

Caring For Creation Now!



FOR THE HEALING OF THE WORLD

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR CONGREGATIONAL USE

Based on the ELCA social statement
Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope and Justice

This study is based on the ELCA's social statement, *Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope and Justice*. (©1993 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.) Quoted material is taken directly from the statement. The full text of the social statement can be found in a printer friendly format on-line at www.elca.org/dcs/environment.pf.html. This study is intended to be a discussion starter, a way to help you integrate some of the vision put forward into this statement into your own community context. It would be helpful, but not necessary, to read the complete social statement before you begin this study.



Section 1. Statement Summary. The social statement articulates the church's vision of creation including the unique role of humanity in creation. Throughout this section relationship, interdependence, and connection of the human community to the rest of God's creation is emphasized.

Human beings are to be loving caretakers of all God called good (Genesis 1:31, Genesis 2:15 Philippians 2:7). We are to live according to Wisdom (Proverbs 8) and within the covenant that God makes with every living thing (Genesis 9:12-17). God continues to be active in creation today (Psalm 104:30).

God's profound involvement with the world is made known to us through the incarnation. "In Christ, the Word is made flesh, with saving significance for an entire creation that longs for fulfillment (Romans 8:18-25). The Word still comes to us in the waters of baptism, and in, with and under the bread and wine, fruits of the earth and work of human hands. God consistently meets us where we live, through earthly matter."

FOR THOUGHT & DISCUSSION:

Give examples of creation's interdependence within your region. What might keep you from recognizing that connectedness?

How might good stewardship of creation be modeled in the place where you live or worship? How might you learn to recognize God's creative acts in the world today?

Seldom does one stop to think about creations longing for fulfillment. What does that mean to you?



WE PRAY:

***Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise [God] all creatures here below
Praise [God] above ye heavenly host; Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.***

(LBW, Hymn 564)

Section 2: Statement Summary. The statement tells of the urgency of our ecological problems. Rooted in our sinful nature (Genesis 3:1-7) we treat the earth as a boundless warehouse. We push creation relentlessly. We are also captives of demonic powers and unjust institutions; we participate in exploitation of the earth and its resources (Galatians 4: 9 and Ephesians 6:12). Together our sin and captivity have contributed to the current crisis: global warming, polluted air and water; resource depletion, species extinction, declining food security and human health issues, affecting first and foremost those who are poor and otherwise vulnerable (Amos 5: 6-15).

FOR THOUGHT & DISCUSSION:

Creation care issues are global issues. The air and water of this earth neither know nor recognize generational or jurisdictional boundaries. These resources are held in common with all life on earth throughout time. As human beings, we often take more than we need and show little regard for the needs of our neighbors. Through corporate or governmental structures we build systems that remove us from accountability and responsibility. We often feel powerless in the face of this great power.

Understanding that natural resources are held in common, how might we affect our neighbor's life and well-being through our everyday choices? (Hint: Think not only about neighbors in your own community, but those around the world as well. What impact does the car you drive have on your neighbors? What about your use of electricity? Grocery purchases?)

- Justice through sustainability. We must not "press creation relentlessly in an effort to maximize productivity (Exodus 20:8-11). The principle of sustainability means providing an acceptable quality of life for present generations without compromising that of future generations."

Take a few minutes to talk about each one of these principles. Ask yourselves what each might mean to you in your community, your synod, your companion synod, and the world? (Hint: think about endangered species, genetic modification of plant and animal life, clean water and air, clear-cutting forests, mountaintop mining, overfishing, etc.)

In the United States, frequent arguments pit jobs against the environment, or the human community against the rest of God's creation. By keeping in mind these four principles of justice, look for choices and actions that move beyond these false dichotomies. Can you name a few ways that support both goals of jobs and stewardship of the earth? How can we learn to live more simply and gently on the earth?

What are the jobs vs. environment issues in your community? Try to imagine jobs and environment at opposite ends of a continuum. What happens when we take either extreme position? What steps might be taken to find a balance? How can your church community play a role?



WE PRAY:

Pour out upon us, O Lord, the spirit to think and do what is right, that we, who cannot even exist without you, may have the strength to live according to your will; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (LBW, p. 25.)

Section 5: The final section of the social statement outlines the commitments of this church, as individual members, as a worshipping and learning community, a committed community, a community of moral deliberation and as advocates. To learn more about these commitments see: *Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope and Justice.*

What commitments, if any, has your congregation made to protect and keep God's creation? What concrete steps has your congregation taken to act on that commitment?



WE PRAY:

O merciful Creator, your hand is open wide to satisfy the needs of every living creature. Make us always thankful for your loving providence; and grant that we, remembering the account that we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of your good gifts; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (LBW, p.41.)

Cite examples in your own community of those who may have been hurt by individual, corporate or governmental actions as they relate to God's creation? (Hint: air pollution, water resources, and toxic waste.) How does that make you feel?

What examples can you find in our own community of a broken relationship between members of humanity and the rest of creation? Then, taking our cue from the God of Love, what actions might be taken in your community that would help to mend some of those broken relationships?



WE PRAY:

Almighty God, in giving us dominion over things on earth, you made us fellow workers in your creation. Give us wisdom and reverence to use the resources of nature, so that no one may suffer from our abuse of them, and that generations yet to come may continue to praise you for your bounty; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (LBW, p. 49)

Section 3: Statement Summary. This section of the statement lays out for us the reasons for going on, for believing that sin and captivity will not have the last word. We have been captured by hope (Zechariah 9:11-12). Set free from sin and captivity by the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we can be loving servants, caring for creation now while we wait for the fullness of the new creation that has already begun (Colossians 1:15-20).

Have you ever experienced a time when hope moved you or someone you know acted in the face of overwhelming odds to protect or restore creation? What was your motivation for doing so?

Have you ever joined in with others to demand accountability from those who abuse creation? Why? Did you experience the presence of God in acts such as these?



WE PRAY:

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, maker of all things. Through your goodness you have blessed us with these gifts. With them we offer ourselves to your service and dedicate our lives to the care and redemption of all that you have made, for the sake of him who gave himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (LBW, Page 109)

Section 4: Statement Summary. Section 4 of the social statement articulates the call to justice. It lays out four principles by which we can gauge the justice of our actions.

- Justice through participation: If we live within the covenant that God makes with all living things, justice through participation would mean that "they are entitled to be heard and to have their interests considered when decisions are made."
- Justice through solidarity: "Creation depends on the creator. The principle of solidarity means we stand together as God's creation."
- Justice through sufficiency. The statement explains, "The earth and its fullness belong to the Lord. No person or group has absolute claim to the earth or its products. The principle of sufficiency means meeting the basic needs of all humanity and all creation."