

## **The Green Congregation Action Plan (Short Version)**

The goal is to make a difference 1) by transforming attitudes and commitments, and 2) by embracing concrete actions that reduce human ecological impact on the earth and contribute to justice for people affected by environmental degradation. Choose projects likely to succeed, institutionalize them, and then move on to others.

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

- a. Incorporate Earth-keeping confessions, intercessory prayers, hymns, and sermons into weekly worship throughout the year.
- b. For four Sundays in September, observe a four-week Season of Creation as part of the church year, with liturgies, sermons, Scripture lessons focusing on a relationship with nature ([www.seasonofcreation.com](http://www.seasonofcreation.com))
- c. Observe Earth Day Sunday in April ([www.nccecojustice.org](http://www.nccecojustice.org))
- d. Have a Blessing of the Animals. ([www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org) under Worship)
- e. Appoint your sanctuary with care for creation greenery, banners, and art.

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

- a. Study your denominational Social Statement and the “Earth Charter.” ([www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org) under Education)
- b. A class/forum to study the biblical, theological, and ethical resources in the Christian faith for eco-justice ministry.

- c. Forums with local experts on environmental issues and resources.
- d. Hold a retreat in a natural setting for a cluster of churches/councils.

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

- a. Carry out a comprehensive environmental audit and develop a plan.
- b. Retrofit church lighting; develop a recycling program; reduce paper use.
- c. Use grounds as community garden, prairie, low maintenance lawn.

4. Discipleship at home and work: “Love your neighbor and Care for Creation”

- a. Recruit members to do an audit of their homes and/or work places.
- b. Provide an opportunity for members to make a “Covenant with Creation” listing the eco-justice practices and disciplines. (See [www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org) under Lifestyle at Home and Work).
- c. Offer a study/support group using a guidebook to encourage sustainable living. See resources at [www.earthministry.org](http://www.earthministry.org) and [www.nwei.org](http://www.nwei.org).

5. Public Ministry/ Public Witness: “The church exists to serve the world”

- a. Notify members with periodic action alerts about local, regional, and national environmental legal and policy issues.
- b. Do a hands-on project in the community: restore a habitat, clean up trash, plant trees, or protest pollution-causing ill health.
- c. Assist another church in becoming a Green Congregation.

For more information, see [www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org) or contact: [webofcreation@gmail.com](mailto:webofcreation@gmail.com).

## **The Green Congregation Program**

### Green Congregation Mission Statement :

As a congregation committed to care for creation, we affirm the creation in all its glory and beauty. We acknowledge God as the source of all things. We acknowledge Christ as the redeemer of all things. We acknowledge the Spirit as the sustainer of all things. As a result, we strive to respect all of life as sacramental. We accept our vocation as earth-keepers who care for creation. We see ourselves as part of the covenant of Noah that God made with humans and with all the animals of the land, sea, and air. We accept our responsibility to live justly in relation to our fellow human beings in ways that all creatures may mutually thrive together.

### Worship:

We seek to worship throughout the year so that we express our gratitude and praise to God the creator and so that we glorify God intentionally together with all creation. In worship, we will celebrate creation, confess our sins against creation, grieve the losses of creation, and commit ourselves to care for Earth.

### Education:

We seek to learn about the biblical, theological, and ecclesial traditions concerning creation, including the biblical mandate from God for us to care for Earth. We will seek also to learn about the present degradations of creation due to human activity, how these degradations are related to human exploitation and oppression, how we as religious people are implicated in these matters, and what we as Christians can do to heal and restore creation for future generations. We will seek to train people to be leaders in the congregation and the community

in our cooperative efforts to care for creation.

#### Building and Grounds:

We agree to assess the destructive impact that our activities and the use and maintenance of our property may have upon creation—in such matters as energy use, toxic products, paper use, water use, waste, transportation, among others. We will strive to make choices that lessen our negative impact on the Earth and that serve to renew and restore Earth community.

#### Discipleship as Home and Work:

We encourage ourselves as individual members of this congregation—at whatever age, economic level, ethnic group, or walk of life—to care for creation in our personal lifestyle, in our homes, and at our work—knowing that our habits and practices can contribute significantly to care for creation. We seek to foster a closer relationship with nature so that we can live simply and walk lightly upon the earth.

#### Public Ministry:

We seek to change the systems that foster the degradation of creation and to rectify the injustices that result from it. And we seek to alert our members to environmental legislation that protects creation and to encourage their active participation in the development of public policy. We encourage members to participate in civic activities that foster environmental health. We seek to let our care for creation be known to others.

Because we desire to leave Earth a better place for our children, we will promote love and respect for creation in our youth, teach them responsible Earth practices, and engage them in projects that restore creation. We will explore the implications of these provisions together. We will pursue them in a graceful and non-legalistic way, seeking to find hope and joy in the commitments and sacrifices these provisions may entail and in the restorations they engender.

## Levels of Action

**Levels of action:** It may be helpful to think of actions and projects at different levels.

**Resources for all suggestions are available on the Web of Creation website.**

***Level 1. Here are some examples of actions that require little or no cost and can be done in a short time period. These can be done quickly with little effort.***

1. Arrange for creation-care petitions to be included in the prayers at worship throughout the three-year common lectionary. (see Worship)
2. Arrange for a personal covenant with creation to be distributed to members at worship, perhaps with a brief ritual of dedication. Materials are available.  
(Lifestyle)
3. Arrange to place creation-care messages in the weekly bulletins. These are already prepared for you to send electronically to the person who does the bulletins. (Education)
4. Work through the comprehensive “environmental checklist for congregations” with the chairperson or the members of the property committee as means to determine what has been done and what subsequent actions might be taken.  
(Building and Grounds)
5. Where available, arrange with the local energy company for a free energy audit.  
(Building and grounds)
6. Publicize creation-care devotional resources with members for personal use.  
(Lifestyle)
7. Promote organic products or commit to the purchase of local food or agree to

have a vegetarian meal each week as a means to reduce carbon impact. (Lifestyle)

8. Get information about local environmental projects and publicize them. Identify and promote the priorities of local communities engaged in justice work that is explicitly or implicitly ecological. (Public Ministry)

9. Learn about the ELCA advocacy programs and get names of people who want to receive environmental action-alerts regarding national legislation, public policies, and local issues. (Advocacy)

***Level 2. Here are some examples of actions that involve a short time period, such as three to six months, and may involve some limited financial expenditure.***

1. Make plans to observe the Season of Creation for four weeks in the church year.

Liturgies, lessons, and suggestions for celebration are available online. (Worship)

2. Develop your property with a community garden or establish a section as prairie or some other native, natural habitat. (Building and Grounds)

3. Engage your educational program to see and discuss books and curricula on creation-care. (Education)

4. Hold a retreat with families of the congregation focusing on our relationship with nature. Invite a naturalist to guide you. (Education)

5. Hold a workshop for members on how to green your home or apartment. (Lifestyle)

6. Recruit members of your congregation to receive action alerts on matters of public policy. (Public Witness)

7. Change overall purchasing practices—paper, cleaning products, food—to reflect care for creation. (Building and Grounds)

**Level 3. Here are examples of some actions that may take a longer period, perhaps several years, and might involve substantial expenditure of funds.**

1. Energy challenge: Set a goal and reduce the carbon footprint of your congregation in five or ten years, by 25% to 40%. (Building and Grounds)
2. Set a goal and reduce the carbon footprint of your members in five years by 25% to 50%. Work together and help each other out to meet these goals. (Lifestyle)
3. So transform your worship life, the sanctuary, and the ecological practices around creation-care in worship such that anyone worshipping with you would know your commitments. (Worship)
4. Plan, organize, and enlist 60 to 80 % of your members to be involved in a session to read and discuss the social statement(s) on the environment from your denomination, perhaps meeting in small groups. (Education)
5. Recruit and mentor another congregation in becoming an LRC green congregation. (Public Ministry)
6. Plan a care-for-creation emphasis for each month with information, congregational actions, and personal actions—around such issues as water conservation, reduction of energy use, transportation, change of eating habits, and so on. (Education)
7. Plant a tree for every ten members of your congregation. (Building and Grounds)



We encourage you to plan for something in each area. Or consider a 2-2-2 plan: two commitments for action from each level. Or plan things that can be done in 2 weeks, things that can be done in 2 months, and things that can be done in 2 years. Then affirm and renew the plan on a quarterly basis.

**Revisit the model: We encourage you to keep coming back to this action plan so that you keep the larger picture before you and that you keep the process of brainstorming and planning as an ongoing part of your work. Keep the vision alive!**

## **ACTION PLAN**

### Action Plan Instructions

Make firm the foundation. The changes we make, and even the capacity to recognize changes we should make, will flow out of our response to the grace of God and the love of God. Taking time personally and communally for prayer, for spiritual practices, and for devotional time in relation to nature is vital to awakening, empowering, and sustaining our efforts in caring for creation. Make it an integral part of all that you do—planning, actions, and reflection on your actions.

**Have a Plan:** It is important to have a plan for greening your congregation. Otherwise, the process will be scatter-shot and haphazard. It is also important for the plan to be comprehensive. Otherwise the actions will be quite limited. We recommend the following model to use when making an action plan. It has five areas: Worship, Education, Building and Grounds, Discipleship at Home and Work, and Public Ministry. Be visionary!

**Be a Catalyst:** We remind you that it is not the work of the planning committee to carry out all of the actions. Rather, it is the goal of the “Green Team” to be a catalyst for the whole community to become engaged. Work with the various people responsible in different committees of the congregation—provide ideas, resources, and support—so that they incorporate care for creation into their arena of responsibilities. This way, the work is shared and many people take ownership for the greening of the congregation.

**Make it policy:** Institutionalize and regularize the actions as quickly as possible. This

way, it will not depend on the committee to suggest them anew each year. For example, if you celebrate Earth Week one year, seek to make it a regular part of the worship schedule for every year. Do not reinvent the wheel each year!

Do not try to do it all at once: Do not be overwhelmed by all that there is to do or all that could be done. The idea is to choose projects that are manageable and that have a good chance of coming to fruition. So pick and choose. You will find that there are good starter projects. Then, as you reach a threshold of interest and support, more ambitious projects will be possible. Celebrate what you get done without worrying about what does not get done. You can only do what you can do!

Use the Action Plan Scenarios. Use the descriptions of the action plan in the five areas to fill out the Action Plan Form to establish the projects and events you hope to accomplish. Then follow through.

1. Transformation through Worship
2. Transformation through Education
3. Building and Grounds as Model
4. Discipleship of the Community Members (at home and at work)
5. Public Ministry/Political Advocacy