgent problems that we are addressing—global warming, depletion of the ozone layer, the loss of species diversity, the proliferation of waste, to name a few. We can and must take concrete actions to address these realities. As alternative communities, congregations can lead the way. They can become flagship organizations that others can look to and *see* the possibilities. The way forward will involve difficult decisions and hard sacrifices. Such an adventure will entail thinking in new ways and trying things that others may not understand. But the investment in the future of God’s creation will be well worth the effort. Think differently! Think comprehensively! Act accordingly!

### **3. Building and Grounds as Model Action Plan**

**Policy/pledge:** We agree to assess the destructive impact that our activities and the use and maintenance of our property may have upon creation—in such matters as energy use, toxic products, paper use, water use, waste, transportation, among others. We will strive to make choices that lessen our negative impact on the earth and that serve to renew and restore the earth community.

**People:** Governing board, Property Committee, maintenance staff, purchasing agent, head of the kitchen, all members of the community.

**Goal:** To reduce the negative ecological imprint of the building and grounds of the congregation in regard to every aspect of the physical area of the seminary, and in turn to create an earth-friendly zone of the congregational property.

**Actions:** Here are some things that can be done to carry out these commitments.

#### **A. Consultation:**

Find ways for environmental factors to become an integral part of the maintenance and remodeling projects of the congregation. Request that a Green Team member be represented at some council meetings and property committee meetings that address issues impacting the environment. Meet annually with the maintenance staff to go over various areas to address in the action plan for each year. Develop a respectful and collaborative relationship. Remember: property folks are often working with severe limitations of time and money. They have their own concerns that may trump environmental issues. Public criticism of their efforts can be counterproductive.

#### **B. Do a Comprehensive Environmental Inventory.**

This is perhaps the most important thing you can do. There is a *Comprehensive Environmental Guide* available on the Web of Creation site that can be used for this purpose. This is an extensive and thorough guide designed to enable you to do a complete survey of your property and make many important changes. You may download the guide from the website or contact us for a hard copy.

The *Comprehensive Environmental Guide* deals with 12 areas: Energy Use; Paper and Wood Products; Water Use; Cleaning Products; Indoor Air Quality; Recycling and Waste; Coffee Hour, Potlucks, and Other Congregational Events; Worship, Education, and Office Practices; Food Choices; Nature Inside and Out; and Transportation. The introduction suggests ways to use the guide.

This is a major undertaking, but nothing is more important than the concrete actions we take to lessen our ecological imprint on the Earth and seek to provide a building and grounds that are healthy for the environment. The guide can be used in any order and may be broken up for piecemeal assessments. Determine what areas it is feasible to address and revisit the guide regularly to assess what new actions can be taken.

Please consult the *Comprehensive Environmental Guide* in order to learn about many resources and links needed to do your inventory.

**C. Here are some specific areas that might be addressed. All of these are covered in greater detail in the *Comprehensive Environmental Guide*:**

**1. *Energy for lighting*:** Retrofitting current lights with new and improved lighting saves fossil fuels and money. Replacing just one incandescent light bulb with a compact fluorescent light saves the burning of five hundred pounds of coal over the ten year lifetime of that bulb. Many states and some federal programs offer rebates and incentives for changes that will save energy for lighting. The Metropolitan Chicago Synod of the ELCA offers an interest-free loan that covers upfront costs for retrofitting lights.

**2. *Energy for heating and cooling*:** An energy audit for heating may also turn up some feasible ways in which you can conserve in the production of heat and air conditioning. Local and state energy companies are often eager to do free audits and make recommendations. Many states and some federal programs offer rebates and incentives for changes that will save energy on heating and air conditioning.

**3. *Renewable energy*:** Get off the non-renewable energy grid altogether. Some congregations have gone to renewable energy. This is especially worth considering if you have a school or day care in your building or other programs that make extensive use of the facility. Some are turning to a geothermal energy source. Others are using solar energy for heating water or for outside lights. Due to advances in technology and the shorter times for payback, all of these options are becoming more attractive. It is worth looking into these options. Again, energy companies or state/federal organizations may offer incentives to assist with the upfront costs.

**4. *Recycling*:** Seek to develop a comprehensive recycling program for the church buildings—plastic, cans, glass, office paper, card board, among others. You may also want to set up a small recycling corner for members to recycle items at church that they might otherwise throw away, such as cell phones, printer cartridges, household batteries, plastic bags, and so on. Post instructions near the receptacles. Encourage members of the congregation to actively participate.

**5. *Lawn maintenance*:** Avoid pesticides and herbicides; avoid chemical fertilizer; where feasible, mow with a hand mower that is battery powered; consider planting low maintenance grass; avoid watering, especially during a drought.

**6. *Green Cleaning products*:** Do an inventory of products used in the maintenance of the church. Reduce or eliminate toxic products used in the maintenance of the buildings. Environmentally safe products are now available for most cleaning jobs.

**7. *Coffee Hour and Potlucks*:** Offer Fair Trade coffee and tea; provide snacks that are healthy; offer organic and/or locally grown food. Make efforts to reduce or eliminate the

use of Styrofoam, plastic, and paper products. Provide a mug rack. Wash dishes and utensils with eco-friendly dishwashing liquid. Consider cloth napkins.

**8. Paper products:** Do an inventory of paper purchases and seek to purchase recycled/post-consumer waste paper for office use as well as for bathroom and kitchen use. Develop guidelines for the use of office paper by staff and volunteers—to reduce, use fully, and recycle. Make use of paperless electronic means of communication where feasible.

**9. Green Your Worship Practices.** Here are some ideas to make your worship practices more earth-friendly: use beeswax candles instead of oil-based candles; place plants on the altar instead of cut flowers; send them home for planting; use local wine that does not require transportation from a distance; provide organic, whole grain communion bread; use recycled paper for printed materials; reduce/reuse/recycle or eliminate bulletins; place recycling baskets at the exits; practice intinction, common cup, or provide reusable glasses (not plastic) for communion; wash communion vessels in eco-friendly dishwashing detergent; purchase fair trade palms for Palm Sunday; consider the origin of material used to make paraments.

**10. Make the most of your property:** Assess the possibilities for the land use. Consider having a community garden with produce given to the local food pantries. Return a section of your land to prairie with native plants. Plant an orchard or a tree sanctuary. Put out benches for meditation. Create a labyrinth.

#### **D. Institutionalize It:**

If some new initiatives begin as a voluntary effort, seek to institutionalize the effort as quickly as possible, so that it becomes part of the regular work of the staff. Volunteers come and go and have periods when they cannot do the work. Make it a permanent part of the life of the congregation. Write it into the job description of an employee or a committee of the church or the standard procedures of event planning.

#### **E. Promote what you do!**

Be sure to announce actions to the congregation. Use each environmentally-friendly practice that is adopted as a means to educate people generally to the importance of greening your institution. If the parish building and grounds function as laboratory and model for members and visitors, then you need to display the efforts being made. Remember also that the comings and goings of members of a congregation make it necessary to re-announce actions and efforts each year.

## 4. Discipleship at Home and Work Reflection

The nurture and support we get from worship and education with our Christian community is ultimately meant to empower us for life in the world. Worship and education are designed to renew and reorient us to the kinds of relationships that will enable us to live the life God would have us live in our daily existence—to love our families and our neighbors, to do our work with honesty and integrity, to be committed to justice, to be honorable citizens of the country and the world, and to care for creation.

### **Simple Lifestyle.**

The United States is a materialistic culture that drives us to take many things for granted. We believe that our happiness depends on many possessions. Many of these possessions are luxuries. We believe that bigger is better—house, cars, televisions. We will buy many things that make our lives easier. As we are able, we purchase a host of products that serve efficiency, even though they may harm the environment. Just as the economy is based on unlimited growth, so also do we base our personal lifestyle on unlimited growth. We assume that if we have money, we have the moral right to spend it on whatever we want, regardless of the impact on others or the environment. We believe we should be able to get our goods cheap, despite the fact that those goods may be made by people receiving non-living wages and under conditions that destroy natural resources.

We seldom call these beliefs into question or consider an alternative set of values by which to live. The commitment to care for creation leads us to challenge these cultural assumptions and to embrace a lifestyle that is committed to justice for people and care for the earth. No longer can we afford to be ignorant of the impact of our lifestyle choices on others and on the Earth. No longer can we turn a blind eye to the consequences of the things we buy or the practices we carry out. We now need to learn where our purchases come from and what happens as a result of our lifestyle.

The opportunity to purchase some “fair trade” products reveals the difference. Most coffee you purchase from the store or from a coffee shop is made in places outside the United States where the laborers are paid as little as possible, the land is stripped of trees and shrubbery, pesticides and herbicides are used to maximize the crop, and there are many “middle people” between the crop and the buyer. By contrast, fair trade coffee is made under conditions where the workers form a cooperative, they are paid a living wage, the trees and shrubs are preserved and actually serve to fertilize the land on which the coffee grows, the use of pesticides is kept to a minimum, and there are few “middle men” to add unnecessary cost. One may pay a little more for fair trade coffee, but we have done an act of justice and we have saved the terrible long-term costs on the Earth from short-term profits. What we need is the choice of fair trade products not just for coffee and tea and chocolate but *for everything we purchase*. Better yet, all products should be produced under fair conditions that honor workers and respect the Earth. While we are not there as a culture, we nevertheless need to make the decisions we are able to make now—as a counter-cultural act designed to express our Christian convictions and to witness to the possibilities of creating a new and different world.

The concept that seems to have taken hold among Christians is to choose a lifestyle that reflects “simple living.” Many resources are available—books, courses, alternative products, group activities, packets—all designed to give us directions to adopt a lifestyle that is equitable toward others who have less and that minimizes our destructive impact on the Earth. What follows are some reflections on what it might take to embrace a lifestyle of simple living and what actions and choices we might make to carry it out.

### **Home and Work.**

In a sense, care for creation “begins at home.” Home is where we tend to be ourselves. We show our true colors there. Few others will observe what we do at home. For that reason, our homes present the greatest challenge to our commitment to care for creation. There are many people who have a public commitment to the environment who never apply it to their own house and property. They do not put their private commitments—money, time, effort, and daily practices—where their public commitments are. If we can show our Christian commitment to care for creation in our own home, we have come a long way toward establishing environmental integrity with habits that will last a lifetime.

Often we are prevented from doing things at home because we think the things we do in our homes are so small and insignificant as to make no difference in the larger scheme of things. We might say to ourselves: What difference does it really make to turn the heat down a few notches or the air conditioning up a few notches? What difference does it make whether we mow the lawn with a power mower or a push mower? How could it matter that we eat fish rather than beef? Why bother to recycle products we have to take to a recycling center when it will not change the big picture? What is the measure of difference that we pay more money for a car that has gas mileage or an appliance that is more energy efficient? And so on. When we see so many other things happening where the effects of pollution are huge, we become discouraged.

*Small efforts add up.* But we *do* make a difference. Many small actions on the part of many, many people can amount to a tidal wave of difference. And these small actions can provide the conditions for other, more dramatic actions to take place in the culture. We need to learn to act unilaterally and to resist becoming discouraged. Scientists and environmentalists in the secular world often look to the churches to make a difference, because religious communities are the largest, most extensive grass roots organizations in the country.

Some years ago, I came to understand the importance of small efforts when Stan Hallett, a Chicago environmentalist, used the analogy of the destruction wrought by Mount St. Helen’s volcano. Here is what he said:

“When the volcano blew, it destroyed all animal and plant life for miles around. The whole area was absolutely decimated. There was no sign of life whatsoever. Then little by little the flora and fauna progressively began to return. Here’s how it happened. First, the moss came back, and the moss created the conditions for the lichen to grow. Insects and beetles appeared. When the lichen returned, that created the conditions for the shrubbery to grow. The shrubbery returned, and that created the conditions for the aspen trees to begin to grow again. And the animal life returned. In

a similar way, all the small efforts we make at the grass roots level are like the moss, creating the conditions for greater things to happen, which create the conditions for wider changes to happen at the local level, which in turn create the conditions for even more extensive changes to take place at the level of corporations and governments.”

Thus, even with small efforts, we are an important part of a broad movement of regeneration, indeed a process of resurrection, which is taking place among us. And we must be sure to do our part, so that we may once again, this time with passion and with action, dedicate ourselves to the care and redemption of all that God has made.

***It's the Right Thing to Do.*** But even if it did not seem to make a large difference, is that any reason not to do it? Compare our common attitude to love and justice. What if we said, why bother to do small acts of kindness, because in the larger scheme of things it does little to stem the tide of evil and injustice in the world. No, we say that every act of kindness is valuable in itself. We can make a difference in people's lives. And, besides, in the end, you never know; a small act of kindness may have a larger ripple effect or combine with the kindnesses of others to reach a threshold of transformation. And whether it is small or large, it matters because people matter. Besides, our actions and commitments help create “the people we are,” quite apart from the results of our actions.

Can we not transfer such attitudes to our care for God's creation? Small or large, the things we do matter, because nature matters, because life forms are affected by the choices we make, because humans are profoundly affected by the changes that take place in the environment. And the disciplined actions we take “to serve and to preserve” the Earth shapes us a people who care about life. Can we not embrace a concern for the environment that matches our commitment to love people and to do justice for people? Can we not love God, love our neighbor, and care for the Earth, and do it just because it is the right thing to do—whether or not it “works”?

Caring for the earth is an expression of our love for God. It is a spiritual discipline, a discipline to do no harm, to foster life rather than death. There is something compassionate about caring enough about people and nature that we attend to things in a careful, care-filled way. We learn what harm our actions can bring, and we seek to minimize that harm and promote the health of the planet. Such a spiritual discipline involves a deep connection with earth and trees and animals and flowers and plants and the sun, soil, and air—such a deep connection that we want to conserve its goodness and beauty and usefulness. Our care for nature comes from our love of nature, just as our care for people is rooted in our love of people. When we act to enable fish to thrive in a lake rather than be damaged by pollution, we love these creatures of the sea for their own sake—empowering fish to praise God by being fish and doing what fish were created to do and to be.

***Home as Green Zone.*** When we think about the actions we can take as a spiritual discipline in our homes and at our work, it is salutary to realize that we can make decisions that directly affect every aspect of the environmental crisis. We often think our homes are insulated from nature because we are inside! We forget the environmental impact of our homes. But look! Our homes are directly connected to every dimension of

the environmental crises and the ecological concerns that we face. Just think about what comes into our homes and what goes out of our homes.

- Electricity lines come into our homes from coal-burning plants.
- Water pipes bring increasingly limited fresh water from filtration plants
- Gas pipes bring in natural gas from distant places
- Sewage lines take water and waste out to sewage processing plants.
- Chimneys release carbon dioxide from the furnace into the atmosphere
- Food in the refrigerator has traveled by truck from great distances
- Food has been raised using pesticides and chemical fertilizer
- Meat we eat may be raised at the top of the food chain
- Paper and Wood for furniture depletes the forests
- Garbage trucks take garbage to land fills, perhaps including also toxic waste.
- Cars in the driveway burn gasoline and use oil and emit pollutants into the air
- Lawn mowers and other machinery emit pollutants into the air
- Air-conditioning emits chlorofluorocarbons that erode the ozone layer
- Pesticides and herbicides used on the lawn get into the air and water and soil
- Leather chairs and shoes can be traced to cattle ranches in California or Brazil
- Cleaning products—from laundry detergent to window washing fluid with toxic substances—that pollute the air and water.
- And the list could go on.

The point is that the choices we make every day in our homes and on our property directly affect global warming, ozone deterioration, air pollution, water pollution, depletion of fresh water reserves, waste accumulation, toxic seepage, the loss of rain forest, and a host of other consequences that affect the quality and now the survival of life on earth.

What if we addressed every one of these items in our homes so as to reduce our ecological imprint on the environment—lowering the thermostat in winter and raising it in summer, reducing our use of water, recycling a higher percentage of items, using recycled paper products and certified wood, refusing to put pesticides/herbicides on our lawns or to use toxic cleaning products, mowing with a hand mower, and so on. If many of us acted accordingly, the cumulative effect could be monumental. The point is that we can make a difference with each and every choice we make to walk more lightly upon the earth.

***Investing in the future of creation.*** Our management of our money is also an integral part of our care for the Earth. This commitment includes the willingness to purchase products, appliances, and services that are Earth-friendly. It includes the willingness to refuse to purchase products and services—such as low-mileage cars, lawn service, leaf blowers, and toxic cleaners—that contribute to the degradation and destruction of nature. Investing in the future deals also with our financial contributions. There are many organizations and agencies—local, national, and global—that are working hard to change the hearts of the people and the laws of the land and the practices of corporations—that are worthy of our support. There has been little government support for such non-profit organizations; so they depend upon our generosity to do their vital work. Finally, investing in the future of creation includes our investments in stocks and bonds, in environmental companies, in research programs, and in corporations and businesses that

are greening their products and practices. We need to turn the tide in favor of an economy that supports a sustainable lifestyle not just for us personally but also for our society and our world. Our individual commitments are an important part of that movement.

***Greening our Workplaces.*** The same point can be made about our work. Look around at work and begin to notice all the things that negatively affect the environment. In many cases, the effort to reduce the environmental impact will also save the company money. In other cases, the upfront money will get a short term payback. In other matters, the effort may cost money but be well worth it in terms of the health and well being of workers, clients, and neighbors. Some things may require significant sacrifices on behalf of our overall environment and may require significant adaptive changes on the part of the company. Nevertheless, we are all going to have to do our part to make the human ecosystem safe for future generations. And sometimes we may have to act unilaterally just because we know it is the right thing to do.

So, look around the office or the factory or the sales and services you provide. Take the same care with these matters as you might take with the greening of your home and the greening of your church.

### **Care for Creation as Spiritual Discipline.**

***Personal Coping.*** Everyday we get news items detailing some aspect of the deterioration of the natural world—global warming, extreme weather patterns, droughts, holes in the ozone layer, the destruction of forests, fires out of control, the erosion of arable land, problems of waste, loss of species, problems with clean air and clean water, the population explosion, and on and on. Occasionally we get good news about some new effort being made to address one or more of these issues. But overall it is overwhelming and deeply discouraging. Then we throw up our hands in despair and say “What’s the use” or put our heads in the sand and deny there is any problem we can do anything about.

How are we to cope with these things? How do we find the resources to keep going? There are obviously many ways. Action itself is certainly one way, partly because it makes us feel better but mainly because we *can* make a difference. As we have said, we can take actions in our homes, at our work, and together with others in our communities, such as in our congregation. And we should be embracing these actions wholeheartedly. We should be pursuing changes in our lifestyles and programs of activity that alter our behavior.

Yet, despite all the avenues for action, what we need at the same time is spiritual sustenance and inspiration for the journey. And it is a long, adventuresome journey that humanity is embarking on to address these issues. We need to be prepared to be in this endeavor for the long haul. The degradation of nature is not a problem with a short term solution. If we are to attain a level of human activity that is ecologically sustainable for the future, we need to engage in a process that will transform us and our children in an enduring way. We need to hear words that lift us and challenge us. We need to meditate in ways that give us a solid center of commitment to the whole natural world. We need to become aware of the multiple ways in which our ordinary daily activities have an impact on the intricately woven web of creation. And we need to know the effects that our actions have on all the vulnerable people—both locally and globally—who are most

profoundly affected by the degradation of creation. As such, we need to develop our daily attention to the care of the Earth as a spiritual discipline.

*It's a spiritual issue.* The point is this: at its most profound level, the ecological crisis is a spiritual crisis. It comes as a result of our alienation from nature, our estrangement from the very ground from which human life, indeed all of life, has emerged. Our civilization has built so many barriers to a relationship with the rest of nature, barriers that separate us from the soil of the land, the myriad animals, the beautiful diversity of plants, the multi-colored and textured rocks, the geological formations that make up our surroundings. We no longer have a sense of belonging, no longer a sense of solidarity with plants and animals—such that we want all forms of life to thrive along with us.

Furthermore, we have reduced nature to things. We are interested in nature primarily in terms of the way we can use it to make our life “better.” And we seem to believe that we can exploit the natural world around us without consequences. We do not see the sacredness of life, the presence of the glory of God in all reality. We have lost the experience of the livingness of all things and the sanctity of all life. We need to recover a sense of reverence for life that will lead us to treat all creatures with love and respect and thereby to walk lightly on the earth.

And we have also lost our sense of appropriate human limitations in the presence of the divine. We seem to believe that we and the world are unlimited in potential. We think we have a right to acquire as much wealth as we want or as much wealth as we are able to obtain. We believe our world should know no boundaries. Our economy is based on the hypothesis of unlimited resources and unlimited growth. We take it for granted that we can discard unlimited amounts of trash in a use-and-throwaway society. And we assume that we can put unlimited amounts of pollutants in the air and water. We are guilty as a whole society of unbelievable hubris and arrogance, because we have no sense of limitations. We think that if we are *able* to do something, that notion in itself gives us the *right* to do it. And we do all of this with no real sense of the consequences of our lifestyle on others and on the rest of nature. We need to recover a sense of humility that will put limits on our activity—limits that will respect the rest of life and give space for all to thrive.

And we approach environmental problems much like we approach many other problems. We want a technological fix so that the problems takes care of themselves without really asking anything of us. We do not want to have to change our behavior or our lifestyle—to own less, to drive less, to turn heat down, to purchase certain products, and so on. We just want some magic bullet to target the problem and solve it. True enough, we need all the technological fixes we can find. But we are facing problems that will not be solved by technology alone. We will need to change our lifestyles, our standard of living, our conveniences, our economic relationships, and our attitudes toward and our relationships with nature.

Even when we try to develop a simpler, more limited lifestyle that addresses these issues, we are confronted with the unbelievably fast pace of our modern world—and its corollary, efficiency. We have come to expect that there will be ways to make everything we do more efficient—easier and quicker than ever before. The resulting products and processes of efficiency are among the most devastating to the earth. How can we slow down? How can we stop living at such a break-neck pace? How can we find a center out

of which slowly and carefully we can attend to the world around us and the people around us with fresh regard and thoughtfulness? It is not easy.

It is not easy partly because all of the messages we get from our capitalist society telling us that our hunger for meaning and satisfaction will be filled by the *acquisition* of things. If we only could have this car or those clothes, this cell phone or that gadget, this convenience or that luxury, then we would be alright. We need to rethink our values and priorities and begin to live an alternative lifestyle, one that finds meaning and satisfaction from the very source of life itself, a relationship that can restore us to solidarity with nature that will bring us new life.

### ***Creation Spirituality.***

A spirituality “rooted” in creation would be a way forward—a relationship with God through the experience of the natural world that would orient us to fresh values, an alternative lifestyle, and a centering of ourselves for kindness and thoughtfulness toward all of life. It is clear that delight is the right basis for use. We will not exploit that in which we delight. Or to put it another way: we will not save what we do not love.

In the face of all these things, how are we to find the inspiration, the motivation, and the sustenance to embrace care for creation in an enduring way? Will we be motivated by fear? Guilt? Shame? Grief? Rage? What would be an adequate source of energy for this work? How could this work be life-giving and not life-depleting? We will probably be driven by all of these at one time or another. However, in the end, these motivations are not appropriate or productive. With such motivations, we will not make the best choices or be sustained for the long haul.

Rather, we are called to be sustained by what the poet Wendell Berry calls the “fund of grace by which alone we live” and what the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins depicted as “the dearest freshness deep down things.” Only by seeking to be fed by the reservoir of God’s grace—the same love of God that is in all things and the same delight that God has for all things—only thus will we be able to face the threats before us without being overwhelmed. Only in this way will we have joy and energy for the task.

We are entering an age in which environmental events and concerns will be the dominant issues of the day. As Father Thomas Berry says, developing a sustainable life on earth in the face of ecological challenges is the “great work” of our time. It is a great work that everyone can be part of at some level. It is work that will involve the transformation of people and structures. It is work that will require vision and sacrifice. It is also work to be done with joy and grace. And it is work to be done in our every day life—at home, at work, and in our communities.

### ***Conclusion.***

We encourage you to be intentional about your commitment to care for earth. Do a room by room assessment of your home and figure out what choices you can make to walk more lightly on the earth. Look at the practices of lawn and garden care. Evaluate your purchases of goods and food. Get a manual that explains how to green your home. Make a list of commitments you plan to embrace in your home and at work. Post these commitments on the refrigerator or as reminders throughout the home. Get some daily devotional material that reminds you all the time why it is important to do these things. Find a group at your church or in your neighborhood to share your commitment and

provide support. Take a course, read a book, consult others who have already begun the journey. Teach others in your family how to participate as earth-keepers. Together join the movement to participate in the great work of our generation—caring for all Earth community.

## 4. Discipleship at Home and Work Action Plan

**Policy:** We encourage members of all ages, economic levels, ethnic groups, or walks of life to care for creation at home and at work knowing that our habits and practices can make a significant contribution. We seek to foster a closer relationship with nature so that we can live simply and walk lightly upon the earth.

**People:** Pastors, lay professional leaders, governing body, heads of committees, all as models for the whole community. All will seek to embrace a vocation that will allow their lives to witness to the commitment to justice and care for the earth.

**Goals:** To make a personal commitment to embrace disciplines that respect the earth community, that seek to restore creation from human degradation, and that enable us to relate closely with nature.

**Actions:** Here are some ideas to carry out these commitments:

### A. Change your lifestyle:

**1. Reflect on your lifestyle.** Take time to think about your lifestyle—the choices you make or the commitments you have or the habits you practice or the things you own. Try to determine in what ways they contribute to the degradation of nature and in what ways they contribute to the sustainability of nature. Consider changing your values and priorities and commitments in the direction of a relationship with nature that expresses love and reverence for other people and care for all of nature. Consider viewing the video or reading the book, *Affluenza* by John De Graaf.

**2. Adopt a change of lifestyle to “simple living.”** We cannot depend on technological changes to make a difference. We must adapt our lifestyles to a radical Earth-friendly posture. There are many resources available for this—either as personal guides or as group study.

**3. Purchase green.** There are many books that help you to purchase products that are friendly to the environment. See the buying guides and catalogs available on these websites:

Alternatives for Simple Living [[www.simpleliving.org](http://www.simpleliving.org)]

Union of Concerned Scientists [[www.ucsusa.org](http://www.ucsusa.org)]

The Whole Earth Magazine [[www.wholeearthmag.com](http://www.wholeearthmag.com)]

Seventh Generation [[www.seventhgeneration.com](http://www.seventhgeneration.com)]

**4. Make a Covenant with Creation:** Develop a personal “Covenant with Creation” that lists a variety of actions you will take to lessen your footprint on the Earth.

[[www.webofcreation.org/GettingStarted/samplecovenant.htm](http://www.webofcreation.org/GettingStarted/samplecovenant.htm)]

## **B. Transform your home and work into Earth-friendly places.**

**1. Do an environmental assessment of your home.** Use the material available in the *Comprehensive Environmental Guide for Building and Grounds of Congregations*. This guide has information for the congregation as well as suggestions for implementation at home and work. Use this material to assess every aspect of your life at home—house, yard, habits and practices of you and/or your family. Over a period of time, work to make your space into a Green Zone—earth-friendly and a witness to others. Join with others to have a vision-time to imagine what a green home might look like!

Or take a room and assess everything that makes a negative environmental impact. For example, look at your kitchen in terms of appliances, refrigerator settings, paper use, food choices, detergents, cleaning products, certified wood for tables and chairs, natural lighting, fluorescent lighting, water-use practices, means to disconnect small appliances when not in use, comprehensive recycling, food conservation, composting of food wastes, and so on. Then go room by room in your house and make the changes necessary to make a difference.

**2. Reconsider eating patterns and food choices:** Buy locally rather than purchasing food that traveled halfway across the globe. Eat organic and eliminate pesticides and herbicides in your diet. Purchase fair trade products that ensure the value of resources and the people who survive off the land. See the *Comprehensive Environmental Guide* for further resources.

[[www.webofcreation.org/BuildingGrounds/index.htm](http://www.webofcreation.org/BuildingGrounds/index.htm)]

[[www.simpleliving.org](http://www.simpleliving.org)]

**3. Green your lawn and garden:** Find ways to make your yard eco-friendly. There are organic ways to grow a lawn without pesticides or herbicides. Plant low maintenance grass. Use an electric or battery-driven mower. Put trees in strategic places to lower heating/cooling costs in your home. Make your property a sanctuary for animals. Turn part of your yard into a natural prairie with native species of grass and wild flowers.

**4. Green your Christmas:** There are many thoughtful suggestions for gifts and wrapping, for decoration and celebration, for being generous to your family and generous to others. Consider having a live tree that can thereafter be planted in your yard or at the church or in a suppressed area of the city. See the workbook on an alternative Christmas that is provided by “Alternatives for Simple Living.”

[[www.simpleliving.org](http://www.simpleliving.org)]

**5. Take your commitment to work:** Whatever your work, opportunities abound to make your place of work and your activities more earth-friendly. Make use of the guidelines you used at home to apply to your work. There are manuals to green offices, workbooks for corporations, guidelines for factories and small businesses. This is part of the vocation of a Christian—to express justice toward humans and care for creation in every aspect of your life.

[See the book, *The Smart Office* by Amy Townsend]

## **C. Provide support for individual commitment as the congregation.**

**1. *Create an atmosphere of commitment:*** Seek opportunities in congregational life to make a profound personal commitment to care about the earth, to make decisions and to take actions that are earth-friendly, and to refrain from actions that are earth-harmful. Be creative and intentional about finding individual and communal ways to strengthen and reinforce those commitments in various aspects of the Christian life.

**2. *Form support groups/ commitment groups/ interest groups:*** Support for environmental practices and disciplines can serve as a focus for small groups that serve to support the commitment to lead earth-friendly lives. Each session, participants could discuss a different area of commitment to earth-care, practice that commitment for the week or month, and then return to discuss the results and give encouragement. Groups that meet around a meal could learn about food and practice ecological disciplines related to eating. Perhaps the groups could meet during a season of the church year, so as, for example, to be part of a Lenten discipline. See the materials from ENACT, a group set up in some cities in Wisconsin to develop neighborhood groups to enact ecological practices in their homes and work.

[[www.enactwi.org](http://www.enactwi.org)]

**3. *Group Study:*** Foster the formation of groups around an educational course on Simple Living or the Ecology of Food. Consider these educational materials for small groups:

Northwest Earth Institute [[www.nwei.org](http://www.nwei.org)]

Earth Ministry's *Simple Living, Compassionate Living* [[www.earthministry.org](http://www.earthministry.org)]

Alternatives for Simple Living [[www.simpleliving.org](http://www.simpleliving.org)]

**4. *Take cooperative congregational actions:*** Choose congregational actions that make personal commitments easier—sell compact fluorescent light bulbs as a fundraiser; do cooperative buying of recycling bins for the home; provide a recycling center where people can bring hard to recycle items such as plastic bags, household batteries, and printer cartridges; sell fair trade coffee and other fair trade products; distribute devotional material. Find out what needs people have in their quest to be green and seek as a congregation to make the process easier. Hold an eco-fair. Put environmental tips in the bulletin and newsletter. Use the resource *Stewardship of Creation: 30 Days With Nature* to put a different devotional guide each week as an insert in the bulletin.

**5. *Ritualize your Covenant with Creation:*** Provide members with a “Covenant with Creation” that lists a variety of actions to be taken by the members of your congregation. Make this covenant part of a worship service with a brief liturgy within the service and to give it as an offering. Participants check the practices they agree to follow. They give one copy in the offering and keep another to post in their apartments/homes.

[[www.webofcreation.org/GettingStarted/samplecovenant.htm](http://www.webofcreation.org/GettingStarted/samplecovenant.htm)]

Litany for Covenant:

[[www.webofcreation.org/Worship/services/covenantwithcreationlitany.htm](http://www.webofcreation.org/Worship/services/covenantwithcreationlitany.htm)]

**6. Creation-Care Training:** You can hold brief training sessions for members as a means to encourage people to develop earth-friendly habits and choices in their personal lives: simple living, food choices, recycling instructions, paper guidelines, energy conservation, devotional practices, connections with nature. Perhaps these training sessions could be coordinated with the items in the Covenant with Creation or with the Environmental Guide. This can be done in a Sunday morning forum, Saturday workshop (perhaps with many churches), or some other venue.

**7. Witnessing/Sharing:** Make use of meetings of the Green Team, worship services, and other gatherings to allow members to make announcements and to share with others their personal environmental practices and disciplines.

**8. Website and Brochure:** Be sure to have your commitments and accomplishments regularly updated on a website. Make a brochure that outlines the personal commitments involved in being part of a Green Congregation.

#### **D. Get in touch with nature.**

**1. Kindle your love of nature** Renew your appreciation for the natural beauty of the area in which you live. Plan trips to a local arboretum, gardens, or a lake/river area. Hold meetings in a place of natural beauty. Where feasible, procure the services of a naturalist to acquaint you with the flora, fauna, geological formations, and natural history of the area. We will not save what we do not know! We will not restore what we do not love!

**2. Devotional materials:** There are devotional materials available for earth-keeping. Consider using these booklets:

*Stewardship of Creation: 30 Days with Nature* at  
[[www.webofcreation.org/Worship/devotions/CreationCare.pdf](http://www.webofcreation.org/Worship/devotions/CreationCare.pdf) ], or  
*Earth Prayers from around the World*, edited by Elizabeth Roberts.

#### **E. Support the community environmental actions**

**1. Join an environmental group.** There are many environmental groups that need your support and participation. National groups such as the Sierra Club have local chapters that are active at local, regional, and national levels of commitment. Find out the local environmental organizations in your area and promote these among members.

**2. Local opportunities for action:** Arrange for members of the community to participate in public efforts to restore a habitat, clean up a beach, rally for clean air, protest a polluter, do write-in campaigns for environmental legislation, and so on.

**3. Green contributions and investments.** There are many local and national organizations, some faith-based and others secular, that are certainly worthy of support. Consider membership or regular contributions to such organizations. Also, there are many green mutual funds and green investment opportunities that haringer the future of an ecological age. Invest now!

## **5. Public Ministry/ Political Advocacy Reflection**

The church exists for the sake of the world. We diminish our understanding of the church and, more importantly, the work of God, if we limit the activity of God to the church. There has been a tendency to bifurcate the work of God into a spiritual/ religious realm separate from the rest of the world by divisions we make into distinct spheres of influence: religion and politics; church and state; Sunday and the rest of the week; the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of the world; spiritual and material; heaven and earth. All these separations tend to isolate and limit the activity of God to things that explicitly have to do with religion.

### **God's activity in the world.**

However, any study of Christianity will clarify that the focus of God's activity is the whole world. God is larger than church and religion. God is active in every place and every moment. Our image of God is crucial here. If we think God created the world and then separated from it, then we have limited the activity of God. If we think God has only to do with "spiritual" things or things related to the soul, then we have limited God. If we think that God is in heaven and we will encounter God only after death, then we have limited God. If we think God has only to do with religious matters and not matters of business or economics or government, then we have limited God. By contrast, if we imagine that God is in, with, and under all things and all events, then we know God to be immanently and intimately involved in working for good in all things. The work of God's creative activity continues to impinge on the world.

*The Work of God in the World.* The whole concept of the kingdom of God is based on this idea, namely: What would the world be like if God were the governing force? What love and justice would reign if the God who cares for the poor was the driving force behind human activity? What care would be taken for all of nature—human and non-human, living and non-living—if human beings followed the guidance of the Spirit of the one who created all things in the first place? God is concerned over wars and poverty and famine and oppression and rampant illnesses and disease and earthquakes and holocausts and loss of species and destruction of the fragile earth that has formed over billions of years. A theology of incarnation does not limit God's presence in the world to religious figures and religious movements and religious organizations. Rather, God is present and active in all places and at all times—not to *cause* and control all things but to *influence* the developments of life in the face of human aggression, human greed, and human resistance.

We also reduce the life and activity of God when we limit the work of God to the lives of individuals. To be sure, much of the power of Christianity as a religion has been to affirm that God cares infinitely for each individual. God has numbered the hairs on our head and cares for us as surely as God cares for each single sparrow. The transformation of individuals by conversion, by the encounter with grace, by the forgiveness of sins, by the healing of the body, by the renewal of the mind, by the infusion of love, by the empowerment for goodness and honesty, by the inspiration of the Spirit, by the awakening to hope, by the freedom from addictions, by the blessedness of peace—all

these have been the source of human renewal of individuals and those around them who are affected by their transformation. No one can take away from Christianity this attention to the life of the individual that has instilled people with freedom and a sense of meaning and purpose in life that promotes goodness rather than destructiveness.

At the same time, we do God and Christianity a disservice when we limit the activity of God to individuals. We have learned that institutions and structures too can be evil and destructive: governments can oppress, corporations can exploit, economic systems can generate a great division between the rich and the poor, narrow national loyalties can lead to wars and ethnic cleansing, religious bodies can engage in wars and purges and domination of people both inside and outside of their group, and conventional wisdom can discriminate and abuse women, people of different races, people of different sexual orientation, and people of different religions. Can we imagine for a moment that God is not concerned to transform such structures so as to rid exploitation and oppression and poverty and war? God is working to bend these structures toward justice and mercy. God is concerned for the larger issues of life. And God has called the church into existence to join in this work for the sake of this world.

Furthermore, we do God a disservice when we think that God is concerned only to save people for a life after death, as if this world were only a temporary place of pilgrimage preparing us for the real world in heaven. Such views have led people to ignore the problems we face in the world and to believe that God will save them out of the world, either when they die or when Jesus comes to rescue believers by some kind of rapture. However, there is nothing in the biblical materials that would lead us to think that God's commitment to offer humans eternal life keeps us from a concern for this world. Quite the contrary. It is precisely the promise of the gift of life and of eternal life that liberates us to give ourselves in the present to the care and redemption of all that God has created. It is the assurance of our ultimate fate that frees us to make sacrifices and to expend ourselves on behalf of others and on behalf of the Earth.

*Doing God's work in the world.* As a church, what we do is for the world. We seek to understand how God is working in the world and join that activity with our own actions. Our life together can be an alternative way of being in the world. And our lives can serve as leaven in the world to bring peace and justice, compassion and healing. When we convert others to our congregations, we bring them in to send them out again. Together, we can address many issues as individuals. But we are called also to address problems as institutions—to advocate for just laws and fair business practices and the preservation of wetlands and the cleanup of brownfields. These approaches represent the public ministry of the church—the church's commitment to act in the public realm to educate and advocate and act for a better world for all.

Some of these actions may include community organizing to protest some environmental condition—a plant that pollutes the air, a green area being lost to urban sprawl, the strip-logging of a local forest, the urging of an incinerator upon a neighborhood. Or the congregation may advocate for those most affected by these environmental degradations. Or the congregation may assist in urging some legislation be passed or defeated by sharing information about the issue and providing opportunities for members to express their opinion to the relevant legislators. Unless we oppose environmental degradation and urge environmental restoration at the corporate, legal, and

structural levels our efforts to join the work of God in the world will be limited and counterproductive—because inaction will only support the status quo. As congregations, we need to find ways to address these issues that are in consonance with our church polity and in ways that respect many different views in the congregation.

### **Ecological Justice**

In an article entitled “Whose Earth is it Anyway?” the prominent black theologian James Cone writes that “The fight for justice must be integrated with the fight for life in all its forms.” He notes the popular views that “Blacks don’t care about the environment” and that “White people care more about the endangered whale and the spotted owl than the survival of young blacks in our nation’s cities.” He adds, “What both groups fail to realize is how much they need each other in the struggle for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.”

This very dynamic is why the environmental movement often refers to itself as an “ecological justice” (eco-justice) movement—so that it becomes clear that environmental issues are inextricably tied up with issues of human justice. The reverse is also true. Issues of human justice invariably have a connection with our human degradation of the Earth. For example, in our economic system we treat both people and natural resources as commodities to be exploited for economic gain.

The Bible knows well this connection between human justice and the state of the land. When there was economic exploitation of the rich by the poor, Isaiah wrote, “The earth dries up and withers. The world languishes and withers. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants, for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the land” (Is 24:4-7; see also Joel 2:2-20).

*Environmental Racism.* A recent article in a local newspaper in Wisconsin ran the headline, “State’s blacks more likely to live in polluted areas.” The article explains that 47 percent of Wisconsin’s black population (compared to 13 percent of white population) lives in the 10 percent of neighborhoods where industrial air pollution poses the most risk to human health. Back in the early 1990s, a report for the United Church of Christ Racial Commission first exposed this type of pattern. In that report, the Reverend Ben Chavis first identified environmental discrimination as *environmental racism*. This report led to the 1991 National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit as an effort to bring national attention to these atrocities.

All this comes as no surprise to black people. Over the last decade, many reports have shown how toxic waste disposal sites, polluting power plants, industrial parks, and waste incinerators have systematically been placed in neighborhoods of poor people and, in particular, poor people of color. The article cited above says that “nationally, blacks are 79 percent more likely than any other ethnic group to live in polluted areas.” The pretext for this placement claims that factories and waste incinerators should go in the most depressed areas because they bring needed jobs. However, the jobs of construction or maintenance seldom end up with the local people, and in any case the negative health consequences (and costs) for the residents of these crowded neighborhoods far outweigh any economic benefits.

The NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) movement has exacerbated this problem. When toxic waste is being distributed and disposed, many middle-class groups, most often white groups, are well-organized in their efforts to keep toxic waste out of the suburbs and wealthy areas. This means that the waste ends up in poor urban or rural areas—communities that often lack grass roots environmental organizations and political clout. The result is that the decisions about where to dump toxic waste are made not on the basis of scientific evidence or fairness but on political grounds by those who have power. The social statement on “Caring for Creation” of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America recognizes these inequities when it states that “The degradation of the environment occurs where people have little or no voice in decisions—because of racial, gender, or economic discrimination.”

*Global eco-justice.* Air, land, and water pollution in local contexts is but the tip of the iceberg in the relationship between environmental degradation and human injustice. When we look worldwide, we find the same dynamic of environmental injustice taking place in every country in the world in relation to every ecological problem—global warming, depletion of the ozone layer, deforestation, loss of arable land to desert, over-population, and the proliferation of waste. Most of these global problems are due to the exploitation of people and nature that enables people in first world countries to maintain their high standard of living. It will serve us well in the United States to understand the dynamics of these problems and to diminish the ways we contribute to these injustices.

*Making eco-justice decisions/ taking action.* Congregations in every context, particularly those working in impoverished communities, along with ecumenical organizations and local ecological groups, can be challenged to identify these dynamics and to address them. Those dealing with the ethical dimensions of environmental decisions often name four norms for decisions that address eco-justice issues: *sustainability* (provide for long-range needs of humans and long-range preservation of nature); *sufficiency* (grant all forms of life the right to share in the goods of creation); *participation* (involve all people and represent all life forms in decisions that affect their well-being); and *solidarity* (recognize the kinship of all life forms and assist those who suffer most from environmental degradation).

All this emerges for us as Christians out of our faith commitment. However, neither the efforts to pursue human justice nor the commitment to care for creation are issues to be relegated only to a “social ministry committee” or a “green team.” They are not add-ons to some more fundamental Christian discipleship. Rather, both human justice and the care for creation are integral to the foundational human/Christian vocation to which God has called us in scripture—to listen to the “cry of the earth” even as we listen to the “cry of the poor.” We are called to love God, love our neighbors, and care for creation. Our faith leads us to see the face of Christ in every person and to see the glory of God in all creation. Earth community as a whole is to be treated with respect and reverence. And restoring earth community—inclusive of all and everything—is the mission of every congregation.

## **Making a Difference in the Public Realm**

Here are some things a congregation, as caring communities, can do to be active in public ministry and political advocacy on behalf of the environment.

- Learn about issues of ecological justice in the local, state, regional, national, and global levels.
- Learn about legal and policy issues on behalf of the environment in the local, state, national, and global arenas. Offer opportunities to express members' points of view to legislators by letter, petition, delegation, and letters to the editor.
- Find out about local issues of pollution, degradation of natural habitats, land use—and get involved. Join the advocacy for people most affected by these environmental issues.
- Become acquainted with other religious and secular environmental groups in your area. Seek partnerships and encourage members to participate in and support these groups.
- Join the movements in your city to become sustainable or green.
- Engage in hands-on services: restore a habitat, insulate lower-income homes, clean-up the neighborhood streets, plant trees, and so on.
- Work with other churches and faith communities to hold common forums on local issues and workshops for cooperative efforts to green churches.
- As church groups or religious schools, join local efforts to adopt a program of “Community Supported Agriculture.”
- Encourage public recognition for outstanding contributions.

## **Conclusion**

All this emerges for us as Christians out of our faith commitment. However, neither the efforts to pursue human justice nor the commitment to care for creation are issues to be relegated only to a “social ministry committee” or a “green team.” They are not add-ons to some more fundamental Christian discipleship. Rather, both human justice and the care for creation are integral to the foundational human/Christian vocation to which God has called us in scripture—to listen to the “cry of the earth” even as we listen to the “cry of the poor.” We are called to love God, love our neighbors, and care for creation. Our faith leads us to see the face of Christ in every person and to see the glory of God in all creation. Earth community as a whole is to be treated with respect and reverence. And restoring earth community—inclusive of all and everything—is the mission of every congregation.

In fact, “the pursuit of ecological justice” may be the most adequate way to express the mission of a congregation. Such a goal encompasses both the quest for human justice and the commitment to care for Earth. It emphasizes the sense of justice and care for creation both within the congregation and in the congregation's mission in the world. It affirms the importance of taking the well-being of people and nature into consideration in all decisions, practices, and actions. It encourages every governing group, each committee, all those responsible for the building and grounds, and all planners of events to take into account the ethical/eco-justice implications of the life of the congregation. In this way, we can fulfill the dictum that “the church exists for the sake of the world.”

## **5. Public Ministry/ Political Advocacy Action Plan**

**Policy:** We seek to change the systems that foster the degradation of creation and to rectify the injustices that result from it. And we seek to alert our members to environmental legislation that protects creation and to encourage their active participation in the development of public policy. We encourage members to participate in civic activities that foster environmental health. We seek to let our care for creation be known to others.

**People:** pastors and lay professionals, social ministry committees, directors of publicity, evangelism committees, all members.

**Goals:** To promote eco-justice and care for creation beyond the walls of the church through hands-on involvement, political advocacy, publicity, conferences, websites, and publications.

**Actions:** Here are some suggested actions to take to fulfill these commitments:

### **A. Ecological justice in local, regional, national, and global issues**

**1. Learn about the public issues:** Use classes, forums, and newsletters to educate people about ecological justice issues at all levels. Engage speakers, panels, workshops, and readings to promote knowledge of environmental concerns. Seek to expose members to the social justice issues involved in environmental degradation. Familiarize people with the major environmental legislation and policies at the various levels of government. Do these on a regular basis to keep the concerns before the community.

**2. Learn about the legislation.** Familiarize people with environmental legislation and policies at the various levels of government. Teach people the mechanisms and procedures to participate in the governmental process and exercise influence.

### **B. Political Advocacy**

**1. Action alerts:** Provide a mechanism whereby members can sign up to receive e-mail action alerts regarding environmental and ecological justice issues with a suggested letter and the appropriate legislators to contact. These can also be promoted through the congregation website or newsletter, or by sign-up sheets in the narthex.

**2. Petitions:** Where appropriate, circulate petitions that support legislative actions and policies friendly to the earth. Provide a letter writing table during coffee hour for people to take the opportunity to urge legislative action.

**3. Local actions:** There may be local issues that arise in the community or city in which your congregation is located. Members can get hands-on experience with community organizers dedicated to resist an action by the government or a corporation that degrades the environment and that poses a threat to human health and well-being.

**4. Eco-friendly Voting:** There are many ways in which the congregation can provide information on the environmental records of candidates for public office and about pros and cons of referenda being voted on by the public. The League of Conservation Voters (at the national and local levels) is especially helpful in providing information on eco-justice issues and concerns that may assist members of Green Congregations in their voting decisions.

League of Conservation Voters [[www.lcv.org](http://www.lcv.org)]

## **B. Promote care for creation in your community/city.**

**1. Publicity:** Promote your commitment to care for creation through parish brochures, a section on the congregational website, and articles and reports in the parish newsletter. It will help to have a name and identity that generate interest, conversation, and perhaps duplicates your commitment to green your congregation.

**2. Public events:** Hold conferences and sponsor speakers who draw local pastors, members of other congregations, and members of the larger community in which the congregation is located. If you have an annual lecture or renewal or theological conference at your congregation, consider making care for creation the focus. Public workshops might focus on political issues or greening the congregation or making your home earth-friendly or greening businesses. Partner with other environmental organizations in planning such a workshop.

**3. Displays:** Sponsor a display of photographs or art depicting the impacts of global warming or portraying some human conditions resulting from our impact on the environment.

**4. Publications/guidebooks:** where there are interested members, prepare workbooks and guides for the greening of congregations. Take turns writing articles or letters for the local paper.

**5. Multiply your impact:** Consider partnering with one or more other churches in the process of greening. Or adopt another church as a way to assist them in initiating the greening process.

## **C. Network and cooperate:**

**1. Partner with other groups.** Locate the environmental organizations in your area, either national ones or local community organizing groups. Network with them, engage them as speakers, cooperate with them to provide hands-on experience for parish members, and arrange to partner with them in sponsoring a speaker or conference.

**2. Fair Trade products and Community Supported Agriculture.** Purchase fair trade products where they are available such as products that are produced under good ecological conditions, that come with a commitment to give fair wages, and that seek to reduce the role of “middle-men.” Also, as a congregation, manage food needs as church or religious school with “Community Supported Agriculture”—so as to minimize transportation and to support local farmers, especially those growing organic food.

List of Farmers' Market by state: [[www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/map.htm](http://www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/map.htm)]  
Community Supported Agriculture info: [<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/csa/>]

**3. Offer support:** Let other organizations know what you are doing and ask how you might participate in *their* mission.

**4. Recognize outstanding efforts.** Cooperate with other environmental organizations to give public honor to those folks in your community or your congregation who show special commitment and efforts on behalf of the Earth.

#### **D. Green the Investment Portfolio.**

**1. Invest in the future of Earth community.** Urge the endowment committee to invest your congregational endowment and other funds in social justice funds that include environmentally sound corporations and companies that serve the environment as their business. Many mutual funds and agencies now specialize in environmentally oriented investments.