



Have you anything here to eat?

Sustainable Food in a Changing Climate

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we commit to daily living out our faith. We do this individually, in community with one another, and with the rest of God's creation. On this Earth Day Sunday, we reflect in particular on how climate and food concerns impact us. How does food production and consumption impact the climate? How does climate change affect growing and accessing food?

While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?"

The U.S. generates more than 36 million tons of food waste each year, with just under 5 percent of that waste being recovered and recycled.¹ This food generates methane, a greenhouse gas that contributes to climate change.²

As we break bread together, both at the Lord's Table and around family and community tables, how are we sharing communion with God, one another, and all creation? We can eat in ways that are healthier for ourselves and more sustainable for all God's creation. We can support food policies that mitigate the effects of climate change and climate policies that support food security for the most vulnerable populations around the world. We can adopt personal actions to tread more lightly to ensure a vibrant, flourishing creation for future generations.

Background: Climate And Food

How and what we eat impacts climate change. Being conscious of the energy and resources needed to produce the meat, vegetables, fruits, dairy, and grains that we eat is a good way to start thinking about the environmental impact of what we consume. Eating more local, sustainable food can reduce greenhouse gas emissions related to food. On average, food travels 1,500 miles from its origin to its end consumption point and this transportation accounts for 11 percent of overall carbon emissions for food production. More sustainable agriculture sequesters carbon, increases soil fertility, prevents deforestation and erosion, and protects food quality and safety.

In addition to being mindful of the substances and chemicals that go into the production and growing of our food, we can also pay attention to how our food waste can be just as harmful to Creation. With increased and industrialized food production the level of food waste will continue to rise and thus accelerate climate change (from methane released from landfills to emissions from factory farms and transportation).

Meanwhile, the changing climate impacts food production. Increasing floods, droughts, and changing weather patterns influence growing seasons, soil fertility and crop yield. Although each global region and community will experience the impacts of climate change on food production in different ways, it is clear that food security worldwide will decrease. Of particular concern to people of faith: climate change disproportionately affects the most vulnerable people at risk of hunger, especially women and children, and their livelihoods. The vast majority of the world's hungry people live in fragile environments prone to climate hazards.

The U.S. agriculture system is not immune. Drought continues to ravage the West, where much of our produce is grown. Increased temperatures and extreme weather will shift growing patterns in the Midwest leading to less productive crops.

Not only do U.S. farms produce food for our country, but according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, we provide 25% of the global supply of wheat, corn, soybeans, and cotton. So while the U.S. will definitely feel the effects of climate change on our food system, we must also recognize that we participate in a global food system that will suffer. Disruptions in the global food supply can lead to many issues including political instability and violence as well as increased migration, poverty, and hunger. Churches work hard to alleviate these global problems, so our individual and collective ways of living should be careful to not worsen these problems through food and energy choices.

Our daily lifestyle choices around food can make a difference. Increasingly, there are good options and opportunities to choose foods that not only reduce climate change but support local community development, a diversity of crops, and small- and medium-scale family farmers.

In North America, projected changes in temperature, soil moisture, carbon dioxide, and pests associated with climate change are expected to decrease food-crop production by as much as 27 percent.³

What You Can Do

1. Eat organic food.
2. Eat food that is grown close to where you live.
3. Be intentional when choosing to eat meat. Support local farmers who are committed to sustainably raising their animals.
4. Compost food waste.
5. Grow some of your own food.
6. Support your denomination's hunger programs.
7. Advocate for justice and sustainability in both agricultural and climate policies.

WORSHIP AND CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

The Bible is full of references to food and meals, and through these stories something important is communicated to us. How do the Last Supper and the institution of the Holy Eucharist influence our understanding of faith? Why does a resurrected Christ need to eat? Biblical stories of food address nourishment of bodies but also of spirits, and relationships between people. The ways we choose to consume food, support food systems and operate within the global food economy are matters of faith. Honoring right relationships (between God and people, between God and all creation, between groups of people, and between people and all creation) are vital for living a daily discipleship in line with biblical understandings of community.

For sermon starter notes and other theological themes, visit www.creationjustice.org/earth-day-sunday

Liturgy

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we commit daily to live out our faith individually and in community with one another and the rest of God's creation. On this Earth Day Sunday, we reflect in particular on how we eat as it impacts God's creation in the face of a changing climate.

Call to Worship

Leader: Awaken!

The new day reveals itself in every moment,
And by the grace of God all things are made possible
Come, let us give thanks.

All: We give thanks to you, blessed, mysterious Life-giver,
For one more day to experience the miracle of creation.

One side: With every breath we remember that life is a gift
from you, O God, and we give thanks.

Second side: With every bite of healthy food, we know
the wonder of your diverse and fruitful Earth, and we give
thanks.

Leader: With every word, we affirm your transforming love
for each of us, and we give thanks.

All: Holy Beloved, through you all things are made new.
Creation is full of your glory. All praise be yours!

Call to Confession

God, who is righteous and just, hear our humble admissions of where we have gone wrong and offers grace. Let us then with confidence come before God to admit the ways we have fallen short.

Prayer of Confession

Gracious God, we have taken the fruits of your creation and your merciful abundance for granted. We have uttered prayers of thanksgiving without true gratitude. Meanwhile, we have failed to recognize the suffering of the earth and of the people who have produced our food. Ignoring our connection to the rest of your creation as we reap nourishment, we move further away from your vision of your beloved community. Forgive us, O God, and transform us. Open us to the richness and beauty in connecting our food—at the Lord's Table and at our individual tables—to all the natural and human resources who have brought it to those tables. Help us to give thanks not just for our food but for all those who have brought it before us and to work that they might also flourish. Encourage us to work for justice for all, so that all may give you thanks and be fed. In Christ Jesus we pray, amen.

Chemical fertilizers for agriculture, typically made from natural gas, contribute to climate change. Nitrogen fertilizers in particular produce a powerful greenhouse gas (nitrous oxide) that traps more heat than carbon dioxide.



Assurance

Leader: In loving compassion, we are blessed and made whole by God. In loving compassion, we are fed and we are nourished.

In loving compassion, we are placed into relationships with all creation, that God's peace and justice might reign.

In loving compassion, we are forgiven and wrapped in the warm embrace of a gracious God as we go forth to live connected lives.

All: Amen.

Sending Forth⁴

Congregation echoes leader

Leader: We stand in the midst of the burning world

Leader: Ready to sing out loud our praise to God the Provider

Leader: Primed to burn with compassionate love and justice for all creation

Leader: Awakened to our dependence with and responsibility to creation

Leader: And recognizing anew the world that is all one flesh with us

All: Amen.

Children's Moment

Bring in many different types of bread, trying to include some breads that are familiar and some that are not. Hold up the breads, give their names, and talk about what they look like (long, short, round, etc.). Allow the children to taste the bread. Say: All over the world, in every country and community, children eat bread. All over the world, in every church, Christians celebrate communion and come around the Lord's Table. Bread connects us to each other and to God.

Prayer: Loving God, we give you thanks for bread to eat, especially (name the children's favorite breads). When we eat bread, help us to think of children around the world and help us to give You thanks. Amen.

Study and Discussion Ideas

- Use the story of the feeding of the 5,000 to encourage reflection on the notion that there can be enough food. The lesson can be found on the Earth Day web page in the Sacred Foods resource, "Provide for All People."
- Explore sustainable agriculture concepts. The lesson can be found in the Sacred Foods resource, "Growing Food in Ways that Protect and Heal Creation."
- Have each person list the top 3 foods they eat nearly every day. Then, write down from where those foods probably originated. Then estimate the mileage from where you live to where that food grows. How many miles did it travel? What do you think is the impact on climate change related to food transportation miles? Discuss if there is at least one item that is grown locally that you might be willing to eat instead of one of the items that comes from far away, or another way your food choices could be better for the earth.

Christian Education

For additional adult study and education ideas, a guided meditation, as well as suggestions for youth and children's education, visit www.creationjustice.org/earth-day-sunday.

Adult Discussion Questions

- Do you feel a connection to the food you eat? To the land and the people that helped grow, produce, manufacture, or serve it? How?
- Many denominations have policy statements on food and farming as well as climate change. What are the policies of your faith tradition? Are you surprised? How might these inform your congregational ministry or your personal lifestyle choices related to food and energy?



Youth Activity

Have youth help plant a simple container garden that the youth will be responsible for tending for a designated period of time. While youth are busy filling and planting the container garden, have one person read Genesis 2:5-15.

What Your Congregation Can Do

Find useful links for these resources at creationjustice.org/earth-day-sunday.

1. Invite a farmer or other speaker to share about your community's Farmers' Markets or Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares in your area (localharvet.org)
2. Start a church-based community garden or volunteer at one in your area
3. Glean and/or support gleaning organizations (ampleharvest.org)
4. Compost at church and at home
5. Reduce your congregation's food waste by joining the EPA's Food Recovery Challenge
6. Host a local foods potluck
7. Request more local foods at your area grocery
8. Plant a row for the hungry (growarow.org)

To Learn More

Find more information, denominational resources, activities, and ideas about climate change and food at www.creationjustice.org/earth-day-sunday.

¹ From the EPA's Food Waste and Recovery Background

² <http://www.epa.gov/smm/foodrecovery/index.htm> and <http://epa.gov/climatechange/climate-change-waste/> have resources on food waste

³ Pimentel, et al., "Ethical Issues Concerning Potential Global Climate Change on Food Production."

⁴ Portions adapted from a litany used by the Seekers Church on Thanksgiving 2003, Washington DC

⁵ <http://ocean.nationalgeographic.com/ocean/critical-issues-sea-temperature-rise/>

PHOTOS

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Page 4: Southminster Presbyterian Church, Beaverton, Oregon

Oceans are warming, harming coral and krill while also spreading invasive species and marine diseases and killing fish.⁵ Food systems dependent on healthy ocean life are already being affected by these changes.

Creation Justice Ministries, formerly the National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Program, develops Earth Day Sunday materials each year to help congregations celebrate and care for God's Creation. For more information, to make a donation, or for additional Earth Day resources, visit www.creationjustice.org or email info@creationjustice.org

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