

2024 Creation Care Plan



To our siblings in Christ,

The Lutherans Restoring Creation Mission Table of the Central States Synod developed this 2024 Creation Care Plan to assist and support congregations and other ministry settings as they carry out their call to care for Creation as communities and individuals. We recognize that at times the volume of available resources and information is overwhelming and we know that congregational leaders and members are busy. Our hope is that we have crafted a document that will prove helpful and provide easy access to relevant resources for each month of the calendar year.

The plan is organized with resources for each of the 5 areas of congregational life as outlined by Lutherans Restoring Creation (lutheransrestoringcreation.org/):

- Worship
- Education
- Buildings and Grounds
- Advocacy/Public Witness
- Personal Discipleship.

Additionally, some months include “Digging Deeper” resources for those who want to do more.



As a Mission Table, we have collectively curated resources that have been helpful to us in our own settings and hope they will be of service to you as well. The resources are organized by month and liturgical season, however, we hope you will access the bounty of these materials in whatever way works best for your setting. We encourage you to plan ahead, skip around, and share your ideas with us!

This Plan is downloadable and may be used both as a printed or digital document. We are grateful for the many websites, books, and resources from which we have compiled this Plan, and we have made every effort to give appropriate recognition of our sources. Accompanying documents are noted in green. All links and documents referenced in this document can be found at <https://lrc-css.square.site/css-creation-care-plan>.

We are also grateful for the many relationships – both human and other-than-human - that have shaped our Creation Care ministry and mission. We invite you to join us on this creative, inspiring, and critical journey as the Spirit guides us all.

Peace,

Lutherans Restoring Creation Mission Table



Central
States
Synod

January -

Joyous Light at Epiphany



Worship – The hymn, “Joyous Light of Heavenly Glory,” ELW 561, often known from Holden Evening Prayer, doesn’t have to stay in the evening. Bring it into the light of day and Sunday morning worship! Instead of “Now as evening falls around us,” consider, “Now as morning rises ‘round us.” “Joyous Light” helps expand our thinking about Epiphany and how it reveals themes of care for Creation. Consider using this hymn each Sunday in worship (or a portion as a Gospel acclamation) and link to themes of light, God’s revelation in nature, the light of the sun by day and the moon and stars by night, and God’s call to justice and peace for a new Creation through Jesus Christ.

Education – We begin the calendar year with scripture and Lutheran theology. Utilize this resource from LRC, [Ten Reasons Why Lutherans Care for All Creation](#), for discussion in adult forums and youth group meetings, your newsletter, or a bulletin board with quotes from members about why they care about Creation. All generations can offer their insights, and children can lead the way!

Buildings and Grounds – Replace old lightbulbs and fixtures with LED lighting to save money, reduce energy usage, and limit frustration when old lightbulbs are no longer available. Your energy company may have incentives to help you reduce the initial cost. Tie these efforts to the themes of Epiphany and joyous light.

Advocacy/Public Witness – The Kansas State Legislature convenes on the second Monday in January. The Missouri State Legislature meets on the first Wednesday after the first Monday in January. Do you know who your federal, state, and local legislators are? Check out www.usa.gov/elected-officials to help.

Personal Discipleship – Many of us already do some recycling. But plastics seem to cause a lot of confusion. Check out this [Recycle poster](#) for some tips. Contact your local recycler for guidance in your area. Share the poster with members and use it on a bulletin board.

Digging Deeper: [52 Ways to Care for Creation bulletin inserts from Creation Justice Ministries](#) - These downloadable bulletin inserts are available if you and your congregation are ready!

February – We love Creation!



Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, February 14

Worship – *Earth Gospel: A Guide to Prayer for God's*

Creation, by Sam Hamilton-Poore, provides morning, midday, and evening resources for prayer and reflection. Utilize this volume for corporate worship in your setting – Sunday morning and if you have Wednesday services during Lent – and share with members of your ministry setting for daily Lenten devotions.

Education – *Wild Hope: Stories for Lent from the Vanishing*, by Gayle Boss, provides beautiful reflections about animals that are on the brink of extinction and the humans who suffer with them. Boss notes in her introduction, “For each week of Lent there are stories of four animals. In weeks one through five the stories can be read on any days of the week. In week six, Holy Week, the reading days are specified.” (p. 9) You can use this book for group reading and sharing, weekly reflections for worship services, or personal devotions and prayer. Published by Paraclete Press, Brewster, Massachusetts, copyright 2020 by Gayle Boss.

Buildings and Grounds – The ashes of Ash Wednesday remind us of our creation from the dust of the Earth. God has entrusted much to humanity to “serve and preserve” (Genesis 2:15) This includes stewardship of our physical buildings and grounds. Utilize the resources of [Interfaith Power and Light's Cool Congregations Program](#) or [EPA's Energy Star Portfolio Manager](#) to reduce consumption, save money, and enrich your faithful stewardship. An Energy Audit is a good place to start.

Advocacy/Public Witness – Set up a meeting with a City Council or County Commission member. Learn more about local issues and how you can be a constructive voice of faith. Attend a meeting (or more). Effective advocacy involves good relationship-building, so when conflict arises, you can continue to work together through established common ground and mutual respect.

Personal Discipleship – The daily [Carbon Fast Calendar for Lent](#) from Lutherans Restoring Creation helps us consider our individual actions and the effects we have on the world around us. During the 40 days of Lent, we examine our consumption patterns and make choices about how to live more faithfully for the sake of all Creation.

March –

Easter is March 31



Worship – The growing season is beginning this month, so it's a perfect time for a Blessing of the Seeds (like the Blessing of the Backpacks in the fall). You can use this prayer - **Blessing Prayer for Seeds** from Web of Creation – and pass out blessed seed packets for people to take home and plant. Encourage folks to take pictures as their plants grow, and share them in your newsletter or on a bulletin board at church. Be sure to use seeds that are appropriate in your climate this time of year. Suggested seeds are lettuce, spinach, broccoli, and other cool weather crops.

Education – ***Awakening To God's Call to Earthkeeping***, by ELCA Deacon Kim Winchell, is a four-session small group study to encourage, empower, and equip Lutherans in their calling to care for Creation. This “timeless resource is a great first step to open people's hearts and minds to what the environment has to do with church.” A free download, including a leader guide, is available at www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org/awakening-to-gods-call-to-earthkeeping/.

Buildings and Grounds – A Community Garden is a great outdoor classroom to help members and neighbors of all ages learn and share. It doesn't have to be huge. Just 3 to 4 raised beds can be a great beginning. To help you get started, check out **ELCA World Hunger's Community Gardens How-To Guide**.

Advocacy/Public Witness – Earth Hour, www.earthhour.org, is March 23, at 8:30 pm local time. Participants from all over the globe observe this hour by turning off all the lights in solidarity with Earth and the cries of Creation. In addition, groups and individuals are encouraged to give an hour of service to do something positive for the planet. This can be a great intergenerational activity.

Personal Discipleship – Seasonal Guided Meditations were written by Sheryl Mehrhoff, a member of our LRC Mission Table. **“Wander with God” on a Spring Day** reminds us to take time to simply be in the outdoor world and experience the gifts of nature.

April –

Earth Day is April 22



Worship – Every year, Lutherans Restoring Creation creates a virtual worship service for use in congregations on the Sunday closest to Earth Day, April 22. The service is fully downloadable and can be used as a whole or in parts. This is a great opportunity to share in worship with Lutherans (and other Christians) around the country. As the day draws closer, a direct link for the service will be published and made available.

Education – Earth Day month is a good time to form a Creation Care Team or deepen your commitments as an existing team. LRC offers a [Guide to Gathering](#) that gives you a step-by-step guide for conversation and community building utilizing a special video and the World Café method. Again, folks of all ages can be involved!

Buildings and Grounds – It's spring! Let's plant a tree! Check with your local nursery to find out what trees are native to your area and what species would thrive in your context. Here's a [Tree Planting Liturgy](#) our Mission Table wrote for the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation in 2017. It's easily adaptable for any time and any year.

Advocacy/Public Witness – [Interfaith Power and Light's Faith Climate Action Week](#) is April 19-28 with the theme, "Common Ground: Cultivating Connections between our Faith, our Food, and our Climate." These ten days during Earth Month focus on how we can all take action to protect our climate. An Organizer Kit and all the resources you need are available using the link.

Personal Discipleship – [Eleven Ways to Reduce Your Carbon Emissions](#) was developed by the Mission Table following the 2022 Synod Assembly in which Voting Members adopted a resolution to reduce GHG emissions by 50% by 2030 and go net zero by 2050. We aren't there yet, so let's keep working together.



May –

Get fired up for Creation Care!

Pentecost is May 19



Worship – *All Creation Sings* is the newest liturgy & song supplement to the ELW. It includes 2 new Holy Communion liturgies, a service of Word & Prayer for contemplative worship, new prayers, and 200 hymns & songs, many of them newly created over the last 15 years.

Education – The ELCA Church Council adopted a new Social Message, *Earth's Climate Crisis*, in April of 2023, following input from ELCA congregational members across the country. This provides great information for conversation and education for Sunday School classes, Bible Study groups, and other small groups.

Buildings and Grounds – Would you like some free money? Earth Charter Grants up to \$250 are available through a joint initiative with Metro NY, New England, Delaware-Maryland, and Central States Synods. Congregations in CSS have received grants for community gardens, solar power, and native plantings. For more information, go to lrc-css.square.site/grants.

Advocacy/Public Witness – Advocacy and public witness are a critical element of our Christian faith. The ELCA website states, “As members of the ELCA, we believe that we are freed in Christ to serve and love our neighbor. God uses our hands, through our direct service work and our voices, through our advocacy efforts, to restore and reconcile our world. Through faithful advocacy, the ELCA lives out our Lutheran belief that governments can help advance the common good.” To learn more and to sign up for ELCA Advocacy Action Alerts, go to www.ELCA.org/Advocacy.

Personal Discipleship – Participate in Audubon Society’s *Lights Out Program* for Bird Migration - www.audubon.org/lights-out-program – and here’s a handout to share, *Creating Bird-Friendly Communities*.

June –

The Sundays after Pentecost are Green



Worship – Check out *A Liturgy for Earthkeeping*, by Dakota Road, www.dakotaroad.com/songbooks-liturgies for resources for summer worship.



dakota road music

Education – **ENDURE VBS** was written by CSS Pastor Christyn Koschmann, who also serves on the national LRC Board. She provides guides and suggestions about all the activities and components of the program. ENDURE is adaptable for any size or context of congregation.

Buildings and Grounds – Here's another intergenerational opportunity - **Waste Audit Guide for Home or Congregation**. This can be a bit messy but is incredibly enlightening (and great fun). This guide gives you step-by-step directions on how to gather, analyze, and reflect upon your congregational waste in order to make informed and thoughtful choices.

Advocacy/Public Witness – Kansas Interfaith Action (kansasinterfaithaction.org) and Missouri Faith Voices (www.missourifaithvoices.org) serve as the public policy offices for our Synod. Ask your Voting Members to Synod Assembly to stop by their displays at the Assembly and bring back information on how your people can be involved.

Personal Discipleship – Farmers Markets are a good way to support local growers, reduce transportation emissions, and eat FRESH. Local Harvest provides a search engine to locate Farmers Markets and local farmers in your area at www.localharvest.org.

Digging Deeper: Enjoy the guided meditation, “**One Sun**,” to celebrate the Summer Solstice.

July –

The Sundays after Pentecost are Green



Worship – Take a moment to breathe and reflect and rest. Perhaps you can find some inspiration for your worship planning from our Episcopalian brothers and sisters in their resource, [Liturgical Materials for Honoring God in Creation](#).

Education – July 4, 1776, is a notable day for the signing of the Declaration of Independence. July 4, 2024, can also be notable when we acknowledge and celebrate the [Declaration of Interdependence](#), by Dr. David Suzuki. "This Declaration is a powerful and eloquent statement describing the interdependence and interconnectedness of all life on Earth. From 31 years ago, it speaks to us today, calling for a new evolution in the thinking and behaving of humankind." Click on the green link for the text and some information about the author.

Buildings and Grounds – Check the thermostat in your worship space. Often we keep our buildings so cold in the summer that people need long sleeves and even sweaters. Try turning that thermostat up a degree or two (or three).

Advocacy/Public Witness – [Ecochallenge.org](#) provides various challenges throughout the year to encourage more sustainable choices and lifestyles. July is the Plastic-Free Ecochallenge, encouraging us to do just that: to refuse and reduce single-use plastics for one month. To learn more about why that's important, how to form a team, and how to craft your own challenge, go to [plasticfree.ecochallenge.org](#)

Personal Discipleship – Saving energy is good for the Earth and your wallet. Here are some tips from Metropolitan Energy Center in Kansas City – [DIY Energy Savings Project Checklist](#). We also recommend drying your clothes outside on a clothesline. Creation smells wonderful!

Digging Deeper – [Creation Reorientation: Liturgy to Reconcile People and Planet](#), by Bridget Jones, is a resource that helps us think deeply about how and why we worship. "Worship can be a reorientation, a way to focus us toward our values and toward God's mission of justice throughout the earth. We can begin to pay attention to the needs of fellow created beings as we gather each week," writes Jones.

August –

The Sundays after Pentecost are Green



Worship – *Habel Hymns: Celebrating with Creation*, are songs about creation written to familiar tunes such as “A Mighty Fortress.” Use these anytime throughout the year. They can bring new perspectives and insights. You can find the hymns at seasonofcreation.com

Education – Plan an intergenerational movie night hosted by youth/young adults. Listen to the concerns of those who will live on the Earth in 25+ years. Films are available from Interfaith Power and Light (interfaithpowerandlight.org/host-a-movie-screening), Katharine Hayhoe’s **Global Weirding series** and other offerings from PBS, and **Kiss the Ground**.

Buildings and Grounds – The 2022 Inflation Reduction Act provides historic funding for energy upgrades and efficiency projects. We rely on Interfaith Power and Light to share with us the latest information as to how to access funds: **Federal Funding for Energy Work at Houses of Worship**.

Advocacy/Public Witness – Creation Justice Ministries states why we take action for God’s Creation: “Living out our faith goes beyond individual actions, our own households, or our own churches. We are called to follow the example of Jesus and the prophets--to be courageous in proactively shaping our communities and our world to better align with our faith values.” Check out resources and sign up for Action Alerts at www.creationjustice.org.

Personal Discipleship – Reducing our use of plastics and harmful chemicals in our daily life is one way to honor the Earth. Create a display and encourage the use of alternative products by your members: refillable cleaning products or simple vinegar and baking soda, toothpaste tablets, bamboo toothbrushes and utensils, metal straws, laundry sheets, toilet paper made of bamboo to prevent deforestation, shampoo bars and soap bars. Check for stores that carry these items and look for local vendors.

September – Season of Creation



Worship – September 1 is the **Ecumenical Day of Prayer for Creation** Use the link to learn more. This Day of Prayer also begins the Season of Creation, Sept. 1 – October 4. Here are some helpful resources as you plan your Season of Creation – from the Northern Illinois ELCA Synod - www.nisynod.org/pages/creation-care-subcommittee, and seasonofcreation.org.

Education – This month is busy with Season of Creation, “God’s work. Our hands. Sunday,” Rally Day, Blessing of the Backpacks, etc. Capitalize on the energy and excitement by starting to create a calendar for 2025 with Creation Care drawings by children – and all generations! A **Creation Care Calendar Guide** is here to give you suggestions.

Buildings and Grounds – Don’t miss the opportunity to sign up volunteers for property cleanup and all the events going on in your congregation and community. Continue to engage folks in Creation Care efforts you’ve established and don’t try to do it alone. People want to contribute and might be waiting for an invitation from you!

Advocacy/Public Witness – “**God’s work. Our hands.**” **Sunday** is in its 11th year! This is a perfect opportunity to tie in themes of Creation Care. If you are making LWR kits, remind your people that caring for those in poverty, hunger, and need is caring for Creation – God’s children. Consider cleaning up a public area or stream near your church and tie it to habitat restoration, recycling, and rethinking waste. Every project can be connected to Creation Care because all of Creation is interconnected!

Personal Discipleship – Switch to the **Ecosia search engine** on your computer(s) and help plant trees every time you search the web.

Digging Deeper: Enjoy “**Gifts of Autumn**,” a seasonal guided meditation for the Fall Equinox.

October –

For the Beauty of All Creation



Worship – **A Blessing of the Animals** – October 4, Feast of St. Francis of Assisi – completes the Season of Creation or can stand alone as an event. Invite the other-than-human members of families to come for a Blessing (and a treat)!

Education - ***Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home***, the 2015 encyclical by Pope Francis, has an **ELCA Study guide**. The Letter is available online or can be purchased in book form. In addition, a film, **The Letter**, provides education and opportunities for conversation as we learn from our ecumenical partners. ***Laudate Deum***, an Apostolic Exhortation by Pope Francis, was released on October 4, 2023.

Buildings and Grounds – Water is a precious gift that we often take for granted. Consider using native plants and rain gardens to limit the need for watering your landscape. Learn more about your local watershed. One Home One Future, a multi-faith coalition of which the ELCA is a member has resources at www.onehomeonefuture.org/care-for-water-resources. Consider joining One Home One Future as a congregation.

Advocacy/Public Witness – Elections are coming up. Utilize ELCA resources to help members understand our call as people of faith to be involved in public life. The Social Message, *Government and Civic Engagement: Discipleship in a Democracy*, was adopted in 2020, and a new Social Statement, *Civic Life and Faith*, is being developed, with input invited from ELCA members. The statements, along with leader and study guides, can be found here: www.elca.org/civicsandfaith.

Personal Discipleship - **Sustainable Tips** is another reminder of how we can live more gently on the Earth and care for all the creatures and waterways we have honored this month.

Digging Deeper: Here's a handy resource that has lots of ideas: ***50 Ways to Help Save the Earth: How You and Your Church Can Make a Difference*** (Revised Edition), by Rebecca J. Barnes. Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY; copyright 2016.

November –

Thanksgiving and Gratitude



Worship – Gratitude and thanksgiving are at the heart of our care for God’s good Creation. Focus on thanksgiving and gratitude in your worship services throughout the month, not just for one day. **God’s Good Earth: Praise and Prayer for Creation**, by Anne and Jeffery Rowthorn, is a marvelous resource. Don’t forget **All Creation Sings** (See [May Worship](#)).

Education – Focus on food and abundance and gratitude. Invite farmers/ranchers to come for an intergenerational education hour or series. Utilize all or part of the video from our CSS Cool Congregations Cohort, August 8, 2023, “**Care for Creation as Faith Formation: Food and Food Waste.**”

Buildings and Grounds – Take an inventory of the supplies and products you use around the church. Try to eliminate single-use items, and switch to Earth-friendly cleaning products, hand soap, and necessary paper supplies. See August Personal Discipleship for ideas. Earth will thank you for your efforts.

Advocacy/Public Witness – This month’s Education tip included a Cool Congregations Cohort presentation using resources from the **Blessed Tomorrow’s Creation Care Ambassador Program**. Online training (ELCA specific) is available.

Personal Discipleship – Food waste is a big problem – about a third of all food is wasted. Here are some tips about how to better store your food to reduce waste and other thoughtful ideas from Dr. David Suzuki (featured in [July Education](#)): **Help End Food Waste**.

December –

Focus on Peace



Advent begins December 3

Worship – In this season of gift-giving and receiving the Gift of Christ, give your pastor or worship leader the book, *Creation-Crisis Preaching: Ecology, Theology, and the Pulpit*, by Leah D. Schade.

Education – During Advent, the four candles of the Advent wreath can signify Love, Peace, Joy, and Hope. When we talk about Peace, we are aware of the economic and human costs of war. But there are significant environmental costs as well. Author Denisa Ogoyi, a mom in Scotland, shares her insights in “*The Environmental Costs of Wars*”. How might our deeper understanding expand our prayers for peace?

Buildings and Grounds – Consider hosting an *Alternative Gift Market* in your church building this year. Instead of purchasing more “stuff,” people can invest in sustainable and life-giving projects around the world and locally. It’s a great way to invite your neighbors and community to join you in focusing on the true meaning of giving. ELCA has the *Good Gifts* program which is another alternative gift-giving opportunity.

Advocacy/Public Witness – Red and Green are everywhere this month, so let’s turn our faith green, too, at GreenFaith. Learn more visiting *GreenFaith* and join the community.

Personal Discipleship – Give a gift to our Earth Community by making a *Personal Covenant with Creation* from LRC. The past year has given you lots of ideas.

Digging Deeper: Author Gayle Boss (see February Education) has another book for Advent, *All Creation Waits: The Advent Mystery of New Beginnings*. A *Children’s Edition* is also available.

We hope your experience with this plan for creation care has been inspiring and positive. We’d love to hear your feedback on how you used these resources! If you have not already, please visit <https://lrc-css.square.site/css-creation-care-plan>, and complete the ‘*Share Your Story*’ form.