



Script:

The climate crisis is vast, complex, and can be terrifying. Churches and Christians who face it may identify with the prophet Amos, who responded to the crisis facing Israel in the eighth century BCE by twice saying, “How can Israel stand? He is so small!” Yet are we too small? Is there nothing the church can do? Quite the opposite is true. If anything, there is a plethora of so many good actions religious communities may choose from.

There are four areas of Creation Care in which the church can be active: Liturgical, educational, active stewardship, and collaboration with local eco-justice work.

We will start with the liturgical possibilities.

Lex orandi, Lex credendi is a fundamental principle of the Episcopal church – as we pray so we believe. In order for us to really get to grips with the challenges of Creation Care and stewardship at this time in history we must pay attention to how and what we pray because our prayer forms our beliefs which affect how we live. In fact, we can expand it further to

Lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi (“the law of what is prayed [is] what is believed [is] the law of what is lived”).

We have many hymns that extol the beauty of creation and praise God the Creator, we have prayers for Creation and many of our eucharistic prayers mention Creation but by and large we treat it as a backdrop for the drama of salvation. The important action we think is the liberation of God’s people in the Exodus and how the story of covenant love and redemption is played out between God and human and is supremely manifest in the incarnation of Christ culminating in his loving death and then astonishing resurrection and ascension. But none of this would be possible without Creation, and we cannot separate ourselves from Creation.

According to the apostle Paul, we humans have a special role to play in the redemption not just of humanity but of the whole universe, He writes,

“For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.” (Romans 8:19-22)

And what's more, Christ himself is totally identified with Creation;

in the letter to the Colossians we read, "Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation, for all things in heaven and on earth were created in him—all things, whether visible or invisible, whether thrones or dominions,^l whether principalities or powers—all things were created through him and for him. He himself is before all things and all things are held together^l in him. (Colossians 1: 15-17)

In order for us to fully understand the truth of these passages and others like them they need to be totally integrated into our worship until they are forming us in a new way. This will not happen unless we make a conscious change, unless we consciously start to pay attention to the role of creation. So the time has come for us to privilege Creation in our worship and in our preaching. The time has come for us to choose to notice how important care of Creation is in our calling to be God's people.

One way to do this is to have special occasions when you intentionally focus as a worshiping community on Creation. Traditionally the church celebrated Rogation Days which were days focused on agriculture and especially the crops of the local fields. In the Church of England Rogation Sunday is most often observed the Sunday before Ascension Day. It is no longer observed in the Episcopal church, but many congregations celebrate Earth Sunday on the Sunday closest to Earth Day – that's April 22.

You may also consider celebrating the Season of Creation from September 1 until St Francis Day on October 4. In 1989 September 1st was declared a day of prayer for Creation by the Orthodox churches and is now celebrated as a worldwide ecumenical day of prayer. The idea of a longer season was developed by the World Council of Churches and Since 2009, the Anglican Consultative Council has called on provinces to include the Season of Creation in their yearly pattern of worship. There are many resources available for this special liturgical season.

Of course, we need to be thinking about Creation care more than on Earth Sunday and during the Season of Creation but these two times of special focus can help us to find new understandings of the relationships between Creation, Christ and Church which can profoundly inform our worship and our spirituality throughout the year.

Many of our Sunday lectionary readings draw examples from Creation or talk about God's help in time of trouble. Preachers who draw these out and relate them to our present experience of creation and the climate crisis assist in building a community which has a focus on the stewardship of all creation.

Now it's time for you -please stop the video and see how these ideas resonate with you. What is your congregation doing to consciously include Creation care in your liturgy? What would you like to do?

Now let's think about Educational Actions

Nelson Mandela wrote that “Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.” Some might take issue with Mandela’s characterizing education as a weapon; our Christian wisdom traditions, especially in Proverbs and the Wisdom of Solomon, see wisdom as a delight and a joy to God and humans. In planning green educational events in faith communities, we might be wise to incorporate both serious heavy lifting studies. . . and delightful learning events that are great fun.

As examples of the first, there are many books that churches have used as the basis for study. A good starting place is Care for Creation: A Franciscan Spirituality of the Earth by Ilia Delio. It takes both a theological and practical approach to a deeper understanding of how as Christians we are called to care for our planet.

Pope Francis issued a encyclical Laudato Si in 2015 which is a **wake up call to help us** understand the destruction that humanity is causing to the environment and its effects on each other. While addressing the environment directly, the document’s scope is broader in many ways as addresses the spiritual roots of the current crisis and the intersections between oppression of people and oppression of the earth. It is surprisingly easy to read.

We have included other possible books in the resource materials.

For delightful and hands-on learning activities, have fun and use the skills of your members and neighbors. Churches have offered workshops on composting, canning, beekeeping, water conservation, drought tolerant gardening, or bread-making, and film and video nights with both ecological and general interest films. Topics as diverse as birding, star-gazing, natural food-tasting and natural burials have also been touched on by faith communities, and they add to our environmental awareness.

There are no doubt many environmental groups in your own community who will be happy to help you explore the riches of your local biosphere as well as understand best practices for caring for it.

Reducing our “carbon footprint” – the amount of carbon that we put into the atmosphere is vital if we are to stop climate change getting out of control. We think of big things like solar panels or electric cars but there are many smaller ways that we can make changes. As we mentioned last week, The Episcopal Church has a great resource to help us do just that.

Sustain Island Home is a carbon tracker which households can use to see how much carbon they are currently using and what they can do to change it. It is in itself a superb educational tool but it only works when we use it. Consider encouraging the members of your congregation to start actively using this tool and you will soon see by how much you can reduce your collective carbon footprint.

Now its time for you to talk...

- What educational activities or events around creation care and climate change have you attended?
- What have you particularly enjoyed?
- What has your congregation offered?
- What might you consider doing?
- What would your friends enjoy – what would be fun?

“God planted a garden in Eden, in the east,” says Genesis 2.8. Norman Wirzba, professor at Duke Divinity School, adds this comment: “As the story describes it, the goal of all human life is to participate in God’s watering, weeding, composting and soil-building life, and then to delight in it and with it in Sabbath rest.” Stewardship is sometimes thought of as mostly a financial matter, or somewhat more broadly as having house-manager’s skills. Before the money or the house, though, “is the sky and the earth and the good Lord’s will.”

Stewardship at its heart is creation care, earth-keeping. And stewardship begins at home.

- How is your congregation practicing earth-centered stewardship?
- Are you recycling?
- Are you using reusable or compostable plates and cups or does your trash can overflow after fellowship hour?
- What kind of light bulbs do you have?
- Do your bathrooms have low-flow fixtures?

You may decide to take an environmental audit of your church building to see how you can live more lightly on the earth.

There are many guides to greening your church – it is much like looking at your home and work life – how can you use less and how can you emit less greenhouse gases? As part of this process you will want to calculate your congregation’s carbon footprint – don’t forget to include the carbon they emit driving to church!

Active stewardship also involves looking at the land you have and how you are using it –

- are you planting native plants that bless insect and bird life?
- Is there land that could be used for an organic garden?
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Churches have a long history of planting trees – is there somewhere that you can plant trees which will reduce carbon emissions?

We cannot all move rapidly to a point of carbon neutrality – where we are no longer putting carbon into the atmosphere – but we can mitigate the carbon we are creating. You may want to consider the possibility of buying carbon offsets.

Organizations like Terrapass fund projects that destroy greenhouse gases and produce renewable energy. Each project is made possible by people like us choosing to purchase an offset of the carbon we are producing.

Now it is time for you to talk...

- When you hear the word “stewardship” what does it mean to you?
- Does it make sense to say that stewardship of creation is at the heart of our calling as Christians?
- How might a greater awareness of the stewardship of Creation affect your congregation?

The fourth way that congregations can get involved with God’s work in redeeming the planet is through collaborating with other green groups to influence public opinion and public policy.

We will talk about this in more depth in our next session as we hear from the Rev Dr Margaret Bullitt-Jonas who is the Creation missioner for the diocese of Western Massachusetts. In the meantime, look around, there are many organizations who are doing great work and your congregation can get involved in local action.

We can have great liturgy, and education, and greening of the church. . .but we don’t worship fully, nor learn much, nor bend the arc of the universe toward eco-justice without working together.

Here are three questions with which to move from section four into the world:

- What are the members and groups in our faith community already doing with other groups working for eco-justice?
- What is an unmet need for eco-justice in our area?
- What are organizations that can help us and we help them in addressing this need?

Among the organizations that may help with resources are Interfaith Power and Light, Sierra Club, Audobon Society, The Nature Conservancy, CoolEffecgt, 350.org, Earth Guardians (young), GreenDreamers, Citizen’s Climate Lobby, Regeneration International, Project Drawdown, etc

Resources

- Encourage your church and its members to take the Episcopal Creation Care Pledge attached to this study guide. In it communities make an interactive, dynamic commitment to loving, liberating and life-giving for the care of creation, at www.episcopalchurch.org/creation.
- Encourage your church members to participate in the carbon-tracking program, Sustain Island Home, developed and recommended by the Episcopal Church and developed by the ????????? Diocese of California. Find it at www.diocal.org/climate.
- Take a look at the “Action Steps to Become Recognized as a Green Congregation.” (This particular one-page sheet comes from the UCC of Connecticut. It’s attached it not because we need to do what the UCC does, but because it puts a lot on one page.) Check off with one color of pen steps that your congregation is already taking. Then mark with a different color two or three items that would be do-able next steps.