



# Lutherans Restoring Creation

## Training Manual for Congregations

2010 Edition

*Sponsored by  
Lutherans Restoring Creation  
([www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org](http://www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org))*

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Lutherans Restoring Creation offers on-line environmental resources for Lutheran communities. The site is centered at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. The website staff will provide guidance and resources for congregations ([www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org](http://www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org)). Many more resources are available online than can be put into a manual. And new ideas and suggestions are regularly featured online. See our companion site, the Web of Creation at [www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org).

## **“Lutherans Restoring Creation” A Program for Lutherans of the ELCA**

LRC is a grass-roots program designed to encourage the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to incorporate care for creation into its full life and mission at all levels. LRC is inviting the ELCA to become partners in these efforts at the congregational, synodical, seminary, and national levels. The goal is to incorporate care for creation into the organizational patterns, worship life, educational programs, responsibility for buildings and grounds, lifestyle of members at home and work, and public ministry of all these institutions—so that Earth-keeping and justice for all Earth community becomes integral to the identity and purpose of our church.

LRC replaces the Lutheran Earthkeeping Network of the Synods (LENS), an independent, voluntary faith-based network that was devoted to bringing care of creation into the life and mission of the ELCA. It was founded in 1997. LENS held retreats and workshops, prepared resource materials for congregations, advocated for earth-friendly laws and policies, and maintained a web site at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago hosted by the Web of Creation, an ecumenical organization providing environmental resources online for faith communities. At this time, LRC is guided by a steering committee and other committed persons serving as consultants. See the LRC website for a list of current members.

LRC believes that we Lutherans are uniquely positioned to offer leadership in the movement to restore creation, based on: a strong theology of creation, a sacramental theology that discerns the incarnation of the divine in all of life, a theology of the cross that leads

us to identify with the most vulnerable, a situational ethic that enables us to respond creatively to new challenges, an ecclesiology which says that the church exists for the sake of the world, a tradition of commitment to social ministry and policy advocacy for justice, an understanding of justification that empowers us to act out of gratitude and grace, and our affirmation of a future that is in God’s hands.

Furthermore, we Lutherans have a long history of social service to and advocacy for the poor, the elderly, the sick, the oppressed, and the marginalized, through hospitals, homes for the elderly, Lutheran Immigration Service, Lutheran World Relief, and on and on. As a church, we have already begun to extend that commitment to protecting and healing all Earth community. Bishop Hanson has issued statements about our commitment to care for creation. There are creation-care resources on the ELCA website. The ELCA has a full-time person in environmental/hunger advocacy issues in Washington. Lutheran Public Policy offices address issues of environmental-justice. The ELCA offers grants for environmental projects.

Much is already in process in many congregations, within ELCA synods, and among seminaries. Lutherans have spearheaded the Green Congregation Program, the Green Seminary Initiative, and the resources on the Web of Creation ([www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org)). We have led the way in promoting a Season of Creation in the church year ([www.seasonofcreation.com](http://www.seasonofcreation.com)). There are many Lutheran scholars representing diverse disciplines who have written on care of the Earth for church and academia.

LRC believes it is time now to step up and respond in comprehensive and holistic ways to the environmental justice challenges facing humanity in our time. Our purpose is to partner with synods, congregations, seminaries, and ELCA’s headquarters to develop viable

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programs in “restoring creation.” Here are some components of the program we envision:

1. We invite congregations to integrate creation-care into communal life of the congregation and into the lives of members at home and work
2. We invite synods to develop ongoing efforts to foster creation-care in leadership conferences and training workshops and to promote LRC in their congregations.
3. We invite seminaries and colleges to prepare leaders for church and society committed to ecological justice.
4. We urge the ELCA church-wide offices and the Conference of Bishops to consider ways in which they can model creation-care for the whole church.

The LRC commitment is:

1. To provide a programmatic framework whereby congregations, synods, and seminaries might develop programs and actions in ecological justice for their context.
2. To promote LRC across the church, develop a nationwide registration program, keep track of what participant groups are doing, and assess results.
3. To offer ready resources for diverse communities and contexts in areas of worship, education and curriculum, property maintenance, discipleship at home and work, and public ministry/political advocacy.
4. To encourage partners to be creative in their efforts and to provide networking places where people can share the methods and fruits of their labor—for mutual instruction and inspiration.
5. To identify and provide resources in Bible, theology, ethics, and ministry as means to undergird our common efforts with strong Lutheran theological foundations.

Lutherans Restoring Creation hopes to expand significantly the number of ELCA congregations actively engaged in care for creation and to register them in this program. The program also hopes to increase the number of “Green Synods” within the ELCA so as to provide leadership and training for the LRC congregational program. LRC hopes to have a number of ELCA Seminaries as partners in the endeavor to train church leaders in environmental ministry.

Lutherans Restoring Creation seeks to help congregations and other institutions of the church to reduce their carbon footprint, utilize the Season of Creation resources for worship, study the ELCA social statement on *Caring for Creation*, share information from the ELCA advocacy program, embrace models for congregations to address issues of ecology and justice in the communities in which they are located, and engage Lutherans to embrace care for creation at home and work. Creativity, initiative, and openness to the leading of the Spirit will be important ingredients in the program.

This program is supported by a grant from the Lutheran Community Foundation, a faith-based community foundation working nationally to help people give where they find their strongest connections. To learn more about the Foundation, please visit [www.TheLCF.org](http://www.TheLCF.org).

## **Introduction to the Manual**

We believe Earth is in trouble—from global climate change, the pollution of air, land, and water, the loss of species habitat and diversity, a deteriorating ozone layer, population expanding at an exponential level, and much more. Those of us in communities of faith do not so much approach these problems as “environmentalists” as we do people who are motivated by our love of God the creator and our love for God’s creation. We believe that the degraded ecological state of the world is in part a spiritual problem rooted in our modern Western/Northern separation and alienation from the rest of nature. We affirm that our common ecological problems need to be addressed not only with new technologies, foundational changes in our systems, alternative cultural beliefs, and massive changes of behavior but also with a “conversion to Earth,” a turn toward a love of Earth and of Earth-community that will serve as the basis for a new world of sustainable living. We will not restore what we do not love. Therefore, in this program, we seek to take a holistic approach to Earth-care.

As people of faith, we also believe that the most vulnerable among us are and will be affected the most by ecological degradation—the poor, the oppressed, people of color, people in third world countries, the elderly, the sick, those with disabilities, among others. Generally speaking, the vulnerable contribute the least to ecological degradation and also have the least resources to cope with the consequences. Vulnerable individuals and communities are affected by ecological injustice and exploitation of people and nature. We have seen it clearly in the patterns of environmental racism, in the human impacts of global climate change on melting ice and weather systems, and in such specific events as hurricane Katrina and the massive Gulf oil spill of 2010. Those of

us in more secure positions must avoid the temptation simply to save ourselves. Instead, out of a basic humanitarian commitment to justice and compassion, and as people of faith, we must all make every effort to reach out to those most devastated by ecological degradation.

Many denominations are engaged in commitments and actions to care for all Earth community. Lutherans also are participating in this movement: congregations are establishing care-for-creation teams; synods are holding professional leadership conferences on ecological justice; public policy offices are advocating for Earth-protective laws; seminaries are incorporating theologies of nature into their curricula; colleges are reducing their carbon footprint; camps are fostering transformative experiences with nature; individual members are seeking Earth-friendly lifestyles; and relief agencies are helping those affected by ecological disasters. Now is the time for the ELCA to celebrate these advances and to promote care for creation among all people and institutions in our fold.

LRC offers resources, training events, and networking opportunities that encourage and empower the ELCA to embrace creation-care. It is our LRC mission to provide resources that may be accessible to any community. We recommend resources/actions that cost little or nothing (and that may save money) as well as resources/actions that take little effort in the short term and that are effective. And we suggest projects that also involve greater time and effort and that may have the greatest impact.

LRC is meant to be generative. The structure and suggestions of the program are not to be seen as a top-down, rigid set of steps. Rather, they are intended to offer helpful ways to organize the material and promote a holistic approach. Our goal is to offer many different resources for you to choose from—given your

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commitments, circumstances, and situation. *Do not be overwhelmed by the number of choices.* Do not be overburdened into discouragement or fatigue. Simply work with some projects that are productive or have the best chance to succeed or for which there is energy. Then come back again and again to the manual and the website for more ideas. Our suggestions are also meant to stimulate you to generate and to develop new programs and projects, fresh approaches and actions, innovative insights and commitments, in your personal and communal efforts to care for creation.

We also encourage you to be visionary, to operate out a holistic vision of the future in relation to your faith community. We seek to hear God's call to "imagine the world anew"! Imagine what your community might be like, say thirty years from now, when care for creation is fully integrated into the life of your congregation—worship, educational programs, care of building and grounds, best practices of your congregation in all events, lifestyle of members at home and work, your commitment to public ministry in the larger community in which your congregation is located, and your public policy advocacy in public arenas of life. Then begin to go about working to enact that vision *in the present*. Such efforts need endurance and occasional new starts. You will reach certain plateaus and thresholds; and there will be occasional backward steps. You may need help going forward. To address these higher levels, we have included sections for "Renewing Your Efforts" and "Taking it to the Next Level."

As you will see, the vision of greening your congregation is deep and profound. The goal is nothing less than changing the ethos of your congregation so that care for creation becomes integral to the full identity and mission of your faith community. Care for creation is not an add-on, not a matter of doing a few things designed to make us look green, not the activities of one more

committee, not things we do only when we can afford to do them or when we have done everything else. Rather care for all Earth community belongs to the whole congregation such that all take ownership for it. The role of a care-for-creation team therefore is to be a *catalyst* to engage all committees and all members in this endeavor. "Greening" is thus not a veneer or a coating of practices, not a superficial green-washing of the congregation, but a *deep soaking penetration*—an embrace of new understandings of faith, fresh practices of worship, deep and enduring commitments to care for creation, changes of habit, and the willingness to sacrifice for Earth community in order to make it happen.

We wish you the best in your venture to care for creation. We stand ready to be helpful in ways that promote your efforts. For new ideas and more extensive resources, please consult our LRC website ([www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org](http://www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org)) and our sister ecumenical website the Web of Creation ([www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org)). You will find directions there to report your activities and to share your ideas, suggestions, and requests.

## **PART I—GETTING STARTED**

### **The Overall Plan**

These materials are designed to train a small group of lay people and clergy to bring care for creation into the life and mission of your congregation. You may want to follow the steps suggested and the principles recommended. The following points represent steps to becoming an LRC Congregation.

1. Gather a small group of interested people (2 to 8) to serve as an LRC green team.
2. Choose a name: LRC/ Green Team, Creation-Care Committee, Earth-Keeping Team.
3. Become familiar with the LRC Congregational program.
4. Inform/involve the pastor(s)/staff as to your interest and commitment.
5. Engage the leaders of your congregation to build allies and support moving. If need be, request authorization to go forward.
6. Seek to engage the whole congregation (see suggestions below).
7. Develop an Action Plan for the congregation in five areas.
  - a) Worship
  - b) Education
  - c) Building and Grounds
  - d) Discipleship at Home and Work
  - e) Public Ministry/ Policy Advocacy
8. Make suggestions/give resources to appropriate committees to carry out the Action Plan. Support those committees in carrying out Action Plan.
9. Promote with members your identity as a congregation that cares for creation.
10. Meet regularly (monthly) to follow the Action Plan and to develop new projects.
11. Consider a congregation project to benefit the community/city of location. Seek out community leaders already working on eco-justice, particularly the vulnerable.
12. Find structural ways to assure the ongoing life and activities of the LRC Team.
13. Plan for opportunities of “spiritual renewal” to empower and sustain your work.

In what follows, you will find many resources and suggestions for taking each of these steps. We encourage you and members of your LRC Team to read the manual through one time and to do so each year in your work. More resources are available at [www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org](http://www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org) and [www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org).

## **Lutherans Restoring Creation Program**

### **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, most particularly the elderly, the impoverished, people of color, and those in two-thirds 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 Lutherans Restoring Creation 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 your 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 in all that the congregation does.
- b. To make a difference as individuals and as faith communities.

### **4. What is the function and role of the LRC Care-for-creation Team?**

- a. An LRC Team is a catalyst in the congregation for the transformation of the congregation to care for creation.
- b. An LRC Team serves as leaven to promote care for creation in every part of the life and mission of the congregation.

### **5. How does the LRC Team work?**

- a. Share concern for environmental justice, explain the program, and invite dialogue about ideas and concerns.
- b. Approach the church leaders as allies for support and authority to proceed
- c. Seek to make care for creation part of the task of all committees, activities, staff tasks, and decisions.
- d. Promote care for creation as part of the ethos of the congregation.
- e. Listen to concerns and be pro-active in fostering open communication.

### **6. How does the LRC Team make a plan of action and set up 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/ advocacy).
- b. Make a plan to implement each project. Identify the committee or group you think will be responsible for the project, and take steps to promote it.
- c. Seek ways to maintain each change for the long term.

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## Task Descriptions for the Congregation

### *Initiating Group*

- ✓ Sets up an LRC Team
- ✓ Takes the LRC plan to the council

### *Contact Person*

- ✓ LRC Team leader as congregational liaison to the church council

### *Church Council*

- ✓ Authorizes the LRC Team to proceed
- ✓ Provides council and support for the LRC action plan

### *LRC Team*

- ✓ Engages the whole congregation; keeps them informed
- ✓ Brings ideas and resources to the appropriate committees/people for action
- ✓ Follows through on action plans
- ✓ Assesses the results and is responsible for accountability

### *Standing Committees of the Congregation*

- ✓ Participates in projects for “greening” the congregation
- ✓ Where feasible, adopts plans recommended by the LRC Team

### *Pastor(s) / Lay Professionals*

- ✓ Support the LRC team and the LRC Program
- ✓ Promote creation-care in preaching, teaching, and leadership roles
- ✓ 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 LRC Program
- ✓ Work with the LRC Team to suggest and carry out projects

### *Whole Congregation*

- ✓ Embrace the LRC Program
- ✓ Discuss the merits of the LRC program, especially in relation to your congregation
- ✓ Participate in plans and projects as appropriate at church.
- ✓ Embrace care for creation as appropriate at home and work

### *The Lutherans Restoring Creation Program*

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

- ✓ Provide resource materials
- ✓ Provide an opportunity to share reports
- ✓ Provide networking opportunities with other congregations.

## 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 congregation is related to the degradations of the eco-systems 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 LRC Team meetings, include a brief educational/ devotional component that centers everyone to their larger purposes in meeting.

**You are not alone.** Efforts by Lutherans are part of a larger ecclesial movement to incorporate care for creation into the life and mission of the church, including other mainline denominations. There are many religious faiths working for the environment, such as 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

**Double your commitment to human justice.** Every ecological problem affects the human community, usually having the greatest impact on the most vulnerable—impoverished people, people of color, two-thirds 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. Engage the voices of the most vulnerable as part of your planning. As you plan eco-justice activities, ask: How does this further the care for *all* or creation?

**Keep the immediate goal in mind.** The primary goal is to transform the life and mission of the congregation so that care for creation is incorporated into every aspect of the congregation. *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 and mission 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 from which 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 straightforward without being alarmist. Do not become the environmental police. Avoid raging against the powers that be. At the same time, we should not minimize ecological problems, 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.*

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**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. Some may have a commitment to simple living. There are likely folks deeply passionate about issues of racism, poverty, labor rights, and social justice, folks who probably already see the connection of these issues to ecology. Some may write letters to their representatives about environmental issues. There may or may not be a lot of people willing to jump in and take a leadership role in getting the congregation involved. However, 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 to initiate some of these efforts in the parish, or you may wish to seek out others in the congregation 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, that is all to 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 to 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.

**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.

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**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 church council. 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 know of their work and to 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. Share your activities with the whole congregation through announcements, newsletter articles, and bulletin boards.

**The strategy of the LRC Team 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 and mission 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 cast in a wide vision.* 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. 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 congregation. You may want to promote care for creation-care 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.*

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**Make an asset of 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 and active. 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. As the congregation grows, make care for creation part of the training for new members. A brochure may help in this endeavor. *If the 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:

- ✓ An informational 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, St. Francis Day (October 2)
- ✓ Open committee meetings with an educational component
- ✓ Adult forums for the community with guest speakers familiar with your approach
- ✓ An event with the youth, with the men's or the women's group, or with 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 close relationship 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 LRC Team.** It might include items such as:

- ✓ Work to green every aspect of the life of the congregation
- ✓ Prepare an action plan and carry out the plan
- ✓ Network and cooperate with the offices and programs of the congregation
- ✓ Organize and sponsor meetings, lectures, workshops
- ✓ Promote care for creation among the members in their homes and work
- ✓ Identify with the priorities of the most vulnerable in your community

Update the description each year.

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**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, or a brochure. Even if fewer people are involved than you hope, the whole community knows what is happening.

**Educate.** 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 the ELCA social statement *Caring for Creation*.
- ✓ Look at the local church resource center or church press catalogues for curriculum on caring for creation (See the LRC listing for youth and adults).
- ✓ Watch an ELCA video available for an educational series: *Earthbound*.
- ✓ Get speakers from local high schools or colleges who have expertise in environmental issues.
- ✓ Get known speakers from local community agencies that deal with eco-justice issues.
- ✓ Do a series of case studies on the environment.
- ✓ Identify other churches in the area that 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 suggest 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 camp or retreat center in the countryside. The retreat might include:

- ✓ discussion of people's concerns and experiences;
- ✓ time for prayer on what God calls you to do
- ✓ time out of doors for meditation or a nature walk
- ✓ 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.

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; 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 green team to develop environmental ministry.

**Survey.** Do a survey of the congregation or a process of “listening” in order 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 what projects they would like the congregation to embrace. From the responses, plan an event to share the results of the survey and to set a direction for the group and the congregation.

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**Keep 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 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 embracing care for creation.* Find a way to announce it and claim it. This is a Lutherans Restoring Creation (LRC) Congregation. You may prefer Green Congregation, Eco-Justice Center, Care for Creation Congregation, Healing Center, and so on. Draw on the symbols and ideas from your own congregational and Lutheran tradition. Use the logo on the LRC website (contact the site manager). It might help to call it a “team” (such as LRC Team or a Green Team) or The Eco-justice Working Group or The Creation-Care Initiative) rather than a “committee”—as a means to emphasize the idea that it is not one committee among many but a catalyst for all the committees and programs.

**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 a local funding agency that offers grants to churches. 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 fund raiser you embrace furthers the environmental efforts, such as selling compact fluorescent light bulbs or fair trade products.

**Submit a report to the LRC Program** at [www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org](http://www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org). *Making a report and keeping it updated will give focus to your efforts. Your achievements will also give publicity and a boost to the efforts.* And there will be incentive to develop ongoing plans as means to maintain the identity and success of your efforts.

**Be evangelical.** Prospective members who learn about your environmental activities and the greening of your congregation 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 fifty 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, an ethos that empowers you to generate personal and institutional commitments that were not otherwise possible. In all of this, continue to lift up the need for ongoing prayer and openness to the Spirit's call to help inform, inspire, and sustain your vision and efforts.

## **Giving your Congregation a Creation-Care Identity!**

The LRC Team can use many ongoing means to foster an ethos of caring for creation.

**Naming the congregation as a place to care for creation.** Give yourselves an identity as a “Lutherans Restoring Creation” congregation, a place where people will care for creation.

**Select a name for your LRC committee.** Choose a name best suited to your congregation: LRC Team; Green Team; Eco-Justice Committee; Environmental Ministry Committee; Creation-Care Committee; Earth Care Committee; Earthkeeping Team.

**Choosing a symbol.** 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; or make use of the LRC logo. The symbols you choose may come from the Bible or from the Lutheran tradition or from the bio-region or from nature itself.

**A public symbol.** 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: community garden; orchard; a rain garden; wind turbine; solar panels; plants in the sanctuary; environmental art.

**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 a framed certificate, a printed announcement/sign, or a plaque.

**Church communications.** 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. The ELCA Caring for Creation social statement has been divided into fifty-two segments to include in weekly bulletins (available on the LRC website under education). Regular newsletter articles or blurbs could include such items as facts about the environment, sayings and proverbs about your commitment, reference to local, regional, national or global opportunities for advocacy, efforts that has been made to restore and protect the environment, personal testimonies of “Why I care about Earthkeeping,” or 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 masthead for your newsletter. If you have the congregation on an e-mail list-serve and bulletin board.

**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. Even a simple sentence, in the right place, can help to convey this. Including creation care in your documents of purpose serves to promote 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.

## **Eight 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 get the entire congregation engaged in caring for creation.

### **Prayer and Bible Study**

For discernment and the leading of the Spirit, begin and end your conversations and decisions by entering into prayer. In relation to care for creation, pray for your congregation, for your community and for the world. Gather participants around relevant scripture passages. Identify passages that resonate with your community. A farming community may connect with creation stories. Communities close to wilderness or desert may seek Job. Inner city congregations may look to the New Jerusalem in Revelation. All worshipping communities can relate to Psalm 104. In all your deliberations, stay rooted in the good news of the gospel.

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

A small group or the church council may want to brainstorm about what your particular congregation might do to care for Earth. It might help to work with a model or list of ideas as a basis for suggesting possibilities. The idea or ideas might be presented to the church council for approval and delegation of tasks to carry the initiative 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 would be helpful 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 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. We recommend the six-week series, *Earthbound*, produced by the ELCA and designed for use by congregations to explore the theological and moral foundations for Earth care. Another possibility is the 4-6 week *Awakening to God's Call to Earthkeeping* ELCA small group curriculum. From the group engaged in this program, there might emerge a core group of people eager to take leadership in enabling more to happen.

### **Strategy Three: Listening and Consensus as a Basis for Action**

Develop a process for a small group to have one-to-one listening relationships with members of the congregation in order 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 what projects they would like the congregation to embrace. From the responses, plan an event to share the results of the “listening” and to set a direction for the group and the congregation.

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## Strategy Four: Action Based on Need

This is an approach that assesses the needs. The idea is to identify the need and then marshal the congregation and its members to address the problem. Here the congregation can look identify needs 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-funds” 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 polluted by runoff pesticides. The parish can provide leadership in community organizing to address these problems.
- ✓ *State and 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 advocate for certain actions or legislation. This can also be true for other issues (e.g. smog, ozone, water conservation, logging, etc.)
- ✓ *Global:* The effects of global climate change 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 climate change and related problems. There may be a desire to learn more about international conferences or treaties and to urge our government to participate in them.

## Strategy Five: 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 features 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 Six: Action Based on Congregational Assets

This approach draws upon the assets of the congregation. Instead of trying to identify needs and seeing 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, and then to develop ways to move forward making use of these assets.

You will find many people already committed to care for Earth in a variety of ways—people who read about environmental issues, people who are recycling or composting as an expression of their commitment, people engaged in social justice that are deeply entwined with creation-care, or people who are concerned about the issue but are not sure how to 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 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.

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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. It 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, eco-purchases, and so on.
- ✓ 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 a Christian?
- ✓ Would you be willing to meet and explore what our congregation 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 Seven: 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 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 that 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 worship life
- ✓ Circulate a petition supporting efforts to address global climate change

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

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## Strategy Eight: Join Forces

You may want to proceed by joining up with folks from a nearby congregation 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 congregation. A project in the community, such as habitat restoration or opposition to the construction of 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 to 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. There will be obstacles along the way, which we hope that you are able to translate these into challenges or that you will find shift gears and discover new directions. The goal is to find ways to keep moving forward together toward an integration of care for creation into the full life and mission of your congregation.

## PART II—THE ACTION PLAN

### Introduction to the Action Plan

Now you are about to embark on a plan to bring care for creation into the life and mission of your congregation. There are many more resources here and on the website than you will use ([www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org](http://www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org) and [www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org)). This is not a top-down or a cookie cutter program. Rather, it is meant to be generative of ideas and actions. On the one hand, we seek to provide many resources for you, so that you do not need to reinvent the wheel. Please choose from them and adapt them to your situation. On the other hand, our hope is that these ideas will stimulate you to think of fresh approaches and to develop further resources out of your creativity and situation—and in turn report them to us so that we can share them with others. We seek to partner with you in bringing care for creation into the life of your congregation.

#### A. Make Firm the Foundation

*In all that we do, we seek to engage this effort as a response to the grace of God manifested throughout creation, in the person of Jesus, and in communion with the Holy Spirit – knowing that it is ultimately God’s creative and redemptive love for creation that prompts us and sustains us in this work.*

—Excerpt from the LRC Vision Statement

The changes that we make, or even the ability to recognize what changes we *should* make, will flow out of our “response to the grace of God.” Taking time for prayer, and spiritual practices or personal devotional time, is vital to awakening, empowering, and sustaining our efforts in caring for creation.

#### B. The Importance of Working with a Holistic Model

In embracing care of 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 integrate concern for creation into all the other important aspects of parish life.

The pages that follow represent one possible model. As we have shown, the model has five areas for

transformation: (1) worship; (2) education; (3) building and grounds; (4) lifestyle of members at home and work; and (5) public ministry/ policy advocacy. 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. 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 that people bring to the task for that year.

#### C. Be Visionary

The key to a greening the congregation 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

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loved and celebrated. Insofar as we are able to do that, we establish pockets of the kingdom now.

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 first 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, create 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.

## D. Levels of Action

It may be helpful to think of actions and projects at different levels. Resources for all suggestions are available on the LRC website.

***Level 1: Here are some examples of actions that require little or no cost and can be done in a short time period. These can be done quickly with little effort.***

- ✓ Arrange for creation-care petitions to be included in the prayers at worship throughout the three-year common lectionary. (see Worship)
- ✓ Arrange for a personal covenant with creation to be distributed to members at worship, perhaps with a brief ritual of dedication. Materials are available. (Lifestyle)
- ✓ Arrange to place creation-care messages in the weekly bulletins. These are already prepared for you to send electronically to the person who does the bulletins. (Education)
- ✓ Work through the comprehensive “environmental checklist for congregations” with the chairperson or

the members of the property committee as means to determine what has been done and what subsequent actions might be taken. (Building and Grounds)

- ✓ Where available, arrange with the local energy company for a free energy audit. (Building and grounds)
- ✓ Publicize creation-care devotional resources with members for personal use. (Lifestyle)
- ✓ Promote organic products or commit to the purchase of local food or agree to have a vegetarian meal each week as a means to reduce carbon impact. (Lifestyle)
- ✓ Get information about local environmental projects and publicize them. Identify and promote the priorities of local communities engaged in justice work that is explicitly or implicitly ecological. (Public Ministry)
- ✓ Learn about the ELCA advocacy programs and get names of people who want to receive environmental action-alerts regarding national legislation, public policies, and local issues. (Advocacy)

***Level 2: Here are some examples of actions that involve a short time period, such as three to six months, and may involve some limited financial expenditure.***

- ✓ Make plans to observe the Season of Creation for four weeks in the church year. Liturgies, lessons, and suggestions for celebration are available online. (Worship)
- ✓ Develop your property with a community garden or establish a section as prairie or some other native, natural habitat. (Building and Grounds).
- ✓ Engage your educational program to see and discuss the ELCA six-part video series “Earthbound.” (Education)

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- ✓ Hold a retreat with families of the congregation focusing on our relationship with nature. Invite a naturalist to guide you. (Education)
- ✓ Hold a workshop for members on how to green your home or apartment. (Lifestyle)
- ✓ Recruit members of your congregation to receive action alerts from the ELCA advocacy office and from your ELCA state public policy office. (Public Policy Advocacy).
- ✓ Change overall purchasing practices—paper, cleaning products, food—to reflect care for creation. (Building and Grounds)

***Level 3: Here are examples of some actions that may take a longer period, perhaps several years, and might involve substantial expenditure of funds.***

- ✓ Energy challenge: Set a goal and reduce the carbon footprint of your congregation in five or ten years, by 25% to 40%. (Building and Grounds)
- ✓ Set a goal and reduce the carbon footprint of your members in five years by 25% to 50%. Work together and help each other out to meet these goals. (Lifestyle)
- ✓ So transform your worship life, the sanctuary, and the ecological practices around creation-care in worship such that anyone worshipping with you would know your commitments. (Worship)
- ✓ Plan, organize, and enlist 60 to 80 % of your members to be involved in a session in which they read and study the ELCA social statement “Caring for Creation,” perhaps meeting in small groups. (Education)
- ✓ Recruit and mentor another congregation in becoming an LRC green congregation. (Public Ministry)
- ✓ Plan a care-for-creation emphasis for each month with information, congregational actions, and

personal actions—around such issues as water conservation, reduction of energy use, transportation, change of eating habits, and so on. (Education)

- ✓ Plant a tree for every ten members of your congregation. (Building and Grounds).

We encourage you to make a 2-2-2 plan: two commitments for action from each level. Or plan things that can be done in 2 weeks, things that can be done in 2 months, and things that can be done in 2 years. Then affirm and renew the plan on a quarterly basis.

## E. Sustainability

In all of the actions you take, seek to promote sustainability. Sustainability is the effort to live in such a way that Earth will be passed on to the next generations in ways that will enable stable and positive life-patterns to endure. Sustainability is a complex issue. Nevertheless, speaking generally, it can be seen in simple terms. Sustainable living has often been compared to a three legged stool. We would add a fourth leg in order to give the stool even more stability. In every action and project you undertake, ask yourself: What can we do and how can we do it so as to promote:

- ✓ ecological sustainability (Is it Earth-friendly?)
- ✓ economic sustainability (Does it support a just sharing of life’s resources?)
- ✓ social sustainability (Does it create and strengthen community?)
- ✓ religious sustainability (Does it deepen our faith?).

These considerations will not only promote sustainability; they will also enable your efforts to have the greatest impact. 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 and great grandchildren by acting so as to sustain life, restore nature, and build hope that the natural world will support those who come after us. What we do and how we do it are of utmost importance.

## Lutherans Restoring Creation 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”

- ✓ Incorporate earth-keeping confessions, intercessory prayers, hymns, and sermons into weekly worship throughout the year.
- ✓ Observe a four-week *Season of Creation* as part of the church year, with liturgies, sermons, and alternative scripture lessons [[www.seasonofcreation.com](http://www.seasonofcreation.com)]
- ✓ Consider using the ELCA Lenten series *Creation Waits with Eager Longing* [[www.elca.org/caringforcreation](http://www.elca.org/caringforcreation)]
- ✓ Observe an Earth Day Sunday in April [[www.nccecojustice.org](http://www.nccecojustice.org)]
- ✓ Have a Blessing of the Animals. See examples on the LRC website.
- ✓ Appoint the sanctuary with care for creation banners, greenery, and art.

### 2. Transformation through Education: “Know your traditions and your world”

- ✓ Study the ELCA Social Statements with guide.
- ✓ See the six part ELCA video series called *Earthbound*.
- ✓ Use the ELCA curriculum, *Awakening to God’s Call to Earthkeeping* [[www.elca.org/caringforcreation](http://www.elca.org/caringforcreation)].
- ✓ Forums with local experts on environmental issues and resources
- ✓ Use resources from the Northwest Earth Institute for small groups [[www.nei.org](http://www.nei.org)].

### 3. Building and Grounds: “The church as an alternative community”

- ✓ Work with the Lutheran Climate Change Coalition to reduce carbon footprint.
- ✓ Carry out a comprehensive environmental inventory with the manual *Environmental Guide for Churches, Their Buildings and Grounds*.
- ✓ Go over the four-page checklist to see what has been and can be done
- ✓ Retrofit church lighting; develop a recycling program; reduce paper use; etc.
- ✓ Make use of grounds as community garden, prairie, natural habitat, tree plantings.

### 4. Discipleship at Home and Work: “Love your neighbor and care for creation”

- ✓ Sign up members to do an audit of their homes and/or work places.
- ✓ Provide an opportunity for members to make a “Covenant with Creation” listing eco-justice practices and disciplines in the home.
- ✓ Develop small groups for mutual accountability. Consider using the book *Simpler Living, Compassionate Life*. [[www.earthministry.org](http://www.earthministry.org)]

### 5. Public Ministry / Policy Advocacy: “The church exists to serve the world”

- ✓ Notify members with periodic action alerts from the ELCA and public policy offices about local, regional, and national environmental issues.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ Join with others to green your community or city. Consider the *Transitions* program ([www.transitionsus.org](http://www.transitionsus.org)) or *The Natural Step* ([www.naturalstep.org](http://www.naturalstep.org)).

## Lutherans Restoring Creation Action Plan (Full Version)

### Part 1 — Transformation through Worship “Let all creation praise God”

**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.

**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 under the following categories:

- A. Creation-oriented worship through the church year
- B. Special services in the church year
- C. Observe key national holidays
- D. Observe special congregational events
- E. Appoint the sanctuary space with creation-care banners and other art
- F. Green your worship practices

**A. Incorporate Earth-keeping confessions, intercessory prayers, hymns, and sermons into worship services throughout the year.**

1. *Worship resources.* Many resources to include creation-care in worship are available—liturgies, prayers, hymns, litanies, confessions, intercessions, for use throughout the church year. See [www.webofcreation.org/Worship/resources](http://www.webofcreation.org/Worship/resources) and [www.earthministry.org](http://www.earthministry.org).

2. *Creation-oriented hymns.* Consult the LRC website for a list of hymns—from Lutheran hymnals and hymnals of other denominations—that express themes related to care for creation. See the section on “Creation” in the new Evangelical Worship hymnal. Provide the list to the worship committee to draw upon when planning worship. See also [www.webofcreation.org/worship/liturgy/hymns.htm](http://www.webofcreation.org/worship/liturgy/hymns.htm). See the “Seven Songs of Creation” by Norman Habel at [www.seasonofcreation.com](http://www.seasonofcreation.com). Many composers have focused on creation care; look for hymns by Ruth Duck, Carolyn Winfrey Gillette, and Norman Habel. Earth Ministry has a detailed list of hymns: [www.earthministry.org/Congregations/song\\_bibliography](http://www.earthministry.org/Congregations/song_bibliography)

3. *Prayers for the common lectionary.* See the LRC site for a list of petitions written by Lutheran pastor Dennis Ormseth and correlated to the full three-year common lectionary. Provide the prayers to worship planners to incorporate into the prayers for each week.

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4. *Other lectionary resources.* Consider creation-care ideas based on the lectionary readings available for each Sunday of the three-year cycle of the church year. [www.env-steward.com](http://www.env-steward.com)

5. *Preaching creation-care through the lectionary.* 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. [www.christian-ecology.org.uk/econotes-index](http://www.christian-ecology.org.uk/econotes-index).

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

See also collections of sermons on creation-care: *Earth and Word, Classic Sermons on Saving the Planet*, edited by David Rhoads (Continuum, 2007); *The Best Preaching on Earth: Sermons to Care for Creation*, edited by Stan LeQuire (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1994).

### **B. Celebrate key worship services throughout the church year.**

Most of these resources are also to be found at [www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org](http://www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org).

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). Lutherans in the United States (David Rhoads and Paul Santmire) and Australia (Norman Habel) have been instrumental in spearheading the movement for congregations to adopt the season of creation into the lectionary year.

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. See the [www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org), under worship.

3. *Special worship setting.* Consider a “Tenebrae for Earth” worship setting (see the LRC website). For a special Lenten focus, see the Lenten worship series *Creation waits with eager Longing* [[www.elca.org/caringforcreation](http://www.elca.org/caringforcreation)].

4. *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 website site for such times of commemoration, such as Thanksgiving Day, Rogation Day, and St. Francis Day [[www.webofcreation.org/Worship/resources](http://www.webofcreation.org/Worship/resources)].

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5. *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. See [www.webofcreation.org/Worship/services/blessinganimals](http://www.webofcreation.org/Worship/services/blessinganimals).

6. *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. See [www.webofcreation.org/Worship/resources](http://www.webofcreation.org/Worship/resources) and [www.earthministry.org](http://www.earthministry.org)

## C. Celebrate key worship services to observe national commemoration days.

1. *Earth Day/Week.* Observe Earth Day on a Sunday near April 22, 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.ncccojustice.org](http://www.ncccojustice.org)

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

## D. Celebrate services special to the congregation.

1. *Covenant with Creation.* In the early fall or near the beginning of the year, 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. [www.webofcreation.org/GettingStarted/samplecovenant.htm](http://www.webofcreation.org/GettingStarted/samplecovenant.htm)

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

2. *Planting of trees.* Some congregations 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. Planting trees is a responsible way to reduce our carbon footprint. Here is a dedication service: [www.webofcreation.org/Worship/services/tree](http://www.webofcreation.org/Worship/services/tree).

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, or other natural area, 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?

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### *E. Appoint the sanctuary 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 worshiping 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 worshiping community.

3. *Banners.* Place banners at the entrance or inside the sanctuary to announce your commitment to creation: “Let all Creation Praise God” “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. Make your worship practices Earth-friendly.*

- ✓ Use beeswax candles instead of oil-based candles.
- ✓ During warm months, Raise flowers to cut and place on the altar
- ✓ 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.

## Lutherans Restoring Creation Action Plan (*Full Version*)

### *Part 2 — Transformation through Education* *“Know your traditions and your world”*

**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. Ecological justice / social justice for all Earth community
- B. Lutheran theology, biblical traditions, and other resources for creation-care
- C. Incorporate earth-care into all aspects of parish education
- D. Use many opportunities for educating the congregation
- E. Hands-on experiences for learning

Remember to check the “Events & Workshops” pages at [www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org](http://www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org) for additional opportunities for learning and connecting with others who are interested in linking care of creation with their faith.

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

1. *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](http://WorldWatchInstitute.org).

- ✓ *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)

2. *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)).

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Some places to start learning are:

- ✓ *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.
- ✓ *Ecolothology: Voices from South and North*, edited by David Hallman (Orbis, 1994).

On global climate change, see:

- ✓ *Climate Justice: Ethics, Energy, and Public Policy*, by James Martin-Schramm (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010).
- ✓ *God, Creation and Climate Change: Spiritual and Ethical Perspectives*, edited by Karen Bloomquist (Geneva: LWF, 2009).
- ✓ View *Climate Change and Hunger in Nicaragua* [[www.elca.org/caringforcreation](http://www.elca.org/caringforcreation)].
- ✓ View *Sisters on the Planet* [[www.oxfamamerica.org](http://www.oxfamamerica.org)].

3. *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)]

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)]

## B. Learn about many Lutheran/Christian perspectives on creation-care.

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/eccoexegesis.htm](http://www.webofcreation.org/Worship/preaching/eccoexegesis.htm)
- ✓ [www.webofcreation.org/ReligiousEducation/quotes.htm](http://www.webofcreation.org/ReligiousEducation/quotes.htm)
- ✓ [www.creationcare.org/resources/scripture.ph](http://www.creationcare.org/resources/scripture.ph)

2. *Study the Lutheran social statements on the environment*: Every congregation should study the Lutheran environmental social statements *Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice* and *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*. Reflect on the statements of the ecological problems, the theological analysis, and what is proposed to address the situation [[www.webofcreation.org/Links/denominations.htm](http://www.webofcreation.org/Links/denominations.htm)] or [[www.elca.org/socialstatements](http://www.elca.org/socialstatements)]. Check the LRC website for resources on the ELCA social statement, *Caring for Creation*, including a study guide with discussion questions and a list of fifty-two excerpts from the social statement for use in Sunday bulletins, church bulletins and newsletters, Bible studies, and so on.

There is also on the LRC website a reflection on Luther's Small Catechism and our vocation as Earthkeepers (written by Pastor Nick Utphall of St. Steven's Lutheran Church in Madison, WI). See the education section of the LRC website.

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### C. Incorporating eco-justice education in the Christian education program.

1. *See the DVD video series "Earthbound," produced by the ELCA.* This is a 2009 6-part series that demonstrates the Lutheran/Christian foundations for creation care. This is highly recommended for congregations and for use in seminary and college classes. Available from ELCA SELECT Resources and Seraphim, Inc.
2. *Offer adult classes:* Class could cover an introduction to all the basics: ecology, theology, ethics, biblical resources, creation-themed 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.
3. *Forums and speaker programs.* There may be experts available in your area: community organizers, local farmer, scientist, corporation representative, experts in 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. Discuss an article on the environment from a national magazine. People could be encouraged to surf the internet and share their findings.
4. *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.
5. *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.

6. *Discover your Earth Community.* Consider a great project for the youth group. Invite them to identify all the members of earth-community that share the small parcel of creation that comprises your church property: ground animals, birds, insects, worms and beetles, trees, shrubs, flowers, vegetables in a garden, grasses, soil, and rocks. Then ask them to find a way to bring the rest of the congregation to awareness. Do we know how much we depend on them for our well being (such trees to breathe and beetles to aerate the soil)? How are we part of their ecosystem with them? How do our actions in lawn care harm them? Do we make provisions for their well being? Can we see them as worship partners? Could we include pictures of some of them in the church directory?!

7. *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.

8. *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.

See the new vacation Bible School resource "ReNew," a "Green VBS" program from Sparkhouse ([www.wearsparkhouse.com](http://www.wearsparkhouse.com)). [Order](#) the "Starter Packet" from Augsburg (\$149.99; individual packets, for three different age groups - preschool, lower elementary, upper elementary - are \$12.99 each. See Augsburg Fortress site.)

9. *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 Wendell Berry, Mary Oliver, Annie Dillard, among others.

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10. *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. See the annotated list of resources on the LRC website.

11. *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 about ecological and eco-justice issues, along with opportunities to commune with nature. Use each meeting to do a devotional related to creation.

12. *Recommended resources.* For [an annotated list of recommended books, video/DVD, and web sites](#), consult the LRC website.

## ***D. 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)] [[www.earthministry.org](http://www.earthministry.org)]

## ***E. 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. Consider a spiritual director to lead in reflections on eco-spirituality.

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, and offer prayers for its healing. 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.

## Lutherans Restoring Creation Action Plan (Full Version)

### *Part 3 — Building and Grounds as Model “The church as an alternative community”*

**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 restore Earth community.

**People:** Church Council, 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 on the congregational property.

#### Actions

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

- A. Consultation (energy audits and actions to reduce carbon footprint)
- B. Comprehensive Environmental Inventory (assessment, audit)
- C. Practical steps
- D. Institutionalize it
- E. Promote it

#### *A. Consultation*

1. *Find ways for environmental factors to become an integral part of the maintenance and remodeling projects of the congregation.* Request that a LRC 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: members of the property committee 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 will always be counterproductive.

2. *Participate in the Lutheran Climate Change Coalition.* Reducing our carbon footprint is the most important and most urgent thing we can do to care for creation. Go to the Lutheran Climate Change Coalition subsection on [www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org](http://www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org). You will find resources to measure your carbon footprint, steps to assess your options, and resources to take action. We need to work together to meet the goals of the ELCA.

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

1. *“Environmental Guide for Churches, Their Buildings and Grounds,”* by David Rhoads and David Glover, is a manual that is available on the Web of Creation site. This is an extensive and thorough guide designed to enable you to do a complete survey of your

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property and make many important changes. You may download the guide from the website or contact us for a hard copy: [www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org).

The 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 Environmental Guide in order to learn about many resources and links needed to do your inventory. Find it under “getting started” in the Green Congregation Program pages at [www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org).

2. *Checklist for Building and Grounds.* Make use of the four-page checklist on the LRC website for all aspects of the maintenance of building and grounds and congregational best practices.

### ***C. Here are some specific areas that might be addressed***

All of these are covered in greater detail in the 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. If you wish to replicate this program, check their synod website for more information.

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 use of heat and air conditioning. Local and state energy companies are often eager to do free audits and make recommendations. State and federal programs offer rebates/ incentives for changes that 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. Or check with the ELCA Mission Fund for possible help in making such changes.

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. Check at [www.Earth911.com](http://www.Earth911.com) for suggestions on items and ways to recycle them.

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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 or native grasses; 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. Encourage folks to bring their own table settings and 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 double-sided copies or 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 for 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 model and witness 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.*

## Lutherans Restoring Creation Action Plan (Full Version)

### Part 4 — Discipleship at Home and Work “Love your neighbor and care for creation”

**Commitment:** 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 can serve 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 more intimately and more gently with the rest of creation.

#### Actions

Consider developing an “Action Plan” for your congregation or household. Below are some suggestions and resources to help you grow personally and to sustain your Earth-keeping activities. The materials below include ideas in the areas of:

- A. Changing your lifestyle (devotional materials & practical suggestions)
- B. Transforming your home and work into Earth-friendly places
- C. Finding support for the commitments you make
- D. Getting in touch with nature
- E. Connecting with local, community environmental activities

#### **A. Change your lifestyle:**

1. *Reflect on your lifestyle.* Take time to first think and pray about your lifestyle. Reflect upon 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 what it would take to change 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 God's creation.

- ✓ *Affluenza* by John De Graaf (book or video of same title)
- ✓ See also [www.thestoryofstuff.com](http://www.thestoryofstuff.com)

2. *Devotional materials.* Explore ways to ground your actions, spiritually, and you will find that the Holy Spirit will help lead you to, and empower you in, your Earth-keeping efforts.

- ✓ *Stewardship of Creation: 30 Days with Nature*
- ✓ [www.webofcreation.org/Worship/devotions/CreationCare.pdf](http://www.webofcreation.org/Worship/devotions/CreationCare.pdf)
- ✓ *Earth Gospel* (edited by Sam Hamilton-Poore) is a collection of scripture passages, hymns, prayers, blessings, and quotations for 40 days of devotions
- ✓ *Earth Prayers From Around the World*, edited by Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon
- ✓ *Living Earth* is a collection of wonderful reflections; look for the Living Earth icon at [www.elca.org/caringforcreation](http://www.elca.org/caringforcreation).
- ✓ [www.earthministry.org/resources/creation-devotions](http://www.earthministry.org/resources/creation-devotions) (from Earth Ministry in Seattle)

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- ✓ [www.stthomas.edu/recycle/quote.htm](http://www.stthomas.edu/recycle/quote.htm) (a wonderful collection of quotes, through the ages)

For a collection of inspirational reflections, see the following:

- ✓ *Earth and Word: Classic Sermons on Saving the Planet*, edited by David Rhoads (New York: Continuum, 2007)
- ✓ *Love God Heal Earth*, edited by Sally Bingham (Pittsburgh: St. Lynn's Press, 2009)
- ✓ *Holy Ground: A Gathering of Voices on Caring for Creation*, edited by Lyndsay Moseley (Sierra Club Books, 2008)

### 3. *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. Keep in mind care for communities that live simply out of necessity or poverty. Seek their participation and leadership. Share with others the savings from efforts to live simply.

- ✓ *Simpler Living, Compassionate Life*, edited by Michael Schut (1999, Earth Ministry, [www.earthministry.org](http://www.earthministry.org)); includes a study guide for individuals / groups
- ✓ *Yes! a journal of positive futures* ([www.yesmagazine.org](http://www.yesmagazine.org))

4. *Purchase green.* There are many organizations that can help you to find or purchase products that are friendly to the environment. See the purchasing guides or catalogs available at:

- ✓ Alternatives for Simple Living [www.simpleliving.org](http://www.simpleliving.org)
- ✓ [www.greenamericatoday.org/programs/LivingGreen](http://www.greenamericatoday.org/programs/LivingGreen)
- ✓ Union of Concerned Scientists [www.ucsusa.org](http://www.ucsusa.org)
- ✓ Whole Earth Magazine [www.wholeearthmag.com](http://www.wholeearthmag.com)
- ✓ Seventh Generation [www.seventhgeneration.com](http://www.seventhgeneration.com)

5. *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 an Earth-friendly zone 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.

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- ✓ [Environmental Guide for Building and Grounds of Congregations](#) (available at [www.webofcreation.org/BuildingGrounds/index.htm](http://www.webofcreation.org/BuildingGrounds/index.htm))
- ✓ [www.simpleliving.org](http://www.simpleliving.org)
- ✓ [www.localharvest.org/csa](http://www.localharvest.org/csa) for a listing of Community Supported Farms
- ✓ [www.localharvest.org/organic-farms](http://www.localharvest.org/organic-farms)
- ✓ See the film, *Food, Inc.*
- ✓ Earth Ministry's *Caring for All Creation: At the Table* ([www.earthministry.org/resources/publications/CFAC](http://www.earthministry.org/resources/publications/CFAC))
- ✓ the book *Food & Faith: Justice, Joy and Daily Bread* ([www.earthministry.org/resources/publications/food-faith](http://www.earthministry.org/resources/publications/food-faith))

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 trees or creatures. Where possible, turn part of your yard into a natural prairie with native species of grass and wild flowers.

- ✓ Check with your local Soil Conservation District office
- ✓ Consider the “Backyard Habitat” program of the National Wildlife Federation ([www.nwf.org/In-Your-Backyard.aspx](http://www.nwf.org/In-Your-Backyard.aspx))

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 an oppressed 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 by 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)

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- ✓ *EcoFaith Recovery*, a new effort based out of Portland, OR, collaborates with faith communities to start eco-spiritual recovery groups. The purpose of such groups is to help people enter into meaningful recovery from consumerism and the devastating effects it is having upon life on earth. See page on “What is an eco-faith recovery group?” online at [www.ecofaithrecovery.org](http://www.ecofaithrecovery.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) offers excellent resources on a variety of topics.
- ✓ Earth Ministry's *Simpler Living, Compassionate Life* [www.earthministry.org](http://www.earthministry.org)
- ✓ Alternatives for Simple Living at [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 reading each week as an insert in the bulletin. [www.webofcreation.org/Worship/devotions/CreationCare.pdf](http://www.webofcreation.org/Worship/devotions/CreationCare.pdf)
- ✓ Look for models or examples of other congregational actions on the National Council of

Churches Eco Justice Program site

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

### 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. See:

- ✓ [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, connection 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 LRC 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 your congregational green commitments.

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## 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!

- ✓ Consult *Reconnecting with Nature: Finding Wellness Through Restoring Your Bond with the Earth*, third edition, by Michael Cohen (Lakeville, MN: Ecopress, 2007)
- ✓ A new resource from Northwest Earth Institute will also be of interest: *Reconnecting with Earth* <http://www.nwei.org>

2. *Share nature with your children!* Let their awe and wonder at the natural world help to inspire and re-awaken your own.

- ✓ For parents and children, to help nurture understanding and compassion towards nature: [www.sharingnature.com](http://www.sharingnature.com) and [www.naturerocks.org](http://www.naturerocks.org)
- ✓ An informative book, on the importance of such activities and time in nature: *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder* by Richard Louv, Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill (2005).

## E. *Support local, community-based environmental actions*

1. *Join an environmental group.* There are many environmental groups that need your support and participation. National environmental groups 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. Consider inviting a group representative in, to tell about and explain their work.

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, or do write-in campaigns for environmental legislation.

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 harbor the future of an ecological age. Invest now!

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### Part 5 — Public Ministry/ Policy Advocacy

*“The church exists to serve the world”*

**Policy:** Beyond the walls of the church, we seek to change the common economic, social, and political systems in so far as they 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 ecological 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 in the areas of:

- A. Ecological justice in local, regional and global contexts
- B. Policy advocacy
- C. Community organizing
- D. Promote your creation care
- E. Network and cooperate
- F. Green investments

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

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. Provide information about international conferences, protocols, and treaties related to the environment. Do these on a regular basis to keep the concerns before the community.

2. *Learn about legislative process.* 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. See [www.elca.org/advocacy](http://www.elca.org/advocacy) for basic information and guidance on “how to” do advocacy.

3. *Ecological justice.* Educate members about the integral relationship between human social justice and issues of ecology.

Look for relevant resources on the following websites:

- ✓ [www.weact.org](http://www.weact.org). Visit this website for resources from communities of color addressing concerns about climate change and other ecological matters. Harlem Community Voices for Environmental Justice.

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- ✓ [www.cjnet.org](http://www.cjnet.org). A list of reports and statements on many matters of concern for environmental justice.
- ✓ [www.blacksingreen.org](http://www.blacksingreen.org). An educational and economic organization based in Chicago and led by activist Naomi Davis.
- ✓ [www.ejrc.cau.edu](http://www.ejrc.cau.edu). Environmental Justice Resource Center at Clark Atlanta University.
- ✓ <http://meldi.snre.umich.edu/> Multicultural Environmental Leadership Development at the University of Michigan.
- ✓ <http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/hazard/dsw/ej.htm>; For Renewed Effort on Environmental Justice, EPA to Assess Impacts of Waste Rule on Disadvantaged Communities.

Consider the following books:

- ✓ Robert Bullard, Editor. *The Quest for Environmental Justice: Human Rights and the Politics of Pollution* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2005)
- ✓ James Martin-Schramm. *Climate Justice* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010)

## 4. *The Lutheran Climate Change Coalition.*

Become familiar with the LC3 initiative and what you and your congregation can do to reduce your carbon footprint and help the ELCA meet carbon reduction goals. See the Lutheran Climate Change Coalition subsection on the LRC website. View the video on the impact of climate change on the churches in Nicaragua. Distribute copies of the printed resource on the impact of climate change on the vulnerable at home and in third world countries.

## B. *Public Policy Advocacy*

1. *Advocacy in the ELCA.* Become familiar with the ELCA resources on advocacy at the advocacy section at [www.elca.org/advocacy](http://www.elca.org/advocacy). Learn about the efforts the ELCA has made through its Washington office to advocate for earth-friendly laws and policies.

2. *Public Policy offices.* Become familiar with the Lutheran Public Policy office in your state. Invite them to hold a training session for your congregations or a cluster of congregations in your area. For a list of offices working on environmental issues, see the subsection on “public policy offices” on the LRC website.

3. *Action alerts:* Provide a mechanism whereby members can sign up to receive e-mail action alerts from the ELCA or the state public policy offices, alerts regarding environmental and ecological justice laws and policies. These alerts will include 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.

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

5. *Local policy 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.

6. *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 LRC Congregations in their voting decisions. Explore cooperation with your local chapter of the League of Conservation Voters at [www.lcv.org](http://www.lcv.org).

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## C. Get engaged in community organizing for action in your town or city.

### 1. Congregation-based community organizing.

Consult the ELCA resources for community organizing. Make use of the new (comicbook-genre) resource *Hope at Work: First Step in Congregation based Community Organizing* by Susan Engh, available through Augsburg Fortress books. See also the ELCA printed resource on community-based organizing by Susan Engh entitled “Emboldened and Empowered.”

### 2. Civic Engagement through Transition

*Initiatives.* The Transition model of civic engagement is based on the premise that we can no longer continue with business as usual. People working together at the local level have the capacity to thoughtfully redesign patterns of living leading to viable, resilient communities. A community’s ability to respond quickly to challenges begins with re-localization of the systems that supply the needs of the local population. Built on a foundation of environmental sustainability, re-localization leads to economic sustainability and human well-being. Similarity of values and principles make the Transition Model suitable for people of faith active in civic engagement.

“The Transition movement represents one of the most promising ways of engaging people and communities to take the far-reaching actions that are required to mitigate the effects of peak oil, climate change and the economic crisis. Furthermore, these re-localization efforts are designed to result in a life that is more fulfilling, more socially connected and more equitable than the one we have today. The Transition model is based on a loose set of real world principles and practices that have been built up over time through experimentation and observation of communities as they drive forward to reduce carbon emissions and build community resilience. The Transition Movement believes that is up to us in our local communities to step into a leadership position on this situation” (*Transition US*).

Transition initiatives provide an opportunity to live out our call to be a public church and encourage the larger community to embrace Earth-care. Contact Patricia Benson at [patricia@transitionus.org](mailto:patricia@transitionus.org) or visit [www.transitionus.org](http://www.transitionus.org) to explore the possibilities.

### 3. The Natural Step for Congregations.

Developing a shared language of sustainability is essential for congregations intending to engage the wider community in caring for the earth. Conversations among people in business, education, and government (within the church and in the community) about sustainability are more fruitful when there is general agreement about what is meant by sustainability. Cultivating a shared language of sustainability is one of the main goals of The Natural Step, a framework that originated in Sweden and is now used by municipalities and organizations in many countries throughout the world ([thenaturalstep.org](http://thenaturalstep.org)).

Four principles of sustainability, along with systems thinking and an understanding of natural processes, form the basis of the first step in the *ABCD Process – Awareness*.

The next step involves a *Baseline Assessment* of one’s own organization (or household, or church, or community) – how are our current practices violating these principles? What practices are in line with these principles?

Next is developing a *Compelling Vision*—what would sustainability look like in these contexts without any violations? This is a creative brainstorming stage that helps groups think about possible solutions.

The final step focuses on *Decision-making* that will benefit the organization in the direction of sustainability (implementing the use of compact fluorescent bulbs, for example, or recycling food waste).

A congregation may choose to articulate elements of its compelling vision using the language of faith. And a working knowledge of this framework can enable a congregation to be more conversant with other organizations in the community.

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For information about how *The Natural Step* process has helped one congregation (Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Duluth, MN) engage its members and participate in wider conversations about sustainability in the community, see [www.sustainabletwinports.org](http://www.sustainabletwinports.org).

### ***D. Promote your Creation-Care beyond the walls of your church.***

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. Perhaps it will lead to other congregations embracing care for creation.

2. *Public events.* Hold conferences and sponsor speakers that will 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 policy issues or greening the congregation or making your home earth-friendly or greening businesses. Partner with other environmental organizations in planning such a workshop. Sponsor a public showing of such films as *Food, Inc* or *Renewal* as a way to generate community interest around key environmental issues.

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. Create your own display from mission trip photos or magazine and newspaper articles.

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.

### ***E. Network and cooperate:***

1. *Partner with other groups.* Locate the environmental organizations in your area, either national ones or local community organizing groups. Be intentional in seeking out those most affected by environmental degradation. 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. *Hold an eco-fair.* Work with other groups to hold an eco-fair that promotes local green products and services and that includes workshops on “greening your home” or “greening your business.”

3. *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. For a list of Farmers Market by state, see [www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/map.htm](http://www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/map.htm). Information on Community Supported Agriculture can be found at [www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/csa/](http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/csa/).

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

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5. *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 Earth.

### *F. 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.

2. *ELCA Investments.* Urge the ELCA to develop a option in the pension plan that would invest in green companies and green technologies. Promote green investments for the ELCA Mission Fund.

## PART III—ADVANCED TRAINING

### One: Reviving Your Efforts

What do you do when you have had a green team for several years and you hit some problems: you hit a plateau; interest fades; you face resistance; or you have run out of energy or ideas? Here are some reflections to help jumpstart your efforts again.

**This is a common problem.** It is not unusual for there to be rhythms in the work of a group seeking to renew a community or a congregation in significant ways. Community organizers often confront this problem. Do not be discouraged by it. See it as a constructive opportunity.

**No magic formula.** The situations described above are quite common. There is no instant formula to embrace that will solve the problem, because every situation is different. You need to assess your situation and see what needs to be done to move forward.

**Re-organize your care-for-creation team.** Solidify the group working on greening the congregation. If there are only a few, that is fine. If you can expand the group at this time, that would bring in some new energy. Connect with people who already have different environmental interests, such as gardening or justice or nature. See if you can get a commitment to meet regularly, say every month, so that you can make some action plans and have accountability with follow-through.

**Have an assessment meeting.** Get the team together for a meeting designed to evaluate where you are. List what you have done. Identify problems. Put your finger on reasons why the efforts to green the congregation may have stalled. See if you can identify some strategies to address these reasons and move forward.

**Go back to the roots.** Know that it is our vocation as religious people to care for creation. Find some resources—biblical, worship, theological, and inspirational—that will help you as individuals and as a group to reconnect to God’s love for creation. Seek inspiration to strengthen your own commitment and renew you for this work. Perhaps a meeting or retreat for the group that is completely oriented to reclaiming our spiritual roots will be important. Get back in touch with the personal reasons for your commitment to care for creation. Share “Why I Care” stories with each other. Pray for the Holy Spirit to give you greater clarity about what your congregation is being called to do and to become. Pray for the power to re-invigorate both your vision and your energy for this work.

**Avoid guilt.** It is no help to feel guilty about what has not been accomplished or what has not succeeded. Guilt is not a helpful or a sustaining motivation for action. The idea is to be free to begin anew. Assessing your situation honestly is a good thing, but blaming yourself or others will not help you move forward. If you have failed, allow God to forgive you and then forgive one another. In the future, be realistic with yourself and others about what you can and cannot do.

**Address the problem of being overwhelmed.** It may be that you are so overwhelmed by ecological problems and environmental crises that you have become disheartened and wonder if anything you/we do will make a difference. It is important to talk

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about this openly. Admit what you are feeling, and name the reasons why you are feeling this way. Acknowledge that what we do might not make the difference we would hope. Sometimes we are motivated by the hopeful outcome of what we are doing. But we are also called to be faithful regardless of results: to love creation for its own sake in response to God's grace, just as we may love our family and just as we are called to love our neighbor. Remember that changes come in an organic way: we keep sowing seeds and entrust the outcome to God.

**Address discouragement about your congregation.** It may be difficult to do the work of caring for creation if your congregation is in decline in terms of members or of finances. You may have had to cut back on pastoral staff. You may be in an interim situation between times of fulltime pastoral leadership. Other concerns may grasp the attention of the congregation. This can be an opportunity to be creative. Continue to work at engaging the congregation in earth-care. We don't stop caring for the sick or giving to the hungry even when under great stress. In whatever ways we can, we should also continue caring for creation.

**You may be burned out.** The goal of the green team is to stimulate other groups and committees in the church to embrace creation care, so that eventually everyone assumes ownership for this work in their own arenas of responsibility. However, sometimes the green team ends up doing all the environmental projects. Then you get tired from so much work and perhaps little support from others. Stop taking it upon yourselves. Strategize ways to engage the worship committee or the social justice committee or the bible study group to integrate care for creation in what they do.

**Recapture the vision.** The purpose of your efforts is to bring care for creation into the full life and mission of your congregation. The goal is that care-for-creation should become not an add-on or the interest of

just a few but the mission and vocation of the whole community. One way to do this is to go back and again read through this *LRC Training Manual for Congregations*. Sometimes people consult the manual at first and then never go back to it. Or some team members may not have read it all. This might be a good time to make the manual available to all, to ask folks to read it all the way through, and then meet to consider next steps. The point is not to overwhelm people with more projects but to recapture the overall vision and be inspired by it.

**Reconsider the needs.** We learn every day about human degradation of the environment and of threats to nature and people. Find ways to highlight how the well-being of humans and the natural world are closely interconnected. Talk about these threats to God's creation at a local, regional, and global level. Clarify why it is so important that we humans who have the resources to do so need to act urgently on behalf of the vulnerable people in the world and the vulnerable ecosystems of the world. Ecological justice demands it. Connect your work to a specific need or threat and make that connection explicit for your group and for others in the congregation.

**Go around the roadblocks.** Sometimes there is resistance in the congregation to certain actions, say for example getting rid of Styrofoam cups at coffee time. If you hit a roadblock, move to other actions. Sometimes the energy of the congregation is taken up in something else. Then find ways to relate care for creation to the issue at hand or keep the creation-care vocation before the congregation as means to lay the groundwork for a time when the congregation can give more attention to this. Sometimes there is opposition or a lack of interest by some. Then work with those who are interested. The idea is this: If a roadblock is up, find a different route. And be open to ways in which the Spirit may nudge you into a better direction.

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**Maintain relationships with those who differ.** Be open and listen to others who may disagree with what you are doing in the congregation as a green team. Do not be defensive. Honor other points of view and seek to understand them. About yourself, be confidently confessional and witness to your own perspective and commitments. At the same time, do not let others prevent you from expressing and acting upon your faith as part of the congregation. Continue to be open and continue to be transparent about your religious reasons for caring for creation as you do.

**Consolidate what you have done.** Sometimes communities will do things and then stop doing them after a while. Perhaps you have celebrated the Season of Creation in worship for several years and then for some reason stopped. See if you can reinstitute changes you have made and do what you can to make them long-term or a permanent part of congregational life—built into your mission statement or description of a committee or on the congregational calendar of events.

**Celebrate what you have done.** It is helpful to remind yourselves and the congregation what you have done already as a way of solidifying the identity of the congregation as an LRC Congregation. Put these things in the bulletin or announce them. If there is a measurable success such as monetary savings or a reduction of the carbon footprint or the amount of food that went from you community garden to a local food bank, this information should be widely known.

**Have persistence.** Persistence is a sign of a long term commitment. Care for creation is not a fad. It is an integral part of our human/religious vocation for life. Keep at it. One person, two or three, or more, can make an enormous difference if you keep going. Be contagious. Explain to others what you are doing and why it is important for the congregation to embrace creation-care.

**Know how important this work is.** Remember that you are doing work that is critical for the life of the congregation and for the sustainable life of God's creation. The church exists for the sake of the world. So we are seeking to be part of a larger movement—an expression of God's grace and mercy in a world filled with suffering and struggle.

**Know that you are not alone.** Know that there are so many other congregations engaged in caring for creation. Make contact with them. Make use of the networking opportunities for reports and blogs on the LRC site. Check out ELCA resources. Find out what other denominations are doing. Follow the websites of the many faith-based groups working on the environment, perhaps in your geographical area, who can share your efforts. Find like-minded people and groups outside your congregation with whom to partner in your work.

**Do what gives you energy.** When you choose programs or projects, decide in terms of what will be fun and meaningful for you and the congregation. Some projects drain energy, while others seem to generate it. Either choose actions that are life-giving or find ways to carry out the projects in life-giving ways.

**Do for others / with others.** Look around the community and notice the people or areas that would benefit from an eco-justice commitment. You might plant trees in a stressed area of the city. You might join in Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program to help support farmers in your region. You might help to restore a habitat or to advocate for improved air quality in parts of the city. You may protest toxic causes of ill health in an urban area. You will garner energy in being oriented to the ecological needs of others. Establish solidarity with those affected by these issues. Join your efforts *with* those you seek to benefit.

**Capture the joy.** God delights in creation; and God delights in you when you enjoy creation in faithful ways. Theologians have argued that delight in creation is the only appropriate basis for our human use of the life of the world. The whole Earth is filled with God's glory. Poet Gerard Manley Hopkins refers to this as "the dearest freshness deep down things." And poet Wendell Berry celebrates "the fund of grace out of which we all live." We are called to love creation. And we are called to know how much God loves us through creation. May we be grasped by this love and rejoice in it!

## 2. GOING TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Many green teams work hard to bring care-for-creation into the life of a congregation and are ready to go to the next level—but they are not sure what to do or how to do it. Because every situation is different, one cannot give advice that will work in all cases. Therefore, what follows is a series of reflections and suggestions about how to move forward. Pick and choose which ones might be helpful for you in your context.

**Seeing the thresholds.** In community organizing, one begins small, where one can, in ways that are do-able. However, after you have done some things, you often hit a threshold that enables you to do some things you could not do at the start. So you move it up a notch. Then you do some more things, at which point there may be wider support or there may be a new foundation on which to continue building. So you ask: Now that we have reached this threshold, what can we do next? How can we go to the next level? You have reached some thresholds. Now consider: What is possible to do now that you could not have done before. Discernment is a gift. Use it!

**Reclaim the *identity* goal.** The congregational goal of greening your parish is to incorporate care for creation thoroughly into the identity and work of the entire congregation. Does everyone know that "we are a congregation that cares for creation?" Assess in what ways you have done that—worship, education, office, property, member lifestyle, and so on. Celebrate these achievements in the congregation as a whole. In this way, you will help to bring others along to the next level. Then assess in what ways the basic congregational identity goal has not yet been met. Identify those areas and begin to reflect on next steps.

**Reclaim the *mission* goal.** The congregational goal of greening your parish is to incorporate care for creation thoroughly into the mission of the entire congregation. The church exists for the sake of the world. Does the community around you see that "you are a congregation that cares for creation"? Therefore, we can ask: In what ways have the actions of your congregation served efforts to spread Earth-care into your community and into the world at large? Assess in what ways you have done that. Celebrate these in the congregation as a whole. Then assess in what ways this goal has not yet been met. Identify those areas and begin to reflect on next steps.

**Deepen your Christian commitment.** Find ways to affirm the biblical, theological, ethical, and spiritual roots for ecological actions and attitudes. It is very important to take action and to promote just and sustainable public policies. At the same time, it is vital to realize that it sometimes takes an "epiphany"—a conversion of both heart and mind—to empower people to change or to see more clearly what changes could be made. We need to re-imagine the world as a place of sustainable living. We need to find a holy passion in our commitment to nature and to ecological justice. The Holy Spirit can work anew in worship, in the educational program, in experiences with nature, in prayer, and in opportunities for personal testimony.

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**Institutionalize every advance.** If you have not done so, seek to make sure that the gains you have made become part of the regular life of the congregation. Is the green team part of the church structure? Is creation-care part of the mission statement of the congregation? Do the task descriptions of the church council and the standing committees include responsibilities related to Earth-care? Are the staff members—office manager or maintenance person—on board to continue the patterns of commitment? Are you set to celebrate the Season of Creation every year? Institutionalizing these will support your next steps.

**Fill the holes.** In what ways has creation care not yet become part of the full life of the congregation? Consider each of the standing committees or task groups of the church. Where might you expand the influence of the green team? Is creation-care an integral part of the conversation and decision-making of the church council? Is it evident in the food and practices of the coffee hour and the church dinners? Is the youth group involved? Is it integral to the children's education? Is there a women's group, a men's group, or a senior group that is not involved? In what ways would a visitor to your congregation be able to recognize readily your commitment to Earth-care? In what ways would they not? These questions may lead you to expand your work.

**Broaden the commitment.** Is every individual in your congregation involved in Earth-care at some level, even if it is at a minimal level of simply having a place to recycle bulletins after worship? Identify which people are not yet involved and invite them into a conversation about how they see creation care as being important for the congregation—and their part in it.

**Try a new approach.** Consider using one of the seven strategies described in the manual to engage the whole congregation in Earth care: action based on brainstorming; action based on learning; action based on

needs; action based on opportunities; action based on congregational assets; action based on consensus; or action based on joining forces with other congregations or groups in the community.

**Practice sustainability.** Keep in mind that sustainability is like a stool with three legs: Does it promote *ecological sustainability*? Does it foster *economic sustainability*, especially for the poor? Does it foster *social sustainability*, that is, does it build community? Add now a fourth leg to the stool: Does it promote *religious sustainability* in depth of understanding and commitment? As you go to the next level, in relation to every action and project, ask in what ways *the project itself* as well as *how it is accomplished* might serve all four legs of sustainability.

**Teachable moments.** When you engage in an act of care-for-creation, explain to the congregation: 1. Why we are doing it both from a faith perspective and from an ecological perspective. 2. How we are doing it to promote sustainability. 3. What we hope the outcomes will be. These explanations promote good communication and strengthen the identity of the congregation as an LRC congregation. They will also help to deepen the faith connection and commitment to this work. And it will serve as a model to those who learn from the combination of action and explanation.

**Keep care-for-creation before the attention of the congregation.** Social change agents say that if you wish to get the attention of a group, use seven different media: bulletins, newsletters, bulletin boards, e-mail, personal contact, posters, church signs, announcements/testimonies in worship, and so on. Be imaginative. There are resources developed to go into weekly bulletins or newsletters: eco-tips from the green team; excerpts from social statements; quotations from writers and poets. The youth may be able to assist with bulletin boards and posters.

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## **Re-read the LRC Congregation Manual.**

Have your committee read the entire manual. This has a wealth of information and ideas for you to (re-)consider. Note that the role of the LRC team is to be a catalyst to the rest of the congregation, so that everyone takes ownership. Consider the ideas suggested in each area: worship, education, building and grounds, personal discipleship at home and work, and public ministry/political advocacy. Perhaps you could draw up a chart of actions in the five areas taken to date. Re-visiting your beginnings and your accomplishments may re-ignite the vision and stimulate you to be generative—to think of actions not mentioned in the manual.

**Choose a big impact project.** Small actions by a lot of people can have a widespread effect. They often lay the groundwork for bigger things. Consider now doing a project with a large impact—either in terms of congregational involvement or in terms of outcome on behalf of Earth. These types of projects can occur in many areas of congregational life. You can also choose one that people can see as they pass by the church, such as a windmill, a solar panel, or a community garden.

**Be imaginative and visionary.** The author of *Revelation* gives a stirring vision of the New Jerusalem (chapter 21) as a way to draw his audience into actions designed to bring that vision to reality in the present. Imagine what your congregation would be like if you were thoroughly and completely to incorporate creation-care into your identity, life, and mission. Think about all areas of church life as well as the building and grounds. What would make your congregation distinctive and different? What would visitors see and experience? Write up that image. Now use your imagination to tackle efforts that will make that vision happen NOW.

**Transform worship.** The goal is to incorporate care for creation into every worship service. In what ways have you not done that yet? Think about all the parts of a worship service and consider what planning

needs to be done to make creation care and creation celebration a natural and integral dimension of worship. There are resources in the congregational manual for doing this. Explain to the worshipping community the Earth-care importance of your current traditions and practices. Consider instructing the congregation on why you are doing something each time you innovate. Does the pastor make creation concerns a part of preaching? Have you discovered how the church year relates to the cycles of nature and how the themes of the church seasons can be connected with nature and ecological justice?

**Worship in nature as the sanctuary.** What might you do to enable your congregation to think of all creation as your larger worshipping community and nature as the sanctuary? Take worship outside in the church yard. Meet some Sundays in striking natural settings near your church. Make the most of windows in the sanctuary to see the continuity between inside and outside. Bring nature inside—plants, trees, flowering plants, ivy on the inside walls, perhaps even an aquarium or gerbil cage. See your congregation as part of Earth community: name all the plants and animals on your property and consider them your worshipping partners.

**Celebrate special days.** Do you celebrate the Season of Creation? Earth Day Sunday? A blessing of the Animals? Rogation Day? Thanksgiving? A greening-of-the-cross service? Find ways to celebrate regularly in the church year. There are resources online for each of these.

**Small and big in worship.** Can you do a lot of small practices in worship that add up to a significant impact: touch the baptismal water; connect water to pollution and shortage; invoke all creation to worship each week; always have a petition on behalf of an endangered species; pray for a human community threatened by global warming; include a confession of ecological sins; receive an Earth blessing. Or do

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something dramatic: put out a bushel of wheat and a large bowl of grapes to connect to Eucharist; provide an eternal light powered by the sun; put trees in the sanctuary; place an aquarium in the worship space; show slides of nature with music as a prelude; and on and on. Use imagination to shape and to shake people into a new awareness.

**Educate for the ecological age.** There are DVD series on Earth-care, films to watch, books to discuss, and sites to visit. Look for the links section on the Web of Creation and the LRC site and surf the many organizations that promote Earth-care. Find out what the denominational resources and themes are for creation-care. Draw on experts in ecology from local colleges or government agencies to demonstrate our ecological problems and possibilities. Schedule outdoor retreats or nature excursions. Use resources for Vacation Church School that develop a connection to creation.

**Try unorthodox methods of education.** Do what needs to be done to dramatize polluted soil, food shortages, loss of species, unlimited trash, carbon glut, and the need for renewable energy, among other ecological concerns. Put amazing and disarming ecological facts around the church. Put up a windmill. Set up a rain garden. Plant an orchard. In these ways, as Wendell Berry says, you will “practice resurrection.”

**Reframe the roots of faith for an environmental age.** Find ways to educate the whole congregation about the biblical and theological roots of care for creation—creation, sin, redemption, justification, Holy Spirit—reinterpreted for an ecological age. Connect faith to ecology in graphic ways. Post around the church insightful quotations from theologians and ethicists around the church in prominent locations. Put excerpts of biblical passages about creation into newsletters. Use every occasion to do some care-for-creation practice/action and then comment on in terms of faith convictions.

**Center care for creation in our lives.** How can we get past the idea that caring for creation is not just an add-on to the Christian life or limited to the interest of a few? How can we promote the idea that loving creation is as foundational as loving our neighbor? How can we make Earth-keeping central to our vocation as being keepers or our sisters and brothers? Imagine new ways to increase awareness of this concern and to address these questions. Pose questions like the ones in this paragraph to spur group reflection and discussion. Remember to be prayerful in seeking deeper answers to these challenges.

**Reduce your carbon footprint.** This is the most important thing you can do for Earth, its ecosystems, and all earth community. Tools are readily available for you to measure your footprint and then investigate every avenue to reduce it. Set a goal for yourself as a congregation and measure the economic and ecological payoffs. Announce these. Then challenge every member to do the same in their homes. Engage everyone in this endeavor. At the same time, join efforts to change the larger economic, social, and political systems that must be transformed if we are to address this problem adequately.

**Monthly emphases.** Chose an ecological issue and then promote action and reflection at church and home: water, energy, transportation, food, and so on. There are resources on the site for such a program. Work it by the month or by the quarter or by the seasons of the church year. For each emphasis, explain the ecological concern, show the eco-justice consequences, take actions at church, commit to certain practices at home, and witness to each other about what you have done.

**Do a comprehensive environmental audit.** This does not mean just an energy audit. Make the rounds of your building and grounds and evaluate everything you do as a congregation that has an impact

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on the environment: purchases, recycling, water use, electricity, heat, paper use, cleaning products, food at coffee hour and church dinners, and so on. Go over the check list for “Congregations Their Buildings and Grounds.” Use the manual “Environmental Guide for Congregations, Their Buildings and Grounds. Be as comprehensive as possible. Do an “extreme makeover” for the environment!

**Use your land in imaginative ways.** Try to think about the uses of your land for the benefit of Earth. See your property as an Earth Community, space you share with many living things. Name and learn the plants and animals on your property. Include pictures of them in the church directory as part of your Earth Community. Include their names in the invocation to worship and in prayer petitions. Plant large flower beds for beauty. Plant some rain gardens. Put up a lot of trees. Create a peace garden or set up a labyrinth. Put large property in a land trust. Restore a native habitat, such as a prairie, as a way to restore your environment to a healthier state. Make your property a striking statement of your commitment for Earth to thrive.

**Strengthen the commitment of members at home.** You may have done a lot in the congregation, but how much difference have you made in the personal lives of members? What can you do to engage the commitment of people in their homes? What about a light bulb challenge to the congregation as a whole to see how many CFLs can be added to members’ homes and how many carbon emissions can be reduced by your actions? Can you make choices to eat local and purchase food that is raised organically and humanely? Can you reduce your intake of meat as a way to reduce the carbon footprint made in the course of raising animals for food?

**Make a Covenant with Creation.** At a worship service, invite people to fill out their personal covenant with creation and dedicate it as part of their offering to God and their spiritual discipline. Examples of such

covenants are available online at the LRC site, along with a brief dedication ritual. Such a covenant gives members an opportunity to make a commitment to reduce energy use, use green cleaning products, change eating habits, lessen transportation emissions, and so on. If you have already invited people to make such a covenant, be sure to repeat it annually, perhaps on Earth Day Sunday or in the fall at the time of the Blessing of the Animals. Or contact people personally and invite them to do this.

**Hold workshops.** Train members to green their homes in a comprehensive way. Use the extensive “Covenant with Creation” checklist to identify what each household has done and can still do. Get information to share on eco-friendly products and services in your area. Give suggestions for how members can green their work places. There are online sites and printed resources for making an office into an Earth-friendly place. Hold a workshop on public policy issues in your area and equip and empower people for getting involved. Invite other churches to join your workshops. Get folks involved!

**Public ministry.** Reach out into the neighborhood and community with your commitment to exist for the sake of the world. If your congregation is part of a vulnerable community in the city, identify ways in which the environment contributes to injustice and ill health in your community. Explore ways in which these concerns can be addressed. If you are in a middle class or affluent neighborhood, find out about the poor and oppressed areas of the city. How can you collaborate with these neighborhoods to resist harmful conditions and destructive policies and to work together to increase health, get rid of toxins in the air or in brown fields, and take actions that increase economic, ecological, and social sustainability?

**Join with other congregations.** Look around at other congregations in your denomination and in other denominations and join together in this common endeavor. Plan for the green teams of many churches to

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meet two or three times a year for reports to each other and an educational program to assist your efforts. Such sharing generates a lot of energy and excitement as people can see what others are doing. The interaction enables you also to do some collaborative projects together: sponsor a joint worship service on Earth Day, lower costs with joint purchases of energy-saving equipment, or tend a community garden together.

### Spread your greening to the community.

Work with city officials and other environmental organizations in your area to green your community. There are programs, such as Transitions US, the Natural Step, among others, that cities are embracing as a way to bring all aspects of city life into the environmental age: transportation, energy use, use of green cleaning products for government and schools, restoration of habitats, recycling programs, green city events, and so on. Churches can spearhead many of these movements in local communities.

Sponsor events for the community. Here is an opportunity to share what you have learned. Plan and publicize an event for the community that raises awareness and offers resources for faith communities to embrace care-for-creation: hold an ecumenical, interfaith worship service; sponsor a city-wide eco-fair; show a DVD that highlights religious care for creation, such as *Renewal*, with a discussion to follow; set up an evening event with a guest lecturer on some aspect of the environment; and hold workshops on greening your congregation or learning about public policy. Sponsor such events jointly with as other like-minded organizations.

Forge partnerships between a thriving congregation and a congregation at risk. Sharing resources and people power to assist vulnerable congregations can be a way to double your efforts: weatherize, reduce energy costs, provide a loan for a new boiler, advocate together for clean air and water, plant

trees for beauty and cleaner air, among other things. A study and survey of what people need and want in their environment can help to clarify what can be done.

Advocate for Earth-care public policies. We need to change not only personal and congregational behavior; we also need to change the public systems that allow and enable earth destructive practices. Collaborate with a local advocacy group around environmental issues. Learn about the laws and policies at the national and global levels that foster care for creation. Educate people on these matters. Instruct people on how to make their support known to legislators. Sign people up to receive action alerts and respond to them. Work with your church advocacy leadership and public policy offices to obtain guidance and direction for your efforts. Encourage and train members to be active “citizens for Earth.”

Each one teach one. Take what you have learned, find another congregation that desires to develop a green congregation and be partners and mentors in their endeavor. This is one of the best ways to strengthen your own efforts while assisting someone else. In the end, you have a partner.

Be a flagship congregation. Show others what a congregation looks like that loves God, loves the neighbor, and cares for creation. Put it on your outdoor board, post it on the website, announce it in the newspaper, and live it every week. This will do a great deal to inspire others to embrace the same identity and mission.

Do not be overwhelmed. This is a lot of information. No doubt you have thought of other things in relation to your situation. Choose from these ideas. Choose what will take you to the next level. Do not choose more than is realistic to accomplish. Choose what may take you to another level beyond this one. Choose what people are excited about. Choose something that is

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needed. Choose what will generate energy rather than deplete it. Do it with a sense of freedom and joy. Look to the roots of your faith as means to sustain you in this work. You can only do what you can do. So plant the seeds and trust God for a harvest.

**Fall in love with creation.** Find ways for you and your congregation to discover anew the love of God for all creation. God has created all things for their own sake, not for what they can do for humans. God is in all things “working for good.” We can be restored not only by our relationship with nature, but also by our relationship with God in nature. By loving nature and by caring for it and about it, we align ourselves with God’s deep and abiding love for all things. Because we encounter in nature a God of love who cares for the most vulnerable, we will be empowered to do the same.

## 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, Copenhagen) 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. A knowledge of Lutheran traditions that foster Earth care.

7. What congregations can do to incorporate care for 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.

9. 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.

10. 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.

11. 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.

## LRC 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.

## Why Lutherans Care for All Creation

**1. Theology:** We affirm God as creator of all. We have a incarnation theology that cherishes the continuing presence of God in, with, and under all reality. We see redemption as the restoration of creation, as “new creation.” We see the future straining toward the fulfillment of creation.

**2. Cross and Resurrection:** The gospel leads us to see God in solidarity with the human situation in all its pain and agony, especially the most vulnerable—humans and non-humans. A theology of the cross gives us solidarity with “creation groaning in travail” and stresses that God redeems *all* creation. Our affirmation of resurrection offers hope for new life in this world.

**3. Worship and Sacraments:** We affirm that the material is a vehicle of the divine and that Christ is present in such ordinary elements of life as grapes and grain—the basis for our delight in and reverence for creation. Our worship invites us into transforming encounters with God deep in the flesh and in the world. We are called to worship God *with* creation.

**4. Ecclesiology:** Our human vocation is “to serve and to preserve” Earth. We believe that the church exists for the sake of the world. We do not have an escapist theology. We are called to continual reformation in response to the needs and crises of this life. When Luther was asked what he would do if the world would end tomorrow, he apparently replied, “Plant a tree.”

**5. Ethics:** We have an ethic of faith-active-in-love for neighbor and for all creation. Liberated from a legalism that enslaves, we are freed to address new situations, such as the ecological state of the world. We do so not to dominate but as servants to our human and non-human neighbors. We do so not out of fear or guilt or arrogance but joyfully out of grace, love, and gratitude.

**6. Social Ministry:** With a heritage back to the Reformation, Lutherans have a history of social service to the poor, the elderly, the sick, the oppressed, the marginalized—through hospitals, homes for the elderly, social ministry agencies, Lutheran Immigration Service,

and Lutheran World Relief. We extend that service to healing Earth community ([www.elca.org/careforcreation](http://www.elca.org/careforcreation)).

**7. Advocacy:** We ELCA Lutherans have relevant social statements: “Caring for Creation” and “Sustainable Livelihood for All.” We have a staff person in environmental/hunger advocacy in Washington and Lutheran Public Policy offices in many states ([www.elca.org/advocacy](http://www.elca.org/advocacy)).

**8. Scholarship and Education:** Many Lutheran scholars have written and spoken on ecology—in theology, ethics, biblical study, and social commentary. Colleges and seminaries of the ELCA have environmental ministry courses that prepare Lutherans for leadership in church and world. Many continuing education events for clergy and laity highlight creation care.

**9. Caring for Creation across the church:** Several synods with creation-care committees have declared themselves to be Care-For-Creation Synods. Many Lutheran congregations incorporate Earth-care commitment in their life and mission—worship, education, building and grounds, discipleship at home and work, and public ministry. Lutheran camps have brought environmental concerns to many people. The ELCA headquarters has a Green Team working to model environmental action. The ELCA offers grants for environmental projects.

**10. Organizations for Earthkeeping:** We have had the Lutheran Earthkeeping Network of the Synods. Lutherans have led in the Green Congregation Program, the Green Seminary Initiative, the Web of Creation ([www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org)), promoted a Season of Creation in the church year ([www.seasonofcreation.com](http://www.seasonofcreation.com)), Lutherans Restoring Creation ([www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org](http://www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org)).

Lutherans are in a critical position to listen to the cry of the poor along with the cry of Earth and to take leadership in addressing these critical issues of our day. In whatever context you may be serving, we encourage you to participate in this endeavor.