

Greening Churches Guide

CULTIVATING HOPE



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• Foreword •

More than anything else, this guide is about seeds.

The title of this guide, “Cultivating Hope,” is the fruit of seeds--both literal and figurative: seeds of vegetable plants in our Inter-Church Garden; seeds of ideas for energy efficiency in church buildings; seeds of native oak savanna vegetation for land restoration at a rural Decorah church; seeds of knowledge that inspire congregation members to live more sustainable lives; seeds of community growing together to take care of God’s Creation; and seeds of hope in the face of complex environmental problems.

The Greening Churches Internship grew out of two Greening of the Churches workshops held at Luther College in April 2007 and 2010, sponsored by the Sense of Vocation Program (Lily Grant) at Luther. The internship is now funded by a generous grant to Luther College by the Kinney-Lindstrom Foundation of Mason City, Iowa.

When we began our Greening Churches Internship in June 2012, we spent the first couple of weeks visiting churches and meeting with people interested in environmental stewardship projects in their churches. During these meetings, ideas of the ways we could best assist our nine partner congregations were planted in our heads.

Many of the congregations expressed similar project needs. Several churches had questions about how to make their building more environmentally-friendly. Others wanted us to write newsletter articles to the congregation about what the leaders had already done to be good stewards of creation. A few congregations requested that we preach about our call to take care of our neighbors and the earth during their worship services. All of the churches requested Sunday School and educational curriculum, so that the seeds of sustainability could be planted in members of their congregations.

This guide is the harvest of our work during this internship. We have included five chapters to help churches with the greening process. The introduction addresses why people of faith should care about Creation and the social justice issues that arise from environmental problems.

- * Chapter 1 discusses stewardship of energy, water, waste and land. Each of these sections includes ideas for what people can do in their own congregations and tips on how to start these projects.
- * Chapter 2 includes educational materials for children, youth and adults. There are (9) lessons written by us interns, as well as references to curricula available for free download or purchase.
- * Chapter 3 addresses ways to incorporate environmental stewardship into worship. There are recommendations of resources for use in worship, as well as examples of sermons we preached this summer.
- * Chapter 4 showcases organizations who are already working with communities of faith on environmental issues.
- * Finally, the Appendix includes reports addressing the questions raised by specific churches. We have included these reports in the guides for all congregations so that they may refer to them as similar questions emerge in the future.

Of course, our internship required some weeding as well. In the brief eight weeks that we had to do our projects, we simply could not address every need of every church. As this internship continues in the future, we hope the seeds that have been planted this summer will continue to bear fruit in this community for years to come.

Most importantly, the goal of our internship has been to cultivate hope. Learning about environmental problems facing Creation can lead us to despair. At times our efforts to engage in sustainable behavior seem futile. But we must not give up! People of faith can tend and keep Creation and love their neighbors while receiving grace from God when we fall short. Communities of faith like yours have the power to mobilize their congregations to seek common ground for the common good. We have witnessed this abundantly in our 9 congregations this summer!

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INTRODUCTION

Faith, Social Justice, & Sustainability



The Call to Eco-Justice

Faith, Social Justice, & Environmental Stewardship

Climate change, air and water pollution, soil erosion, and habitat degradation are among the many complex environmental issues affecting the earth community. As people of faith, we are called to advocate for justice with our neighbors near and far who suffer under these conditions. We are called to nurture and protect all creatures on this earth. As we are entrusted with the responsibility to care for creation, it can be easy to be paralyzed by despair. But by the grace of God, we are called to faithfulness, not perfection. We are invited to a place of wonder and gratitude for the integrity of creation. We celebrate the call to be stewards of the resources upon which life depends. Through action and collaboration with each other in this community, we seek to cultivate hope that will sustain us as we do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God.



From the Dust

From the beginning, nature and humans are fundamentally connected. In Genesis, God forms the first man out of the dust of the earth and instructs him to tend and keep the garden. God entrusts him with the responsibility of naming all the livestock, the birds in the sky, and all the wild animals. The first human helps God manage life in the garden. Genesis shows what the relationship between humans and the earth ought to be. In the same way that the first human was instructed to tend and keep the garden, God calls us to be good stewards of creation.

Stewardship does not mean we will stop using resources in our daily lives. Rather it calls us to use the blessings God has given us wisely and responsibly.

Loving God and Neighbor

Not only is Creation held sacred because it belongs to God, taking care of the earth is also the call of the Gospels. We only have one earth. We must be aware of our actions out of concern for our neighbors around the globe who inherit the consequences of our actions. Many environmental problems disproportionately impact poor and marginalized communities. Even in the most developed societies, environmental problems exacerbate existing socio-economic injustices. For example, as the sea levels rise, droughts worsen, and storm cells intensify due to increasing carbon emissions, climate change affects the world's most vulnerable people who cannot easily afford to adapt to climate instability. This is one among the many ways that environmental problems are complex, global social justice issues. The link between socio-economic and environmental justice is commonly referred to as "eco-justice".

Furthermore, the impacts of many environmental issues will not be experienced immediately. Our actions today affect future generations. We must consider the intergenerational justice dimension of environmental problems and work towards the future we want for our children and grandchildren.

Towards Sustainable Living

There are many ways to live out these call to eco-justice in the daily lives of your congregation. While it is important to make the church building as environmentally friendly as possible, the earth community will experience a greater impact if everyone in the congregation makes similar changes in their homes.

So where do you begin? Educate yourself, make simple changes, and keep moving forward in the process of environmental stewardship. Remember you are not alone on this journey. Join with others in your community of faith and rely on God to sustain and strengthen you.

Recycling, conserving water and energy, and restoring land exemplify the many environmental actions that a congregation can take to care for creation. However, since we do not see the consequences of many environmental problems in the short-term it is important to alleviate the burden of environmental issues from those most impacted today. This is central to the call of the Gospel: to feed the hungry, care for the sick, and heal the broken. For example, gardens connect people to the earth but also can provide fresh produce for local food pantries. Dropping off household items at thrift stores not only eliminates waste through reuse, but also helps people in need.

On the path to sustainable living, we must not forget the grace of God. We must seek faithfulness in our commitment to sustainability, not perfection. When addressing bleak environmental issues, it is easy to succumb to despair, but it is important to remember that individual actions matter. As the Body of Christ, we have our faith--our source of infinite hope--that sustains us as we make the vision of eco-justice a reality.