

The premiere issue

Justice Seekers

February 2009



Justice Seekers

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On the Care of Creation

An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation

The Earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof - Psalm 24:1

As followers of Jesus Christ, committed to the full authority of the Scriptures, and aware of the ways we have degraded creation, we believe that biblical faith is essential to the solution of our ecological problems.

Because we worship and honor the Creator, we seek to cherish and care for the creation.

Because we have sinned, we have failed in our stewardship of creation. Therefore we repent of the way we have polluted, distorted, or destroyed so much of the Creator's work.

Because in Christ God has healed our alienation from God and extended to us the first fruits of the reconciliation of all things, we commit ourselves to working in the power of the Holy Spirit to share the Good News of Christ in word and deed, to work for the reconciliation of all people in Christ, and to extend Christ's healing to suffering creation.

Because we await the time when even the groaning creation will be restored to wholeness, we commit ourselves to work vigorously to protect and heal that creation for the honor and glory of the Creator---whom we know dimly through creation, but meet fully through Scripture and in Christ. We and our children face a growing crisis in the health of the creation in which we are embedded, and through which, by God's grace, we are sustained. Yet we continue to degrade that creation.

These degradations of creation can be summed up as 1) land degradation; 2) deforestation; 3) species extinction; 4) water degradation; 5) global toxification; 6) the alteration of atmosphere; 7) human and cultural degradation.

Many of these degradations are signs that we are pressing against the finite limits God has set for creation. With continued population growth, these degradations will become more severe. Our responsibility is not only to bear and nurture children, but to nurture their home on earth. We respect the institution of marriage as the way God has given to insure thoughtful procreation of children and their nurture to the glory of God.

We recognize that human poverty is both a cause and a consequence of environmental degradation. Many concerned people, convinced that environmental problems are more spiritual than technological, are exploring the world's ideologies and religions in search of non-Christian spiritual resources for the healing of the earth.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we believe that the Bible calls us to respond in four ways:

First, God calls us to confess and repent of attitudes which devalue creation, and which twist or ignore biblical revelation to support our misuse of it. Forgetting that "the earth is the Lord's," we have often simply used creation and forgotten our responsibility to care for it.

Second, our actions and attitudes toward the earth need to proceed from the center of our faith, and be rooted in the fullness of God's revelation in Christ and the Scriptures. We resist both ideologies which would presume the Gospel has nothing to do with the care of non-human creation and also ideologies which would reduce the Gospel to nothing more than the care of that creation.

Third, we seek carefully to learn all that the Bible tells us about the Creator, creation, and the human task. In our life and words we declare that full good news for all creation which is still waiting "with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God," (Rom. 8:19).

Fourth, we seek to understand what creation reveals about God's divinity, sustaining presence, and everlasting power, and what creation teaches us of its God-given order and the principles by which it works.

Thus we call on all those who are committed to the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to affirm the following principles of biblical faith, and to seek ways of living out these principles in our personal lives, our churches, and society.

The cosmos, in all its beauty, wildness, and life-giving bounty, is the work of our personal and loving Creator.

Our creating God is prior to and other than creation, yet intimately involved with it, upholding each thing in its freedom, and all things in relationships of intricate complexity. God is transcendent, while lovingly sustaining each creature; and immanent, while wholly other than creation and not to be confused with it.

God the Creator is relational in very nature, revealed as three persons in One. Likewise, the creation which God intended is a symphony of individual creatures in harmonious relationship.

The Creator's concern is for all creatures. God declares all creation "good" (Gen. 1:31); promises care in a covenant with all creatures (Gen. 9:9-17); delights in creatures which have no human apparent usefulness (Job 39-41); and wills, in Christ, "to reconcile all things to himself" (Col.1:20).

Think the CRC is just another organization jur

The statement above was issued by the World Evangelical Alliance in 1994 a
As Reformed Christians, we are called to care for creation. Keep on reading t

Men, women, and children have a unique responsibility to the Creator; at the same time we are creatures, shaped by the same processes and embedded in the same systems of physical, chemical, and biological interconnections which sustain other creatures.

Men, women, and children, created in God's image, also have a unique responsibility for creation. Our actions should both sustain creation's fruitfulness and preserve creation's powerful testimony to its Creator.

Our God-given, stewardly talents have often been warped from their intended purpose: that we know, name, keep and delight in God's creatures; that we nourish civilization in love, creativity and obedience to God; and that we offer creation and civilization back in praise to the Creator. We have ignored our creaturely limits and have used the earth with greed, rather than care.

The earthly result of human sin has been a perverted stewardship, a patchwork of garden and wasteland in which the waste is increasing. "There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land...Because of this the land mourns, and all who live in it waste away" (Hosea 4:1,3). Thus, one consequence of our misuse of the earth is an unjust denial of God's created bounty to other human beings, both now and in the future.

God's purpose in Christ is to heal and bring to wholeness not only persons but the entire created order. "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross" (Col. 1:19-20).

In Jesus Christ, believers are forgiven, transformed and brought into God's kingdom. "If anyone is in Christ,

there is a new creation" (II Cor. 5:17). The presence of the kingdom of God is with God, but also by renewed marked not only by renewed fellowship harmony and justice between people, and by renewed harmony and justice between people and the rest of the created world. "You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands" (Isa. 55:12).

We believe that in Christ there is hope, not only for men, women and children, but also for the rest of creation which is suffering from the consequences of human sin.

Therefore we call upon all Christians to reaffirm that all creation is God's; that God created it good; and that God is renewing it in Christ.

We encourage deeper reflection on the substantial biblical and theological teaching which speaks of God's work of redemption in terms of the renewal and completion of God's purpose in creation.

We seek a deeper reflection on the wonders of God's creation and the principles by which creation works. We also urge a careful consideration of how our corporate and individual actions respect and comply with God's ordinances for creation.

We encourage Christians to incorporate the extravagant creativity of God into their lives by increasing the nurturing role of beauty and the arts in their personal, ecclesiastical, and social patterns.

We urge individual Christians and churches to be centers of creation's care and renewal, both delighting in creation as God's gift, and enjoying it as God's provision, in ways which sustain and heal the damaged fabric of the creation which God has entrusted to us.

We recall Jesus' words that our lives do not consist in the abundance of our possessions, and therefore we urge followers of Jesus to resist the allure of wastefulness and overconsumption by making personal lifestyle choices that express humility, forbearance, self-restraint and frugality.

We call on all Christians to work for godly, just, and sustainable economies which reflect God's sovereign economy and enable men, women and children to flourish along with all the diversity of creation. We recognize that poverty forces people to degrade creation in order to survive; therefore we support the development of just, free economies which empower the poor and create abundance without diminishing creation's bounty.

We commit ourselves to work for responsible public policies which embody the principles of biblical stewardship of creation.

We invite Christians--individuals, congregations and organizations--to join with us in this evangelical declaration on the environment, becoming a covenant people in an ever-widening circle of biblical care for creation.

We call upon Christians to listen to and work with all those who are concerned about the healing of creation, with an eagerness both to learn from them and also to share with them our conviction that the God whom all people sense in creation (Acts 17:27) is known fully only in the Word made flesh in Christ the living God who made and sustains all things.

We make this declaration knowing that until Christ returns to reconcile all things, we are called to be faithful stewards of God's good garden, our earthly home.



umping on the green bandwagon? Think again.

and signed by David Engelhard, former General Secretary of the CRCNA.

to learn more about the good work already happening in our denomination.



The Green Grant

As more attention is given every day to environmental concerns, many Christians are beginning to discover a connection between their faith and their relationship to the created world – consumption, stewardship, and caretaking.

But what are Christian Reformed Church in North America congregations doing?

How can CRC congregations work together to care for God's creation? What kind of creative responses are already happening that need to be shared among CRC members across the continent?

Last August, the Office of Social Justice offered a "green congregation" grant to one U.S. and one Canadian CRC congregation who would use the money – \$500 – toward an earth-keeping project of their choosing.

Preference was given toward ease of replication, community impact, congregational change, and mostly how each church planned to use the money.

Has your congregation begun an urban garden? Undergone changes due to an energy audit? Offered creation care Sunday schools? Swapped older light bulbs for energy-saving light bulbs or switched to reusable coffee cups?

Many CRC congregations in the U.S. and Canada have done all those things and more. But don't worry if your congregation isn't quite there yet! In the pages to come, we hope you'll find inspiration and encouragement from others who have broken the trail for us.

So without further ado, the winners of the first annual Green Grant:

To win the prize, **Covenant CRC in Sioux Center, Iowa** submitted curriculum for a 4-day Creation Care Day Camp focusing on composting, deciduous tree and insect life cycles, and organic gardening. The church is active in local government, community organizing, and the region's universities.

Two second place grants of \$200 each were also awarded. One of these grants was given to **Seymour CRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan**, and the other went to **Lynden CRC in Lynden, Washington**.

Seymour CRC's funding will expand an ecumenical partnership with a suburban congregation to grow an inner-city garden club. Third CRC in Lynden will expand its organic community garden, Five Loaves Farm, which includes a greenhouse and raised plant beds made from cedar planks members planed themselves.

In Canada, the \$500 grant went to **Houston Christian Reformed Church in Houston, B.C.** for their multi-faceted approach to creation care. They plan to create a garden where refugees, single parents, and others in the neighborhood can grow vegetables for their families.

Many of the applications we received were outstanding, and we hope to draw even more submissions next year. Read on for a selection of some of the many greening activities happening in your neck of the woods, and as always, visit our website for additional resources and information on creation care: www.crcjustice.org.

“By sovereign appointment we are earthkeepers and caretakers: loving our neighbor, tending the creation, and meeting our needs. God uses our skills in the unfolding and well-being of his world.” (Contemporary Testimony, par. 10).



Someone told me a few months back that "green is the new black." He meant that environmental awareness was trendy in churches these days, and that evangelicals had started jumping on the bandwagon of creation care with as much gusto as we'd rallied around issues like abortion in the past.

Green – the new black. I laughed at this. Out loud. I didn't believe it was true. See, I'm the one who fields the phone calls when people don't like us talking about climate change. I'm the one to defend the spending of hard-earned money on North American congregations instead of communities abroad.

I'm the one who tries to brainstorm ways to again ask the coffee-making-committee if the church could switch to biodegradable stirring sticks. I was worried that, at least in the CRC, black was always going to be the new black. And green was a dirty word. I was concerned that this Green Grant would flop.

Boy, was I wrong. We found out there are community gardens sprouting all over the country in the backyards of our churches.

We found out congregations have committees focused on energy audits, youth groups hosting fair trade gifts markets, vacation Bible schoolers painting reusable ceramic mugs for coffee time.

We found out about worship services held outdoors, inter-generational canning parties, and reusable shopping bags with CRC logos on them. We discovered dual-flush toilets, LED exit signs, programmable thermostats, and gifts to needy neighbors of CFL light bulbs to celebrate the light of epiphany. We found out that congregations in the CRC have been working to care for creation for a long time – we just hadn't heard the stories.

Thank you for telling us your stories. Thanks for the much-needed reminder that we are all in this together – that our collected efforts can translate into a big impact if we remember to join forces. We are making a big impact, and are being called to one that's greater still.

When I read these grant applications, I was buoyed. We're already making a mark. And I was spurred-on, too. We have so many steps that we have yet to take. May this – our inaugural issue of *Justice Seekers* – be an inspiration to find your next step. And don't forget to tell us when you do.

Kate Kooyman
Congregational Justice Mobilizer





“Through Jesus Christ, we are reconciled not only to the Father, but to our neighbor and to creation.” Article 38, Synod 2008

Outdoor Worship (Watershed Church)

In the summers, we meet outside. When we are learning that God’s creation is good all we need to do is glance around us and that reality is present. Meeting outside is also a positive reflection of our commitment to the environment to others who might be curiously walking by.

We are almost entirely unplugged.

Even when we do meet inside our energy impact is minimal. We’ve made a point to be creative and find ways to use acoustic music for worship. To provide our lighting we use candles and a few lamps. With no cords to run, no sound systems to set up, no computers to load things are fairly simple on Sunday mornings. It not only cuts down on our energy expenditure, but it also helps minimize some of the ordinary distractions we might otherwise experience trying to set up for Sunday service.

For two years, **Monroe Community Church, Grand Rapids** has hosted “Green Sunday” as part of a month-long outdoor worship series. The day includes an eco-fair and Creation-care based worship service.

“The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.” Psalm 24:1-2

“For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that [people] are without excuse.” Romans 1:20

Song choices have included “God of Wonders”, “This is My Father’s World” and “All Creatures of our God and King”.

This summer’s message explored the biblical basis for an environmental worldview and unpacked material from J. Matthew Sleeth’s book, *Serve God, Save the Planet*, which basically advocates that the first and second commandments: “Love God” and “Love Your Neighbor” are in and of themselves a succinct theology of environmentalism.

Our pastor told us how he got from Grand Rapids to Holland, MI for a meeting for only \$4.20 using public transportation.

The message also included an interview with a LEED accredited architect who discussed the impact that overconsumption and environmental negligence has on poor people and children both here and abroad, and the challenges and opportunities we all have in managing our homes and lives.

Chapel Campus (CCCI)

The Campus Chapel, a student ministry at the University of Michigan, began a group called the Chapel Climate Change Initiative (CCCI) two years ago to raise awareness within about the effects of global climate change and how the church has a moral responsibility to actively address the problems. We began with the dual goals of educating our congregation about the affects of climate change, integrating care for creation into our worship services, and pursuing ways to make our place of worship one that integrates with the creation instead of adversely affecting it.

During the Spring, CCCI worked with the Chapel’s worship committee and pastors to create a sermon series on “Care for Creation,” integrating appropriate liturgy and music into a sermon series on human’s care for the creation.

During Lent, CCCI worked with the pastors to lead a time of confession about the ways in which sin through our greenhouse gas emissions. Using the Jewish custom of marking the wrist with ash, we confessed communally and individually the ways in which we create the deep problem of global warming through our carbon emissions – thus confessing carbon by marking ourselves with carbon as a reminder.

Ideas for your own Eco-Fair:

- Have a representative of your local public transit system onsite to answer questions
- Provide information on water conservation
- Promote your city’s recycling system by handing out bins, collection schedules and guidelines
- Provide environmental home management guidelines (contact osjha@crcna.org for a copy of Monroe Community Church’s *Green Guide*)
- Display a large map with sign-up sheet to encourage carpooling in your congregation
- Have a perennial exchange
- Have a kids’ crafts table with all scrap materials
- Raffle off compact fluorescent light bulbs, environmentally-friendly cleaning products, or other similar items

The season of Lent begins today, a time when we reflect on Christ's journey to the cross in preparation for the celebration of his resurrection. Lent is traditionally a time when Christians renew their commitments to prayer (right-relationship with God), fasting (right-relationship with self), and giving (right-relationship with others). These spiritual disciplines slow us down, help us to see the world and our faith in a new way, and hopefully lead us toward greater shalom and justice.

This year for Lent, we want to invite you to journey with us through 40 days of prayer, fasting, and giving when it comes to **care of creation**. Each day you will receive an email with the day's reflection. It may be a call to prayer - for our field staff and partners around the world who are seeing the impact of environmental destruction on the poor. It might be an invitation to give something up - like electricity for an evening. Or it maybe a call to give - perhaps donating time to pick up trash in your neighborhood or lend your voice to advocate for legislative change in your country.

Email osjha@crcna.org to receive a FREE daily e-devotional for Lent. We hope you'll join us on this Lenten journey!

So much of justice and advocacy work is solitary. We were delighted to find so many examples of fellowship and community-building in our grant applications. We've included just a few samples below:



Shopping Bag Sewing Bee (Covenant CRC)

In an attempt to reduce the usage of plastic grocery bags, Covenant CRC urged store managers to sell cheap cloth bags that people could buy. At the same time, one of their members went to local furniture stores and asked for upholstery fabric samples. They were given hundreds of these swatches and then organized sewing bees to make shopping bags out of this material. The result was a large number of beautiful, colorful shopping bags that were given to any member of the congregation who would promise to take it to the grocery store and use it to carry his groceries home. A donation box was made available and moneys gathered have paid for publicity for our electronics recycling events.

Canning Community (Trinity CRC)

Trinity CRC in Grandville, Michigan found a great way to span the generation gap: canning! Congregation members with experience + congregation members ready to learn = spaghetti sauce for everyone, and a good time to boot!

Eco-Team (Friendship, Eastern Avenue)

It's never fun being the sole voice in your congregation. Friendship CRC formed an eight-member eco-team to lead their church in making changes, informing, and motivating the congregation.

Group Posters (Watershed)

Instead of bringing home paper every Sunday, our children create a group poster together rather than doing individual projects. Together they craft a work of art every Sunday to beautify our space, etch a lesson in their memories and keep meaningless clutter from getting lost in the cars of their parents. We plan on taking pictures of these posters and using a photo company to make them into a book that the families can have to option to purchase.



Building maintenance and grounds keeping can be among the most intimidating of good environmental practices. Sticker shock and overall reluctance to change can be a barrier in many congregations, but the Christian Reformed Churches listed below have found creative and simple approaches to making their facilities more green.

Silver Spring Christian Reformed Church, Silver Spring, Maryland

In the summer of 2008, we installed a rain garden on our property that absorbs runoff from a portion of the church roof. Previously the runoff moved rather swiftly into a storm drain, increasing erosion and sedimentation in our local stream. We installed our rain garden during several “work parties”, which involved approximately 20 volunteers for a total of 130 volunteer hours.

Now that the garden is finished, we hope that members of the local community will learn more about rain gardens and reducing the impact of storm water pollution by observing the garden and reading about it on the sign we’ve posted.

Bellevue Christian Reformed Church, Bellevue, Washington

Our church has made an effort to be environmentally responsible and to be a good caretaker of God’s creation by education, facility construction and remodeling, and less wasteful practices. During our building expansion in 2004-2005, several environmentally responsible elements were built into place. We maximized shade and minimized rainwater runoff on our blacktop parking lot with tree and shrub plantings. Water that runs off our paved lot enters a retention pond with grass and soil filters to screen out pollutants that wash off the parking surface.

Stewards of the Environment

(excerpted from the Bellevue CRC Deacons’ Statement of Stewardship)

The earth is the Lord’s creation, and the environment in which we were placed to do His Kingdom work.

To preserve His general revelation to all people and the animals, the deacons ask that as a body we select building practices and materials, cleaning methods and products, pest control solutions (both for flora and fauna), waste removal practices and energy consumption patterns which would impact the environment in the following order:

- 1) environmentally beneficial,
- 2) have neutral impact to the environment,
- 3) have minimally negative (short term) impact.

Only if necessary should we use those which have environmentally destructive (long term) consequences. As His ambassadors on earth we should strive to lead in this area, not simply conform to minimal requirements designed by local governments.

Other quick, low-cost changes you can make:

Stop the Styrofoam!

Join churches like Eastern Avenue, Calgary, Crossroads, Watershed, Roosevelt Park, and others in using ceramic mugs for your coffee.

As a plus, children from Boston Square CRC’s Vacation Bible School hand-painted each mug with bright colors and their names. Not only does this conserve resources, but it also reminds church members of VBS each week and to pray for the child that decorated their cup.

Get Audited

No, not the tax kind. Ask your local utility company to survey your church building. You might be surprised at the ways you can conserve your energy usage. You can also start small—fill out the quick checklist found on pages 14-15.

Teenie Weenie Greenies

You don’t have to overhaul your entire building in order to see changes in your utility bills. Install programmable thermostats so that heating and cooling are at maximized efficiency (Calvary, Covenant CRC)

Switch to CFL bulbs (Covenant, Eastern Avenue)

Recycle church bulletins after each service, and remember to print dual-sided when possible (New Community Church, Roosevelt Park CRC)

Green the area around your building with native plants and shrubs. This prevents runoff, soil erosion, and water pollution. Eastern Avenue CRC planted 100 daffodil bulbs in neighbors’ yards to beautify their entire neighborhood

Put Your Heads Together

Consider starting an eco-team in your church that can lead in some of these changes, as well as inform and motivate the congregation and community (Eastern Avenue, Friendship CRC, CRC denominational headquarters)

Third CRC, Lynden, Washington

The largest effort we have undertaken is the establishment of a community garden on the church's backyard. The concept was to have an organic garden run by our church members to produce food for our community.

This past summer Five Loaves Farm produced organic vegetables for the church community, church neighbors, and two local food banks. It was a flourishing success and a very visible example of our church's commitment to engaging with the bountiful creation and sharing it was our community. It is place for people to connect to their food, to know where it comes from, how good food can be, and that it comes from God.

The best part of this garden were the volunteer events. For part of the garden, we wanted to build a series of raised beds. We needed lumber so we organized a lumbering/milling event to salvage windfall cedar from a nearby cadet camp property. We cut up several topped and fallen cedar trees into 16 foot sections, transported the raw logs to a portable saw mill where we milled the boards that were then used to build the raised beds. Being in the Pacific Northwest, it would be hard to find a better way to connect to this place than taking part in the process of making boards. Even better was that this lumber was produced locally, sustainably, and we took part in the process.

Walking through the garden and talking about it was the most satisfying method of communication. What better way to communicate progress than by eating a tomato you just picked? This summer, I met more people because of this garden than I did since joining the church three years ago. Every time I was working in the garden people would stop by to see the prolificness. Neighbors walking past would comment on the artichokes, the strawberries, or the pumpkins. On Sundays, people would ask how things were going or say how good things were looking.

We used other methods of communication as well. I kept an email list of anyone interested and sent out event reminders, labor requests, and progress reports. I submitted bulletin announcements to the entire church for event reminders. We wrote garden progress updates in the church's newsletter.

Friendship CRC

Two programs have involved youth groups which gave experience and a better understanding of our environmental challenges. For five years our junior high youth group has had a spring trash collection project in the residential area around a local lake (about 300 homes). Each year we collected truck loads of trash and cleaned the streets and vacant lots of litter. We collected tires, appliances, wood, and even an old organ. This past year we separated the items that we could recycle from those that go to the land fill. This gave our youth first hand experience and the donations they received helped them pay for their summer mission trip.

The second youth group project was our SERVE program. This past year we hosted 60 teens from other churches. One of our major projects was a free, trash pickup from Moline, a local community of about 400 homes. We announced our two clean up days with door to door fliers and signs in the community. Before starting out each day, the SERVE teams were given a talk about what we were going to do and why this was part of our service to the community and would improve our environment. We sorted the trash into twelve categories such as metals, batteries, electronics, wood, tires, paint, yard waste, and land fill. The collection brought in tons of trash, including 125 tires. Short term storage was on church property and many church members helped with the recycling which both helped to inform the congregation. Several teams visited an electronics recycling company, Comprenew, and were given a tour and allowed to work there for a few hours—an amazing first-hand experience.



Eastern Avenue CRC, Grand Rapids

We would use the \$500 to help our inner city neighbors reduce their energy costs. In connection with Epiphany we plan to take a special offering, asking congregational members to give 4-5 of the new fluorescent bulbs that are used to replace the incandescent type.

We would then purchase enough bulbs to match what the congregation gave. These bulbs would be distributed to each of the 250 neighborhood families who visit our Saturday Food Program each week.

We will instruct them to use the bulbs to replace the 4-5 bulbs they use the most in their homes. We will include a little devotional about Jesus as the Light of the World and his challenge to use to be reflections of his Light.





Stewardship doesn't have to be contained within the four walls of the church. Here are some ideas that can be used in your congregation, home, or workplace.

Composting (Third CRC, New Community Church, Covenant, Burlington headquarters)

Birds do it, bees do it, lots of CRCs do it. Whether it's a fancy carbon-filter machine, a simple heap in the back of your garden, or a joint arrangement with your neighbors, composting is quick, easy, and awesome for your garden. Go online for easy, do-it-yourself guides.

Coffee Hour

We've already talked about ditching the Styrofoam. At Crossroads CRC, members bring their own mugs. Members of Monroe CRC have unique mugs with their church logo printed on them, and Boston Square CRC has their VBS-decorated set. Any mug is better with fair trade coffee, of course!

Communicating online (Monroe Community, Watershed)

For better or worse, the world is increasingly online—and in this case, better means less paper usage! Try distributing your newsletters and other announcements online if you don't already. It cuts costs, saves trees, and might even increase your marketing base.

Green cleaning products (Bellevue, Grand Rapids headquarters)

My grandmother taught me that vinegar and baking soda can be used to clean anything. Try switching to more natural cleaning products, which have health benefits and often even costs less than harsh chemical solvents.

Ink cartridge recycle (Roosevelt Park)

Ink cartridges, cell phones...you know they can be recycled somehow, but can never remember the proper procedure. Why take a page from Roosevelt Park CRC and designate your church the local drop-off center for miscellaneous recyclables?

Reusable shopping bag challenge (Boston Square)

Most major retail chains have their own reusable shopping totes—why shouldn't the CRC? Boston Square CRC ordered reusable shopping bags with the church logo and information on them as well as the phrase "Caring for God's earth". Their whole congregation has set a goal to be plastic bag-free for 2009, and are extending the challenge to the community as well.

You didn't think we'd leave out advocacy, did you? Individual lifestyle choices are important, but a drop in the bucket compared to large-scale campaigns. Here are a few examples of environmental advocacy, CRC-style.



"Step It Up 2007" (Campus Chapel, Ann Arbor)

The Chapel Climate Change Initiative (CCCI) worked with other congregations in the Ann Arbor area to organize "Step It Up 2007," the largest organized response to climate change in US history and a call for congress to reduce carbon emissions by 80% by 2020.

Meeting with the Mayor about wind energy (Covenant, Sioux Center)

The Mayor is an expert on energy and has served on the boards of various energy companies. (Sioux Center is a community which has for several decades owned its own utilities, purchasing its energy from various companies.) In our discussion with him, the Mayor told us of various green initiatives the city is pursuing, answered our questions about the church possibly purchasing a windmill, and urged us to be active as a body by communicating concerns or attending council meetings if we had proposals about energy, water usage, or other environmental concerns.

County-wide Environmental Initiatives Committee participation (Covenant, Sioux Center)

Our pastor and three other committee members are also members of a Sioux County Environmental Initiatives Committee. Some of them participated as panelists in an area-wide environmental conference held in October 2007 ("Caring for the Environment: Putting Biblical Principles into Practice" co-sponsored mainly by Citizens for Public Justice, Dordt College and Northwestern College). Some of our Committee's efforts have also been jointly sponsored and carried out with Dordt College students involved in a Justice/Creation Care campus group.

When God created the world, He called Adam and Eve to be stewards of creation. They were called to: “Prosper! Reproduce! Fill earth! Take charge! Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air, for every living thing that moves on the earth” (Genesis 1: 28, *The Message*). Adam and Eve were given the responsibility to care for His creation. As their successors, we live under that same charge of stewardship. The earth that we live in today is very different from that of Adam and Eve. Technology has changed the world and the way we live in it. The environment is in dire need for redemption. We live in a world where we can be overwhelmed by reports on the environment. Is there anything we can do? Will our actions really change the world? Do our doubts over the impact we can have give us a free pass to not be the stewards we were called to be? What might happen when we combine the notion of the steward with the idea of ecumenism?

Ecumenism is defined as “a movement promoting unity among Christian churches and denominations.” Doesn’t it make sense for us as we are asking the hard questions related to justice and the environment to explore with other brothers and sisters in Christ who we can work with towards a common goal? Doesn’t the idea of working with others make this venture seem less daunting?

Karen Bokma, Social Justice Coordinator for the CRC in Canada

Say it loud, say it proud! Keep your creation care efforts sustainable by educating others. As you can see below, youth groups, adult Sunday school, and community events are all fair game with eager listeners. Maybe you’ll even learn a little something yourself!



Fair Trade Fair (Calvary Wyoming)

This smart church has enlisted high school leaders to think about and promote ways for their congregation to go green. On the docket? A fair trade fair to promote and inform the congregation on the benefits of fair trade.

Adult Sunday school class (Bellevue)

Our pastor is teaching a class on Wednesday evenings entitled “Going Green,” using the book *Earthwise* by Calvin DeWitt. The group discusses how to be more environmentally responsible and restore God’s damaged earth. Members are encouraged at each class to present examples of environmentally beneficial activities they have engaged in.

Blogging- (Campus Chapel, OSJ)

This student website is a little dated, but still has good resources—chapelclimate.blogspot.com

Our own Tracy Young is blogging about her black thumb (with a theological perspective, of course!)—<http://justiceseekers.ning.com>

Join our Eco-Justice group to share resources, ask questions, and find support—<http://justiceseekers.ning.com>

Some light reading, all available from Faith Alive Resources

- *Serve God, Save the Planet: A Christian Call to Action*, by Matthew Sleeth - Practical, readable how-to guide to changing your lifestyle
- *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care*, by Steven Bouma-Prediger - A thorough theology of creation care for pastors and lay-leaders
- *Living the Good Life on God's Good Earth*, edited by David Koetje - A group guide to care-taking through a series of topics: lifestyle, homes, food, clothes, etc.
- *Earth-Wise: A Biblical Response to Environmental Issues*, by Cal DeWitt - Six sessions for groups on how Christians play a crucial role in environmental stewardship

Bulletin / newsletter tips (Crossroads, Grand Rapids headquarters)

Put tips and tricks in your bulletins, your atrium, your intranet...many of our grant applicants have gotten local press coverage for the environmental impact they’ve had on their communities.

Tutorials (Covenant, Friendship)

See if someone in your congregation has a special skill set that can be shared. Canning, beekeeping, worm composting, native planting...sign me up!

Creation Care Camp (Covenant CRC)

With brief lessons on gardening, butterflies, and trees, this 4-day camp for upper elementary-aged students is highly transformative for children and families who participate. Email osjha@crcna.org for an outline of the camp curriculum.

HOW GREEN IS YOUR CHURCH?

Fill out this simple environmental audit to help gauge your church's greenness.
For info, assistance, or next steps, contact Kate Kooyman, kkooyman@crcna.org

WORSHIP

How often during the year are environmental concerns included in sermons?

never	occasionally	special services (Earth Day)	frequently
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In your church's prayer life, do you:

praise God as the Creator	give thanks to God for the gift of creation	ask forgiveness for the harm done to the earth	pray for the healing of creation
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Yes	No	Potential to develop	THEOLOGY
			<i>Does your church:</i>
			Include environmental issues in teaching or preaching program?
			Encourage practicing Sabbath as a community / individuals?
			Educate parishioners re: Reformed eschatology as opposed to popular end-times beliefs?

Some-times	Never	Potential to develop	CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS: <i>Do the following programs include earth-keeping elements?</i>
			Kids church / children in worship / Sunday school
			Cadets / GEMS
			MOPS

Have done	Could consider	YOUTH PROGRAMS
		Undertake a practical environmental/conservation project (trash pick-up, road adoption, etc.)
		Assess how environmentally-friendly the church is and make recommendations for action.

Have done	Could consider	ADULT EDUCATION/FORMATION
		Environmental Bible study / Sunday school class / speaker
		organize / participate in a carbon fast
		Organize carpool schedule for church services / activities

Have done	Could consider	PROPERTY MANAGEMENT
		Switch to green electricity (if offered by the electric company)
		Commission an energy/environmental audit (free with membership in Interfaith Power and Light)
		Encourage switching off unnecessary lights / equipment not in use; not leave items on stand-by (copier, etc.)
		Install low-energy light bulbs where appropriate, replace lighting fixtures with timed or motion-sensitive lights
		Check water faucets – fix drips / leaks, install aerators
		Collect down spout water in rain barrels, use in garden
		Install a bike rack

		KITCHEN
		Use reusable cups/plates; corn-based rather than plastic?
		Use farmers markets and other local suppliers for food
		Compost used coffee grounds/un-cooked food scraps.

Have done	Could consider	FINANCIAL & PURCHASING
		Use environmentally-friendly cleaning materials & paint
		Purchase recycled paper and envelopes
		Purchase fairly-traded products
		Use local suppliers where possible

		RESOURCE MINIMIZATION
		Get a Paper Gator, papergatorrecycling.com
		Reconsider the need to print materials (bulletins, mailings, etc.); ensure easy recycling for materials

Have done	Could consider	CHURCH GROUNDS
		Native landscape responsible to watershed (rain gardens, omit pesticide/fertilizer), promote wildlife flourishing (birds, bees)
		Trees planted for shade / wind protection, reducing the need to heat and cool building
		Environmental consideration of church improvements (carpet, paint, bathrooms, green space, drainage for parking lots, etc.)
		Compost yard waste

Have done	Could consider	PERSONAL LIFESTYLE
		Publish green tips in church newsletter
		Promote use of reusable shopping bags and coffee mugs
		Encourage a Community Supported Agriculture, where local farmer provides weekly shares of crops
		Promote a "Green Challenge" for lifestyle changes.

Have done	Could consider	COMMUNITY OUTREACH
		Participate in local environmental initiatives or policy formation (e.g. local watershed cleanup project, etc.)

Have done	Could consider	GLOBAL OUTREACH
		Support the work of development agencies (CRWRC) and campaigns (Micah Challenge)
		Support the work of international conservation and environmental agencies (e.g. A Rocha, WWF, Friends of the Earth, Care of Creation, etc.)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **KAIROS** (Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives): Re-Energize project challenges us to change ourselves, our communities and the world at www.re-energize.org.
- **Christian Stewardship Services:** Stewardship happens at many levels. Find out how CSS can help at www.cssservices.ca.
- **A Rocha:** a Christian nature conservation organization. A Rocha projects are frequently cross-cultural in character, and share a community emphasis, with a focus on science and research, practical conservation and environmental education. www.arocha.org.
- **Eco-Justice Ministries:** an independent, ecumenical agency that helps churches answer the call to care for all of God's creation, and develop ministries that are faithful, relevant and effective in working toward social justice and environmental sustainability. www.eco-justice.org.
- **Evangelical Environmental Network:** a non-profit organization that seeks to educate, inspire, and mobilize Christians in their effort to care for God's creation, to be faithful stewards of God's provision, and to advocate for actions and policies that honor God and protect the environment. www.creationcare.org.
- **Office of Social Justice:** visit our creation care section frequently for updated links, resources, and events. www.crcjustice.org
- **CRC Justice Seekers:** interact with like-minded CRC justice seekers on our online social network. <http://justiceseekers.ning.com>
- **Your Organization Here:** we're always looking to expand our resources databank. Contact osjha@crcna.org if you have something to include.



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