

Earth-keeping Forums

Long-term goals:

- For the congregation to become a Creation Awareness Center that loves ourselves, loves God and loves creation through vision, hope, justice and action.
- To spur environmentally informed small groups that come together for specific action and education throughout the year concerning the environment. *(For example, a second set of forums could bring in speakers on the topic of the environment that live and work within the community. Or, a small book club could start that would read books on the topic of ecology and the role of the church.)*

Short-term goals:

- For a small group to meet, read and study the ELCA's statement concerning care for creation in a series of forums held on Sundays during the Adult Education hour.
- At the end of the forums, each participant will create a Plan of Action for themselves as an individual.
- At the end of the forums, the participants will, together, create a Plan of Action for their congregation.

The Social Statement on Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice can be found at <http://www.elca.org/dcs/enrironment.pf.html>

<u>Forum</u>	<u>Portion of Statement Covered</u>
Forum One:	Prologue and I. The Church's Vision of Creation (A. and B.)
Forum Two:	II. The Urgency (A. and B.)
Forum Three:	III. The Hope (A. and B.)
Forum Four:	IV. The Call To Justice (A. through D.)
Forum Five:	V. Commitments of this Church (A., B. 1-4)
Forum Six:	V. Commitments of this Church (C. through E 1-2)
Forum Seven:	Claiming the Promise and Plan of Action

Components of each forum

- Opening Prayer
- Review of portion of statement to be covered (It is the hope that individuals will read it prior to attending that particular forum.)

- Focus on particular Bible passage within portion of statement covered (if available and applicable)
- Creation connecting activity and/or individual/congregational action point
- Closing prayer (for example: Offertory prayer from LBW, page 109)

Specific Components of Forum One:

- The statement itself – What is it? What does it mean? How do we utilize it? Why is it important?
- Take a look at the Biblical creation story, especially Genesis 1:31 and Genesis 2:15 – what is our role in creation as individuals and as a community of faith?
- Creation connection activity: Take a walking tour of the church and/or the land surrounding the church. What do your senses pick up? How are we currently caring for creation? How are we not caring for creation? What are some ideas as to improving this care?

Specific Components of Forum Two:

- What does it mean to experience nature as an instrument of God’s judgment (Duet. 11:13-17; Jer. 4:23-28)?
- Discuss the “twin problems” of excessive consumption and relentless growth. How is the church a participant of these problems? How are you a participant? How is the church taking action against these problems? How are you taking action against these problems? (take a look at the specific problems mentioned in the statement under B.)
- Creation Connection Activity: Do a confession and forgiveness liturgy for sins against creation (with 1 John 1:9). (Or, it could be done as an activity similar to the 4th and 5th step of AA.)

Specific Components of Forum Three:

- How are we captives of hope (Col. 1:15-20) through the cross?
- What does it mean “to be a herald here and now to the new creation yet to come, a living model?” How are we doing?
- Are there any “death to life” examples in creation? What are they? How can we use these examples, along with our faith, as examples of hope?
- What does hope mean for creation? What does hope mean for the church? How are these different? How can these be the same?
- Creation Connection Activity: Make a list of “hope and dreams” for creation. How can the church participate?

Specific Components of Forum Four:

- What do you think of the “principle of participation” and how can creation be given a voice?
- How can we “stand together” as God’s creation? What does that look like?
- How does American consumerism bring injustice to our global neighbors? Is there any way that it can be changed? (How / Where we spend our money. Decrease spending.)
- Creation Connection Activity: Lead the group through a series of prayers concerning each of the areas of Justice (Participation, Solidarity, Sufficiency, and Sustainability).

Specific Components of Forum Five:

- Discuss the concept of “to tithe environmentally.”
- Discuss the concept of “incentives.”
- What is one way that we can celebrate creation within the church year? Is it biblical?
- Creation Connection Activity: Individual: Have each person write down one individual goal “to tithe environmentally.” Group: Make a list of potential speakers for future forums concerning care of creation, such as a Native American, a scientist, a conservationist, someone from an environmental center, an environmental activist, etc. Can the group come up with specific names and phone numbers?

Specific Components of Forum Six:

- How can the church be a place that welcomes discussion concerning environmental issues?
- Creation Connection Activity: Work through the gospel of Matthew’s pattern for discipline and forgiveness (Matthew 18:15-20). Does this relate to issues with creation? Would it be helpful in light of disagreements that arise surrounding what should/could be done about environmental issues? How can you create a clear sense of boundaries when discussing these issues in a group? In church? At home?

Matthew 18:15-20¹

1. Point out the fault when the two of you are alone (v.15).
2. If you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you as witnesses (v. 16).
3. If you are still not listened to, then take it to the church (v. 17).
4. If the offender refuses to listen, then treat him as a “Gentile and a tax collector” (v. 17).

Specific Components of Forum Seven:

- How can we claim the promise of “a new heaven and a new earth” as Rev. 21:1 states?
- Creation Connection Activity: The group produces a “creation covenant” that they are invited to sign and present to the council and/or the entire congregation. The covenant will be based off of the ELCA’s social statement.
- Also, time will be spent for the group to create a rough draft of a Congregation Action Plan in Relation to Creation that will list specific things that they can do in order to care for creation and remain aware.

¹ This is from a handout from Lois Malcolm’s Holy Spirit course.