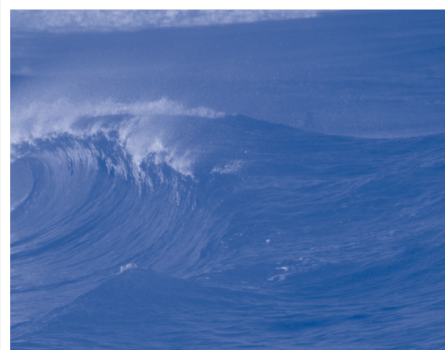


Water Stewards



A Toolkit for Congregational Care of Local Watersheds

Water Action Toolkit

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES USA
ECO-JUSTICE PROGRAM

Water Stewards:

A Toolkit for Congregational Care of Local Watersheds

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Introduction

The purpose of this “*Water Stewards*” guide is to provide Christian communities with a simple manual that suggests ways to contribute to watershed protection.

The everyday choices we make—whether in our homes, at our places of work, or within our churches—have a profound influence on the health of the natural communities in which we live. In this guide we provide tips and resources to enable your congregation to discuss what wise choices and positive actions you can make to help restore your watershed for this generation and those to come.

As you learn more, we hope that you’ll feel empowered to take simple actions that make meaningful changes for God’s creation.

The everyday choices we make—whether in our homes, at our places of work, or within our churches—have a profound influence on the health of the natural communities in which we live.



Why Churches Care: Theological and Ethical Foundations

God's creation is wonderfully complex, interdependent, and beautiful. The gifts of creation and the responsibility of its stewardship were given to all of humanity so that each would have access to its bounties. As God's people, we are called to this task—respectfully taking care of God's creation for its own sake, so that present and future generations may live on it and enjoy all of its fruits.

Those wondrous pictures of the earth from outer space offer a particularly good place to start to understand the importance of God's gift of water. What strikes one in looking at those pictures is not the land masses, but the abundance of water. From outer space, one can see clearly that earth is a "blue planet" – a water planet.

Throughout both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, water plays a significant role in helping us understand the nature of God, God's purposes in the world and our relationship with God. One need only think of the crossing of the Red Sea, Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River, the woman at the well, and Jesus describing himself as living water. In fact, the Bible includes over 500 references to the word "water" and countless more on water-related subjects, like rivers, rain, seas, floods and storms. Many of the main water themes that run through the Bible include creation, sustenance, purification and transformation and begin to tell us about God and the relationship God would like us to have with the waters God created.

The best place to begin to appreciate the importance of water is with the creation stories themselves. To understand the stories, it is important to remember that the ancient writers did not have a concept of infinite space as we do. And, the writer had to accommodate his/her experience of water coming from the sky in the form of rain, being on the surface of the land in the form of seas and rivers, and available from under the ground from wells.

As God's people, we are called to this task—respectfully taking care of God's creation for its own sake, so that present and future generations may live on it and enjoy all of its fruits.

In the first chapter of Genesis, God first separates the waters into those from above and those from below by forming a solid dome called the sky. Then, God creates the earth out of the waters. Only after the water is in place does God put vegetation, animals and other creatures on the earth. Genesis 1:20 teaches that creation literally comes out of the waters. From the beginning, all of creation is dependent on the gift of water. This ancient narrative is uncannily similar to modern understanding. Science confirms that life as we know it first arose in the water, and it goes without saying that without water, life on earth can not be sustained.

For five days, God creates and creates. After each challenging day of creation, God stops and acknowledges that it is indeed "good." This declaration reminds us that even before humans were created, God loved and valued creation for its own sake. Regardless of how small the creature, God recognized its value even before humankind.



Why Churches Care

And we know from our own experience that, indeed the creation is good. We all enjoy a blue sky and the green buds of spring. We love the feel of cool water on our skin on a hot summer day, the glowing colors of fall and the gleam of sunshine on snow in winter. We are sometimes almost overcome at the myriad stars shining on a clear night, and love to see the full moon lighting up the nighttime world with its pearly glow. We marvel at the mysteries of migrating birds and butterflies and fish. We are enchanted by the attentiveness of a mother bird to her chicks and charmed by the beauty of wildflowers in the spring. We are often left speechless by the splendor of a sunset, or the fury of a thunderstorm, or the power of falling water. We enjoy the fruits of summer and the harvest in the fall, the fresh fish, crabs and oysters that are pulled from our waters. Yes, the Earth--and the whole universe--is good. God made it that way.

On the sixth day, God creates both men and women in God's own image and gives humans "dominion" over the earth (Genesis 1:27-28). The combination of having been created in God's image as well as being given dominion over the earth has often been misinterpreted as giving humanity absolute right to use and exploit creation for its own purposes. What the Scripture actually says is that the earth and its waters belong to God and God alone. In the ancient Near

Eastern world the word "image" was understood as one's representative and often used for a king standing in for, or representing, a god. The human role, therefore, is to stand in for the Creator, to represent God's creative purposes in the world, not humanity's. As images of God, we are called to love, value, and sustain the waters of the world just as God does.

The word "dominion" is understood in the same vein. Dominion is not domination. Dominion is exercised in recognition of God's sovereignty over earth. We are given the privilege of joining God in the care-taking of the waters. If we are looking at a model of how to establish leadership in creation, we need look no further than Jesus who taught us to lead by being servants.

In the creation story, on the seventh day God "rested." A special kind of rest; the Hebrews called it "menuha." In this "menuha," God enjoyed all that had been created, and God continues to invite humans to enter into this deep enjoyment. To fulfill our ministry, it is important to take time apart, time for "Sabbath rest."

**Explore more water theology by conducting an
adult education or Sunday school class.**

See the curriculum located in this Toolkit for suggestions.



Water: A Source of Life

Water covers nearly three-fourths of the earth's surface. Yet even with water everywhere around us, less than 3% of it is freshwater. Of freshwater, much is permanently frozen or in deep underground aquifers. Freshwater available for use is less than 1% of the world's water. Freshwater is home to 40% of the world's known fish species. It is essential for human life and health.

FRESHWATER: SCARCITY AND JUSTICE

Freshwater is one of God's most precious gifts and is vital as the life support of the planet, its ecosystems, and its inhabitants. While so important in sustaining life, less than one percent of the world's freshwater is available for human use, whether for agriculture, drinking and household use, transportation or energy production. Freshwater is in high demand and the competition is ever increasing as overuse and water quality issues continually threaten existing supplies.

Freshwater ecosystems come in many forms and include all inland bodies of water, including—among others—lakes, rivers, and wetlands. These ecosystems, also known as watersheds or catchments, are globally threatened by unsustainable land use and water management.

These fragile freshwater ecosystems face a broad range of threats. These include the direct impacts of dams, overfishing, pollution, stream channelization, water withdrawals and diversions, as well as the indirect consequences of terrestrial activities such as logging, agriculture, industry, infrastructure development, and mining.

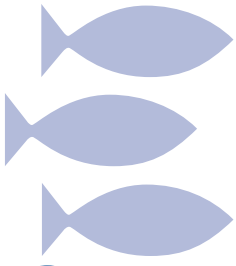
USE AND POLLUTION

Together, agriculture and industrial practices claim the highest rates of use of freshwater resources. As industrial and agricultural use has increased, as well as residential development, so has pollution. Excessive uses of pesticides and fertilizers have a negative effect on water stores, and ultimately on both human and ecosystem health. For example, excessive use of fertilizers contributes to excess nitrate production in water systems, which has been shown to cause infant brain damage and, in some cases, death. In the United States, more than 40 million people take their drinking water from systems that exceed health-based standards.

UNSUSTAINABLE USE

Groundwater resources are used by about one-third of the world's people. Excessive withdrawals—extraction of groundwater at a rate greater than can be naturally recharged—are occurring across nearly every continent. This unsustainable use of groundwater also increases the risk of secondary effects such as land subsidence and saltwater intrusion. Increased and expansive urbanization, in addition to overuse, threatens groundwater recharge rates.

Good water management plays a vital role in realizing the abundance of the Earth's freshwater supply. Communities, in both the developed and developing world, must take seriously the need to use and protect this life giving and sustaining resource for today's inhabitants and future generations.



Currents of Creation in the U.S.

The USA, with a landmass over 3.5 million square miles, is the world's fourth largest country in area. It is home to a wide variety of landscapes and ecosystems. Americans live on the bay, in the high mountains, on the plains, in desert, forest, and marshland. In all of these settings, whether for its abundance or scarcity, water plays a key role in the life and livelihood of human and natural communities.

The United States has a total of over 2,100 designated watersheds. Recognizing the diversity of freshwater ecosystems within the United States, problems and solutions are unique in each region. Unfortunately pollution of surface and groundwater is a problem common across the nation and needs immediate action. (For more on freshwater in North America, check out the UN Environmental Programme's Global Environment Outlook 3 at <http://www.grida.no/geo/geo3/english/298.htm>)

Pollution of groundwater comes from point source pollution, a direct outflow from a sewage plant or factory, and from non-point pollution, contamination from a combination of unidentified sources, such as agricultural and urban runoff.

Point source pollution is relatively easy to identify and to deal with as regulations such as the Clean Water Act give the government the authority to compel industries and factories to stop discharging polluted water. While there has been considerable progress in industrial pollutant regulation,

sewage treatment plants are in many cases still discharging excessive quantities of nitrogen into freshwater. With new sources of funding, the introduction of modern technology for all sewage treatment plants is becoming feasible and this discharge may be significantly reduced in coming years.

Non-point sources, on the other hand, are much more difficult to control. Agriculture, one of the major non-point sources, begins on land with nitrogen-rich animal manure, which, if improperly applied as fertilizer or dumped as waste, can release large amounts of nitrogen into surface water. Excess nutrients, when left unabsorbed, also can flow through groundwater, polluting rivers and streams. Septic tanks can have a similar effect, although to a lesser degree, as the nitrogenous waste seeps into the groundwater and horizontally traverses soil layers until it enters a stream.

Pollution of surface and groundwater is a problem common across the nation and needs immediate action.

Ecosystems have ways of dealing with some of these problems. For example, if rainwater collects in a freshwater wetland or infiltrates into the ground, much of the pollutants it contains can be absorbed, metabolized by bacteria or plants, or filtered out. Because of expansive development, however, we now have huge areas of impervious surfaces—roads, parking lots, roofs, driveways—that prevent water from infiltrating the soil. The practice has been to channel surface water off these surfaces into storm drains that too often deliver the water straight into streams and rivers with no filtration or cleansing action to remove the oil and other pollutants that flow off the surface. In times of heavy rain,



Currents of Creation in the U.S.A.

storms pour more water into streams than they are naturally designed to accommodate. Stream beds wash out; the scouring action of the excess water turning the beds into gullies. Sediment and debris washes out, burying native plant life and churning downstream water. In other cases, storm drains feed into public wastewater treatment plants, increasing the cost of operating the plants and sometimes leading to serious overload during rainy weather. Newer regulations and designs require the use of stormwater ponds that treat not only volume but water quality, thus reducing the detrimental effects of stormwater from impervious surfaces.

These problems are not insurmountable. If we—as individuals, as communities, as congregations, and as voters—are committed to work together, we can, ultimately, mitigate these threats and restore beauty and ecological integrity to our freshwater sources.

For more information about your watershed and its ecology, see:

- <http://www.epa.gov/owow/watershed>

For information on river or water organizations in your area, see:

- www.waterkeeper.org
- www.americanrivers.org
- www.river-management.org
- www.rivernet.org, or
- www.irn.org

OUR CALL FOR WATER STEWARDSHIP

We are not asked to go out and rid the world of its problems in a single day. Serving on the mission field does not always mean traveling to remote foreign villages to preach the Gospel. Many of us can serve, preach, and minister to others from our own backyards. It is important that congregations come together to do these things, and that they begin with their own houses of worship. Small changes in buildings can make a difference in the environment. Congregations can serve as a witness to their neighbors, to other churches, to the community, and to the government of the responsibility humans have to protect and conserve God's creation.

When God created humans, we were given stewardship over the Earth and the creatures and plants that fill it. Creation was made in its entirety to work together in a symbiotic relationship, making each ecosystem reliant on other ecosystems. Riparian habitats depend on the weather to sustain their environment. Creatures on the land side of the shoreline need creatures of the water to maintain the nutrients in that water, and keep life moving, often times providing food for the animals on the land. Trees provide the oxygen necessary for human life. Delicate ecosystems are constantly threatened by a world too concerned with growth, industries, technology, and consumption. We must do what we can to protect all God's creatures, great and small, and ensure that technological and industrial progress do not lead to dissipation of these important habitats and systems.

We must do what we can to protect all God's creatures, great and small, and ensure that technological and industrial progress do not lead to dissipation of these important habitats and systems.



Congregational Life

VISION

Perhaps your congregation has already formed a creation care group (a committee or task force dedicated to caring for God's creation) or you are just beginning to explore how your congregation can become better stewards of God's creation. Either way, a vision—in the form of strategic plans, a mission statement, or statements of purpose—is a great place to begin and will, ultimately, help to guide your congregation to develop and live a congregational lifestyle. The process of composing a vision will likely help your group better understand its shared ideals and goals.

If you are just getting started, here are some tips for where to begin:

- Prayer can be a helpful spiritual tool. Begin activities with prayer, use prayer as a problem-solving method, and share prayers of thanksgiving for accomplishments.
- See if your denomination has a statement or policy about caring for creation. Visit www.ncccojustice.org for a list of prayer statements and denominational contacts.
 - If your denomination has a statement, explore with your group the prospect of creating a more specific vision for your congregation.
- If your denomination does not have a statement, explore with your group creating an original vision for your congregation.
- If your congregation doesn't have an existing creation care group, start recruiting others for this environmental ministry. Identify an interested group of people using announcements, church bulletins, and word of mouth. Make sure you get the approval and involvement from your clergy and other key church leaders including those individuals who deal with building and grounds.
 - Take an inventory of time, talent, and interest once you have established a group.
 - With your congregational vision in mind, agree on a mission for your creation care group.
 - Create an action plan and develop measurable objectives and goals for how to achieve your vision.
 - Remember that every journey starts with a single step. Small projects that are successful are great ways to get an action plan off the ground.

Meeting Management

Meetings should be conducted on a regular basis and be soul-nourishing, concise and enjoyable. If possible, distribute an agenda ahead of time and assign a timekeeper if needed. Ensuring time for personal sharing and prayer, along with fellowship time and refreshments, will help strengthen the ministry. Remember to keep a positive atmosphere.



Congregational Life

ECO-JUSTICE COVENANT CONGREGATIONS

Join other churches around the United States as a part of the Eco-justice Covenant Congregation program. Each governing body of a participating congregation makes a promise that they will engage in ecological ministries to help protect their local watershed. The covenant includes a commitment to environmentally focused worship, education, lifestyle change, and involvement in the global, national, and local communities. Congregations are encouraged to implement principles from all four categories to reflect the holistic nature of the commitment to care of the Earth—specifically water concerns.

To learn more about this program, or how you can obtain help for getting started, contact:

NCC, Eco-Justice Programs
110 Maryland Ave., NE, Suite 108,
Washington, DC 20002

To become an Eco-Justice Covenant Congregation, fill out the covenant form (in the Appendix) and return to:

NCC, Eco-Justice Programs
110 Maryland Ave., NE, Suite
108, Washington, DC 20002

WORSHIP

Worship is an essential component of caring for God's creation. It is the place where together we listen for God's call and accept our part of the covenant with the Holy. In our praises we rejoice in the beauty and wonder of creation, sense God's enlivening presence in our midst, and find our souls fed with the wisdom and courage that we will need to be faithful. The spirit of our worship will flow into our action and make it fruitful. And it is also the place where we offer back to the Holy what we have ventured, that it may be gathered into God's promised peace.

PLANNING A CREATION CARE SERVICE

While important to plan for special occasions (e.g., Earth Day, the Rogation Days, or Sundays in a "Creation Season"—a series of worship services in the fall intentionally focused on Creation themes), it is equally valuable to integrate the dimension of Creation in your congregation's worship throughout the year. In planning, look at all the elements of worship: Scripture, psalmody, music, preaching, prayers (including litanies), and acts of congregational offering and dedication, as well as the forms for opening (call to worship) and closing (benediction).

Scriptures

First, consider the Scripture passages you wish to use. Does your congregation typically follow a Church-year lectionary or do you have the freedom to substitute your choices for one or more of the readings? If you can choose the readings, select those that highlight a special theme, perhaps one that seems appropriate both to the time of year and to special concerns of your congregation—for example, a spring fair or an autumn harvest festival. These readings do not need to be specifically about nature but may suggest interesting interconnections, for example, how God nurtures and "waters" life and quenches our thirst, both physically and spiritually. In addition, you might consider supporting Scripture with writings from theologians, scientists, environmentalists, and poets. For examples of water-related worship themes, including Scripture and sermon suggestions, see "Worship and Water Theme" on page 10.

Music

Music is another pathway to awakening our souls to the beauty of God's Earth and our covenant with God and God's creation. There are many wonderful hymns and anthems extolling the glory of God's creation. It is helpful to include some new music along with the familiar. Metrical settings of psalms are included in many hymnals and are easy to sing.

TIPS FOR WORSHIP:

Do not simply hear the call from God to steward water, but also undertake ongoing study of the issues around water use and preservation of your watershed. Have worship proclaim the glory of God in Creation.



Congregational Life

A moving testimony to our unity with the powers of nature, St. Francis' "Canticle of the Sun," with its invocation of "Brother Sun and Sister Moon," "Sister Water," and "Brother Fire," invites us to join our voices with their praises. It has been adapted for easy metrical hymn singing.

There are also songs (canticles) based directly on Scriptural texts, for example, "A Song of Creation" (*Benedicite omnia opera domini* based on The Song of the Three Young Men [additions to Daniel] verses 35-65) and "The First Song of Isaiah" (Isaiah 12:2-6), which includes such verses as "Therefore you shall draw water with rejoicing from the springs of salvation."

Other sounds

You can also introduce sounds of nature at certain times. Many CDs are available with sounds of waterfalls, or waves, songs of birds, or wind in the trees, etc. These may be used as background for a time of prayer or reflection, or for a prelude.

Preaching

By including Creation themes, ministers can illuminate the sacredness of nature and our responsibility, as God's people, as stewards of God's gift. For example, water is the Creator's gift for the entire world to share and it is imperative that we ensure its just distribution and preserve its quality and purity. Through God's word, a preacher may call us to a simpler Christian lifestyle in which our delight shifts away from consumer-driven goods toward the wonders of the universe.

Preachers can reflect on how Caring for Creation is an essential part of the ministry of the Church. In the New Testament, the Cosmic Christ is the Center of the universe and promises that our final home will be in a transfigured cosmos. Thus, it can be taught, that to care for rivers, streams, and forests is essential to prepare, in the Spirit of God, for our ultimate destiny (Cf. Colossians 1:1-29 and Revelation 21; Isaiah 66.)

Prayers

It is helpful to allow places for congregational participation – in the call to worship, perhaps, and also in the general intercessions and thanksgivings. Litanies may be used effectively, noting the particular concerns of the congregation. Prayers can be wide-ranging, so as to include concerns for

justice, for church leadership, for the oppressed and suffering, as well as for specific ecological petitions. This breadth is a good context for connecting this particular gathering with the wider outreach of the Church.

Offering

In a Caring for Creation service, there can be opportunity to involve the people in offering gifts from God's creation. During the offering, congregants can be asked to bring stones from their local streams and waterways. In the fall, they can offer autumn leaves, blades of wetland or beach grass. What we offer is a token of our concern for the renewing of God's creation.

Or, invite congregants to offer a new personal commitment to caring for Creation by placing a slip of paper with their written commitment in the offering plate or by bringing it up front to a common altar.

WORSHIP AND WATER THEMES

"Wash and be Clean"

Theme: *Healing Waters*

Pools and streams have healing gifts for those who come in faith, with openness of heart and with respect for the powers of nature. Naaman almost missed his promised healing because of his pride and spiritual blindness. Likewise, the man at the Pool of Siloam was invited to set aside his anxieties and doubts and to receive the healing power of the water simply through Jesus' word. Will our own lakes, rivers, and streams continue to heal us if we should fail to see God's healing presence in them? How can we renew our own body and soul by treating the our waters with respect?

Readings:

- 2 Kings 1–14 (Naaman and Elisha)
- Psalm 84: 4–7
- John 5: 1–9 (10–15) (Healing at Pool of Siloam)
- Alternative contemporary reading: "The Hidden Messages of Water" by Masaru Emoto (e.g., "Water is the life flow of majestic nature" [pg. 38] or quote from Joan S. Davis of Zurich Technical University, "The important thing is that we recover our respect for water." [p. 63].)



Congregational Life

“Wade in the Water”

Theme: The Womb—Waters of New Life and Vision

C.S. Lewis in “The Four Loves” says that he cannot ever imagine sensing the meaning of God’s glory without the magnificence of waterfalls. For this very reason, we are in desperate need of recovering our intimacy with the Earth. For many of us, this will call for deep change—a cultural rebirth. Ezekiel witnesses God’s promise to a people who have lost their way by the sprinkling of clean water and the gift of a new heart, a “heart of flesh” to replace their hearts of stone. And Jesus tells well-born Nicodemus that being of good family is not enough: “You must be born from above ... of water and the Spirit.” Are we ready to be born again in our relation to creation, to become indeed brothers and sisters of all God has made? Can we use this new relationship to be better water stewards?

Readings:

- Ezekiel 36: 24–28
- Psalm 46
- John 3: 1–10

“Launch out into the Deep”

Theme: Meeting God afresh in the “Deep Waters”

Deep waters call for a trusting heart and invite adventure into the unknown. The disciples of Jesus at the shores of Lake Gennesaret had fished all night and caught nothing, yet Jesus bids them to launch anew, this time trusting themselves to the deep waters. And something wonderful happened! Likewise Jacob at the Ford of Jabbok was invited to trust. Afraid of meeting his brother, he wrestled all night with God and was powerfully transformed. Can our local waters be for us a place of transformation, as we move deeply into the unknown rapids, such as advocacy for clean water, the elimination of agricultural “run-off,” and (hopefully) creative dialogue between developers, farmers, and legislators for healthier freshwater systems? In this new relationship with creation, God will meet us and our nets will be full.

Readings:

- Old Testament, Genesis 32: 22–30
- Psalm: Psalm 36: 5–10
- Luke 5: 1–11

“Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread?” (Isaiah 55: 1)

Theme: Returning to the true “waters of life”

God cries out to an Israel whose heart is set on comfort and power: “Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread?” This speaks directly to the sickness of heart of our culture today. We have become addicted to the ever-increasing cornucopia of consumer goods. What is alarming is the central place we give them in our lives and hearts. We were born to find our deepest joys in God’s creation and to be its voice of thanksgiving as we offer it back in praise. The rhythms of the Earth, the land and the waters, are to be our guide and the touchstone of the patterns of our living, our joys, and our hopes. Can we find our way back to these “waters of life?” Jesus said to the Samaritan woman beside Jacob’s well, “If you knew ... who it is who is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” Surely it is the mission of the Church today to attend to the lands and waters, their purity and their beauty, and to equip us as God’s saints to call into being the renewed life of our home waters and, with those waters, the new and vibrant life of our souls.

Readings:

- Old Testament, Isaiah 55: 1–3, 6–9 (“Come to the waters”)
- Psalm 42: 1–3, 6–8
- John 4: 1–15 (The woman at Jacob’s Well)

A CREATION SEASON

The Creation Season is a period of three to six weeks, usually in the fall and often starting near St. Francis’ Day (October 4), when a congregation agrees to focus its worship and education on themes related to God’s Creation.

The consecutive Sunday themes may be based on the elements of earth, air, fire, and water, or aspects of our call to simple living, or the ways God’s love in nature interacts with our own spiritual growth. Whatever we choose should connect with Scripture and/or dovetail with assigned readings in the lectionary. For more information on creation season materials visit www.seasonofcreation.com.



Institutional Life

Caring for creation begins at home—and, for communities of faith, in our church home. How we care for our church property can speak to how we regard our place on the Earth. Recognizing that we are part of the complex web of creation, not separate from it, not “above” it, but embedded in it, causes us to treat it lovingly. Loving God and loving our neighbor includes caring for the Earth that God has created. We can start with the patch of earth that is our church property.

Within the church walls and on its grounds, simple changes can make our sacred spaces healthier and more environmentally-friendly. Our worship facilities impact God’s creation, and it is our obligation and joy to reduce this burden on the Earth and to create more sustainable spaces.

Our church buildings are built to the glory of God, the service of humanity and the world, and the potential of the Spirit. It is inside these structures that we celebrate creation and the Creator. We look to our physical houses of worship and their spiritual centers for guidance.

What happens in congregations has positive ripple effects. As the church makes changes, congregational members are likewise encouraged to make personal changes that nurture the world. In this way the church’s example is emulated by homeowners, businesspeople, government workers, and others across the region.

The key elements of a green church life

- I. Reduce waste
- II. Reduce and eliminate toxics
- III. Create incentives for transportation alternatives
- IV. Control stormwater and green the landscape
- V. Conserve water
- VI. Conserve energy and use green power
- VII. Purchase and invest responsibly

I. REDUCE WASTE AND CONSUMERISM

Why?

Our everyday choices—both at home and at church—about the products we use and discard have a great impact on creation. The more we think about what is behind our purchased goods—Where did this product come from? What impact does throwing this away have on the environment?—the more likely we will make wise choices about what we use and buy. For example, U.S. office paper consumption is excessive—in 1999, roughly 63 pounds a month per American!—driven mostly by printer and copier paper consumption. By choosing to reduce our use of paper, by reusing the paper we don’t completely use, and by recycling the paper that we do use, we can make a significant dent in our own contribution to waste production. Reducing waste and recycling reduces air and water pollution and the need for landfill space—all good acts of responsible creation stewardship.



DON'T FORGET CHURCH OFFICES

Look for ways to close the loop on paper recycling:

- 1) buy recycled paper. purchase the highest percentage of post-consumer waste, process chlorine-free paper possible.
- 2) reuse unused or partially used paper
- 3) set printers to print on both sides of the paper
- 4) recycle fully used paper. producing virgin paper requires a chlorine bleaching process that releases the carcinogenic chemical dioxin and other toxics.



Institutional Life

What can we do?

Reduce and reuse

Our churches can live more lightly by simply reducing use of new products. For instance, reduce or eliminate use of disposable kitchen and dining products. For church meetings and potlucks, consider asking people to bring their own dishes and silverware. You might even request that parishioners donate their unused dishware to the church, which will provide reusable dishes for most events.

Recycle

Establish a recycling program at church. If minimal recycling already exists, look into ways to ramp up your recycling program. Are recycling receptacles conveniently located? Do you know what recyclables your municipal recycling will accept? Are bins clearly marked? Are office goods like used cell phones, computers, and toner cartridges being recycled?

Make smart institutional purchases

Your creation awareness group could consider meeting with the church committees or individuals who make institutional purchases to discuss making better choices, such as avoiding disposables and excess packaging and buying recycled products. If disposable cups and plates are unavoidable, make sure that they are biodegradable (e.g., not Styrofoam or plastic). Your congregation can also team up with other congregations to buy environmentally friendly items together to save money through bulk purchasing. When purchasing food, try to buy in season from local growers. This supports local foods and saves the energy needed to transport food purchased from faraway places.

II. REDUCE AND ELIMINATE TOXICS AND PESTICIDES

Why?

Like our homes, our churches can be a hidden source of toxics. Many of the products we find in the church have toxic substances, which have the potential to cause a variety of avoidable harms, ranging from upset stomachs to irritated skin to developmental disorders and even cancers.

What can we do?

We can improve human health and lessen adverse environmental impacts by using non-toxic (or “green”) cleaning products in our houses of worship and limiting or eliminating the use of pesticides on our church lawns. Non-toxic cleaning products can be found locally at some national grocery chains, local food cooperatives, and natural food stores.

Try using alternative methods of pest control first. If your problem is persistent and you do decide that pesticides and weed killers are the best options, be sure that you are aware of the dangers they pose. Choose the least toxic option. Carefully read all labels, and take the proper precautions to ensure limited human contact with recently treated areas.

**Hand-pick weeds instead of spraying them;
Set traps to control rodents;
Mulch around trees and plants to reduce weed growth.**



If you are troubled by insects, think twice before blasting them with insecticides. Insecticides are non-discriminatory—they kill all insects. The fact is that the majority of insects are beneficial to the environment: they provide food for birds and they pollinate flowers. Some insects serve to control other insects, and in a healthy system, they all live in balance. If you hope to have songbirds surrounding your church, you need to have insects for them to eat. So, understand that it is not necessary or desirable to get rid of all insects. Be sure you are not doing more harm than good. Think control, not elimination.

Where can we learn more?

- The Green Guide provides lists and recommendations about purchasing green products at www.thegreenguide.com.



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- For institutional purchasing of green cleaners, visit the Center for a New American Dream's institutional purchasing web site at www.newdream.org/procure. Download the specific church purchasing guide at www.newdream.org/publications/purchguide.pdf.
- Consult the Pesticide Action Network of North America's Pesticide Advisor for chemical-free alternatives at www.panna.org
- For more information on reducing exposure to toxins in your church, download www.epa.gov/OPPTpubs/Cit_Guide/citguide.pdf

III. CREATE INCENTIVES FOR TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES

Why?

The manufacture and, more important, the use of personal vehicles cause more environmental damage—especially air pollution and global warming—than any other single consumer spending category. Our cars and light trucks are responsible for almost a quarter of annual U.S. carbon dioxide emissions, the main greenhouse gas. Driving a car may be the single most polluting activity that most of us do. In addition to driving more fuel efficient cars, modest changes can make immediate impact.

What can we do?

Post a carpooling board

Encourage parishioners to try carpooling to church together. This will not only save gas and reduce individual car emissions, but it also provides opportunities for church members to spend some time in fellowship with one another.

Hold a "Ride Your Bike to Church Day"

Sponsor a bike riding or alternative transportation day. Provide water for people as they arrive and set aside space for bike parking in the car lot. Take it a step further and teach a bike safety class, including basic safety tips such as wearing helmets, displaying reflectors, and using arm turn signals.



Calculate your ecological footprint.

Discuss the impact of our everyday choices after calculating how much "nature" your own lifestyle requires.

An ecological footprint estimates how much productive land and water you need to support what you use and what you discard. You might be surprised how much your driving habits contribute to how large your footprint is. For a simple quiz, see www.myfootprint.org

Participate in Car Sharing

Instead of purchasing a new church vehicle, consider joining a car sharing program like Zipcar. Having access to a car only when you need it could save your church in maintenance, gas, and insurance costs, and will promote goodwill for all creation.

Use Public Transportation

If available, encourage members of the congregation to use public transportation.

Where can we learn more?

- Join the discussion about the moral issue of transportation, at www.whatwouldJesusdrive.org.
- The Union of Concerned Scientists has a comprehensive discussion of personal vehicle contributions to the adverse effects of the U.S. transportation system. See www.ucsusa.org.

IV. CONTROL STORMWATER AND GREEN THE LANDSCAPE

Why?

Rain falling in forests or vegetative areas is mostly absorbed into the soil where it accumulates in the ground water, eventually replenishing streams, rivers and other local waters. Some rain, depending on the amount, may run off directly



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into streams and lakes. With increasing development, streets, parking lots and buildings prevent water from its natural course into ground water and streams, instead causing large amounts of water to be directed into storm drains overloading the streams in the area, causing excessive erosion, not to mention loss of ground water recharging. According to the Center for Watershed Protection, water quality begins to degrade when 10 percent of the watershed contains impervious surfaces. For naturally producing trout streams, the threshold is an alarming 2 percent. Conservation landscaping is a method of landscaping properties that promotes a healthy ecosystem. It encourages and fosters the natural relationships between plants, animals, and weather, making it a holistic approach to protecting and conserving God's creation. To some degree, it mitigates the detrimental effects of impervious surfaces.

What can we do?

Manage stormwater

Bio-retention systems, or rain gardens, try to replicate natural hydrologic function by holding water from a storm event until it can permeate the ground into the groundwater system. They are specifically designed to take in the stormwater from an impervious surface, like a rooftop, church parking lot, or street. Layers of mulch absorb rain water and runoff, and slowly release it to the underlayers of the soil and the roots of trees, shrubs, and groundcover. The plants take up the nutrients like nitrogen in the water, and microorganisms break down some of the pollutants, while others dissipate in the ground until they are no longer a concentrated contaminant. Properly managing a church's stormwater can help protect God's waterways and groundwater.

Rain Barrels/Cisterns

Rain barrels and cisterns collect rainwater during storm events that you can use to water your landscape. This is an easy way to promote stormwater management and reduce the unnecessary use of potable water. They can be purchased at many garden centers and are also appropriate for use in the home.

Lawns

Many churches are surrounded by lawns. Lawns are environmentally bad for several reasons: they do not provide the diverse community of plants and animals most appropriate for a healthy environment; they are planted with non-native grasses that do not provide shelter or food for native animals or birds; they often require the addition of extra water; they often require fertilizer that can contribute excess nutrient runoff into streams; cutting lawns generally demands consuming fossil fuel and adding pollutants to the air; and lawns are less permeable than planted areas. Seek ways to reduce the area of lawn around the church. Replant these areas with native plants, trees, and shrubs that increase biodiversity and make a positive contribution to the integrity of the environment.

Rain Gardens

Rain gardens are gardens built to contain and filter rainfall from a specific area of impervious surface for a typical rain event. Bio-retention systems are the same in principle to rain gardens, but often imply a large area.

Plant natives

Native plants are specifically adapted to the local environment, and don't require additional water or fertilizers that non-native plants may need to survive. In addition, native wildlife has adapted to native plants, and depends on them for food and habitat to grow and thrive.

- For more information on native plants, use an excellent free guide for gardeners and landscapers: *Native Plants for Wildlife Habitat and Conservation Landscaping*, published by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Also available from many environmental organizations.

Control pests

Pesticides tend to kill beneficial insects as well as the bothersome ones, keeping the system out of balance; they are dangerous for pets and small children in excessive and concentrated quantities; and pesticides wash off landscapes,



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BUILD A SIMPLE RAIN GARDEN

1. Calculate rain garden size

- Measure the footprint of the impervious surface.
- Divide the area by 3.

Example:

15 feet x 15 feet = 225 square feet of impervious surface; $225/3 = 75$ square feet needed for rain garden

2. Dig the rain garden

- Locate garden at least 10 feet from buildings to avoid flooded basements! Use an underground pipe or gravel swale to direct water to rain garden.
- Create a garden with a 3 inch depth. Dig to a 6 inch depth, then add 3 inch of Leafgro or similar material.
- Use a “water test” to level garden: Place a hose in the downspout, and adjust the soil to level the garden and create channels.

3. Plant the garden

- Plant drought-tolerant plants (shrubs, grasses, and perennials) that can tolerate standing in water for up to 24 hours.
- Mulch the garden well.
- Water the garden well, especially until the plants are established.

killing aquatic life in nearby streams. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is a method of using native insects and plants to keep your property in balance and control invasive insects and other pests.

- For information on using integrated pest management, visit attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/ipm.html or www.epa.gov/pesticides/factsheets/ipm.htm

Manage fertilizer applications

The application of chemical fertilizers, by individuals and lawn-care companies, can substantially increase the amount of nitrogen in the system. Those nutrients that aren't absorbed into the lawn are washed into local waterways. Good nutrient management starts with soil testing. By knowing the composition of your soil, you can add the proper amounts of slow-release nutrients (such as compost), allowing you to keep a flourishing garden and protect the health of your local waters.

Eliminate invasives

Non-native, invasive plants have done great harm to many water ecosystems. They are a major reason for the loss of native plants in our landscapes. Increased development, loss of forests and habitat, and extensive use of lawn grasses, edge out native plants and make way for encroaching invasive species. While control of invasive plants can be difficult and time consuming, your congregation can band together to stop the intrusion. Consider removing non-native, invasive plants on your grounds and replacing them with native plants.

SUCCESS STORY:

St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Chesterhill, PA created a butterfly garden in the spring of 2004 as a way to restore native species to the church property. In addition to the butterfly garden, the church's property committee completed a critical storm water management project to continue the focus on sustainable landscaping around the church grounds. Linda Eastman, Chair of the Sustainability Committee at St Paul's, says that sustainability is now a part of the church's parish life.



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Where can we learn more?

For more information on how to green the landscape at your church see:

- An extensive list of 282 exotic invasive plant species can be found at www.invasive.org
- For strategies for removing invasive plants, see The Nature Conservancy's Invasive Species Initiative site at www.tncweeds.ucdavis.edu
- For an excellent, free, concise manual for identifying and eradicating invasive species see: *Plant Invaders of Mid-Atlantic Natural Areas*, published by the National Park Service/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Available from many environmental organizations, including The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (202) 857-0166

V. CONSERVE WATER

Why?

Increases in water consumption adds to stream, river, and lake pollution and can cause depletion of groundwater supplies. Waste water from toilets and sinks either is disposed of in a septic system, affecting the quality of the ground water, or is disposed of in a municipal waster water treatment plant that in most cases cannot remove all of the pollution before discharging it to a river or other body of water. With little or no up-front costs or adverse user impacts, your congregation can implement water-saving practices that can lower your utility costs and promote conservation landscaping principles.

What can we do?

- Run automatic dishwashers only with full load.
- Wash dishes by hand with a basin of rinse water, rather than running water.
- Water the grounds in the evening to avoid rapid evaporation.
- Fix leaking toilets and sinks. A leaking toilet can waste 45,000 gallons of water in six months.
- Install water-saving toilets and low-flow faucets.

Where can we learn more?

- visit <http://maryland.earth911.org/master.asp>

VI. CONSERVE ENERGY AND SAVE ON COSTS

Why?

The electricity that feeds the houses of worship around the United States comes mostly from burning coal. Carbon emissions from coal-fired power plants are projected to increase by 45 percent between 2000 and 2025. Surprisingly, lighting accounts for about 25 percent of American electricity consumption, and this consumption of electricity is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the United States. Since most church sanctuaries are large spaces used only periodically throughout the week, religious buildings are prime for energy savings. Compact fluorescent light bulbs, with a modest upfront investment, can save energy costs 65 to 75 percent over standard incandescent

SUCCESS STORY: Congregational restoration

The men's maintenance breakfast group at Calvary United Methodist Church in Annapolis, Maryland, teamed up with environmentally concerned members of the church to begin some shoreline restoration along College Creek, a tributary of the Chesapeake. They constructed a buffer planting along the creek to absorb and filter runoff water between the impervious surface of the parking lot and the creek. By planting this buffer, the group not only improved the stormwater management of their property, but they have a lovely garden on the water as well. The congregation is now planning to build a rain garden.



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lights. An action as simple as installing a programmable thermostat has the potential to save hundreds of dollars a year in utility bills, as well as prevent literally “tons” of pollution. Most religious office areas are high-traffic, well-used areas where small changes like weather-stripping, energy-efficient appliances, or compact fluorescent bulbs can make a significant difference in energy use.

What can we do?

Conduct an energy audit

Start with an energy audit of your church building. This will provide a baseline for where to begin and help prioritize the most cost-effective interventions. Ask your power company if they help with audits or visit www.energyguide.com.

Replace inefficient lights with clean, efficient lights

Following your energy audit, replace incandescent lights with low-mercury compact fluorescent light bulbs, which use less energy than traditional lighting. They are now found at most major home improvement stores and come in sizes to fit all light fixtures.

Purchase “green power”

Check into purchasing “green power” from your local energy company. Green power is electricity generated using environmentally friendly renewable and reusable resources, such as solar, wind, biomass and water. To learn more about your local options, see www.epa.gov/greenpower/index.htm

Where can we learn more?

- Visit Interfaith Power & Light – <http://www.interfaithworks.org/>
- Consult the “Putting Energy into Stewardship” guide from the U.S. ENERGY STAR program. Make an action plan and commit to substantial energy reduction over a period of time, then measure the savings in utility costs. Find the guide at www.energystar.gov and click on “congregations.”
- Should you not find compact fluorescent lightbulbs at your local retailer, these national companies offer a good selection. Real Goods at www.realgoods.com and

Seventh Generation at www.seventhgen.com.

VII. GREEN BUILDING AND REMODELING

Why?

When it’s time to remodel or make improvements, our congregations can choose to make wise purchases that reduce adverse affects on congregational and creation health. Green building and remodeling is an approach that makes your space look better and work better for your church and creation. With careful planning, you can build or rebuild a sacred space that is beautiful, inspiring, welcoming, and sustainable. Environmentally-friendly building products and energy-wise designs will enhance creation, and its resources, rather than deplete it.

What can we do?

- Find an architect who is knowledgeable about environmental design and who can help create a structure that requires little energy to maintain.
- Use renewable, non-toxic building materials to limit the negative impacts on creation and maximize indoor air quality.
- Seek renewable, local building materials that will require less transportation for delivery and reduce the

Certified Green Buildings



The United States Green Building Council (USGBC), a nonprofit organization, has developed the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system, which makes it easier to determine how to create a healthy and green building. The LEED system utilizes a list of 34 potential attributes and certification is given at the silver, gold, and platinum levels. Through USGBC, congregations can find helpful resources to improve the quality of their buildings and might even want to consider seeking LEED certification.

Find out more, at www.usgbc.org/leed.



Institutional Life

use of transportation fuel.

- Keep an eye toward energy efficiency in order to cut down on energy consumption, reducing air pollution and carbon emissions, which lead to climate change.

Where can we learn more?

- Looking for a national source of green building products, check out Green Building Supply at www.greenbuildingsupply.com and Green Home at www.greenhome.com.
- For a great resource on green remodeling, check your library or local bookstore for *Green Remodeling: Changing the World One Room at a Time* by Johnston and Master (New Society Publishers, 2004).

Contributions to this section from Naomi Friedman, Center for a New American Dream, Director of Sustainable Markets and Howard Ebenstein, DC Energy Office, Energy Program Specialist



Unitarian Universalist Green Sanctuary Program

As a part of the Unitarian Universalists Ministry for Earth, their Green Sanctuary Program is to promote sustainable lifestyles through living in a way that nurtures life, builds relationships, and rejects material consumption as the sole determinant of happiness. The program includes a certification process for congregations to receive accreditation as a “Green Sanctuary.”

Learn more about UU’s Green Sanctuary Certification process, see www.uuaspp.org

SUCCESS STORY:

Solana Beach Presbyterian Church in Solana Beach, CA received the “ENERGY STAR for Congregations Award” from the US Environmental Protection Agency in 2000. The Church's Environmental Task Force worked with the local power utility to form a clear methodology and energy saving plan so that the full effort took only 7 months to complete. After an energy audit, the church replaced 780 fluorescent lamps and 88 incandescent bulbs with new energy efficient designs. As a result of these and other conservation measures, energy consumption was reduced by more than 25,000 kilowatt hours and 120,000 lbs of pollution were prevented. Cost savings amounted to \$12,000/year; carbon dioxide emissions were reduced by 70,000 pounds/year. The San Diego Gas and Electric Co. provided a rebate of \$9,400, so Solana Beach's net cost was only \$5,900. Full payback of the net cost was received within 11 months from the savings.



Education and Outreach

As stewards of all God’s creation, we have the responsibility to educate ourselves and others about the creation’s wondrous, living diversity, how it is placed at risk by human activity and what can be done to undo past damage and plan for more faithful stewardship in the future. We must prepare ourselves with the necessary tools to protect the systems that sustain life for not only humans, but for all of creation. And we must respond with action—and guide others—to responsibly conserve and preserve God’s gifts that we have been so abundantly provided.

While individual efforts to protect our environment are important, these steps alone are not sufficient. It will require our collaborative efforts to address the systemic problems that affect the well-being of the God’s creation. The actions you take with your congregation and in the local and global community will be important to protect God’s natural gifts for this and future generations.

CONGREGATIONAL EDUCATION

Church communities can educate children and adults about the theological and spiritual aspects of God’s creation, and the practical implications for Christian living, through Sunday School classes, vacation Bible school, and adult studies.

Form an environmental study and action group

A study and action group can be a great way for parishioners to gather for fellowship, learning, and action. Whether as a core group or as supplemental to a creation awareness group, this group can help the rest of the congregation become more environmentally aware and promote positive changes within the church community.

Train your leaders

Special events are a great way to motivate others to join in your ministry. Consider hosting your own training event for

churches in your area. The National Council of Churches, in partnership with local faith-based organizations, also host several regional training events around the country. The program for each day and a half event includes basics on water, how to motivate and inspire your congregation, advocacy training, hands-on field trip opportunities, fellowship, and congregational success stories. Special clergy events (with continuing education credits) are also offered.

- For a list of upcoming events visit www.ncecojustice.org
- To host your own event, reference the sample agendas located in the Appendix.

Share in fellowship

God’s Great Outdoors:

Sponsor hikes, walks, and bike rides that integrate faith. Encourage participants to stop along the way and thank God for the creations they witness. These trips will be a great opportunity to share in fellowship and enjoy together the glory of God’s lands and waters. You might also consider organizing outdoor field trips for adult study classes or youth groups to learn more about local and regional environmental issues.

- Join a National Public Lands Day event in September near your place of worship. For more information, go to www.npld.com

Waste-wise Meals:

For congregational dinners, ask environmental group members or volunteers to “sponsor” a table. Each sponsor should provide the dishes, silverware, and cloth napkins for their table. While significantly reducing the waste for the event, you can also use the task as a learning opportunity to discuss the connection between daily household resource use and the health of the local environment.



Education and Outreach

Green Coffee Hour:

Replace a standard Sunday coffee break with responsible, “green” coffee selections. An average congregation drinks an estimated 5,200 cups of coffee per year, which requires 7,300 square feet of land for the coffee bushes. Coffee producers and conservations now know that coffee plantations grown without chemicals under forest cover provide great habitat for wildlife and migratory birds; this shade grown coffee also makes for productive coffee crops. So next time your creation awareness group or environmental study group is scheduled to host Sunday coffee, provide shade-grown coffee in reusable ceramic mugs.

- For more information about shade-grown, fair trade coffee, go to www.newdream.org/consumer/buycoffee.php
- To learn about Equal Exchange’s Interfaith Coffee Program, visit www.equalexchange.com/interfaith-program

Educate your congregation

Adult education

Sacred Waters is a five-week adult Christian education course on understanding and appreciating God’s wondrous gift of water. The course is designed to be taught in five consecutive one-hour weekly sessions but is easily adaptable to a number of different educational formats. Each session covers a specific aspect of the sacred gift of water.

Youth education

Most young people enjoy spending time outdoors and these activities can be enhanced when children become familiar

+ Tips for Getting Your Church Involved

- Spend time talking with church members and find out their passions
- Form a group of people for support, inspiration, and longevity
- Determine stakeholders in and outside of church and seek their involvement
- Identify points of leverage where your group and or church can have the most impact
- Identify both the needs and the assets within the community
- Create an inventory of skills, talents, and passions of the people within the group. Figure out what is missing, and see if there are people within the congregation that you can ask to join the group or help with a specific project
- Create an inventory of local and national groups for support and resources
- Publicize programs, events, and initiatives throughout the church, using various types of media, such as the bulletin, newsletters, websites, and word of mouth
- Start with small, accessible and achievable projects and build upon them
- Choose projects that are visible and be clear about your goals
- Encourage church leaders and stakeholders to incorporate advocacy into the life of the church: worship, fellowship, Sunday School, fundraisers, church council meetings, youth and young adult ministries
- Continue to raise awareness and seek involvement
- Celebrate your successes, both big and small!

Vacation Bible School

Vacation Bible School curricula that are devoted to creation care are an excellent way to take advantage of children’s natural enthusiasm for God’s world. Various themes such as water, wildlife, sun, recycling, and forest ecology can bring into focus the beauty of God’s creation and the importance of valuing and caring for creation. At the core of any VBS should be the idea of fun and creativity. Consider pooling resources with a local farm or nature center. Many secular environmental education materials can be modified for Vacation Bible School.



Education and Outreach



Taking these principles home

Make the same changes within your household as you recommend for the church.

- Keep thermostats lower in the winter, and use air conditioning as little as possible in the summer
- Install programmable thermostats
- Turn off lights when you leave a room or leave the house
- Take shorter showers and use less hot water
- Use CFLs instead of incandescent bulbs
- Track energy use through bills
- Ensure your home is properly insulated, especially around windows and doors
- Install lower-energy, high-efficiency appliances
- Ride your bike, carpool, or use public transportation when possible
- Practically consider your needs and desires when considering lawncare, fertilizers, and pesticides

with Biblical principles of creation care. Instead of telling children about God's creation, let them experience it. Be receptive to their observations, questions, and reflections and make sure that there is time allotted for discussion and follow-up after the activity. Whatever the activity, it should be participatory, fun, and foster a sense of wonder about the world that God created.

COMMUNITY, NATIONAL, AND GLOBAL OUTREACH

Involve the whole community

Share your congregation's environmental awareness with others—extend involvement beyond the walls of the church and into the community. Doing a community environmental project is a great way to get the church involved in your neighborhood, which will foster a positive and on-going relationship with community members that are not currently involved in the church.

Don't do it alone

If there's an environmental or water-specific issue that your church is grappling with, likely your neighbors are too. Consider ways to express your congregation's opinion, such as letters to the editor, letters to congressional leaders, and public service announcements, or contact other local and regional churches. As you know, public policy makers are far

World Council of Churches and the Ecumenical Earth

The World Council of Churches, a fellowship of churches in more than 120 countries, has a justice, peace, and creation concerns team that, in part, focuses on issues of the ecumenical Earth. The team is mandated to analyze and reflect on the interrelatedness of justice, peace, and creation. Four of their focus issues on the environment are economic globalization and ecology; climate change; biotechnology, agriculture, and indigenous peoples; and the vision of earth as home.

For more information on the WCC and their ecumenical participation, see www.wcc-coe.org



Education and Outreach

more likely to respond to an issue that has generated public concern.

Track legislation and other public issues

Keep track of how your governmental leaders at the city, state, and national level, vote on environmental issues. The national denomination offices of your particular denomination or the Eco-Justice Program office of the National Council of Churches can provide you with this information on national environmental issues. Or visit the League of Conservation Voters Web site at www.lcv.org.

Participate in the public process

As members of the faith community, we must hold accountable those people in positions of power for the decisions they make regarding our health and the health of God's creation. To adequately represent the people, lawmakers need to hear from the religious community about how we stand on current environmental issues. Write letters to newspapers and legislators about creation care issues that concern your members. Suggest that parishioners include how their faith has helped them come to a concern about the issue.

Legislative Advocacy Tips

- **Develop relationships with your legislators**
- **Invite your senator and representative(s) to special events**
- **Express the opinions of the church through calls, letters, and emails**
- **Stay informed of the issues that affect your church and community**
- **Participate in your denomination's national advocacy efforts in Washington, DC**

SUCCESS STORY:

Growing Power is a nationwide nonprofit organization and land trust based in Milwaukee, WI that supports people from diverse backgrounds through programs in urban agriculture and the creation of distribution networks of small farmers. Growing Power involves youth in urban gardening and educates city residents about aquaculture, vermiculture, and composting. Their Community Food Centers provide high-quality, healthy, and affordable food for residents. Growing Power also offers a multi-year apprenticeship program which offers youth from low-income backgrounds both academic and professional experience. Their programs train 3,000 people per year and help to reclaim inner-city neighborhoods through urban agriculture.

Conclusion

God asks us to be good stewards of all God has entrusted us with. What better place to start than in our own houses of worship?

Together we can make a difference. God's Earth is our haven, our shelter, our refuge, and it is our responsibility to protect it. Access to what the Earth provides to us, in food and water especially, is a gift from God and we must ensure it is available to our neighbors today and our children tomorrow. We must do what we can to rectify the damage that has already occurred, and remedy the opinion that God's creation is simply a commodity for our consumption. God asks us to be good stewards of all with which God has entrusted us. What better place to start than in our own houses of worship? We are asked to be set apart and holy, and to be examples to those around us. If we establish these values in the body of the church and our congregation conforms to them, we prepare ourselves to be that example. We start in our own neighborhoods and watersheds so that we may show those around us the importance of God's Earth, and our responsibility to nurture and shelter it, while it does the same for us.

Sacred Waters

A 5-WEEK ADULT CHRISTIAN
EDUCATION COURSE

Created by:
Beth Norcross



Course Overview

Sacred Waters is intended as a five-week adult Christian education course on understanding and appreciating God's wondrous gift of water. The course is designed to be taught in five consecutive one-hour weekly sessions but is easily adaptable to a number of different educational formats. Each session covers a specific aspect of the sacred gift of water:

SESSION 1 – God's Gift of Water

SESSION 2 – The Miracle of Water







SESSION 3 – Water as Sustenance

SESSION 4 – Water as Purifier

SESSION 5 – Living Water

Each topic can be taught as a discrete unit or in conjunction with the other sessions. **If possible, Session 5 should be taught outside at a nearby water body.**

The session guides are divided into two parts: a background piece for the facilitator and a guide for a suggested structure for the class itself. No specific educational background is needed to teach the course. All of the session guides include the following components:

-  **Opening Meditation**
-  **Introduction to Today's Session**
-  **Scripture Reading and Teaching**
-  **Activity**
-  **Suggested Spiritual Exercise for the Week Ahead**
-  **Closing Prayer**

This format is designed to allow both academic and spiritual involvement with the material. Often, there will be too much material to cover in one week. Feel free to pick and choose the parts that seem most suited to your class, and take them in any order you wish. The session guide is included only as a suggestion. The specific structure of a given class should be altered to meet the needs of a given class.



Session 1

God's Gift of Water

BACKGROUND

Those wondrous pictures of the Earth from outer space offer a particularly good place to start to understand the importance of God's gift of water. What strikes one in looking at those pictures is not the land masses, but the abundance of water. From outer space, one can see clearly that earth is a "blue planet"—a water planet.

Throughout both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, water plays a significant role in helping us understand the nature of God, God's purposes in the world, and our relationship with God. One need only think of the crossing of the Red Sea, Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River, the woman at the well, and Jesus describing himself as living water. In fact, the Bible includes over 500 references to the word "water" and countless more on water-related subjects, like rivers, rain, seas, floods and storms.

Throughout this study, we will explore many of the main water themes that run through the Bible, including creation, sustenance, purification, and transformation and begin to think about how they tell us about God and the relationship God would like us to have with the waters God created.

The best place to begin to appreciate the importance of water is with the creation stories themselves. To understand the stories, it is important to remember that the ancient writers did not have a concept of infinite space as we do. And, the writer had to accommodate his/her experience of water coming from the sky in the form of rain, being on the surface of the land in the form of seas and rivers, and available from under the ground from wells.

In the first chapter of Genesis, God first separates the waters into those from above and those from below by forming a solid dome called the sky. Then, God creates the Earth out of the waters. Only after the water is in place does God put vegetation, animals and other creatures on the earth. Genesis 1:20 teaches that creation literally comes out of the waters. From the beginning, all of creation is dependent on the gift of water.

For five days, God creates and creates. After each exhausting day of creation, God stops and acknowledges that it is indeed "good." This declaration reminds us that even before humans were created, God loved and valued creation for its own sake. Regardless of how small the creature, God recognized its value before it had any utility for humankind.

On the sixth day, God creates both men and women in God's own image and gives humans "dominion" over the earth (Genesis 1:27-28). The combination of having been created in God's image as well as being given dominion over the Earth has often been mis-interpreted as giving humanity absolute right to use and exploit creation for its own purposes. What the Scripture actually says is that the Earth and its waters belong to God and God alone. In the ancient Near Eastern world the word "image" was understood as one's representative and often used for a king standing in for, or representing, a god. The human role, therefore, is to stand in for the Creator, to represent God's creative purposes in the world, not humanity's. As images of God, we are called to love, value and sustain the waters of the world just as God does.

The word "dominion" is understood in the same vein. Dominion is not domination. Dominion is understood and exercised in the recognition of God's sovereignty over earth. We are given the privilege of joining God in the care-taking of the waters. If we are looking at a model of how to establish leadership in creation, we need look no further than Jesus who taught us to lead by being servants. And, as we'll see later in the course, Jesus has a great deal to say about water!

SESSION 1 GUIDE

Supplies Needed

- ◆ Bibles for the group to share
- ◆ drawing paper
- ◆ colored pencils/markers
- ◆ water-related images

Welcome and Opening Meditation

Set up a worship center with water images to be used for the duration of the five-week course. Begin simply with flowing fabric and a small bowl of water. As the weeks

progress, add other appropriate materials identified with water – rocks, sea shells, etc.

Introduce the leader/leaders. Welcome all participants to the class on Sacred Waters. Tell the class there will be an opportunity for them to introduce themselves later in the session.

Read Psalm 104 aloud. Ask each participant to read one verse. As they read this familiar psalm of praise for God's creation, ask the group to pay attention to all the references to water in the psalm and to ask God for insight into the wondrous gift of water.

Take a minute of silence after the meditation so that the class centers before the study.

Introduction to the Course

Use this part of the session to introduce the course. Start by welcoming all participants. Explain that the purpose of the course is to learn more about God's gift of water. Explain that through the next five weeks, you will explore together what the Scriptures say about water, how water functions in nature, how important water is to our physical needs, the significance of water as a spiritual image in the Bible and how water can ultimately be transforming.

Encourage the class to attend all of the sessions they can. That having been said, it is designed so that each session is a discrete unit, so someone can miss classes and not be lost.

The course is designed to be a hands on experience, engaging the class's intellect as well as its spirituality. Each week begins with a meditation, followed by Scripture and a brief teaching, then an activity. Each session concludes with a suggestion for a different spiritual activity to try during the week. Each spiritual exercise is water-based and is designed to enhance and expand that week's lesson. While the spiritual exercises are not required, they are highly recommended. The natural world offers a variety of rich opportunities to get out of our heads and experience God firsthand.

Today's session will focus on God's creation of the waters. It will also discuss God's creation of humanity and what the Bible says about our relationship to the rest of creation.

Activity—Special Place

Give a piece of paper to each participant, and ask each to draw or write words about a watery place that is special to them, and in particular where they might have experienced God's presence. Provide markers or colored pencils.

After five minutes of drawing, ask each participant to take one minute, say his/her name and share their picture of their special place if they would like. Suggest that they explain why the place is sacred to them.

Experience suggests that you will have to keep this exercise moving along. If you have a larger class, break the group into small groups and ask the participants to introduce themselves to each other. Then after that activity is complete, take a minute to go around the room quickly to get names.

Scripture Reading and Teaching

Ask the group to read aloud parts of the traditional creation stories. Before beginning, ask the class to pay special attention to what the Scripture says about water.

Genesis 1:1-13, 20-25, 2:10-14

After reading, discuss some of the questions below. Use the material presented in the Background section to guide the discussion:

1. How does God use water in Creation?
2. What is the relationship of water to the rest of Creation?
3. What is God's response to the creation of non-humans? What does that response tell us about the value of non-human Creation to God?

Genesis 1:26-28

1. What are the similarities between how God creates humanity and God creates the rest of non-human Creation?
2. What are the differences?
3. What does the creation story tell us about our connections with the rest of Creation?
4. What does it mean to be an image of God in the world, particularly when it comes to water?
5. What does it mean to be given dominion over the Earth, particularly water?

Again, if the group is too large for whole-group discussion, divide the group up into small groups for discussion, then put aside a time for each group to report to the whole about what they learned.

Spiritual Exercise

For this week's spiritual exercise, encourage the group to try the following:

Adopt for the duration of the class (longer if you'd like) a watery nature home near to where you live. Even in the most

urban settings, there is almost always a small fountain, creek or stream nearby. Encourage class members to find a natural place with water that beckons them to sit still for a while. Look around. Get to know the place. What lives there? What creatures visit regularly? Give the place a natural name. Visit it as regularly as possible. Has anything changed since the last time you were there? Notice shapes, textures, smells, sounds, and movements. Ask the question: Is God here? Suggest that participants might want to record some of their thoughts and images using a nature journal.

Closing Prayer

Thank everyone for coming and ask them to join you again next week.

Ask a class member to close the session in prayer. Ask him/her to bring into prayer the theme of the session.



Session 2 The Miracle of Water

BACKGROUND

The water cycle tells the wondrous story of how God's water circulates around the earth, without beginning or end. Water is always on the move, traveling around in different forms – solid, liquid, and gas. Water is the ultimate networker, connecting different landforms, different cultures, different species, different times. Because of the abundance of water that cycles through time, the drop of dew in the early-morning grass might contain the same water molecule that provided a much-needed drink to a thirsty Jacob laboring in Leben's fields for his beloved Rachel.

Water flows down from rivulets high in the mountains, joins with other small channels to become streams, which join with other streams to become rivers. Streams and rivers seep into vast underground reservoirs called aquifers as they move downhill, and eventually flow into the oceans. Driven by the heat of the sun, water returns to the atmosphere by way of evaporation from soil and water bodies as well as transpiration from plants, trees and shrubs. When enough pressure builds up in the atmosphere, water condenses into clouds and falls back to the Earth as rain and snow.

The water cycle vividly demonstrates the interrelatedness and deep connections within God's Creation. What affects the air affects the rivers. What affects the rivers affects the oceans. What happens upstream affects life downstream.

During this cycle, water is constantly being exchanged. Water that might be in the ocean one day is falling as rain several days later. Water "turns over" at different rates. Atmospheric water is depleted and replenished every nine days or so, while river water turns over every 12 to 20 days. Lakes might takes days or even centuries to renew while the water in an ocean is completely emptied and renewed in only about 3,000 years.

While over two-thirds of the Earth's surface is covered by water, freshwater is actually quite scarce. The Earth's waters are unevenly distributed through oceans, lakes, rivers and groundwater, with oceans accounting for 97 percent of the water in the biosphere. Two more percent is trapped in polar ice caps and glaciers, leaving only about 1 percent of all the Earth's water as freshwater, upon which thousands of species

within God's Creation (including humans) are directly dependent.

SESSION 2 GUIDE

Supplies Needed

- ◆ Bibles for the group to share
- ◆ heavy-duty aluminum foil
- ◆ different sized cups, wood or foam blocks (green foam blocks from florists work great)
- ◆ large shallow metal or aluminum baking pan
- ◆ plant spray bottle

Opening Meditation

Ask the group to read the following poem out loud. Each participant should read a few lines. Ask the group to note all the different forms that God's gift of waters take. Suggest that, as the poem is being read, they begin to think about all the interconnections between the different forms of water.

Water.

Lakes and rivers.

Oceans and streams.

Springs, pools and gullies.

Arroyos, creeks, watersheds.

Pacific. Atlantic. Mediterranean.

Indian. Caribbean. China Sea.

(Lying. Dreaming on shallow shores.)

Arctic. Antarctic. Baltic.

Mississippi. Amazon. Columbia. Nile.

Thames. Sacramento. Snake. (Undulant woman river.)

Seine. Rio Grande. Willamette. McKenzie. Ohio.

Hudson. Po. Rhine. Rhone.

Rain. After a lifetime of drought.

That finally cleanses the air.

The soot from our eyes.

The dingy windows of our western home.

The rooftops and branches. The wings of birds.

The new light on a slant. Pouring. Making everything new.

Paula Gunn Allen

Take a minute of silence after the meditation so that the class centers before the study.

Introduction to Today's Session

Check in with the class as to how the spiritual exercises went from the week before. Ask if anyone had an experience s/he would like to share?

The purpose of today's session is to understand the wondrous gift that water is to all of God's creation. In particular, we want to understand how water works in the natural world and the various forms it takes, from raindrops to the mighty oceans.

Scripture Reading and Teaching

Introduce the Psalms as a book of Scripture rich with natural imagery. Ask the class to pay attention to the Psalms as they are read and make a list of the different forms that water takes. Notice that sometimes water is used literally, and sometimes it is used as a symbol or metaphor:

Psalm 1: 3 (Stream)

Psalm 18: 11-14 (Storm clouds, Hail)

Psalm 33: 6-7 (Sea)

Psalm 36: 8-9 (River, Fountain)

Psalm 65: 9-10 (River)

Psalm 68: 6-9 (Rain)

Psalm 69: 15 (Flood)

Psalm 78: 15-16 (Groundwater)

Psalm 104: 13-15 (Mountain headwaters, Wine)

Psalm 107: 33-35 (River, Springs, Pools)

Using the material in the Background section, explain the way that water travels through the water cycle. Reproduce a drawing of the water cycle as necessary. Emphasize the interconnectedness of God's waters. Point out that affecting water at one point in its cycle affects water in the entire cycle. Point out how wondrous this system of water is and how fragile. Have the class make connections between the various forms of water in the Psalms and in the water cycle.

Activity – Build a Watershed **

Everyone lives in a watershed. Watersheds are important components of the water cycle and the place where most of us interact most directly with the water cycle. A watershed is an area of land that catches rain and snow and drains and seeps into a marsh, stream, river, lake, or groundwater. This is home to us and thousands of other of God's creatures that depend on it. Healthy watersheds are essential for maintaining our health, the health of God's other creatures, as well as a sustainable economy.

1. To build the watershed, place the blocks and cups on the baking sheet, with the larger blocks towards one end and the smaller towards the other. Cut a piece of aluminum foil twice the length of the baking pan. Tuck one side of the aluminum foil under the larger blocks to form the top of

the watershed, and tuck the other side under the smaller blocks to form the bottom of the watershed. One end of the watershed should be taller (to represent mountains), and the other end should be level (to represent a lake or sea). Crinkle the aluminum foil around the blocks to create ridges, valleys and creek beds.

2. Ask for a volunteer to "rain" on the watershed by spraying water at the highest point of the model. This is the headwaters of the watershed. Watch how water forms from the little tributaries into larger rivers. Watch how the rivers run into the lake or sea.

3. Poke holes in the watershed to model how water seeps into the ground. Lift the foil to see where the groundwater goes.

4. Point out that at each place in the watershed, different species depend on the water.

5. You might throw a little dirt in the top of the watershed and show that water carries sediment and nutrients downstream to nourish river creatures and eventually lake and sea creatures.

NOTE: It helps if you assemble the watershed ahead of time, and do a practice run.

Ask the class if they know which watershed they live in. If they do not know, they can contact their local water authority or check out the extremely helpful United States Geological Survey web site, www.water.usgs.gov/edu/. The USGS web site will identify anyone's watershed by just entering the zip code.

Spiritual Exercise

For this week's spiritual exercise, encourage the group to try the following:

Return to your favorite watery nature spot identified last week, or a different place, and sit for a while quietly. Breathe deeply and center yourself. Then, write your own psalm about the water. Express what you see, hear, smell and feel. Write from the heart, not from the head. Express joy, praise, wonder, sorrow, concern, anger, marvel, love, or whatever it is that one is feeling towards God in that natural moment.

Closing Prayer

Thank everyone for coming and ask that they join you again next week.

Ask a class member to close the session in prayer. Ask him/her to bring into prayer the theme of the session.

** This activity was adapted from the *Hands on Save Our Streams Teacher's Manual*, September 1995, published by the Izaak Walton League of America, Inc.



Session 3 Water as Sustenance

Background

In early Palestine, the climate and terrain were often rugged and harsh and given to extremes. Torrential floods and significant droughts were not uncommon. Weather patterns were unpredictable with considerable variation from one year to another, making agriculture difficult and inconsistent. The soils in the mountainous regions were particularly poor, and sources of persistent water were rare. As Hebrew Bible scholar Daniel Swartz says, it was “no Eden, not any longer: the promised abundance had to be teased and more often wrested from the Earth by the sweat of the brow, and the seasons had a way of being fickle, not bestowing their appointed blessings.”

Rain determined settlement patterns as towns settled near springs, rivers and seas. Wells, which are so prominent in Scripture, provided access to much-needed groundwater. Elaborate tunnels and conduits were built to ensure continuous safe access to water within city walls. The Israelites were deeply connected with the sources of their water – be it rain-water, river or groundwater.

In this harsh, dry climate, water was often scarce. The Bible is full of images of thirst, drought, dryness and parched earth. In the midst of this scarcity, the Israelites understood water as a treasured gift from God, not something to be taken for granted. God gave them water to fulfill their thirst, to wash with and to nourish their crops.

After the Exodus from Egypt, when the anxious Israelites were thirsty in the desert, God provided them water from rocks (Exodus 17: 3-6). In Psalm 107, God turns a desert into a pool of water to provide for the people (Psalm 107: 35-36). Psalm 65, the great praise hymn, speaks of God as the great cosmic farmer who gently waters the earth and prepares the soil so that it might provide nourishment for the people (Psalm 65:9-10). And for this great blessing of water, the people were always thankful.

Furthermore, God not only provides water for humans but for all of God’s creatures:

You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills, giving drink to every wild animal; the wild asses quench their thirst.

By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation; they sing among the branches.

From your lofty abode you water the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work (Psalm 104: 11-13).

Sometimes in contemporary society, when all we need do is turn on a faucet and abundant clean water comes flowing out, it is difficult to remember that water is the precious gift that sustains us and the rest of Creation. Without water, however, we would not have life, and neither would the rest of God’s beloved creatures. About 60 percent of our body weight is made up of water; in some organisms it is as high as 90 percent. Our brains are 70 percent water. Blood is 82 percent water. The lungs are 90 percent water. And, the average American uses about 80 to 100 gallons of water per day. Without water, we simply could not exist.

In many areas of the world, the availability of fresh water can mean the difference between life and death. Approximately one billion people worldwide lack access to clean drinking water. Clean water for our fellow creatures is increasingly scarce as well. Twenty percent of all freshwater fish species are threatened or endangered because of too little water. In the Columbia and Snake Rivers, 95 percent of juvenile salmon do not reach the ocean because river flows are impeded by large dams and reservoirs.

SESSION 3 GUIDE

Supplies Needed

- ◆ Bibles for the group to share
- ◆ 5-gallon bucket
- ◆ 2-cup measuring cup
- ◆ 1/2 -cup measuring cup
- ◆ eye dropper

Opening Meditation

Welcome the class, and ask someone from the group to read aloud the poem below. Suggest to the group that they close their eyes and see if they can go in their minds to Blackwater Pond. Think about how it smells, what the weather is like and what sounds they hear. And, of course, what does the water taste like?

At Blackwater Pond

by Mary Oliver

At Blackwater Pond the tossed waters have settled
after a night of rain.

I dip my cupped hands. I drink
a long time. It tastes
like stone, leaves, fire. It falls cold
into my body, waking the bones. I hear them
deep inside me, whispering
oh what is that beautiful thing that just happened?

Take a minute of silence after the meditation so that the class centers before the study.

Introduction to Today's Session

Check in with the class as to how the spiritual exercises went from the week before. Did anyone have an experience s/he would like to share?

The purpose of today's session is to explore how water is an important gift from God for our sustenance and for the sustenance of the rest of Creation.

Scripture Reading and Teaching

Using the Background materials, describe the harsh and difficult climate and terrain of ancient Israel. Show a picture of the terrain if possible. Talk about the scarcity of water and the importance of water in early Israel. Before reading the Scriptures below, ask the class to pay special attention to the attitude of the Scripture writers towards water.

Exodus 17: 1-6

Psalm 65: 9-10

Psalm 104: 10-16

Break up into groups of 3 or 4 and ask the groups to consider the following questions:

1. What is the author's attitude about water?
2. Who does the water belong to?
3. What purposes does the water serve?
4. Compare the authors' views on water and our contemporary views.

Leave time to reconvene as a group and discuss what insights the groups had about the questions.

Activity 1—How Much Fresh Water Is There? **

1. Fill a 5-gallon bucket of water before class. Explain to the class that the 5-gallon bucket of water represents all the Earth's water (including surface water, groundwater, polar ice caps, sea water, vapor in the atmosphere, water in people, etc.). Ask the class to guess how much of the 5-gallon bucket is fresh water (water that is not ocean salt water and available to drink).
2. Then ask someone to remove 2 cups of water from the bucket. Explain to the class that just 2 cups of the 5-gallons of "Earth water" is fresh water. The rest of the bucket is salt water and not available for us and many other species that rely on fresh water. Set the bucket aside.
3. Then ask someone to pour out 1/2 cup out of the 2 cup measure into the 1/2 cup measure. Explain that the 1-1/2 cups of water left in the 2-cup measure represents all the fresh water frozen in polar ice caps that is not available for consumption. Set this aside. Point out that only 1/2 cup of the 5 gallons of earth water you started with is left. This 1/2 cup represents all the freshwater in the water cycle, including groundwater, surface water and water vapor.
4. Ask the class to guess how much of the 1/2 cup of fresh, unfrozen water is surface water that appears in rivers, streams and lakes. At this point, take the eyedropper and remove one drop of water. This one drop of water is all the fresh surface water on the earth.
5. Explain to the class that water is limited. No more is being produced. Discuss the pressures on human and non-human populations that rely on freshwater. Open the discussion up to the class at this point. Ask the group if it was surprised at how limited fresh water is. Ask how the class thinks God is calling us to interact with this precious and limited gift of water.

Activity 2 — Water Use Quiz

Take this quiz together with your class. Some of the questions do not have a single answer. Many people might not know the answers to these questions, but they are designed to get the participants thinking more of their individual water use. Discuss the answers.

*** This activity was adapted from the Hands on Save Our Streams Teacher's Manual, September 1995, published by the Izaak Walton League of America, Inc.*

1. Where does your drinking water come from? Did it come from a well? A river? A lake? Which one? You only get half credit if you name the reservoir without naming where the reservoir got its water.
2. Where does your wastewater from your home go to when you're finished with it?
3. Where does the runoff from your lawn go?
4. How much water does the average person use? (c)
 - a. 10-25 gallons/day
 - b. 40-50 gallons/day
 - c. 80-100 gallons/day
 - d. 150 gallons/day
5. One faucet dripping one drop per second wastes how much water in a day? (d)
 - a. 1 gallon
 - b. 3 gallons
 - c. 5 gallons
 - d. 7 gallons
6. Name five ways you can use less water?
7. Name five ways to put less pollution in your local waters?

Spiritual Exercise

For this week's spiritual exercise, encourage the group to try the following:

Each time you turn on a tap this week or drink a glass of water, say a brief prayer of thanks to God for providing it for you. Reflect upon where the water came from and the route it traveled to get to you. Reflect upon where your water goes when you are finished with it. Consider all the other creatures who enjoyed God's sustenance from the same water you did.

Continue to visit your favorite water spot as possible. See how it has changed since you last visited. Make note of anything new you notice about it.

Closing Prayer

Thank everyone for coming and ask that they join you again next week.

Ask a class member to close the session in prayer. Ask him/her to bring into prayer the theme of the session.



Session 4 Water as Purifier

Background

In both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, water is consistently used to purify and make clean. Because water was the only available cleaning agent in ancient times, it makes sense that it was the major purification agent as well. Water was used to cleanse and purify sacrificial animals and also used by priests before their consecration. The priestly Levites were sprinkled with water to anoint them and purify them for God's work (Numbers 8:7). There was also a washing area in front of the ark of the covenant so that people might wash before approaching it (Exodus 30:18-21).

Water not only made people clean but also came to be understood as a way of cleansing them of sinfulness as well (Psalm 51:2). Water could remove the stain of sin and create a clean heart (Isaiah 1:16-17). There is evidence that shortly before and during the time of Jesus, the early Jews used ablution, or washing of the entire body, as a means of removing sins before joining a community of believers. Since water sitting around would have become tainted, it was believed that purification was particularly effective if the waters were running waters – so-called “living water.”

It is important to pause here for a moment and consider how symbols and signs were used by the Scripture writers. Theologian Larry Paul Jones reminds us that while a symbol is a literary device, it points beyond itself in such a strong way that it actually embodies that which it represents. The water used during purification did not just remind ancient Israelites of God's redeeming power, they believed God's redeeming power was in the water.

It is in this context that John began baptizing in the name of repentance and the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4-5). It was generally understood that communal repentance was the precursor to the coming of the Lord's judgment. Baptism for John was most probably not a symbolic act, as it is sometimes understood today. Through repentance and baptism, sins were forgiven.

The baptism of Jesus, whom Christians traditionally understand to be sinless, was a different matter. Commentators believe that while Jesus was sinless and did not need to be

baptized, he did so to affirm the practice of a communal gathering of repentance. And, it offered an opportunity in the midst of this sacred tradition, for the Spirit to descend upon him and receive his call to his vocation in the world.

In the earliest Christian churches, baptism became a sacred ritual whereby an individual experiences forgiveness of their sins through the love of Jesus Christ and is then initiated into the community of believers. It is one of only two major sacraments accepted by virtually all of the major Christian traditions. The way it is practiced varies a great deal between denominations. Some believe that the community of faith can speak for an infant in baptism, while others believe that a person needs to be old enough to make his or her own commitment to the community. Some traditions sprinkle water while others fully immerse the individual. Some denominations require a lengthy time of study and reflection on the commitment to Christian faith baptism will require. Other denominations require only a desire to be baptized.

There has been quite a bit of discussion lately within specific denominations about whether baptism is a symbol of God's love and forgiveness or an act of God's love or forgiveness. Some traditions believe that baptism is a sacred re-enactment of Jesus' baptism and a sign of God's forgiving power. Others are re-claiming a more ancient understanding that baptism is an “efficacious sign.” In other words, God's grace and forgiveness are actually experienced within the baptism. In either case, baptism serves three major purposes: to offer an opportunity for us to confess our sins, to acknowledge God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ, and to be initiated into the community of faith.

Other important references to water as purification appear in the New Testament as well. Jesus washes the feet of his reluctant disciples as an invitation into fellowship with him and into his ministry after he is gone. Here, Jesus adapts the foot-washing custom of the day, which would call for the servant of a host to wash the feet of a weary traveler to his home. This story makes the point that purification by water is no longer necessary since salvation is available through a relationship with Jesus. By insisting upon washing the Disciples' feet himself, Jesus also reminds them that they are to serve others just as he has served them (John 13:5-15).

Another familiar Biblical purification by water is done by Pontius Pilate. Pilate publicly washes his hands to literally

and figuratively remove the stain of Jesus' blood.(Matthew 27:24).

In nature, too, water is a particularly important cleansing agent. River water routinely scours channels and transports much needed soil and nutrients downstream. Wetlands act as natural sponges, filtering out deadly pollutants. Rainwater washes away dense forest litter to allow young sprouts to reach much-needed light.

SESSION 4 GUIDE

Supplies Needed:

- Bibles
- Hymnals or other book that includes your denomination's baptism ritual
- a large bowl or bucket
- construction paper cut into large strips
- scissors
- markers
- pitcher of water

Opening Meditation

Welcome the group, and ask someone to read aloud the Hindu prayer below. Remind the group as they listen to this prayer from another religion and another culture how water is thought of universally as having healing power.

Mistresses of all the things that are chosen, rulers over all peoples, the waters are the ones I beg for a cure.

Soma has told me that within the waters are all cures and Agni who is salutary to all.

Waters, yield your cure as an armour for my body, so that I may see the sun for a long time.

Waters, carry far away all of this that has gone bad in me, either what I have done in malicious deceit or whatever lie I have sworn to.

I have sought the waters today; we have joined with their sap. O Agni full of moisture, come and flood me with splendour.

HINDU PRAYER

Take a minute of silence after the meditation so that the class centers before the study.

Introduction to Today's Session

Check in with the class as to how the spiritual exercises went from the week before. Did anyone have an experience s/he would like to share?

The purpose of today's session is to understand the role of water in baptism as an opportunity to confess our sins, acknowledge God's forgiveness of our sins, profess our faith and to enter into the community of faith.

Scripture Reading and Teaching

Take a few minutes and explain the long history of water has as a purifying agent in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. Explain the connection between water and casting away sins. Read the following Hebrew Bible passage regarding water as a purifier:

Isaiah 1: 16-17

Discuss why in the desert when water is scarce water might have come to be understood as a purifying agent. What does it mean to be purified?

Now, ask the group to read the first gospel account of baptism.

Mark 1: 4-9

1. Discuss why John was running around the countryside baptizing people? Why was it so important to baptize people at that moment?
2. How do you think John understood baptism, as a symbol or as something really happening?
3. How is Jesus' baptism different than John's other baptisms?

Ask the group to read about the early church's use of the sacrament of baptism.

Acts 2:37-41

1. One of the first rituals of the early church was baptism. Why was it important to this young community?
2. What do you notice had to happen before baptism?
3. Why is it necessary to take time to confess our sins before we join into a community of faith? Isn't a confession of sins focussing on the negative?
4. What does Peter promise will happen in baptism?
5. Do you think baptism is an important ritual today? Why?

Activity – Purifying Water

This is a good time to think about our own negligence around how we have treated God's gift of water. Break into groups of 3-4. Together think about the ways in which we have not acted responsibly towards the gift of water God has given us so graciously. Record each "sin" on a strip of constructive paper. Be creative. Think of individual acts and communal acts. They can be specific things we do or attitudes we take. They can be acts of omission or commission.

When the groups are finished, reconvene as a group. One by one, read the individual pieces of paper and place each one into the bowl or bucket. Turn now together to your own baptism ritual recorded in your book of liturgy or hymnal. Find the section where the community acknowledges its sinfulness. Read that together. Take a few minutes of silence to reflect upon and acknowledge where we have not carried out our mandate to safeguard God's gracious gift of water to us.

Now, ask the group to find the section in the baptism liturgy that talks about the washing away of sin or the forgiveness of sin. Read that aloud together. As that section is being read aloud, have someone pour water from the pitcher over the paper in the bucket. Watch the colors blend and bleed as the group's sins are washed away by the waters. Take a few moments of silence to reflect upon the love God continues to show us by forgiving us for the times we do not measure up. Ask the group to think about ways to be more engaged in safeguarding God's waters.

(Taken seriously, this can be a difficult exercise. Be sure to remind people that while we are to take our sinfulness seriously, we are also assured that through our baptism our sins are forgiven.)

Spiritual Exercise

For this week's spiritual exercise, encourage the group to try the following:

- Find a spot near your home that has running water. It might be a river, a stream, or a creek. It could be a fountain. If you have no such water near you, you can do this exercise in the shower or the bathtub!
- Find a stick or a leaf or something else on the ground that can be broken up. Break the leaf or stick into small pieces. Each piece of leaf or stick represents something done or

left undone that might be troubling you. Acknowledge them to God. Ask God to forgive you. Put the "sins" in the running water and see what happens. The water will (eventually) carry the sticks and leaves away. Think about the marvelous love that God shows towards us by forgiving our sins. Reflect on the cleansing power of water.

- Continue to visit your favorite watery spot and journal and record your reflections there.

Closing Prayer

Thank everyone for coming and ask that they join you again next week.

Ask a class member to close the session in prayer. Ask him/her to bring into prayer the theme of the session.



Session 5 Living Water

Background

We have seen in the previous four sessions what a powerful image water can be in the Scripture. The Scripture writers knew their audiences understood the importance of water to their lives and their livelihood. In a dry, difficult climate, water was literally the life-blood. It should be no surprise then that perhaps the most powerful way in which water is used in Scripture is to represent God, our life-blood.

In numerous places, water stands in for God, for the Spirit and for Jesus Christ. Psalm 36:8 compares God's love to giving God's people a drink from the river of God's delight. Psalm 36:9 refers to God as a fountain. Psalm 18:12-14 compares God to a thunderstorm, with dark rain clouds serving as God's canopy. Psalm 42:7 talks of the deepness of God's love as the deepness of the mighty sea whose waves billow over us.

Liquid forms are often used for God's Spirit as well. Isaiah 44:3 speaks of God's Spirit being *poured out*. The New Testament continues watery references to the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit is *poured out* (Acts 2:4). God promises to *pour out* the Spirit in the end time (Acts 2:17-18). The gospel of Luke refers to John the Baptist being *filled* by the Holy Spirit in Elizabeth's womb, Elizabeth and Zechariah being *filled* by the Holy Spirit at hearing the news of Mary's pregnancy, and Jesus himself *filled* with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:15, 41, 67, Luke 4:14).

Of course the most specific reference to the divine as water comes in John's gospel. Here, Jesus continually refers to himself as "living water." In his familiar conversation with the woman at the well, Jesus asks the woman, a Samaritan no less, for a drink of water. When she questions him about his audacity in asking her, a Samaritan, for a drink, he uses word-play around water to reveal himself to her. Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water" (John 4:10).

As we saw in Session 4, living water to a Jew would have indicated purification from sins by way of running (living) water. The point Jesus is making is that the old way of forgiving sins is being replaced by him, who cleanses our sins not with actual water but by his own sacrifice. Jesus stands in for water by becoming the living water. He goes on to tell the woman that those who drink of the well will only provide for their physical needs, and indeed they will be thirsty again. The kind of water Jesus offers quenches our real thirst by cleansing our sins and offering eternal life (John 4:6-14).

In this story and indeed throughout the gospel of John, water plays a very powerful dual role. First, water is used to show us Jesus' humanity. He gets tired and thirsty from his journey and needs to ask the Samaritan woman for a drink of water. Even though the gospel of John makes clear that Jesus is divine, in his human form he still gets weary and thirsty. Like us, he is dependent on God's physical sustenance through the sacred gift of water.

Secondly, the gospel of John uses water to show that God provides not only physical sustenance through water, but through Jesus as living water, God provides spiritual sustenance. The woman is so "filled" by Jesus that she runs off to her village to tell people about him, leaving her water jar behind since she no longer needs it to quench her thirst.

John's gospel also gives us another story about water that makes clear what God has in mind for us. In the story, Nicodemus, the learned Pharisee seeks out Jesus to talk to him about spiritual matters. Jesus completely confuses him when he tells him that to enter the Kingdom of God he must be born again. While this passage has been used in a number of different ways to justify all sorts of different positions, it deserves another look because it offers a very powerful message about water. What Jesus tells Nicodemus, and indeed tells us, is that through a birth by water in our mother's womb and re-birth in the Spirit, we are promised nothing short of new life.

At the end of our study on God's sacred gift of water, we can see that water provides a powerful image for God's sustenance, God's forgiveness and God's promise of new life. With new hearts, cleansed and changed by the living waters, we come to understand and appreciate the wondrous and miraculous gift of sacred waters God has given us. Born

again through water and the Spirit, we yearn then to participate with God in keeping God's waters safe and pure for all God's beloved creatures for generations to come.

SESSION 5 GUIDE

*** Try to teach this session outside if possible, near a local water body. Even a small fountain in a city park will suffice.*

Supplies Needed:

- 💧 Bibles
- 💧 a nearby stream, fountain, creek, river or water body
- 💧 if inside, you will need:
 - decorative bowl
 - plants
 - twigs
 - leaves
- 💧 earplugs
- 💧 blindfolds

Opening Meditation

Ask someone from the group to read the poem below. Suggest to the others that they close their eyes as the poem is read. Reflect on how God is present to us in the waters.

From: Meditation in the Spring Rain

by Wendell Berry

I crossed a place where a stream flows
underground, and the sounds of the hidden water
and the water come to light braided in my ear.
I think the maker is here, creating his hill
as it will be, out of what it was.

For a time there
I turned away from the words I knew, and was lost.
For a time I was lost and free, speechless
in the multitudinous assembling of his Word.

Take a minute of silence after the meditation so that the class centers before the study.

Purpose of Today's Session

The purpose of today's session is to understand the use of water as a metaphor for God and for Jesus. We will also seek to understand how we might be transformed by "living waters" to live as gracious recipients of the gift of sacred water.

Scripture Reading and Teaching

Explain to the group that water is such a powerful image in the Bible that even God is referred to as water. Read the following passages which talk about God as water. Ask the group to notice all the different water images. Make a list of them on the board or on a piece of paper.

Psalm 18:12-14

Psalm 36:8-9

Psalm 42:7

Isaiah 44:3

Luke 4:14

Acts 2:4

Discuss the following questions:

1. Why do you think the Israelites used water to talk about God?
2. What do we come to understand about the nature of God through these metaphors?
3. Are they illuminating?

Now, read the story of the woman at the well:

John 4:6-15, 25-28

Use the Background section of this session to discuss the following:

1. What is the significance in the story of the woman being a Samaritan?
2. What is the woman's attitude towards Jesus at the beginning of the story? At the end?
3. What are the two ways in which the words thirst and drink are used in the story?
4. What does Jesus mean by living water? What is the claim/promise he is making? How do you understand that given our earlier understanding of living water as used by Hebrew Bible writers to mean purification in running water?
5. Why did the woman leave her water jar behind?

Activity — Senses

This activity will work best if you can take a walk to a nearby park and experience water in a natural setting. If you do so, and the weather cooperates, you can conduct the entire session outside. If you cannot go outside, re-create a small indoor pond as best you can with a large bowl of water, some plants, sticks and leaves to give it a natural setting. Divide

the group into four groups. Assign each group one of four senses – sight, hearing, touch, and smell. (We'll leave tasting to our imaginations.)

Ask each group to experience the water using only the sense it was assigned. The sight group can only use its eyes. It is best to have earplugs for this group so they can't hear. The hearing group can only use their hearing, so they will need blindfolds or to close their eyes. Similarly, the touch and smell groups should be blindfolded and have earplugs in so that they might use only their assigned sense.

Ask each group to fully experience the water using only their one sense. For the seeing group, what is the shape and color of the water? What do you notice about its movement? For the hearing group, what kind of pitch does the water have? Is it noisy or quiet? For the touch group, what kind of texture did the water have? Is there anything in the water? What did that feel like? For the smelling group, what did the water smell like -- acidic, sweet? Most importantly, ask each participant to be open to experiencing God in the water.

After everyone is clear about the instructions, ask the group to sit quietly without speaking and experience the water using only the one sense assigned

After about 5-10 minutes of observation, ask the group to reconvene and share their experiences. What did each learn about the water? What did they learn about God? Did they experience living waters?

Wrapping Up

Briefly review the major themes of the course: God's gift of water; the miracle of water; water as sustenance; purifying water and living waters. Ask the class to discuss any new insights they received through the course. Has their understanding of water changed? How will their relationship with water be different in the future?

Discuss with the class whether we can be changed by the living waters into those who graciously accept water as a sacred gift from God and as such act to conserve and protect it?

You might suggest to the class that they continue to do any of the spiritual disciplines that they found to be effective means of communicating with God. They might continue to visit their watery nature spots. Encourage the class to keep asking God how they might be stewards of God's miraculous and sacred gift of water.

Closing Prayer

Ask a class member to close the session in prayer or use the following:

Dearest Creator God,

We cannot begin to thank you for this most marvelous gift of water you have given to us and to the rest of your beloved Creation. We marvel at your bounty and the many ways you nurture us. We are amazed by the miracle of how your water moves around the Earth in order to sustain Your beloved Creation. We acknowledge that there are so many times that we have not fully appreciated this sacred gift. We confess that we have often failed to be your image in the world by not caring adequately for your waters and by using much more than our share. Forgive us, God, and remind us always that the Earth and all that is in it belongs to you. Amen.

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Appendix

Sample Water Regional Training Event Agenda

Note on location: Many church buildings, which can be obtained for little or no charge, are ideal for hosting events since they often have space for plenary sessions, worship, workshops, and meals.

FRIDAY EVENING

- 7-9pm Reception with optional plenary speaker
Suggestions:
- Include music or other artistic element
 - Include ice breakers to increase fellowship opportunities

SATURDAY

- 8:45 am Registration
- 9:15am Welcome and worship
Suggestion: Include an opening “ritual” to create a sacred space for the event
- 9:30am Keynote speaker
Suggestion: Focus on theology and water
- 10:45am Break
- 11:00 Concurrent Workshops
- 12:30pm Lunch
- 1:45pm Concurrent Workshops
- 3:15pm Break
- 3:30pm Closing Worship
Suggestion: End with a closing “ritual”

WORKSHOP SUGGESTIONS:

(Note: Many secular environmental organizations, government agencies, and universities can help provide workshop leaders or resource persons for workshops. You can also tap into nearby seminaries or college religion departments for workshop leaders.)

- Public Witness and Advocacy
- Water 101: The Science of Watersheds
- Worship/Preaching Tools and Techniques
- Theology of Water
- Education, Organizing and Outreach in Your Congregation
- Local Water Issues

Worship Resources

I. HYMNS AND OTHER SONGS

A Short List of Hymns (listed by first lines)

Most are widely available in many versions and hymnals. Some, marked with an asterisk, are adapted from Reformation sources or are modern. They may be found in The Hymnal, 1982 (Episcopal)

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation

(Words: Joachim Neander. Melody from *Stralsund Gesangbuch*, 1625.)

For the beauty of the earth

(Words: Folliot Sandford Pierpont. Traditional English melody.)

All creatures of our God and King

(Words from Francis of Assisi. Melody from *Cologne Gesangbuch*, 1623.)

Before the Lord Jehovah's Throne

(Words: Isaac Watts – based on Psalm 100. *Musikalisches Handbuch*, 1690.)

*Lord of all being, throned afar...

(Words: Oliver Wendell Holmes, 1848. Traditional German melody, arranged by Samuel Dyer, 1828.)

Joyful, joyful, we adore thee

(Henry Van Dyke, 1907. Music: Beethoven, adapted by Hedges, 1867.)

*I bind unto myself today

(Adapted from “The Deer’s Cry” by St. Patrick. Traditional Irish Melody.)

How wondrous and great thy works, God of Praise!

(Henry Ustik Onderdone, 1826. Melody arranged from J. Michael Haydn.
Another tune is by Thomas Ravenscroft, *Whole Book of Psalmes*, 1621.)

*Earth and all stars

(Herbert Brokering, b.1926. Music: David N. Johnson, b. 1922.)

All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small

(Cecil Frances Alexander. Traditional English melody, arr. Martin Shaw, 1915.)

*Sing praise to God who reigns above, the God of all creation

(Johann Jacob Schutz, b.1640. Melody from *Une Pastourelle Gentille*, 1529.)

*O creating God, your fingers trace the bold designs of farthest space

(Jeffrey Rowthorn, b.1934. Music: *Wilderness* by Reginald Thatcher, 1868-1957.)

O worship the King, and gratefully sing his power and his love

(From Psalm 104 by Robert Grant. Music adapted from Michael Haydn.)

This is my Father's world

(Maltbie D. Babcock. Music: Franklin K. Sheppard.)

He's got the whole world in his hands

(Traditional spiritual)

Love divine, all loves excelling

(Charles Wesley. Music: John Zundel.)

The last verse, “Finish then thy new creation,” links humans with cosmic fulfillment.

(HYMNS AND OTHER SONGS CONT.)

Other Songs for Choir or Solo

(These songs are not in most hymnals and will need to be listened to online, though some also have sheet music available online. References given with each song ... and enough words to guide your selection.)

(a) “As torrents in summer”

(Words by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow; music by Edward Elgar, 1857-1934)

A cappella SSA and SATB arrangements available at: <http://www.musicroom.com/Default.aspx>

As Torrents in Summer half-dried in their channels
Suddenly rise, though the sky is still cloudless
The sky is still cloudless
For rain has been falling far off at their fountains

So hearts that are weary rise full to o'erflowing
And they that behold it marvel and know not
Marvel and know not
That God at their fountains has been flowing.

(b) “Awake”

(Words by Peter Mayer) *Sheet music not available. Recording on Earth Town Square, available at:* <http://www.peppermintcds.com/peterdemo.html>

Clouds are swift, rocks are ancient	Waves are crashing, rivers churning
Mountains are high, oceans great	Planets twirling, stars ablaze
Winds are restless, trees are patient	Storms are raging, atoms whirling
And you, my child, are awake	And you, my child, are awake

To perceive these wondrous things
To count the beat of a blackbird's wings
To tell a story, and dance and sing

(c) “Blue Boat Home”

(Words by Peter Mayer.) *Sheet music at* <http://www.peppermintcds.com/peterdemo.html>
Recording on Earth Town Square, available at the web site above.

Though below me I feel no motion
Standing on these mountains and plains *(Two other verses follow)*
Far away from the rolling ocean
Still my dry-land heart can say
I've been sailing all my life now
Never harbor or port have I known
The wide universe is the ocean I travel
And the earth is my blue boat home

(HYMNS AND OTHER SONGS CONT.)

(d) “Swimming to the Other Side”

Online recording, lyrics, and sheet music available at: <http://www.pathumphries.com/stos.html>

CHORUS:

We are living ‘neath the great Big Dipper
We are washed by the very same rain
We are swimming in the stream together
Some in power and some in pain
We can worship the ground we walk on
Cherishing the beings we live beside
Loving spirits will live forever
We’re all swimming to the Other Side

*(Three verses, each followed
by the chorus, follow)*

II. ADDITIONAL SERMON STARTERS

“God’s Gift of Water”

Water is so abundant on this planet that some believe the Earth should be called the “water Planet.” In the account of Eden in Genesis 2, a river flows out of Eden to water the garden. Life and water are overflowing. God blows moist breath into the clay to bring the human to life. Water and earth are combined by God to make us humans.

Throughout the stories of the Hebrew Bible water plays a key role. When Hagar and Ishmael are sent into the desert to die, God finds for Hagar a spring. God opens Hagar’s eyes and she sees the well of water at Beer’lahai-roi. (Genesis 21:19). There is enough water for all if we just look.

One of the first treaties or covenants between humans in the Bible is a water-use compact. After Abraham complains to King Abimelech about access to a well, they swear an oath about access to the well’s water and name the well “Beersheba” - the “well of the oath.” (Genesis 21:25-34)

God’s economy is always an economy of abundance; but some circumstances require careful planning.

After the Israelites follow Moses into the desert, they doubt God’s abundance and complain to Moses that they are being brought into the desert to die of thirst. First, they complain of the bitterness of the water at Marah (Genesis 15:24). Then, despite God’s having turned the water sweet and his leading them directly to Elim, a place of 12 springs, they still complain at Horeb that there is no water. So Moses strikes the rock with his shaft; and the waters flow out. Both the account in Numbers 20 and in Exodus 17 agree on the wonderful flow, but in the Numbers 20 version Moses is punished by being denied a sight of the Promised Land ... because he did not give God the credit for bringing the water from the rock.

The abundance recounted in Exodus and Numbers has a simple formula: worship God above all and you will have all that you need. “You shall worship God and I will bless your bread and your water. (Exodus 23:25) In Numbers 24:7 God promises, “water shall flow from his [Israel’s] buckets and his offspring shall have abundant water.”

Many psalms and the Book of Proverbs remind us of God’s bountiful gift of water and our need to share that gift. Proverbs tells us that the one who gives water will get water in return. Chapter 25, verse 25 directs us to give food and drink even to our enemies, and adds: “even if they are thirsty, give them water to drink.”

For Jesus, the sharing of God’s gifts was often exemplified by the use of water. In Mathew 10:24 he says “Whoever gives

Worship Resources

(ADDITIONAL SERMON STARTERS CONT.)

even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple – truly I say to you, none of these will lose their reward.”

Despite the abundance of water on the Earth, we humans are doing rather a poor job of sharing the abundance. Concern over the pollution of fresh water and the many efforts to limit access to fresh water led the United Nations to declare 2003 “The Year of Fresh Water.”

According to the United Nations’ Committee on Economic, Cultural, and Social Rights, water is not just an economic commodity. On November 28, 2002 the Committee declared that access to water is a human right. The Committee defined water as a limited natural resource and a public commodity fundamental to life and health. “The human right to water entitles everyone to sufficient, affordable, physically accessible, safe and acceptable water for personal and domestic uses,” states the Committee document. This is a modern secular way of recognizing that water does not come from our own private ventures but is provided by God for all persons. Those that declare water to be best provided by private efforts are repeating Moses’ heresy of not recognizing God as the giver of water.

Today, some 1.1 billion people do not have access to clean, safe drinking water; and some 2.4 billion do not have adequate sanitation or sewage, according to the United Nations.

The nations of the world gathered for the Millennium Summit in 2000 and again for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2002. At both of these summits, the leaders of the nations of the world committed themselves to reducing by half the numbers of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water by 2015.

The World Bank estimates that up to \$870 billion will be needed over the next ten years to improve access to safe drinking water and sanitation in developing countries. In the absence of international direct funding to improve water access in third world countries, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund are demanding that countries privatize water supplies, hoping that the private sector will supply the funds that rich nations refuse to supply. Many business people see that this will not work. A United Methodist businessman at the World Summit on Sustainable Development told the U.S. delegation: “As much as I might like to work in Africa on these problems, I am in business to make money, and I don’t see how I can make money doing this. There is still a role for the U.S. government. I support the U.S. doing more.”

According to the World Council of Churches, 80% of the disease in poor countries is related to poor drinking water and sanitation. Six thousand children a day will contract diseases linked to unhealthy water. In 2005, half of the world’s poorest countries faced moderate to severe water shortages.

Forty percent of the world’s population goes thirsty every year; but if water is plentiful in your area, it is easy to be unaware of the human costs in other lands. Consider the stark differences in water use. In the United States, for example, it continues to climb while in East Africa water use per capita has, by necessity, been cut in half in the last 30 years. In East Africa women and children must walk an average of 21 minutes for each trip to collect water!

In Matthew 25 Jesus elaborated on the comments he made earlier (Matthew 10) about providing a child with a drink of cold water. He now declares that one of the ways that both individuals and nations will be judged will be by whether we have provided water and other services “to the least of these, my brothers and sisters”—that is, the poorest members of the human community. The stakes are high. Those who carry out this command are promised eternal life. Those who turn away give themselves into eternal punishment.

Jesus told his disciples that he came that we might have life, and “have it abundantly.” (John 10:10b) His other sayings make clear that he meant this as combined spiritual and physical reality. For example, he said that he came not to reject but to fulfill the vision of the prophets—which always included social justice. As his followers, then, we are bidden to

(ADDITIONAL SERMON STARTERS CONT.)

work on fulfilling that vision. And indeed he empowers us to do so: for he said, “The one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.” (John 14:12)

Let us take heart, then and go forth to fulfill the vision—providing water for God’s children everywhere. We begin at our own table when we give thanks to God for our daily bread (and water) and thus initiate in our hearts our sharing with all in need.

In the words of Isaiah the prophet: “Let all who thirst come to the water. Though you have no money, come; receive grain and eat.” (Isaiah 55:1).

“Sacred Oceans and Seas”

“And God said, ‘Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures’ So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm . . . And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas . . .’” (Genesis 1:20-22)

“Yonder is the sea, great and wide; creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great. (Psalm 104:25)

In comparison to the land, God’s oceans are indeed vast, occupying 70 % of the Earth’s surface, and they are home to over 90% of all life on Earth. In another translation, the Psalmist (104:25) states, “There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number – living things both large and small.” Even with Scriptural passages such as these to remind us, nevertheless when we talk about the Earth, we are usually referring to just that 30% of the Earth’s surface we call land. We know little or nothing about much of ocean life. Scientists hope to identify many of the estimated million-plus species of life in the oceans (only a small fraction of which have been identified to date) through a comprehensive global study, and expect to discover at least 5,000 new species of fish.

God, with an overflowing love for us and all Creation, has provided an oceanic world as part of our earthly heritage. As God’s stewards, guided by the Spirit that hovers over the waters, humans are to care for the oceans bequeathed to us by God as much as we care for the land and the air. In so doing, we will be sharing with others the generosity of God’s love and the extravagance and beauty of Creation. In awe and deep thanksgiving, we will be answering God’s call as we maintain the productive capacity of the oceans’ waters and the integrity of the oceanic systems that support such an abundance of life and have an untold wealth of beauty.

Current industrial fishing practices and pollution are leading us to the exact opposite of proper Christian stewardship, obscuring the glory to God that God’s ocean creatures proclaim. Nearly one-third of the world’s fisheries have collapsed or are near collapse; and about half are being fished at their maximum level. By over-fishing we are in effect stealing from people in poverty and from future generations. Fish is the primary source of protein for coastal communities and is especially important for those living in poverty. Fish make up about 19% of the total animal protein consumption of developing countries in the world.

As Christians, we are called to be especially concerned for the poor and vulnerable. Marine pollution caused by our personal choices as consumers (especially as drivers), by improper land use and development planning, and by agricultural runoff adversely affects “neighbors” downstream who live near the sea or depend on the oceans for their livelihoods and health. We must begin truly to care for the oceans by insisting on the protection of coastal areas.

By restoring the beauty and regenerative capacity of God’s oceans, we will enlarge our understanding and appreciation of God’s compassion. We will show our caring for our neighbors and for God’s other creatures as we make choices that minimize the impact humans make on these great bodies of water. Thus we will help “the seas and all that is in them” (Psalm 146:8) to resound to the glory of God.

(ADDITIONAL SERMON STARTERS CONT.)

Globally, the gap between those who will be able to withstand environmental change and those who will not is widening. The poor and disadvantaged will be hurt most by the depletion and degradation of our oceans. However, we will all suffer ... and God's other creatures will also suffer. Conservation of the waters is an urgent call for prayer and action by all Christians.

The oceans are one of God's masterpieces and home to an outstanding array of life. God's oceans also provide for all of us, supplying both food and atmospheric control that all life depends on. We cannot afford to take them for granted or think of them as indestructible,

(Freely adapted from an article by the Rev. Jim Ball in "Creation Care" magazine. Scripture verses are from the New Revised Standard version of the Bible.)

III. Worship and Liturgical Resources

A Call to Worship

(May be read responsively, as indicated by bold type, or else by the worship leader alone.)

Our help is in the name of the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.

(Psalm 124:8)

Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
Ascribe to the Lord the glory due God's Name;
worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.
The voice of the Lord is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the Lord over the mighty waters

(Psalm 29:1-3)

The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come."
And let everyone who hears say, "Come:
And let everyone who is thirsty come.
Let everyone who wishes
take the water of life as a gift.

(Revelation 22:17)

A Responsive Prayer

Creator God,
whose Spirit moved over the face of the waters,
who gathers the seas into their places
and directs the courses of the rivers,
who sends rain upon the earth
that it should bring forth life:
we praise you for the gift of water.

Redeemer God,
who spared Noah and creatures of every kind
from the waters of the flood,

Worship Resources

(WORSHIP AND LITURGICAL RESOURCES CONT.)

APPENDIX · VIII

who led your people over dry land through the seas
and across the Jordan to the land of promise,
who marks our adoption as children
with the sign of water:
we thank you for the gift of water

Sustaining God,
create in us such a sense of wonder and delight
in this and all your gifts
**that we might receive them with gratitude,
care for them with love,
and generously share them with all your creatures,
to the honor and glory of your name**

(Prayer by the Rev. John Paarlberg)

For the Harvest of Lands and Waters

O gracious Father, who openest thine hand and fillest all things living with plenteousness: Bless the lands and waters, and multiply the harvests of the world; let thy Spirit go forth, that it may renew the face of the earth; show thy loving-kindness, that our land may give her increase; and save us from selfish use of what thou givest, that men and women everywhere may give thee thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Book of Common Prayer, 1979)

The Eco-Justice Covenant Congregation

JOIN THE COVENANT CONGREGATION PROGRAM, WHICH INCLUDES ACTIONS CONGREGATIONS CAN TAKE ON WORSHIP, LEARNING/TEACHING, LIFESTYLE, AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT.

Healing and Defending God's Creation

God created the Earth and all that is in it and declared it good. God's creation is marked by wondrous complexity, interdependence, and beauty. Human beings are called by God to the task of stewardship - taking care of the Earth respectfully for its own sake and so that present and future generations may live on it and enjoy its fruits. The gifts of Creation and the responsibility of stewardship were given to all of humanity, so that all might have enough and no one would have more than is needed and God is justice would prevail.

In our pride and brokenness, all of humankind is in sin and separated from God. The Earth has not been well cared for. The water and air and land are polluted with poisons which hurt people and all Creation. Many species of animals and plants are endangered by the behavior of human beings. Some have even become extinct.

We have not shared the fruits of Creation justly. Some people live in luxury, taking more than they need, while others are desperately poor, especially people of color.

God, through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, heals and reconciles humanity and all of Creation to God. We are able to become new creations - the new comes and the old passes away.

God calls the church to participate in the redemption of individuals, all of humanity and creation. Therefore, ministries of environmental stewardship and environmental justice are significant in the mission of our congregations and judicatories. Therefore the governing body (session, church council, vestry, consistory etc.) of our congregation affirms the importance of healing and defending creation to our mission. We promise to become engaged in or to continue to be engaged in this ministry in the following ways:

Worship

In worship, we will celebrate God's grace and glory in creation and will declare that God calls us to participate in the redemption of the world by cherishing, protecting, and restoring creation.

Learning and Teaching

We will seek opportunities for ourselves and our children to learn more about the wonders of Creation, the threats posed by human beings to the survival of creation and the possibilities of our participating in God's redemption and justice.

Lifestyle

Our individual and congregation's lifestyles will respect and cherish creation. We will form habits of consuming, conserving, and sharing that serve to protect and restore the environment. In particular, we will reuse and recycle as many materials as we can and seek ways of limiting our consumption of fossil fuels.

Covenant Congregation Project

Community, National and Global Involvement

In our community, the nation and the world, our congregation will witness to and participate in God's redemption of creation by supporting public efforts and policies which support vulnerable people and protect and restore the degraded earth.

Each year we will review our previous year's work on environmental justice and consider other ways we can participate in God's redemption of creation.

Signed by the pastor:

SIGNATURE

DATE

Signed by an officer of the congregation:

SIGNATURE

DATE

(Please keep this in the official minutes of the governing body of your congregation.)

How to Host a Regional or Local Training Event

- **Identify planning committee.**
Suggestion: keep the planning committee small (2-5 people).
- **Set date and location.**
Suggestion: churches will often donate their facilities and are ideal spaces for hosting events since they typically have worship spaces, kitchen facilities, dining areas, and classrooms for breakout sessions.
Note: Planning committee members should do a walk-through of the facility so they can visualize the space when planning workshops, tabling areas, food set-up, etc. The committee should also identify a “point person” at the facility who can answer questions during the planning process. See list of questions to ask the facility manager in the Appendix.
- **Identify any co-sponsors.**
Suggestion: contact local and regional secular environmental groups as well as other religious organizations.
- **Set agenda.**
Note: sample agenda located in Appendix.
- **Design worship service.**
Suggestion: consider adding an opening and closing ritual that includes hands-on experiences.
- **Identify plenary speakers and worship leaders.**
- **Identify workshop leaders.**
Suggestion: regional and local environmental organizations often have staff or skilled volunteers who are ideal workshop leaders.
Note: Be sure to include different learning styles (e.g., hands on activities, music, poetry, art, etc.) when designing the various workshops so that the workshops are both engaging and educational.
- **Secure caterer or other food service option.**
Suggestion: when choosing a caterer, be sure to ask about vegetarian options and accommodating other special dietary needs.
Suggestion: whenever possible, use locally grown, organic food.
Note: many churches provide food service options, often through their women’s groups.
- **Determine the registration process and develop registration form.**
Note: for sample registration forms, visit www.nccecojustice.org.
Suggestion: to save time, make sure your registration software includes ways to print out name tags, registration check-in sheets, and contact lists.
Suggestion: set a registration deadline with a reduced fee to encourage early registration.
- **Design and distribute promotional materials: fliers and brochures.**
Suggestion: promote the event through email and church listservs.
Note: for sample promotional materials, visit www.nccecojustice.org.

- Promote event with local and regional media as well as local and regional faith groups and environmental organizations.
Suggestion: send out email and snail mail information.
Suggestion: consider inviting religious leaders, heads of local and state government agencies, and elected officials.
- Promote tabling opportunities with local and regional environmental organizations and government agencies.
Suggestion: charge a small fee for tabling and exhibit opportunities.
- Determine what audio visual equipment speakers and trainers will need and ensure that it will be available.
- Create a conference evaluation form to be included in registration packets. Feedback is vital!
- A day or two before the event, send a final email out to participants with directions to the location and a reminder of start times.

For the Event Day

- Prepare registration packets.
Suggestion: include registration list with contact information, agenda, worship materials, speaker bios, and advance presentation materials.
Note: to reduce waste, you may want to make presentations and supporting materials available on the web, rather than in hard copy. You may also want to collect and reuse plastic nametag holders after the event.
- Set up appropriate signage inside and outside the location site.
- Set up tabling location.
- Set up registration table.
Note: have blank registration forms on hand for on-site registration and be sure to have petty cash on hand.
Suggestion: have registration list on hand for easy sign in process. Consider dividing the list in half alphabetically and assign two volunteers to check attendees in so that the registration process is efficient.
Suggestion: place the registration table in a visible location.
- Set up dining area.
- Set up audio visual equipment for plenary and workshop speakers and worship leaders.
- Be sure to arrive at the event location early in order to tackle any last minute logistics.
- Assign clean up duties and make sure that you leave the event facility in good shape when everyone leaves.
- Enjoy the event!

Questions to Ask the Facility Manager or Point Person

In addition to walking through the building and seeing the space where various components of the event will take place, you should identify a point person who can answer questions as you go through the planning process. Here is a list of suggested questions:

- How and when we will be able to access the building before the event?
- Will there be a sexton or building manager on duty if we need assistance?
- What are the clean-up procedures for the kitchen and dining facility?
- Where should people park?
- Is there audiovisual equipment available for our use? Will it be set up for us or how will we access it the day of the event?
- Where are the bathrooms, light controls, and thermostats?
- Are there tables available for groups to use when tabling?
- Are there any other events taking place at the facility the same day that we should know about?