

## Local Congregations Anticipating Eden

Craig L. Nesson, Wartburg Theological Seminary  
With Appreciation to Students from the Ecojustice January Term Courses

Key Question: How do we imagine congregations as “local places” and “anticipatory communities” (Larry Rasmussen) that 1) practice sustainability and 2) model sustainable practices for others?

### Worship Practices

1. Move worship outdoors.
2. Move worship offsite. There are many natural wild spaces we could use.
3. Hold baptisms and affirmations of baptism with natural waters.
4. Name creation as dimension of the assembly: creation as a “thou.”
5. Create a Sacred Space Team to attend to creation at worship.
6. All natural materials in the worship space.
7. Native plants in worship space rather than cut flowers and poinsettias.
8. Use art, slides, banners, or photos of creation in worship. Sacred art reflecting God in nature.
9. Preaching references to eco-wonders and eco-challenges.
10. Public confession to include sins against creation.
11. Include creation in intercessions, for example, for local crops, farmers, environmental issues, and natural disasters.
12. Introduce Eco-vangelism or Eco-Testimony at worship: personal witness to the love for places in creation. Tell faith stories from national or state park experiences, hunting, or fishing.
13. Use creation care liturgies, music, and eucharistic prayers. Use liturgies and songs from *All Creation Sings*.
14. Offer sacred space blessings. Expand pet blessings to include plants, wildlife, trees, etc.
15. Provide natural burial alternative.
16. Be explicit and consistent in sharing what the Gospel means for the whole Earth.

### Education Practices

1. Increase awareness of indigenous cultures. Initiate connections and conversations. Learn the history of indigenous tribes and engage past history to seek greater harmony with our neighbors which includes all of creation. Take time to research and publicize the history of your owned property.
2. Foster conversation through intergenerational programs.
3. Confirmation programs include teaching ecology as part of First Article instruction.
4. Telling stories that bring climate change into focus for others
5. Partner with local, regional, or national nature and/or ecological organizations.
6. Bible studies on creation care.
7. Creation crafts from natural materials.
8. Education on local grown food. Build relationships with local growers and small farmers.
9. Use fair trade coffee and other products, including explanations why.
10. Organize eco-encounter excursions to explore eco-wonders and eco-challenges in your local place.
11. Advocate for ecojustice with judicatory leaders and at judicatory meetings.

12. Take an active role in advocating for policies that support creation care at the local, state, national, and global level.
13. Service projects for litter removal and beautification.
14. Form a society of walkers or bikers.

#### Organizational Practices

1. Intentionally hold meetings outside at the church building and other locations.
2. Draw on the gifts of members who are creation conscious and advocates.
3. Build partnership with area camping ministries.
4. Develop a budget that incorporates a green fund that prioritizes clean energy and carbon offsets.
5. Utilize space in your building for re-purposing materials (a 'stuff' swap).
6. Local food cooked together for church meals.
7. Form an Ecojustice Task Force whose members serve on all the other committees as advocates for ecojustice.
8. Invite prayer circles and prayer teams to pray for creation and creatures.
9. Open your building to support the efforts of ecojustice and conservation groups.
10. Committees and task forces always consider decisions through the lens of ecology.
11. Long range planning, building projects need to consider ecologically sound alternatives.
12. Eco-friendly practices
  - a. Recycle bins next to garbage containers.
  - b. Avoid packaging and plastic, etc.
  - c. Mugs instead of disposable cups.
  - d. Creation crafts from natural materials.
  - e. Reusable materials: bulletins, funerals, meals, communion cups, etc.
  - f. Use natural, biodegradable cleaning supplies.
  - g. Nothing goes to the landfill.
  - h. Compost.
13. Divest from fossil fuels and eco-damaging investments.
14. Train naturalists, like we train community organizers.
15. Hire and honor storytellers who can share creation stories in different media.
16. Care for local land, plants, and animals. Become water protectors and land rehabilitators.
17. During heat waves, open the church as a cooling center for those who need relief.
18. Gifting trees.
19. Improve the local habitat through bee colonies.

#### Green Space Practices

1. Use church property for a community garden that creates opportunities for youth and others to learn skills, appreciate nature, and care for the earth.
2. No chemical dumping on lawns.
3. Develop habitat for wildlife.
4. Install a rain barrel as a water source.
5. Prairie grass instead of lawns.
6. Develop a community park or playground.

7. Construct a prayer labyrinth open to the public.

#### Energy Practices

1. Recycle, LED bulbs, programmable thermostats, paper bulletins, switch from styrofoam materials to natural.
2. Renew with energy efficient windows, heating, and cooling systems. Insulate all areas well.
3. Solar panels on the church buildings. Wind turbines in partnership with others depending on context. Where property allows, use green space for a solar garden.
4. Install geothermal for heating and cooling efficiency.
5. Chargers for electric vehicles in the parking lot.
6. Improve your church's waste management practices.

As we imagine local congregations as “local places” and “anticipatory communities” that practice sustainability and model sustainable practices for others, building community among congregation members is foundational. Sustainability is best practiced in community with members collaborating with each other. As the relationships in community become stronger and people listen to each other, they become more aware of one another's needs and begin caring more deeply for each other and for creation. Take comfort from Matthew 19:26 where Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible.”