

FAITH AND CLIMATE ACTION: BECOMING A "GREEN" CONGREGATION



FIVE "GREEN FIELDS"

Religious communities engaged on climate and environmental issues typically work in five main areas. It may help to think about these categories when considering what projects to take on. Below are just a few examples.

WORSHIP

An opportunity to make climate change and care for creation part of your community's culture and identity.

- **All Worship.** Make every service creation-care worship: Make it explicit in the call to worship, prayers, blessing/commission, scriptures, hymns, and/or sermons.
- **Season of Creation.** Observe a four-week optional season to celebrate creation as part of the church year, with liturgies, sermons, and alternative scripture lessons.
- **Special Worship Services.** Observe a special day, such as Earth Sunday in April a "Greening of the Cross" service in the Easter Season, or a blessing of the animals service near St. Francis Day.
- **Decorate the worship/gathering space** with creation-care banners, greenery, and art.
- **Green your worship practices.** energy-saving lights and heat; altar plants, local wine, green cleaning products, eliminate/recycle/reuse paper.

EDUCATION

Learn about historical, scriptural, and theological traditions and teachings on topics including the degradation of creation from human activities; how this causes suffering and oppression, especially among the poor and vulnerable; and mandates that call us to restore Earth-community for future generations.

- **Adult Education.** Show a series of videos or work through a curriculum, like the Intercommunity Peace and Justice Center's four-part curriculum, *Climate Change: Our Call to Conversion*.
- **Forums, presentations, or facilitated discussions.** Bring in outside speakers or local experts on topics of interest to your congregation, or attend a local workshop.
- **Book clubs.** Organize a book club to study in depth.
- **Bulletin educational materials.** Each week include a short blurb in your bulletin - there are resources that provide weekly brief texts.
- **Youth and Children's education.** Use a themed curriculum for VBS or Sunday School, or other special events. Choose activities that help children and young adults connect with nature and involve them in other creation-care efforts around the congregation.

BUILDING AND GROUNDS

Assess the impact of activities, use and maintenance of our property upon creation.

- **Energy Audit.** Assess your congregation's energy use/costs and carbon footprint. Track your energy use, create an action plan to reduce and conserve energy and improve efficiency.

- **Overall environmental audit.** Do a complete environmental inventory of your congregation, and take action. For an example, see: <http://www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org/comprehensive-environmental-visioning>
- **Choose a specific project.** Replace all incandescent bulbs; retrofit fluorescent lighting; develop a recycling program; reduce paper use; purchase green cleaning products; make Earth-friendly food choices; eliminate Styrofoam; develop Earth-friendly lawn care, among others.
- **Use of land.** Create a community garden; restore native prairie; maintain any natural habitat; plant trees; create a sanctuary or peace garden; nurture animal life.
- **Know your property as an “Earth community.”** Get to know the trees, plants, animals, insects, birds, and other creatures who live with you on this space. Pray for them. Worship with them.

DISCIPLESHIP: LIFESTYLE CHANGES AT HOME AND WORK

Encourage each other as individual members of this community—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.

- **Covenant with Creation.** Plan a worship service in which members can identify Earth-friendly practices they are willing to commit to at home and work. Use a brief ritual that makes these commitments an offering.
- **Conduct a workshop on making your home Earth-friendly.** Many resources are available to inform members about the areas of greening they can do.
- **Support groups.** Excellent for change of habits and accountability for “eco-recovery.” For example, Earth Ministry’s *Simpler Living, Compassionate Life*.
- **Devotional resources.** Recommend creation-care resources to members for personal devotions. Ask people to sign up to follow a discipline with a resource for a particular season.
- **Hold a retreat.** Lead a retreat for people to get closer to the natural world.

PUBLIC WITNESS/POLICY ADVOCACY

Seek to change the systems that lead to the degradation of creation and to address the human injustices that result from it. Become aware of environmental policies and legislation that protect creation and encourage active participation in the development of public policy.

- **Informational forums.** Learn what environmental organizations are active in your community and invite a representative of one or more to present a forum on their program.
- **Legislative forum.** Invite the head of your denominational Public Policy office in your area or an official familiar with state and regional environmental issues to preach or present a forum. If there is a critical issue in your area, plan a forum for information and conversation about it, and act on it.
- **Direct action/letter-writing/lobbying** Organize letter-writing campaigns on local issues. Sign up for action alerts through your denomination or other organization.
- **Hands-on project.** Learn what projects are happening in your area and what organizations are sponsoring them, and partner with them.
- **Partner with other faith communities.** Join with others seeking to green their congregations. Or, if you have been active for several years, offer to mentor another congregation.
- **Other.** For example, identify an issue of ecological justice in your community and support the vulnerable who are being affected by environmental degradation.

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS/EXTERNAL RESOURCES

There are many excellent resources available to support your efforts in the five areas of engagement, from individual religious denominations to national organizations. Here are just a few examples. Faith and Climate Action Montana can help connect you with resources specific to your needs.

NATIONAL/REGIONAL ECUMENICAL AND INTERFAITH RESOURCES

- **Interfaith Power and Light:** <http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/>
The mission of Interfaith Power & Light is to be faithful stewards of Creation by responding to global warming through the promotion of energy conservation, energy efficiency, and renewable energy.
- **GreenFaith:** <http://www.greenfaith.org/>
GreenFaith's mission is to inspire, educate and mobilize people of diverse religious backgrounds for environmental leadership. GreenFaith offers a certification program as well as many resources in the areas of "Spirit", "Stewardship", and "Justice."
- **Earth Ministry –** <http://earthministry.org/>
Based in Seattle for over 20 years, Earth Ministry has excellent resources especially for political advocacy and greening congregations.
- **Let All Creation Praise:** www.letallcreationpraise.org
Ecumenical Christian resources mainly for worship.
- **National Religious Partnership for the Environment:** <http://www.nrpe.org/>
The National Religious Partnership for the Environment brings together a diverse alliance of faith institutions and leaders in order to bring voice and action on behalf of caring for God's Creation.

DENOMINATION/FAITH-SPECIFIC RESOURCES

- **Buddhist:** One Earth Sangha: <http://www.oneearthsangha.org/>
- **Catholic:** The Catholic Climate Covenant: <http://www.catholicclimatecovenant.org/>
The Global Catholic Climate Movement: <http://catholicclimatemovement.global/>
- **Episcopal:** Episcopal Ecological Network: <http://www.eenonline.org/>
- **Evangelical:** Evangelical Environment Network: <http://creationcare.org/>
- **Friends:** Quaker Earthcare Witness: <http://www.quakerearthcare.org/>
- **Lutheran (ELCA):** Lutherans Restoring Creation: <http://www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org/>
- **Presbyterian (PCUSA):** Presbyterians for Earth Care <http://presbyearthcare.org/about-what.html>
- **Reform Judaism:** Religious Action Center: <http://www.rac.org/environment>
- **United Methodist Church:** Caretakers of God's Creation: <http://www.umccreationcare.org/>
- **United Church of Christ:** UCC Environmental Ministries: <http://www.ucc.org/environmental-ministries>
- **Unitarian Universalist:** <http://www.uua.org/environment/climate>