

Pledge for the Care of Creation

Reflection Guide

Episcopalians and our friends are transforming our concern for the environment into a concrete Pledge for the Care of Creation. If you take up the pledge, you are doing more than adding your signature to a petition. By pledging, we each name and take up a set of concrete commitments specific to our own lives and callings. As such, you'll need to do some reflection and personal decision-making about how God is calling you to be more loving, more liberating and more life-giving in your relationship to the whole of creation.

This Reflection Guide is meant to support your engagement with the Pledge for the Care of Creation. Each of the three sections – called “Meditations” – can be done individually or in a group. Consider gathering a group to study together, or encourage people to reflect with it during coffee hour, a bible study, at home, or on their own. No leader is needed, but people within the group may take turns reading the individual sections, or they may choose to appoint a facilitator for one or all the sessions. If an issue leads the group to deeper questions, consider finding someone who could speak more deeply on the subject.

The meditations follow the three parts of the Pledge to Care for Creation:

Meditation 1: That we may be Loving. . .

Meditation 2: That we may be Liberating. . .

Meditation 3: That we may be Life-Giving. . .

At the end of each Meditation, you may write or otherwise capture the commitment you wish to make for the sake of God's good earth and all who live within it.

At the close of this Guide, there is a litany (series of prayers) for people who are stepping forward to take up the pledge and share their commitments to care for Creation.

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THE *Episcopal* CHURCH 



Meditation I: That we may be Loving. . .

Prayer for Joy in God's Creation

O heavenly Father, who has filled the world with beauty: Open our eyes to behold your gracious hand in all your works; that, rejoicing in your whole creation, we may learn to serve you with gladness; for the sake of him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Book of Common Prayer, p. 814)

Psalm 19:1-6

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork.
Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.
In the heavens God has set a tent for the sun,
which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy,
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.
Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them;
and nothing is hid from its heat.

Job 12:7-10

But ask the animals, and they will teach you;
the birds of the air, and they will tell you;
ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you;
and the fish of the sea will declare to you.
Who among all these does not know
that the hand of the Lord has done this?
In God's hand is the life of every living thing
and the breath of every human being.

Reflection

Standing at the edge of the ocean at sunset, or standing under towering redwoods, or breathing in the scents of a beautiful garden after the rain, I am often silent. My words can't describe what I'm feeling or how I am lost in a sense in the beauty that is around me. Too often my daily environment is defined by lots of concrete and asphalt. I can go days without touching dirt. The only animals I have contact with are my two cats. Intentionally going to parks, walking along the shore, hiking through a forest, or working in a garden is a way to realign myself with the earth, and to then be transformed in some way by understanding myself in connection with all of God's creation. There are moments when the incredible scale and beauty of nature fills me with awe and wonder, and if I'm really being mindful, I will thank God for the extraordinary beauty around me and be more mindful of my personal care of the earth, the air, and the water that we depend on for life.

Personal or Group Questions

1. When have you felt overwhelmed with awe and wonder at Creation?
2. How do you understand yourself as part of nature? And how do you see yourself connected to it?
3. The writer of Job says animals, birds, plants, and fish teach us about God. Recall a moment when an interaction with nature taught you about God as Creator and Giver of Life.

4. As you think back on your connection to the natural world, have you seen any of the places or things you love be damaged or limited because of human action? If so, what has changed? How have you felt about that loss?
5. What would you like to see happen for the good of the earth and nature in your community?
6. What could you or a group do to help protect the beauty and connectedness of all created life, as a way of loving God and following the way of Jesus?

Commitment #1

As the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement and as people who live the Way of Love, we long to grow Loving, Liberating, Life-Giving relationship with God's Creation. In this urgent moment, we pledge to protect and renew this good Earth and all who call it home. Together, we commit to specific actions, trusting we can do more as a body than any one could alone.

That we may be LOVING: We will share our stories of love and concern for the Earth and link with others who care about protecting the sacred web of life.

Because I want to share my strong love of God and God's Creation, I will...

Ideas for Concrete Commitments

- Record a 1-minute video answering the questions "When have you experienced wonder in God's Creation? What is your commitment to protect what you love?" Stretch yourself and post to social media networks or to creation@episcopalchurch.org.
- Form a Care of Creation group in your congregation or diocese, or connect with a group in your local community. Stretch yourself and organize your group to apply for a Creation Care Grant.
- See more ideas at the end of this Guide

Capture your commitment in the open space above. If you are in a group, share your commitment.

Closing Prayer

Creating and life-giving God, you have placed us in communities of people and in connection with all of life. Help us to be aware of your presence in the natural world around us, and to commit ourselves to caring for all of life on this fragile earth, our island home. Let us love and support one another in the shared work of caring for the environment, that others in generations to come may always see your handiwork in the sky, land, and water. In the name of the one through whom all things came into being, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Meditation 2: That we may be LIBERATING . . .

Prayer for Social Justice

Almighty God, who created us in your image: Grant us grace fearlessly to contend against evil and to make no peace with oppression; and, that we may reverently use our freedom, help us to employ it in the maintenance of justice in our communities and among the nations, to the glory of your holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer, p. 260)

Matthew 25: 34-40

Jesus said: "Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'"

Isaiah 42:5-9

Thus says God, the Lord,
who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,
who gives breath to the people upon it
and spirit to those who walk in it:
I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness,
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations,
to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.

Reflection

In Matthew 25, Jesus clearly asks his followers to stand with the most vulnerable in society, because whenever we do that we are standing with Jesus. Churches have often read this passage and committed to feeding and clothing folks and visiting the sick and those in prison. What happens when we think of Pacific Islanders losing their homes to rising sea levels? Or indigenous tribes whose food sources and way of life are disappearing because of melting polar ice caps and offshore drilling? What about poor neighborhoods with high rates of asthma or polluted drinking water?

Archbishop Desmond Tutu stated the problem well in the Foreword to The Green Bible:

"We must act now and wake up to our moral obligations. The poor and vulnerable are members of God's family and are the most severely affected by droughts, high temperatures, the flooding of coastal cities, and more severe and unpredictable weather events resulting from climate change. We, who should have been responsible stewards preserving our vulnerable, fragile planet home, have been wantonly wasteful through our reckless consumerism, devouring irreplaceable natural resources. We need to be accountable to God's family. Once we start living in a way that is people-friendly to all of God's family, we will also be environment-friendly."

Personal & Group Questions

1. What do you know about difficulties facing vulnerable people around the world because of climate change and damage to the environment?
2. In light of Matthew 25:34-40, what do you imagine Jesus saying about those who face the loss of their ancestral homes and livelihoods due to changes in the environment?
3. As you think of the community you live in, do you know of any situations where people are having difficulties because of polluted air, water, or land? Are you experiencing these difficulties personally?
4. How do you think God might be calling you to build relationship with people in your community and around the world who are most vulnerable to the affects of climate change and environmental damage?
5. What could you as an individual or in a group do to stand with and help people who are suffering the effects of a polluted, compromised environment or suffering the effects of climate change?

Commitment #2

As the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement and as people who live the Way of Love, we long to grow Loving, Liberating, Life-Giving relationship with God's Creation. In this urgent moment, we pledge to protect and renew this good Earth and all who call it home. Together, we commit to specific actions, trusting we can do more as a body than any one could alone.

That we may be LIBERATING: We will stand with those most vulnerable to the harmful effects of environmental degradation and climate change – women, children, poor people and communities of color, refugees, migrants.

Because I want to stand in solidarity with my sisters and brothers, especially those being harmed by environmental degradation and climate change, I will...

Ideas for Concrete Commitments

- Sign on for alerts from the Episcopal Public Policy Network at advocacy.episcopalchurch.org. Stretch yourself and engage in advocacy around an environmental justice issue close to your heart.
- Learn more about a specific way that climate change or environmental degradation affects people near you. Stretch yourself and listen to the stories of hurting neighbors, and find ways to ally with them.
- See more ideas at the end of this Guide

Capture your commitment in the open space above. If you are in a group, share your commitment to be Liberating, along with your commitment to be Loving.

Closing Prayer

Almighty God, in giving us dominion over things on earth, you made us fellow workers in your creation: Give us wisdom and reverence so to use the resources of nature, 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 Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer, p. 827)

Meditation 3: That we may be LIFE-GIVING . . .

Opening Prayer

Give us all a reverence for the earth as your own creation, that we may use its resources rightly in the service of others and to your honor and glory. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer, p. 388)

Ezekiel 34:17-19

As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord God: I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats: Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, but you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture? When you drink of clear water, must you foul the rest with your feet? And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and drink what you have fouled with your feet?

Romans 8:18-23

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

Reflection

Unintended consequences are the worst. None of us ever means to step on someone's toes, or bump into them while walking down the street, or pollute the only source of clean water for hundreds of miles. But we have. We've absentmindedly hurt someone inadvertently, and we've made purchases or benefited from actions that have supported the destruction of God's creation.

Like awkward teenagers whose feet are still too big for their bodies, or sheep paying no attention to where they walk or how much mud is on their hooves, oftentimes we make our way through life unaware of the impact our choices are making on the world around us. But God invites us to live with intention, to wake up and notice the relationship between our behaviors and the lives of others. The way of Jesus is fundamentally about choosing a path that is gentle, humble, even sacrificial, so that more people and more created beings might flourish. The way of Jesus invites us to widen the circle of our loving concern, from self to family and friends to strangers and to the whole creation.

The good news is, we're not alone in this commitment. Even as we struggle to care for life around us, Paul reminds us in Romans that all of creation has joined in the struggle. God has given us the work of redemption and liberation, work that takes time, patience, diligence, and perseverance. It is work that includes making changes in personal habits, living simply, being humble, and taking up less space. But we do it not only for ourselves or by ourselves. We do it knowing we are knit together with all that God has created – all reaching for the fullness of God together.

Personal & Group Questions and Actions

1. The last time you accidentally hurt someone, how did you apologize? Did you make amends? Did you make reparations? What did you do to ensure that it wouldn't happen again?
2. Have you set up an account with the Carbon Tracker yet? Go and explore at www.sustainislandhome.org.
3. One you've set up your Carbon Tracker account ... What did you learn about your carbon footprint? Did the size of your carbon footprint surprise you? Why or why not?
4. What three things can you do in the coming week to create less of an impact on the environment around you?
5. What three things can you do in the coming year to live more simply, humbly, and gently on the earth?

Commitment #3

As the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement and as people who live the Way of Love, we long to grow Loving, Liberating, Life-Giving relationship with God's Creation. In this urgent moment, we pledge to protect and renew this good Earth and all who call it home. Together, we commit to specific actions, trusting we can do more as a body than any one could alone.

That we may be LIFE-GIVING: we will change our habits and choices in order to live more simply, humbly and gently on the Earth.

Because I want to change my own life so that my flourishing is woven together with the flourishing of the Earth, I will...

Ideas for Concrete Commitments

- Personally use the carbon tracker at www.diocal.org/climate. Stretch yourself and organize your whole congregation to sign up and track their carbon footprint.
- Change your eating habits by consuming less meat and reducing the amount of food your family wastes. Stretch yourself by committing to a goal, like one meatless meal per day.
- Change your consumption habits by repairing or repurposing items, rather than purchasing new ones.
- See more ideas at the end of this Guide.

Capture your commitment to be Life-Giving in the open space above. If you are in a group, share your commitment, along with your commitments to be Loving and Liberating.

Now think about what supports you need to keep the promise and engage in the ministry of Creation Care. If you are in a group, decide together on a way to support each other in making lasting commitments.

Closing Prayer

Creator God, you call us into relationship with others as co-creators of the world we inhabit. We see the damage done to this fragile earth and all who reside within it, and we want to change it. Show us the ways to simplify our physical lives in ways that will broaden our souls, magnify our interconnectedness, and strengthen our bond to you. All this we ask through the one who is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Commitment to the Pledge for the Care of Creation

Individuals or the group(s) who have engaged in reflection and commitment stand at the front of the congregation and present the Presider with their Pledges.

Presider: As the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement and as people who live the Way of Love, we long to grow loving, liberating, and life-giving relationship with God, each other and God's Creation. In this urgent moment, these people have come forward to make a faithful pledge to protect and renew this good Earth and all who call it home. They have discerned commitments to specific actions, and they trust that the body of Christ acting together will always accomplish more than any one could alone.

Group: As followers of Jesus and as lovers of God and of all that God has created, we present ourselves and our Pledge for the Care of Creation to you and this congregation. We ask for God's blessing on our commitment to sustain and renew the earth and all who call it home.

Presider: Will you share your stories of love and concern for the Earth and link with others who care about protecting the sacred web of life?

Group: We will.

Presider: Will you stand with those most vulnerable to the harmful effects of environmental degradation and climate change – women, children, poor people and communities of color, refugees, migrants.

Group: We will.

Presider: Will you change your habits and choices in order to live more simply, humbly and gently on the Earth?

Group: We will.

Presider: And will you who witness these promises pray for your companions on the Jesus Way, and discover ways that you can also engage in new behaviors that help the whole creation to flourish?

Congregation: We will.

Presider: Creator God, in the beginning you made all things and wove them together in interdependence and community. You have called us to tend and care for your creation and all the life within it. Give us wisdom, courage, reverence, strength, and delight in the ministry of Creation Care. Guide us to make right decisions, not only for ourselves but for the whole ecosystem. And show us the way to form more loving, liberating, life-giving relationship with you, with our neighbors and with the earth you made and love. All this we ask in the name of Jesus and in the power of the Spirit. Amen.

Additional Ideas for Personal Commitments to Care for Creation

Resolutions at the Episcopal Church's 2018 General Convention are indicated in parentheses (as in, A011 or B027). Search for resolution text at www.generalconvention.org/legislative-information-gc2018.

More ideas for Loving relationship with Creation

- Connect with others who are passionate for the care of Creation, whether in your congregation, city, state or church-wide (A008)
- Learn about StorySharing work through the Beloved Community StorySharing Project (www.episcopalchurch.org/storysharing) or Called to Transformation (www.calledtoformation.org), and to prepare to share stories of our love for God and Creation

More ideas for Liberating relationship with Creation

- Oppose environmental racism, sexism, classism in the community near you or elsewhere (A011, B027)
- Learn about the Paris Accord and the United Nations Conference of Parties, and support efforts to adopt and advance the Accord at state, regional and local levels (A018, CO08)
- Advocate to protect vulnerable people/lands/species, especially in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (Resolution X023)
- Inhibit extraction practices that hurt communities and/or the natural environment (A011)

More ideas for Life-Giving relationship with Creation

- Support your congregation's use of the Carbon Tracker at www.diocal.org/climate (C008)
- Introduce formation resources in your congregation to help others to live more simply, humbly, and gently on the Earth
- Promote conscious food decisions and local, sustainable agriculture (C049)
- Support use of the carbon tax and carbon offsets (A014, C020)
- Ask diocesan officials to track energy use as part of the parochial report, and promote energy and water efficiency across the church (C039, A213)
- Learn about the Paris Accord and the United Nations Conference of Parties and support the adoption of the Accord at state, regional and local levels (A010)
- Contribute to regenerative agriculture, biodiversity conservation, and habitat restoration (D053)
- Help your community to transition to clean energy economies and encourage stewardship of creation with church-owned lands (D081, D053)
- Promote ocean health and phase out use of bottled water in church-related facilities (C063)
- Help your church to rely on renewable energy and to track fossil fuel divestment/reinvestment (A020, C021)
- Learn about ocean health, watersheds, and water as a human right (B025, C063)