

Action Plan: The Green Congregation Program

The strategy is to make a difference on earth by 1) transforming attitudes and commitments, and 2) embracing concrete actions that reduce human ecological impact on Earth and 3) contributing to justice for people affected by environmental degradation. Work out of this six-part model to make your congregation a Green Congregation. Choose projects likely to succeed, institutionalize them, and then move to others. The committee will seek to engage the congregation in doing actions drawn from the following six areas. The Green Team can identify the committee or group they hope will carry out the project and then plan how to approach that committee to follow through.

1. Transformation through Worship: Let all creation praise God”

- a. For four Sundays in September, observe a four-week *Season of Creation* with liturgies, sermons, scripture focusing on a relationship with nature: forest, rivers, wilderness, and so on. (www.seasonofcreation.com)
- b. Observe Earth Day Sunday in April with common worship services (NCC Eco-justice Working Group: www.nccecojustice.org)
- c. Have a Blessing of the Animals to commemorate St. Francis Day. (www.webofcreation.org under Worship). See other Holy Days on the Web of Creation calendar
- d. Covenant with Creation. Have a service for people to offer their personal commitments.
- e. Incorporate earth-keeping confessions, intercessory prayers, hymns, and sermons into worship throughout the year.
- f. Appoint the sanctuary with appropriate banners, greenery, and art that keeps before the congregation their earth-keeping identity and mission.

2. Education: “Know your tradition and your world”

- a. Study the denominational Social Statement on “Caring for Creation” and the “Earth Charter.” Make these available to members. Contact ELCA headquarters or see www.webofcreation.org under Religious Education)
- b. A class/forum to study the ecological state of the world, how we should think about the challenges, and what we can do about them (see Northwest Earth Institute (consult www.nwei.org). Read *Plan B: Rescuing and Planet Under Stress and a Civilization in Trouble* by Lester Brown)
- c. A class/forum to study the biblical, theological, and ethical resources in the Christian faith for eco-justice ministry.
- d. Sunday forums with local experts to become informed about environmental issues and resources in the region.
- e. View *Inconvenient Truth* and other relevant films.
- f. Hold a retreat in a natural setting for the cluster of churches/ councils
- g. Study *Awakening to God’s Call to Earthkeeping* by Kim Winchell, available in hardcopy or at www.elca.org/stewardship/teaching.
- h. Develop Vacation Church School or youth resources on creation-care

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

- a. Make a comprehensive environmental plan of action with the *Environmental Guide for Congregations, Their Buildings and Grounds* available in hardcopy or at www.webofcreation.org. Use the checklist.
- b. Get renewable energy or do a complete retrofit of church lighting

- c. Develop a comprehensive recycling/disposal program.
 - d. Use green cleaning products.
 - e. Reduce paper use and purchase ecologically friendly paper.
 - f. Develop low maintenance lawn and property.
 - g. Green coffee hour, church dinners, and worship practices.
- 4. Discipleship at home and work: “Love your neighbor and Care for Creation”**
- a. Recruit members to do an audit of their homes and to develop a plan to address the concerns. Hold training sessions.
 - b. Recruit a targeted number of members to join the 1-2-3 program: 1) lower thermostat 1 degree; 2) drive 2 miles per hour slower; and 3) put three compact fluorescent bulbs in your home. (See the Unitarian Universalist “Green Sanctuary Program” Manual: www.uusapp.org)
 - c. Provide an opportunity for members make a personal “Covenant with Creation” in which they dedicate their environmental practices. (See www.webofcreation.org under Lifestyle at Home and Work).
 - d. Offer a study/support group using the book *Simple Living, Compassionate Living*. (resources from Earth Ministry: www.earthministry.org). Study Voluntary Simplicity with the Northwest Earth Institute (www.nwei.org)
 - e. Make available daily devotional materials that emphasize care for creation and the importance of connecting with nature. (see, for example, *Earth Prayers From Around the World* by Elizabeth Roberts)
 - f. Hold training sessions for members to green their places of work
- 5. Public Ministry/Political Advocacy: “The church exists to serve the world”**
- a. Notify members of action alerts about legal or policy issues in the public arena, along with information about how to contact appropriate officials
 - b. Do a hands-on project in the area of your church, such as restore a habitat, clean up trash, plant trees, or protest pollution causing ill health.
 - c. Learn about local environmental issues and cooperate with existing environmental agencies and organizations to address the issues.
 - d. Develop a plan to promote earth-keeping practices in your denomination.
 - e. Plan an ecumenical earth-keeping workshop for churches in your area.
 - f. Recruit and mentor another congregation in becoming green.
- 6. Special project: some ideas**
- a. Community garden
 - b. Protest emissions that cause ill health
 - c. Alternative energy (wind, geo-thermal)
 - d. Develop a prairie on site
 - e. Work to restore a community habitat.
 - f. Make a natural sanctuary/labyrinth
 - g. Redesign neighborhood program to include environment
 - h. Green building/ remodeling program
 - i. Develop a community composting program
 - j. Plants trees in suppressed areas of your city.
 - k. Do a workshop for local residents on “Greening Your Living Space”