

Greening your Congregation 101

The reasons for starting a Faith and Environment group are as varied as our churches. Perhaps someone asked, "Why don't we..."

- Start recycling all the paper we use
- Help with the community clean-up
- Buy local foods for our events
- Plant some vegetables for the food bank in that weedy space in back of the church."

Perhaps someone went to a Green Day workshop or heard a sermon on Creation care and came back all fired up, ready to act. Now what?

First Steps

- Gather people together, adults and youth
- Provide a focus – a short video, an interesting article to read out loud together, a Creation litany
- Some groups may want to begin with a group study. See the HOPE Conference and Earth Ministry sites for ideas
- Gather ideas for work, discuss them, and, depending on the group, let people take ownership of their own projects or set group priorities
 - Which are most important to us
 - Which are "doable"
 - Which will help our church community understand our mission
- Consider developing a mission statement and a plan of work
- Before the first meeting ends
 - Gather contact information (names, email/phone numbers), special interests or comments if applicable
 - Set the next meeting date, time and place and, as soon as possible, settle on a regular schedule: monthly (e.g., first Friday mornings, Second Sundays after service); monthly works well over the long run, oftener if there's readiness.
 - Ask for the names of other people who may be interested in joining the group or have expertise that may advance the group's work

Getting to Work

- Meet regularly to share resources and celebrate successes
- Keep the clergy, staff, and vestry or bishop's committee in the loop about your plans
- Find ways to include care of God's Creation in the liturgy
- Build awareness and acceptance in the church community through fun, one-time events
- Be prepared for resistance: listen, respect different points of view, appeal to hearts
- Reach out to other churches in your community
- Education and group process are both essential; so plan meetings of each type: more formal programs with speakers or videos followed by group discussion and also more relaxed agendas with free discussion and sharing of opinions. People need to be heard and to make their individual contributions
- Establish links between the work and the Genesis Covenant. As your group develops its own unique and transformative program, all of us in the Diocese of Olympia will be preparing to implement the Genesis Covenant
 - Reduce carbon footprint in our churches by 50% over 10 years
 - Reach out to other faith communities and ask them to participate with us
- Finally, take pictures and movies of your own events as they occur: The pictorial records build teamwork and confidence and later can be shared with others.

Ideas that have worked for other Faith and Environment Groups

- "Turn Over a New Leaf" (around Earth Day, continue for one month) where parishioners, adults and youth, choose one life style change that will help the environment, write it on a leaf, and sign it. Attach leaves to the branches of a paper tree or a real tree branch. Leaves can even adorn the baptismal font. Sort the leaves

into categories – tells you a lot about where your congregation is on greening. Have people share their new leaf experiences

- Create a "Blessing of the Animals" service, for St. Francis' Day (Oct. 4th annually – choose closest weekend) for adults, children and pets; open to the community, with publicity by newsletters, newspapers, and posters. Clergy appreciate help with planning and implementation; photos published afterwards build good will and a sense of ministry outreach
- Invite a speaker from the Northwest Wildlife Federation to explain their program for "Certified Wildlife Habitats"; parishioners learn how comparatively easily this can be done for homes and may begin considering it for the church grounds. The cumulative effect on our regional land and water is magnified by each additional plot of land that offers sanctuary to wildlife; a rich resource for children, too
- Have a "100-mile-dinner" with speaker, video, discussion about the interrelated issues of food, nutrition, agriculture, and our growing regional food safety network. Menu can be as varied as the parish, and may include offerings from local gardens

Resources: "Top Picks" for getting green ministry groups started

1. **DVDs from the HOPE Conference** (healingourplanetearth.org). These are foundational for any Episcopal group, and essential for the Genesis Covenant work ahead. The BCE recommends most strongly that you show Bishop Steven Charleston's speech at the Conference or the sermon he gave at Washington National Cathedral in Feb. 2008 (genesiscovenant.org) early on to interested committee members.
2. **GREENING YOUR CONGREGATION HANDBOOK: Stories, Ideas, and Resources for Cultivating Creation Awareness and Care in Your Congregation.** Earth Ministry is a local organization with a national/international outreach. Their publications, helpful staff, and local meetings-- are excellent. The website also has wonderful resources for including care of Creation in liturgy and prayer.
3. **A CATECHISM OF CREATION: AN EPISCOPAL UNDERSTANDING** (episcopalchurch.org) for understanding the theological underpinnings of Creation care.
4. **Your own parish resources:** 'home-grown and local' experts are your best resource. People in your congregation have experience in fields that bear on climate change, faith and environment, energy, transportation, food, pollution, recycling, social justice, and so on. By utilizing these people, first, in your parish 'creation care' projects, you will save time and money and be developing needed leadership and support on site. Just invite them! Even students will often speak about their classes in, for example, environmental studies. Most people can manage a short (15-30 min) program.
5. **Videos, movies, slide shows, DVD's:** there are many and the supply is growing.
 - THE STORY OF STUFF by Annie Leonard (storyofstuff.com)
 - HUMANS KNOW WHAT TO DO by Paul Hawken (blessedunrest.com/)
 - AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH: Incomparable in breadth and depth, a 'must see': video (purchase or rent), or slideshow (through our speaker's bureau). See also the DISCUSSION GUIDE (eco-justice.org)
6. **Support from the Bishop's Committee for the Environment:**
 - Speakers on faith and the environment, climate change, the Genesis Covenant, getting a recycling program started and other topics
 - An E-Newsletter that can feature your congregation's work
 - An annual retreat to refresh and nurture our commitment to our work
 - Education for parishioners and clergy
 - Guidance in calculating the church's carbon footprint and in beginning to reduce its size

Contact information for the Bishop's Committee on the Environment (BCE)

To be included on the e-mail list	Marilyn Imbach	mimbach@verizon.net
To get help in starting a faith & environment group	Elizabeth Hardisty	lehardisty@gmail.com
To arrange for a speaker	Joleen Sloniker	joleenlh@clearwire.net
For information about the Genesis Covenant	Jim McRae	jamesrmcrae@comcast.net
For information about the BCE	Nancy McConnell	nimcconnell@gmail.com

***Remember, there is no one way to care for Creation through a Faith and Environment group.
What works for you is the right way!***