

*Every
Creature
Singing*

Embracing
the Good News
for Planet Earth

LEADER'S GUIDE

Produced by Mennonite Creation Care Network,
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The Canadian Edition of Every Creature Singing is a rich resource designed for **electronic use** and enhanced with a wide array of web resources.

Although we have done our best to ensure all hyperlinks are up-to-date at the time of publication, any changes to them or the resources they connect with are beyond our control.

Canadian Edition Design: Matt Veith

*Every
Creature*

Singing

LEADER'S GUIDE

INDEX

The Canadian Edition of MCCN's creation care curriculum, *Every Creature Singing*, is free and downloadable.

To access curriculum materials, visit: www.commonword.ca/go/1054.

How to navigate links in *Every Creature Singing*:

Bold links with green underlines lead to a page in this PDF.

Green Links with green underlines lead to online webpages or resources.

BACK < links work on *supported PDF readers* and return to the previous page visited in this PDF.

Leader's Guide Content

- Session 1** Don't Be Afraid
- Session 2** Jesus and Creation: In Search of a Whole Gospel
- Session 3** Biblical Views of Nature
- Session 4** The Human Calling
- Session 5** Environmental Disasters, Ancient and Modern
- Session 6** Slow Violence and the Gospel of Peace
- Session 7** Hearing from the Global Community
- Session 8** Claiming Our Citizenship
- Session 9** Rethinking the Market Economy
- Session 10** Simple Abundance
- Session 11** Creating Communities of Accountability
- Session 12** A Spirituality that Sustains
- Summary Session:** Your Call

Leader's Guide Overview

The *Leader's Guide* contains material to help lead the class through the 12 sessions provided in the [Study Guide](#), along with an additional summary session. **Please read the *Study Guide* before consulting the *Leader's Guide***, as this is where most of the content for this curriculum is located. As the leader of this study, you will have the following materials to work with:

Study Guide

Each session includes:

- Suggested scriptures and selected Through an Ecological Lens questions.
- An introductory essay.
- A list of discussion questions related to the scriptures and the essay.
 - Questions focused on your local ecosystem.
 - Spiritual and household practices to try.
 - A list of additional resources.

Leader's Guide

Each session includes:

- A set of goals for the session.
- Suggestions for leading the session.
- For some sessions, supplementary materials and handouts are noted. Some are available through <http://www.commonword.ca/go/1054>.

Local Ecosystem Focus Guide

This is a separate guide designed so that you can invite an assistant to lead this part of the course. It includes:

- Instructions for working with maps.
- Resources that may help you answer the questions focusing on your local ecosystem.

Every Creatures Singing does not provide detailed lesson plans, because you know best how to work with your congregation or group. You will be able to determine whether you can expect your participants to have read the designated essays and scriptures in advance, or whether they will need to be summarized or read at the beginning of class. We suggest you begin with high expectations and assume people will rise to meet them.

You will also need to prioritize what is undoubtedly too much material. A lively discussion around questions about your local ecosystem could eat up the whole hour, squeezing out other elements of the curriculum. That's okay; review the outline each week and try to maintain a balance over the course of the series. Or, make a conscious decision to emphasize one element over others based on the needs of your group. For those who like things a little more structured, the "Keep-it-Focused Option" provided in this guide for each session offers a quick lesson plan based on one main point.

Suggestions for Working with Through an Ecological Lens Questions

Encourage your class to read the scriptures and essays before coming to class so that you don't need to spend a lot of time reading or reviewing. Have copies of the Ecological Lens questions available each week, but other than during your introduction of them the first week, don't try to cover all of them. If you apply one of the Ecological Lens questions each week, your group will still get some practice with all of them. The *Study Guide* suggests the questions that might be most fruitful to look at with that week's scriptures.

Consider Outreach:

Have you thought of inviting your neighbors? The emphasis on learning about your local community might be a draw for people who wouldn't normally come to church.

Choosing the Best Format for Your Group

There are many ways to package the material in this curriculum. Just because we designed it with traditional 13-week, one-hour sessions in mind doesn't mean you need to use it that way. We hope people will be creative in adapting this material to fit their time frame and context. The material below outlines a few of the ways we can imagine adapting this material for a shorter series, worship services, and retreats. If you know you do want a quarter-long study, read section 1.A. below and then proceed to the *Leader's Guide* for Session 1.

1. Ideas for Sunday Morning Formats

A. The Standard Format: A 13-week Quarter on Creation Care

The class covers one session each week with the 13th Sunday available for overflow, taking a fieldtrip, planning next steps or accommodating interruptions. Participants are expected to read the texts for the week and the weekly essay ahead of time. They are also invited to try one or more of the practices listed in the sessions.

At least two people share the leadership load. One focuses on the ideas presented in the scripture readings and essays in this document, the *Every Creature Singing Leader's Guide*, and a second person works with the questions focusing on the ecosystem of your community using the *Local Ecosystem Focus Guide*. Two others may be appointed to see that some attention is given to Suggested Spiritual Practices and Suggested Household Practices.

Giving each of these areas adequate attention will be challenging. You will need to make choices, and not all of the four areas will be covered each week. One way to make sure the Bible study piece gets covered is to kick off your 13-week unit by offering Retreat D, Finding Creation in the Word, the week before you begin. Similarly, concluding with one of the other retreats below could help cement practices.

This material could be a church-wide study with all of the Christian education classes focused on creation care for a quarter. If you do that, consider shuffling class groupings so that household members meet in the same group. If families or housemates experience the same discussions, they can then more easily agree on decisions in their homes.

B. The Abridged Format I: A Four to Six-Week Unit on Creation Care

Use the sessions as written, but focus on just one of the three units within the 13-week curriculum:

- Exploring Biblical and Theological Roots
- Pursuing Peace and Justice
- Choosing a Sustainable Lifestyle

For a six-week session, use the additional two weeks to summarize the other two units you are not covering. For example, if you want to focus on Pursuing Peace and Justice, you might begin with an introductory session that explains the Ecological Lens questions and Local Ecosystem Focus questions from Session 1. For your sixth gathering,

reflect on how choosing a sustainable lifestyle is part of pursuing peace and justice, using Session 9.

Coming back to the other units later will keep creation care in front of the group over an extended period of time without wearing out the topic.

C. The Abridged Format II: An Eight to Thirteen Week Unit on Creation Care

This model covers fewer sessions, allowing two weeks for each session instead of one. You would spend the first week discussing the biblical texts and essay and you would also introduce the suggested practices and Local Ecosystem questions. The second week, you would focus on the Local Ecosystem questions and have time for people to discuss their experiences with the suggested practices. If you have eight weeks, you could cover one of the three units. If you have a full quarter, you could cover one of the three units plus one session from each of the other two units. This extended format might be needed in a congregation where Christian education time is short or also includes time for sharing of prayer concerns. Another advantage of this approach is that it allows more time for review and application.

D. A Worship and Christian Education Series

Choose the sessions that interest you to create a worship series. Use the suggested texts and/or ideas from the essays as the basis of a sermon. You have permission to borrow from the essays or even read them as they stand, provided you give MCCN a footnote. If you only want to do one Sunday with a creation emphasis, we suggest Session 2.

Combining a shortened version of the curriculum with a worship series and running them simultaneously has advantages. For one thing, it sends the message that creation care is a concern for the entire church, not just a few people with an agenda. Secondly, it allows you to cover the material people *should have* read in the sermon and worship time. This brings everyone up to speed for fruitful discussions.

E. The Tracked Model: A 13-week Quarter with Interest Groups

This approach assumes you are a larger congregation with multiple Christian education classes. Offer two to four *Every Creature Singing* classes and allow people to select the emphases that matter to them most. All of the classes cover the same material the same week, but one emphasizes the Bible study piece; another leans toward the circle question piece; a third devotes time to the spiritual practices piece and a fourth stresses household and congregational practices. If you have three classes, combine both practices emphases into one class. If you

have two classes, one could focus on Bible study and spiritual practices while the other emphasizes the Local Ecosystem Focus questions and Suggested Household Practices in the *Study Guide*.

F. “The Works”: A Yearlong Intensive Transformational Study

For this expanded approach, you spend a month of your Christian education time on each of the twelve sessions in this curriculum. That would definitely send a message that creation care is an important issue! Expanding the sessions that much requires resourceful leaders willing to run with themes presented here and sometimes do their own work.

At the beginning of each month, one worship service is crafted around the session you are studying at that time. The preacher preaches a sermon based on the suggested texts, essay and resources. Meanwhile, during Christian education time, the various components of the sessions are addressed on different weeks:

- **Week 1: Biblical basis of the session.** Work through the texts provided using the ecological lens questions.
- **Week 2: Local Ecosystem Focus questions** and discussion of local environmental issues.
- **Week 3: Spiritual Practices.** People do some Suggested Spiritual Practices during class time. They have an opportunity to share spiritual practices they’ve tried during the week and offer support to each other.
- **Week 4: Suggested Household Practices.** People discuss what practical responses they have been working on with regard to the session and offer support and suggestions to each other. They make concrete plans for improvements to church property or contributions they can make to the community.

5th Sundays. Walk your neighborhood with the session you just studied in mind, or take a field trip.

Variation: Attend to both spiritual and household practices during Week 3. Using supplementary resources suggested in this curriculum, spend Week 4 discussing issues relevant to your locale. For example, an Alberta congregation might want to look into fracking; a farming congregation might discuss treatment of animals or land.

2. Ideas for Retreats

The first three ideas are left up to your imagination; the last two are sketched out in a little more detail.

A. Shaping Our Spiritual Lives as if the Earth Mattered

See the *Study Guide* for a list of all of the spiritual practices suggested in this curriculum. Select several and take time to do them together in a retreat setting. Another option would be to notice and interact with nature on your own property.

B. A Local Ecosystem Focus Staycation

Instead of using fossil fuels to drive away from your community for an extended time together, explore your own community using the Local Ecosystem Focus questions in this curriculum. Break up into interest groups to pursue questions from different sessions. Meet back together to share findings, a meal, a worship service.

Such an approach could complement a Christian education class on the biblical portion of the *Every Creature Singing* curriculum or stand alone. If you have a river within your local ecosystem, canoeing can be another interesting way to get a new perspective on your landscape.

C. Visiting Another Community's Ecosystem

If your congregation has the habit of meeting together for a yearly retreat an hour or two away from the church building, consider making this year's gathering a chance to get to know another community through the Local Ecosystem Focus questions you've been using. Choose an area that is geographically, racially, or economically different from your own. The comments below envision gathering on a Friday night and spending two two-hour blocks discussing Local Ecosystem questions on Saturday.

Advance planning needed:

- Make a map of this area, with a circle marked.
- Plan field trips; line up speakers if there are people you want to meet.
- Find suitable lodging if this is a new area for you.
- Break people into groups or pairs, each with one or two Local Ecosystem questions to explore.

Variation: Two congregations who are working through this curriculum at the same time could take turns hosting each other for a day. In that

case, it might work better to start Saturday morning and end your retreat on Sunday with shared worship.

D. Finding Creation in the Word: A Bible Study Retreat Using Through an Ecological Lens Questions

This retreat devotes three hours to the texts covered in this curriculum and the Ecological Lens questions. If you are doing the standard 13-session plan as well, place this retreat beforehand or early in the quarter. It would be a great opportunity to teach people about the Ecological Lens questions and how to work with them.

Session 1: 60 minutes (introduce Ecological Lens questions and give examples)

- 15 minutes — Overview of Ecological Lens questions
- 15 minutes — Spotlight on question A
- 15 minutes — Spotlight on question B
- 15 minutes — Spotlight on question C

Break - refreshments: 15 minutes

Session 2: 45 minutes

- 15 minutes — Spotlight on question D
- 15 minutes — Spotlight on question E
- 15 minutes — Spotlight on question F

Break: 10 minutes

Session 3: 50 to 55 minutes

20 minutes—Putting all the questions together

- Invite individuals to choose a favorite Bible passage and apply all of the Ecological Lens questions. Not all of the questions will yield results, but some may give you new insights into the text. Work on your own. Study outside if weather permits.

30 minutes—Sharing your work

- In groups of three or four, share your experiences with the favorite biblical texts you worked on individually. If you spent time with the passage outdoors, also discuss how this affected your reading. Is the setting of the text indoors or outdoors?
- Then choose one of the texts presented and together, brainstorm ways this passage could be shared in a worship

service in a way that helps people see and hear creation in the text.

- Come back together as a whole group if you split up and have each group present their text or at least share their idea.
- Conclude with a prayer and a wrap-up question such as:
 - What is one thing that you found valuable about this retreat?
 - Which question did you find most illuminating?
 - What hopes do you have for our quarter-long study of creation care?

E. A Watershed Discipleship Workday, at Church and in Homes

In this four to eight-hour block, participants share tasks around the church that can reduce their energy consumption, improve hospitality to other species or in other ways make a congregation greener. This is a time and place to “just get it done.” Including a meal is one way to reward your hard work.

All participants gather at the beginning and end of the retreat for 15 minutes of worship and prayer. In between, they break into teams. Each congregation will need to determine what needs doing in their context. One or two groups might work on an area of need related to the church building. Another group might make house calls to people’s homes. A third group might work on an outreach project in the community. In order for this to function as a retreat for people, you might want to build in other fun activities as well, such as a pool party at a member’s home, a backyard ball game, etc.

Advance Planning might include:

- Discerning what needs doing.
- Training youth or others without hands-on skills to perform the tasks you want done.
- Raising funds for materials.
- Finding out who is available for tasks and who is interested in working on what.
- Enlisting a worship and/or song leader.
- Enlisting cooks if you want to include a meal in your retreat.

Ideas for Church Buildings:

- Install insulation.
- Install a rain garden or native plantings.
- Change to energy efficient light bulbs if that has not already been done.
- Insulate water heaters.

Ideas for Home Visits:

- Have individuals propose tasks they need help with, such as insulating or installing a low flow toilet for example. Match these tasks with people who know how to do them.
- Handy person tutorial: Have a person with hands-on skills show others how to install low-flow showerheads or weather stripping, etc. Or determine three or four simple tasks—like installing compact fluorescent light bulbs, for example—and take them from house to house.
- Don't underestimate the importance of including non-skilled labor. Sure, it would be easier if the building caretakers did all the work, but others need to learn too. You are not just imparting information; you are helping to form habits. Anyone can look up how to weather strip a window on the internet, but if you've never *done* it, you're not likely to do it. Find ways to pair experienced and inexperienced workers.

Ideas for Outreach:

- CFL light bulb giveaway: On a limited income, it is difficult to make up-front investments even if they save you money. Find a way to share CFL light bulbs with low-income members of your community.
- Extend home efficiency house calls described above to the surrounding neighborhood. This would require door-to-door advertising in advance, inviting people to sign up. First check if free services like this are already available to people in your community through city services or utility companies.
- Youth fundraiser carwash with a twist: Include tire pressure checks along with the cleaning service provided and give each customer a sheet about energy-efficient car maintenance and driving practices. ([See fuel economy tips here.](#)) Coach youth in ways to pitch the energy efficiency idea.

- Check with your local park department or city hall for suggestions on ways you can contribute to the environmental health of your community. Culling invasive species on parkland is a group project that anyone can participate in. A river clean-up in canoes could combine intergenerational fun, a valuable service and a new view of your community. Planting trees in a low-income neighborhood or maintaining plantings is another valuable service.
- Link your choice of project to something you learned through the Local Ecosystem Focus questions in the *Every Creature Singing Study Guide*. Note that these contacts with the public are also an opportunity to share a brochure about your church and a friendly invitation to visit some Sunday.

Session 1:

Don't Be Afraid

Goals for Session 1

Make sure you cover at least the first three goals below.

By the end of the session, people will:

- Know what you mean by an “ecological lens” and what questions are involved
- Have applied these questions to Matthew 1
- Know what is meant by “local ecosystem focus” and know roughly what is included in the radius circle your group is going to use
- Have reviewed the four points outlined in the session 1 essay and examined their reactions to them
 - The long view is important
 - God is with us
 - Christ is central to what this endeavour is all about
 - The Bible speaks to us in our own time and place.
- Be excited about exploring the Bible, their community and the suggested spiritual and household practices in the *Study Guide*.

Advance Preparation

Don't worry, there's much less to do next week.

Orient Yourself to This Curriculum by reviewing the following:

- The outline of this curriculum (found at the beginning of the *Study Guide*).
- The Introduction and Session 1 of the *Study Guide*.
- The Introduction and Session 1 of the *Leader's Guide*.
- The *Local Ecosystem Focus Guide*. Even though you are delegating this piece to someone else, you will need to know what that portion of the class involves.

Communicate with Prospective Attenders:

- Put an announcement in your church newsletter or send an email inviting people to look at the *Every Creature Singing Study Guide* online. If possible, have them read the Introduction and Session 1 before the first class. If that's not possible, you will need to orient people more thoroughly.

Delegate Roles:

- The primary leader will work mainly with the biblical/theological piece of the study. However, your group will benefit greatly if people with other gifts help with the different facets of the course. Tap several people who are planning to attend the class for the following roles:
 - **Local Ecosystem Focus leader or leaders:** This role requires weekly research and, if you are able to use a projector and laptop during class, it helps to have someone comfortable with Google Maps or Google Earth. If one person fills this role, choose an outward-looking individual with Internet access. An

environmental professional would be ideal if you have one in the congregation.

There is also merit to dividing up Local Ecosystem Focus questions week by week. One person could make the map described in the *Local Ecosystem Focus Guide* for an introduction to your local ecosystem and run the projector when needed; others could take turns researching the questions based on interests or schedule. If your congregation is skeptical of “tree huggers,” it might help to have input from a variety of people instead of one green enthusiast. Besides, the questions are not only about nature and ecology; they cover a broad range of topics related to community living. It is important to be clear with your Local Ecosystem Focus leader or leaders about how much time they will have in class; otherwise you will be competing for class time. Check in on timing each week.

- **Keeper of Spiritual Practices:** You might find a person with this interest on your worship commission. If so, he or she will be well positioned to apply learning from this class in your worship services.
- **Keeper of Household Practices:** Choose a doer. If a person from your facility committee is available, he or she can help translate these suggestions into improvements to your building and grounds.

The practice keepers need not have teaching responsibilities, but it helps to have someone present who is alert to this facet of the course. They might bring a new angle to the discussion, or find a way to implement class insights in your worship or congregational life. Another way to engage people and spread the responsibility would be to call for volunteers at the end of each class period: *“Who could try one of the spiritual practices and report back?”*

Gather Supplies:

- The Local Ecosystem Focus questions require a map. See the [Local Ecosystem Focus Guide](#) and coordinate with your Local Ecosystem Focus leader.
- A bulletin board is not essential, but if you have one, you can hang up local news clippings related to environmental issues or events related to your studies.
- Through an Ecological Lens questions are used each week. They are

available in the *Study Guide* or for download in [poster](#) or [handout](#) format.

- The *Prayer of Intent* is also used each week. It is available in the *Study Guide* or for download in [poster](#) or [handout format](#).
- We encourage the use of electronic documents for this curriculum to conserve resources and for the advantage of easily following links to online resources. If you feel that some individuals would prefer to work with printed copies, make arrangements with your church secretary to print the necessary copies.

Options for Leading Session 1

The Keep-It-Focused Option

Main point: God is with us. God does not give up on us. Therefore, we can face grim truths about our environmental situation without fear and despair.

Use discussion question #2 about environmental fears as an icebreaker. Then pass out Through an Ecological Lens handouts and demonstrate these questions using Matthew 1 or a favorite Bible story familiar to all. If you use Matthew 1, see the tips in point 5 below.

Ask your Local Ecosystem Focus leader to review the concept of watershed discipleship mentioned in the introduction, and present the map he or she has prepared. After you've worked through today's circle questions, close with an idea that interested you from the "God is with us" section of the essay.

More Ideas

1. **Prayer of Intent:** Get in the habit of introducing each session with the prayer of intent provided in [poster](#) or [handout format](#), or a similar one.
2. **Curriculum access:** Make sure everyone has access to the curriculum, either electronically or via a paper copy. We encourage reading the curriculum electronically to conserve resources and for the advantage of easily following and navigating to links to other resources.
3. **For discussion question 3:** Allow adequate time to discuss Matthew 1 together, as it introduces the ecological lens. One way to ask the question

is to ponder how land is part of the story that this genealogy reviews. If you are still not sure how to find an ecological interpretation in this text, here are some clues:

- **Ecological Lens Questions A & C:** Matthew’s genealogy is shorthand for the entire history of Israel. It is brimming with stories, many of which have to do with Israel’s relationship with its land. While this text doesn’t mention any plants, animals or landscape features, they are there in the shadows, along with the wives and mothers of these men. Think of Abraham’s long quest for a land to belong to; think of the cedars of Lebanon felled for Solomon’s building projects.
 - **Ecological Lens Question B:** Seeing Jesus’ name appearing in a genealogy reminds us that God-with-us was born into a particular ecological context and place in history. From there, one might ponder how desert landscapes shaped biblical thought, or the fact that people walked everywhere they went. (More on that next week.)
 - **Ecological Lens Question D:** There’s a lot of “begetting” going on in this text. This is a natural process built into creation. Do you see human fertility as a gift from God?
 - **Ecological Lens Questions D & E:** Emmanuel—God incarnate—appears in this text as an unwanted fetus. Jesus comes to us as a human baby, flesh and blood, umbilical cord and amniotic sac, spirit and matter. Throughout Western history, people have tended to value the spiritual and devalue the earthly, but the biblical story insists on holding the two together. God values nature and all its earthy, messy practices!
 - **Ecological Lens Question F:** The deportation to Babylon is mentioned. Here, Israel’s relationship with God and its land is broken due to sin: breaking the covenant, worshipping other gods, failure to keep the Ten Commandments and injustice to the poor. That the land suffers when human beings sin is an idea that is widespread in the Old Testament. Examples include Jeremiah 7:20, 9:10, 12:4. In contrast, Ruth’s story is mentioned in the genealogy, evoking just land laws that enable the poor to glean and to regain family land.
4. **Empty chairs:** Include three empty chairs and label them to represent the following voiceless members of our planet who have a stake in your conversations:
- Future generations
 - Other species
 - Those most affected by environmental problems¹

1 This idea comes from the social ethicist, Larry Rasmussen. See [Voices from Empty Chairs](#).

Children's drawings taped to the first chair could evoke future generations. A fish tank, photo collage of animals or a bouquet of native plants might represent other species. Usually, the poor are the ones most vulnerable to the effects of floods, hurricanes or toxins. News clippings or photos from a recent environmental disaster could make this audience concrete.

5. **What if no one's afraid?** If you sense that your group is oblivious to environmental problems, you might want to begin with a brief video recapping the state of affairs. Here are several options:
 - [Welcome to the Anthropocene](#). In three minutes, this video commissioned for the 2012 Planet Under Pressure conference sums up both the accomplishments of the past 250 years and the planetary challenges we face as a result.
 - [All Things](#): This four-minute video from Intervarsity Christian Fellowship emphasizes that loving our neighbor means caring for creation.
 - Sites such as [National Geographic](#), [The Smithsonian](#) and [Climate Science](#) also have short clips to choose from.

Session 2:

Jesus and Creation—In Search of a Whole Gospel

Goals for Session 2

Circle your first priority.

By the end of the session, people will:

- Have examined their own understandings of the Gospel in light of those suggested in the essay for this session.
- Have thought about what Jesus of Nazareth’s relationship with creation might have been like.
- Have caught a glimpse of Christ the creator of all things.
- Be eager to try at least one of the spiritual and household practices suggested in the *Study Guide* for this session.
- Have practiced applying the Ecological Lens questions to a New Testament text.

Advance Preparation

- Make a practice of both reading ahead and reviewing where you’ve been the previous week. This will provide coherence and balance to your discussions. See the curriculum outline in the *Study Guide*. This document can serve as your map throughout the course.
- Check in with your Local Ecosystem Focus leader on when in the session to include the Local Ecosystem Focus questions and how much time to allow.
- The suggestion “Seven-word Gospels” under More Ideas requires sticky notes.

Options for Leading Session 2

Remember this is not a lesson plan; these are ideas to choose from and shape to fit your class.

The Keep-It-Focused Option

Main point: *Jesus is the Savior of all of creation, not just human beings.*

Begin with the *Prayer of Intent* to focus your discussion. It is important to model this practice. Allow some time for backtracking to include people who were not present last week. Review the Ecological Lens questions and the importance of the Local Ecosystem Focus for this study. Also see how people fared with any of the spiritual or household practices they tried.

Then practice using the Ecological Lens questions on Colossians 1 and John 3:16. This leads into discussion question 2 as to whether a Gospel that does not include the Earth is a whole Gospel. Allow your Local Ecosystem Focus leader some time and then conclude with discussion question 5.

More Ideas

1. **Seven-word Gospels:** The first discussion question asks people to state their understanding of the Gospel in seven words. Provide people with sticky notes and have them attempt to express the Gospel in seven words. Post the sticky notes on the wall and compare them. Is there any good news for non-human creation on your wall? Where does non-human creation fit into your group's understanding of the good news? Is it represented? If it is not represented, ask people to try again and come up with seven-word Gospels that include creation.

Here are some examples if your group gets stuck:

- **We and the Earth are saved together.** See the paragraph at the bottom of page 1 of the essay. In contrast, texts such as Isaiah 24:4-6 show the Earth and humans suffering from evil together.
 - **God loved the WORLD and gave Jesus.** In this paraphrase of John 3:16, point out that the Greek word for world is *kosmos* and includes all things. Why do we assume that *world* only refers to humans?
 - **God's shalom for all creation: you too.** See Session 5 for more on shalom.
2. **What kind of Jesus does your congregation preach?** To make your discussion of question 4 as concrete as possible, jog people's memories by listing a few recent sermons from Gospel texts, or bring in examples of children's curriculum you use. You could also bring a copy of your church's mission statement. Favorite hymns are another window into your theology.
 3. **Take an interest poll:** If your group read the curriculum, they may have come with their own questions and interests. You don't need to intervene in the flow unless some people are dominating or the discussion strays off topic.
 4. **End times:** Your class may raise the question of how a theology that emphasizes salvation for all of creation deals with end times and/or the end of life. Eco-theologies reject the idea that planet Earth is destined for destruction while believers escape to some other reality. They see this idea as inconsistent with the God of the incarnation and a God who raised Jesus from the dead in bodily form. They embrace texts such as Revelation 21 and 22, which depict the presence of God coming to dwell fully on Earth, and interpret most other apocalyptic texts in light of this ultimate, earthy fulfillment. The main point you will want to dwell upon, however, is that whatever future God has in store, we are to live faithfully in the meantime, and that includes loving and caring for God's creation.

For further help on this topic, see:

Rossing, Barbara. [*The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation*](#). New York, NY: Basic Books, 2004.

Wright, N.T. [*Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*](#). New York, NY: HarperOne, 2008.

Session 3:

Biblical Views of Nature



Goals for Session 3

Circle your priorities. Remember, these are ideas to choose among, not a structured lesson plan.

By the end of the session, people will:

- Examine their attitudes toward nature and compare and contrast them with the ideas presented in the essay.
- Broaden their understanding of community to include the community of creation.
- Learn from each other about parts of the natural world that class members value. They will identify actions that could help sustain these aspects of nature.
- See ecological learning as a part of discipleship.

Advance Preparation

- A good way to prepare for this session is to spend time in nature. Reading nature writers is another source of inspiration. Two authors who deliver short pieces that can be read at bedtime or at a bus stop are Sy Montgomery and Edwin Way Teale. Or find a book of poetry by Mary Oliver.
- This session begs to be held outside, or to include a brief walk. If that won't work, bring a few natural objects into the classroom to pass around. Items you found on your church property are especially appropriate.

Options for Leading Session 3

The Keep-It-Focused Option

Main Point: *The Earth belongs to God and has its own relationship with God independent of human beings.*

Begin this session with people's experiences related to nature. Everyone should be able to respond to question 1 and the first part of 2 from the Key Idea questions. Hear from each member, or break into small groups for discussion. Work through the other questions as you have time and conclude with the second part of 2: What actions would sustain the parts of the natural world that you value most?

More Ideas

1. **Nature as community:** Has your group had experiences that enable them to imagine non-humans as members of their congregation and community? Here's an outtake from the essay that might serve as an example:

I once met a woman whose teenage son was training a pair of oxen on the family farm. After spending a good deal of time with the animals, he left for summer camp. The family was sharing a meal together the night of his return when they suddenly had the uncanny feeling they were being watched. There at the window stood the boy's oxen, peering into the dining room as if indignant about their exclusion from the boy's welcome-home party. They had never escaped from their pen before and never did so again, the woman said. "Now my son always makes sure he greets his oxen first when he has been away," she laughed.

If you have farmers in your congregation, you have a unique opportunity to explore the practicalities and challenges of an issue such as the loss of monarch butterfly habitat. (See Household Practice #2.) What would it cost a farmer to farm as if monarch butterflies were important? How do you weigh these costs in light of Exodus 23:10-11 where the land's sabbaticals are intended to benefit both the poor and animals?

- 2. Nature in worship services:** How might your congregational life emphasize our relationship with creation? Here are some ideas to think about:

Visuals in the sanctuary: Are native wildflowers available?

Offering: What about seasonal offerings of fruits and vegetables to share with a local food pantry?

Communion: How can you help people relate the elements to the bread and grapes they came from?

Fellowship time: Is there an inviting outdoor area that entices people to connect with creation?

Bulletin boards: You could feature a species that lives on your property or in your community each month.

Note that some of these ideas also occur in Session 12.

Session 4:

Finding Our Place in Creation

Goals for Session 4

Circle your top priority.

By the end of this session, people will:

- Understand living in right relationship with the Earth as central to the role God has given us.
- Identify areas where they have dominion over land or other species and reflect on what responsible dominion looks like in their own contexts.
- Be able to hear themes of interconnectedness and dependence in the Genesis creation stories. They will be able to name ways we are *like* the rest of creation as well as ways humans are unique.
- Reflect on what the call to earth keeping means for the mission of their congregation and the broader Church.

Advance Preparation

- Read through the session and spend time with Genesis 1-2. Circle the goals and discussion questions that seem right for your group. Look back over Session 3, since the two sessions are closely related.
- If other people are leading Ecological Lens questions and Household/Spiritual Practices suggestions, coordinate how their parts will fit in.
- Find a copy of your church's mission statement for Key Idea question 5. Write it on poster board if it is brief or copy it so that everyone can see it.

Options for leading Session 4

Remember these are suggestions to choose from and adapt, not a lesson plan.

The Keep-It-Focused Option

Main Point: *Our relationship with the rest of creation is one of the central concerns of the Christian faith.*

Begin by asking your group what they think the top 5 concerns of the Christian faith are. List their answers on a white board and then have participants rank them. Where does our relationship with the rest of creation come in the list and why? Then spend most of your time on Key Idea question 2, regarding the understandings of nature that you explored last week. Review the five key points listed near the beginning of Session 3. Do they shed any light on our unique relationship with and responsibility for the natural world? Then move to practical implications for your congregation, as in Digging Deeper discussion questions 3 and 4.

More Ideas

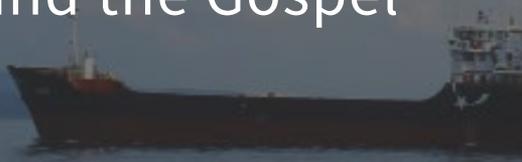
1. **Remember to begin the discussion** with the prayer of intent you printed out for Session 1. Or use your own prayer of intent to focus the discussion.
2. **Create cognitive dissonance:** The challenge with Genesis 1 is that for some, it is over-familiar. People think they know what it says and lapse quietly into a daze. Of the four points made in the essay, pick the one you think will be most challenging for your group and then “discover” it for yourselves by working through the text.

3. **Not everyone takes kindly** to the idea that beloved scriptures have done harm. At the end of the second paragraph, the essay asserts that misuse of the idea of dominion has helped to “raze forests and prairies, enslave Africans and push Native Americans off their lands.” Here are some examples you could cite to make that statement more concrete:
- [Dominion Theology](#) is a contemporary movement that celebrates Christian nationalism and promotes religious supremacy. Genesis 1:26-28 is a primary text for adherents.
 - Learn about the Doctrine of Discovery, a legal framework dating from the 15th century that gave Christian governments the right to invade Indigenous lands. See the [Doctrine of Discovery Fact Sheet](#) and [Yours, Mine, Ours: Unravelling the Doctrine of Discovery](#).
 - [Amadi Ahiamadu](#), presumably a Nigerian, links Genesis 1:26-28 with destructive oil mining in the Niger Delta.
4. **Is caring for creation part of your mission?** These resources can help with Key Idea question 5:
- Review your congregation’s attitude toward creation care with MCCN's [Greener Congregation Scoresheet](#) and use the [Scoresheet Discussion Guide](#) to examine your responses. Appendix 1 offers Statements from the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective and an example covenant of care.
 - Read “Mission After Christendom: The Missio Dei,” in [Worship and Mission After Christendom](#), by Alan and Eleanor Kreider, Herald Press, 2011.
5. **What are we saved from?** If you want to discuss Digging Deeper question 6, check out the following points that reveal how a broken relationship with the earth emerges in these early chapters of the Bible:
- The word "earth" occurs 80 times in these 11 chapters.
 - The act that causes Adam and Eve to lose their place in the garden involves a tree. Humans refuse to respect the limits that God set on their use of nature.
 - The consequence of this act is a broken relationship with the earth: it now grows thorns and thistles and raising food is difficult.
 - The beautiful, life-giving Earth cries out when it is stained with Abel’s blood.
 - Cain is cursed from the earth and driven from the soil when he murders.

- The earth is filled with violence before the flood.
 - Human sin brings about an environmental catastrophe (the flood).
 - The fate of humans and animals is linked in the flood story. The salvation God offers via the ark and flood is for humans, animals and the earth, which is washed clean.
 - The covenant God makes in Genesis 9 is with every living creature, not just Noah's family.
6. **Spending congregational resources on creation:** The suggestions under Digging Deeper question 3 are just examples. Think of options that could provoke discussion in your own context.
7. **Modern science's story of origins:** If question 10 intrigues you, the following resources may be of interest. These are academic readings from a mainline perspective.
- Brown, William. *The Seven Pillars of Creation: The Bible, Science, and the Ecology of Wonder*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010.
 - Ruether, Rosemary Radford. "Does Science have a New Creation Story?" in *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*. New York, NY: HarperOne, 1994, 32-58.
 - Brian Swimme, [Center for the Story of the Universe](#), or *The Universe Story* by Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry.

Session 5:

Slow Violence and the Gospel of Peace



Goals for Session 5

Remember this is not a lesson plan; these are ideas to choose among.

By the end of the session, people will:

- Be able to name the elements of the biblical understanding of shalom.
- See creation care as an integral part of a Christian's peace witness and be able to explain why the two go hand in hand.
- Know what is meant by environmental injustice and be able to identify ways we are all connected to this issue.
- Be aware of potential hazards nearby and how this may affect human residents or local ecosystems.
- Find hope in Jesus as reconciler, savior, redeemer of all creation.

Advance Preparation

- **Review:** Beginning a new unit is a good time to reread the introductory material in this curriculum, just to make sure you are keeping the class focused and balanced in the way you would like. Did the Ecological Lens questions get lost along the way? Are you communicating well with your Local Ecosystem Focus leader about times and content? Adjust as necessary.

- **Look ahead:** Also skim through the other three sessions in the Pursuing Peace and Justice section so that you know where you are going and can make a few comments about Unit 2.
- **Preparing for the climate change session:** Next week plunges into climate change. Depending on how much background your group has on this topic, you may want to point people to the Suggested Resources on Climate Change in Session 6 of the *Every Creature Singing Study Guide*. Ask them to spend a half hour or so with some of these. If you anticipate conflict, consider doing Session 7 before 6.
- **Role-play option:** If you plan to use the [Role-Play Handout](#), make the necessary copies. If you want more informed actors, email the role sheet to participants in advance so they can look up the footnote on their character or find related articles.

Options for leading Session 5

The Keep-it-Focused Option

Main point: *Creation care is an integral part of the good news of Jesus Christ and a Christian's peace witness.*

Begin with a time of prayer using Jesus' tears in Luke 19:41-44. Work through the goals listed above. Stick to points 1, 2 and 6 in the essay. Conclude with comments from your circle leader on local hazards and/or environmental injustices.

More Ideas

1. **Look for opportunities for lament and confession.** This week's biblical text is a lament, and there is much to lament about as we examine today's environmental violence. Perhaps allow a period of silence for this purpose. Confession #697 in the *Hymnal: A Worship Book* fits well with today's session and even mentions today's text.
2. **Look for opportunities to celebrate good news.** This session on environmental violence could be very heavy if your group recognizes the truth about all of our lives. We are all caught in webs of injustice and violence that we cannot escape. Sin is not an important category for many upright people, but sin includes those unseen broken relationships that we are powerless to fix on our own. This session helps us see our unintended sins, and this can give us powerful new insights into the meaning of repentance and salvation. Help people grasp the good news in the concluding page of the essay.
3. **Spend time with the weeping Jesus** in Luke 19:41-44. Here is additional material you might wish to share.

These words are uttered while Jesus is riding toward Jerusalem on a donkey. Commentator Fred Craddock describes them as a lament: a complex form of expression that interweaves love, grief, anger and the loss of a vision of what could have been.² They are found only in Luke and add an unexpected twist to the very familiar “triumphal entry” story that we celebrate with palm branches and happy children.

The processional could be called an “acted prophecy.” It is a claim to kingship based on Zechariah 9:9-10. While we often quote verse 9 about a humble king riding the transportation of the poor rather than a king's warhorse, many readers may be ignorant of verse 10:

He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the war-horse from Jerusalem;
And the battle bow shall be cut off,
and he shall command peace to the nations...

2 Fred Craddock, *Luke. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville, MO: John Knox Press, 1990.

This, along with Jesus' rejection of help from a sword during his arrest, underscores Jesus' rejection of violence.

Ecological Lens Question B: Usually, we think of the “triumphal entry” taking place in the city of Jerusalem, but Luke describes the procession descending from the Mount of Olives, a mile or so away. While we don't know exactly what Jesus was looking at, the higher altitude would have given him a broad view of Jerusalem within its ecological context. In Jesus' day, the land around Jerusalem was being intensively farmed for imperial estates. If Jesus had a good sense of history, he likely knew that this area was once beautiful parkland covered with trees. However, they were cut down to make catapults and battering rams during Pompey's siege against Jerusalem in 63 BCE.³ Jesus may also have had a good view of the social stratification of Jerusalem. The city was organized with the wealthier elites living in the center of the city and the poorest people and outcasts remaining on the outskirts.

The siege and the destruction that Jesus describes in these verses did come to pass in A.D. 70.

4. **Role play option:** It is appalling to think of the price people in the developing world pay to provide North American lifestyles, but there are no simple solutions. Give your group permission to explore the complexities of environmental injustice by having a few of them spend the class in someone else's skin. The [Role-play Handout](#) for this session introduces a lively and opinionated cast of characters, all related to the issue of using Africa as a dumping ground for toxic waste. Copy the sheet and distribute it to willing class members. Then proceed with the discussion questions. Actors should stay in character throughout the class period.

3 Josephus describes this in the *Jewish Antiquities*.

Session 6:

Environmental Disasters, Ancient and Modern

Goals of Session 1

Circle two or three priorities from the goals below.

By the end of the session, people will:

- Be able to define climate change and list at least three kinds of measurements scientists take to determine if the planet is warming.
- Understand both the unprecedented nature of current environmental challenges and the continuity with losses people experienced in the past.
- Have felt God's anger and grief when the land is spoiled by human sin.
- Have found some common ground with the group as a whole in spite of whatever differences of opinion may exist.
- Leave feeling hopeful about some aspect of the discussion and empowered to respond to climate change in some way.

Advance Preparation

- Spend time with some of the recommended resources on climate change and decide which ones would be helpful to mention to your group.
- Review the Canadian Council of Ministers for the Environment PDF, [Climate, Nature, People: Indicators of Canada's Changing Climate](#) and print out the summary on pages 39 and 40. Hang these pages up in your classroom.
- The Local Ecosystem Focus questions could be time consuming this week. Consider whether you want to spend your extra session on climate change.
- Get scratch paper for the first option in "More Ideas" on the next page.

Options for leading Session 6

Remember this is not a lesson plan; these are ideas to choose from and adapt.

The Keep-It-Focused Option

Main point: Climate change is real; human behavior is causing it and it will bring unprecedented changes to our planet. How do we respond as followers of Jesus Christ?

Follow suggestions 1 and 2 below; then hear from your Local Ecosystem Focus leader. Follow up with Key Ideas question 4 on the small, tractable problems that make up climate change. Close with a reminder that God suffers with us, no matter what.

More Ideas

1. **Begin the discussion** by having everyone write down the following:
With regard to climate change:
 - What is one thing you believe you have in common with most people present?
 - Name an angle or perspective that is unique to you. This could be something others might disagree with or it might relate to your life experience.

First invite people to share what they think they have in common. Write

these offerings on the board and then try to establish the common ground within your group. Maybe everyone is concerned about what kind of world future generations will experience. Maybe everyone agrees that reducing fossil fuel consumption is a good idea even if they don't all believe in climate change. Or maybe you all have a risen Lord.

Next ask about what unique insight each person brings. Hopefully this will provide space for climate change doubters in a room of believers, or vice versa. It could also turn up some really interesting perspectives based on line of work or life history. An insurance agent and a farmer, for example, would each have unique reasons to be concerned.

2. **Provide background on climate change.** How much time you spend reviewing information about climate change will vary with the needs of the group. At minimum, point out the items you posted on the wall, and mention a few of the indicators that scientists track with regard to climate change. Provide the link to the Canadian Council of Ministers for the Environment PDF, [*Climate, Nature, People: Indicators of Canada's Changing Climate*](#) for further reading. Point out the recommended resources at the end of the participant guide. Or coordinate with your Local Ecosystem Focus leader and leave the science piece entirely to him or her.
3. **Another option for a starting point:** Begin the class with a few minutes of silence during which you lead the class in a guided meditation along these lines:
 - Imagine a time when someone else messed up a place that you value. Maybe you watched someone litter, or saw a bulldozer destroy the forest where you played as a child, or cleaned the house only to have it trashed an hour later. Think about how it made you feel.
 - Now imagine what God must feel like when people, other species and landscapes cannot flourish because of human foolishness. These are the emotions described throughout the book of Jeremiah.

You could also use this meditation to conclude the session.

4. **Digging Deeper Question 1 is important.** This question gives you the chance to review content from the first unit on biblical and theological perspectives and apply it to a real world problem. See what people bring up, but here are ideas that would be good to reinforce and connect to climate change:
 - **From Session 1:** God is with us no matter what, and does not plan to abandon this planet. Also review this Andrew

Shepherd quotation from the essay about Christian ecological living involving suffering: *To walk in the steps of the suffering Savior will surely involve coming face to face with degradation and pollution...the polluted stream, the toxic waste dump, the rubbish-filled gully... Inevitably, these places of environmental destruction will often be the places where those less fortunate, those blessed by God, also reside. A characteristic mark, therefore, of Christian ecological living will be an acceptance of and experiencing of suffering and pain.*⁴

- **From Session 2:** Christ is both creator and redeemer of creation, and God’s intent is to save all of creation, not just human beings.
 - **From Session 3:** All parts of nature are of value, and are able to voice praise and lament. If we understand these beings as part of our community, their distress is our distress as well.
 - **From Session 4:** What aspects of the human vocation suggested in Genesis 1 and 2 are most relevant to climate change? Appropriate dominion? Service?
5. **Stress the need for political pressure.** Spiritual practice 3 asks people to identify themselves as Christians and ask their leadership to address climate change, even at a cost. My colleague whose expertise is in policy says, “My state uses coal for 95% of all its electricity. With a simple, significant federal carbon tax at the source, that would radically change in five years. With enough federal will power, my carbon footprint would collapse infinitely faster than if I use LED lights and carpool.”
 6. **Include an action step:** The magnitude of climate change can paralyze people. Model active hope by discussing Key Idea question 4 on small, solvable problems or encourage people to work on their carbon footprints.
 7. **Remind people of their common ground:** At the end of the session, summarize some of the unique perspectives you have within the group and remind people of the common ground that appeared in suggestion 2 above. Underscore God’s power to bring life out of death.

4 Andrew Shepherd, “Creation and Christology: The Ecological Crisis And Eschatological Ethics.” *Stimulus* 18.4 (2010): 51-57. An adaptation made for this curriculum is available [here](#).

Session 7:

Hearing from the Global Community

Goals for Session 7

Choose and circle your priorities.

By the end of the session, people will:

- Link Ephesians 2:11-22 with the contemporary church's need to work with divisive environmental issues and walls created by geography, culture and social class.
- Become curious about others' perspectives—either within your church, your local ecosystem or globally—and brainstorm ways to learn more.
- Notice ways in which human divisions lead to environmental damage or inefficient use of resources.
- Gain at least one new insight into the ways our lifestyles are connected to environmental impacts around the globe.
- Be interested in making at least one behavior change in response to this session.

Advance Preparation

- This session discusses dividing walls—walls that disconnect us from global voices, as well as those environmental issues that act as walls dividing our communities and congregations. Pray for your classmates and any dividing lines you are aware of.
- Note that this session could be focused within your congregation, within your local ecosystem or globally. Decide which is most important to stress and select goals accordingly.



Options for leading Session 7

Remember, this is a list of ideas and options, not a lesson plan.

The Keep-it-Focused Option

Main point: *God’s work in Christ is compared to the keystone of an arch built from broken walls. This metaphor offers us guidance in breaking down walls that limit our ability to live sustainably and protect the earth.*

Begin and end with wall imagery. Spend most of your time on Key Idea question 2. Name the “walls” related to creation care that most confine your group and imagine ways to break them down.

More ideas

1. **Recap and anticipate:** Whatever priorities you have embraced during this course, make sure each session looks both backward and forward. Briefly review last week’s topic and allow a few minutes for people to report on any practices they tried. Also review practices for the coming week.
2. **Coordinate with your Local Ecosystem Focus leader.** The *Local Ecosystem Focus Guide* questions suggest two directions. See whether your leader prefers to look at different groups within your local ecosystem or goods sold within your local ecosystem that connect you to producers in other parts of the world. Plan the lesson accordingly.

3. **Try drawing a web** of your congregation's global connections. Start with a large sheet of flip chart paper or an empty board. Draw a large circle in the middle, representing your congregation. Ask people to add their names inside the circle as they are entering the room. Then brainstorm all of the direct connections you have to other settings around the world. Jot these around the outside of the circle with lines connecting them to the individuals involved. International members of your congregation are one link to other places. Other ways connections may have formed include friends, travel, service experiences, sister church relationships and missionaries you support.
 - Step back and review which of these connections are most significant for your congregation. How can you strengthen them? How can they enable you to be better earth keepers?
 - You could also draw a web showing how you are connected to people with radically different ideas about environmental problems: friends, neighbors, relatives, sister churches, etc.

On discussing divisions: If you plan to raise questions about divisions within your church related to environmental issues, take a look at [Agreeing and Disagreeing in Love](#).

4. **Treat the global community with respect.** While preparing this session, we struggled with how to portray the voice of the global community. On the one hand, we need to be aware of the suffering and injustice that the earth and its many peoples endure. On the other hand, no one wants to be known as a needy victim. Graver circumstances elsewhere may have inspired ingenuity North Americans do not yet possess. Our global neighbors are resourceful people who have much to teach us. Try to keep the conversation in that vein. Be prepared to challenge people who revert to a mindset that sees North America as the source of all solutions.

One way to counter our tendency toward arrogance is to do a little reading on traditional ecological knowledge. Indigenous people have thousands of years of experience living in harmony with their land. This knowledge base is now understood as a valuable resource alongside modern science and is known as traditional ecological knowledge. See [Why Traditional Knowledge Holds the Key to Climate Change](#).

5. **Household Practices 2 or 3** could be done in class. For #2, check the tags on your clothing. For #3, do your own research in advance and share your findings. Let the class wrestle with the economics of fair trade purchases. For example, is it better to spend \$12 on organic fair trade socks or to go to Wal-Mart and send the money you save to missions? Why?
6. **Human dividing walls that affect the earth:** If you discuss Key Ideas question 2, here are some examples you could mention:
 - Neighbors who don't know each other are unlikely to share items such as tools and lawn mowers, whereas neighbors who are friends might share.
 - Churches and denominations often duplicate resources.
 - The environmental destruction that war brings about was mentioned earlier in this unit, but it bears repeating. Review the Slow Violence essay, Session 6.
 - As North Americans, we have tended to send money, goods and people to other places on the globe to meet various kinds of needs. It could be argued that this is an inefficient use of resources that creates dividing walls. How can we foster "exchanges" between people in ways that benefit all parties involved and conserve natural resources?
7. **Invite a guest** from a different race, class or culture to lead this session with you and provide a contrasting perspective. Or you could interview a member of your congregation who has insights from somewhere else to share.
8. **Ask people to read** the [Lausanne Global Consultation on Creation Care](#), What are these global voices saying to you?

Session 8:

Claiming Our Citizenship

Goals for Session 8

Circle your priority.

By the end of the session, people will:

- Draw inspiration from biblical narratives involving witness to empires, local governments and the faith community.
- See themselves as citizens of their bioregion as well as citizens (or residents) of Canada.
- Have identified the issues related to faith, creation care and ecological justice that matter most to them and imagined working to influence one such issue.
- Believe they can make a difference in the governance of their communities—and go out and do it.

Advance Preparation

- Look back over the four sessions in Unit 2 on Pursuing Peace and Justice. How might you summarize what the group has covered and bring it to closure? Look ahead to Unit 3 Choosing a Sustainable Lifestyle so you can give people a sketch of where they are going next.
- Hazard a guess as to what most often hinders your group's public witness with regard to creation care. Are they skeptical that this is what Christians should be doing? Are they uninformed about the issues? Are they passionate about particular issues but uncertain how to influence them? Or are they simply too busy? Plan the session accordingly. Depending how you answer these questions, you might let your Local Ecosystem Focus leader have at least half the period or spend the time writing letters.

- If you want to use Household Practice 2 in suggestion 3 below, plan your route and calculate how much time you want to spend that way.
- The Third Way page reviewing [historical political actions taken by Mennonites](#) page is good background for leading this session.

Options for leading Session 8

Remember, this is not a lesson plan; these are ideas to choose from or adapt.

The Keep-it-Focused Option

Main point: We are citizens of God's household. We are also citizens of a particular part of God's creation. Claiming our citizenship is the first step toward advocacy and political action.

Ask which of the biblical examples in the essay your members identify with most. Then spend your time on Key Idea questions 1 and 2, in which people reflect on their identity and imagine themselves creating positive change.

Pass out scratch paper when you pose the hypothetical question as to what people would work on if they could choose one environmental situation to influence. Encourage people to draw themselves witnessing to governing structures in some way, or to write about their responses. Allow plenty of time for mental play and then hear from each person. Reinforce their offerings with the challenge to do one thing this next week related to the concern that moves them.

More Ideas

1. **Practice landscape citizenship:** Begin this session by having each person introduce him or herself according to local geography rather than municipality. “I’m Louann and I’m from the Atlantic Ocean Watershed... I’m Jim from the Hudson Bay Watershed,” etc. Talk about how it feels to identify yourself as a citizen of a landscape or watershed. How might this change your thinking if you did it all the time?
- **Or begin with a poem:** Another interesting way to start off could be to read the poem, “[Patriotism](#),” by Ellie Schoenfield. If your class members were writing a poem about patriotism, what would it include?
2. **Walk around the neighborhood:** The walk suggested in household practice #2, could be done during class. Many eyes will come up with more answers than one person could.
3. **Less talking, more doing:** Drawing on current events or previous work in this course, select one or two creation care issues that matter to your community. Spend your class time writing letters to governing officials. The [Climate Action Network](#) and [Citizens for Public Justice](#) referred to in the *Study Guide* can point you to current legislation. Be sensitive to the fact that people may not share the same position. Propose at least one issue that everyone agrees on.

Session 9:

Rethinking the Market Economy

Goals for Session 9

Circle your highest priority.

By the end of the session, people will:

- Be aware of where and how the assumptions underlying our economic system conflict with the teachings of Jesus.
- Desire to seek the reign of God, especially as it relates to economic life.
- Understand what is meant by externalized costs and be able to give examples related to their own consumption of resources.
- Have envisioned a sustainable alternative to at least one aspect of our current society that troubles them.

Advance Preparation

- Session 9 begins a new unit on Choosing a Sustainable Lifestyle. Scan the remaining sessions so you are clear about where you are headed.
- Think about how to capture energy generated in this class. How will you use your 13th session? Are there projects you want to take on or groups that need to form in order to build on this study? Do you want to do any of the retreats described in the *Leader's Guide Overview* section?
- See suggestion 3 under More Ideas, below, and decide if you want to use any of the supplementary readings that describe what an alternate economy might look like. Let others know what they need to read in advance or print it for use in class.

Options for leading Session 9

Remember, this is not a lesson plan. These are ideas to choose from or adapt.

The Keep-it-Focused Option

Main point: The teachings of Jesus critique the assumptions that underlie our current economic system.

Focus on Key Ideas question 1 and the first two goals described for Session 9. Write the bulleted points on the second page of Session 9 on a white board and then have the group list biblical teachings or stories that relate to scarcity, self-interest, self-sufficiency, etc. You may need to spend some time teasing out what your group understands “seek first the kingdom of God” to mean. Invite people to share stories from everyday life that illustrate their own struggles to manage resources faithfully.

More ideas

1. **Opening moments:** Comment on the fact that you are making a transition to the third unit in this curriculum, which focuses on lifestyle issues. Adapt your prayer of intent to reflect this.
2. **Begin with [The Story of Solutions](#):** In an engaging and youth-friendly way, this 9-minute video introduces the idea that our economy may be pursuing the wrong goals. It is listed under Suggested Resources.
3. **Imagining alternatives:** If you want to work with Key Ideas question 5, you can glean ideas from additional readings:
 - Excerpt from [“Conserving Communities,”](#) by Wendell Berry

- “A Vision for Sustainable Living” excerpted from *Christianity, Climate Change and Sustainable Living*, by Nick Spencer, et. al.
- [“31 Ways to Jumpstart the Local Economy.”](#) by Sarah Van Gelder

Select quotes from these readings to share aloud with your group, or ask them to look at one reading in advance. In what ways would your group’s vision of a sustainable society correspond to or diverge from this vision?

4. **Possessions as Tools:** Do household practice #1 in class. You could bring in a collection of small objects or write the names of larger objects on slips of paper and have people draw an object or a slip out of a hat. Take turns imagining how this possession could serve the kingdom of God that Jesus preached.
5. **Explore Issues:** Break into two groups, based on interest in either investments or fair trade shopping. See Digging Deeper questions 3 and 4. Is there a MEDA fan in your congregation who could introduce the funds mentioned under household practice 4?

You may have discussed fair trade purchases during Session 7 on the global community, but if you didn’t, here’s another opportunity. These sites were mentioned as resources.

- [Equal Exchange](#)
- [Fair Trade Canada](#)
- [Ten Thousand Villages](#)

Session 10:

Simple Abundance

Goals for Session 10

Circle your highest priorities.

By the end of the session, people will have:

- Named one environmentally friendly action they could take that would be a source of greater wellbeing.
- Named barriers that prevent them from making environmentally friendly changes they would like to make, and identify ways to overcome these barriers.
- Been inspired to work at a sustainable living issue in their personal lives, such as food or energy.
- Opened the door to discussing lifestyle issues with each other in the future.

Advance Preparation

- Your discussion on lifestyle issues could go in many different directions. Decide in advance whether you want to encourage specific household actions in an area such as food or water or whether you want to stick to the underlying concepts in the essay. Reviewing several of the Suggested Resources may help you decide how to focus this session for your group and your setting. The [Grace Communications Foundation](#) site makes some interesting connections between food, water and energy.
- Consider further discussion options. You could spend a week each on food, energy, water and so on. Is there energy to go beyond your one-hour session, and if so, how could that need be met?
- Suggestion 1 below requires a Bible and gift wrap.

Options for leading Session 10

Choose from or adapt the ideas below.

The Keep-it-Focused Option

Main point: Attention to food is fundamental to a sustainable household.

Zero in on food, since it is so basic to everyone's life and is not addressed elsewhere in this curriculum. Review the bold print points about sustainable households covered in the essay; then work on the first two goals above. See the [Food Resource Sheet](#). Some of the questions can be answered in terms of the congregation instead of individual households. Ask your Local Ecosystem Focus leader to concentrate on the food question and give him or her extra time to present findings.

More Ideas

1. **Psalm 23 as gift:** Try wrapping up a Bible as a gift to emphasize the abundant life, freely given, that texts such as Psalm 23 envision for us. Mark this text with a bookmark. Ask participants to reflect on what they want most out of life and allow a moment of silence. Then invite someone to open the gift box you brought and read the 23rd Psalm. Discuss: What does abundant life look like, according to this familiar text? Does this Psalm address your deepest needs and desires? In what way?
2. **Where are people coming from?** Begin with Key Idea question 1 and spend time exploring participants' associations and past history with a simple lifestyle. Depending on your congregation, this will be very familiar for some folks, or it could be brand new. What people, images or stories come to mind when your class hears the phrase, "simple lifestyle?" Do

they have positive associations with these ideas, or frustration? How can we discuss lifestyle issues in ways that inspire change rather than unproductive guilt? In ways that honor diversity?

3. **In groups of twos or threes**, share:
 - A sustainable habit that you feel good about.
 - A cutting edge area—something you'd like to work on but haven't achieved yet.
 - An area of frustration or failure. We all have them.

As a larger group, brainstorm ways to implement the cutting edge ideas people share.

4. **Other small group discussions:** If you have couples in your class or other household groupings, you could provide time for people to discuss actions to implement at home. Another option is to form smaller groups around interest areas such as food, water, and energy.
5. **Review carbon footprints:** This session could be a good place to discuss the results of the carbon footprint exercise suggested in Sessions 5 and 9, if people chose to do it. What actions seemed to make the most difference as you played with the carbon calculators? What surprised you? Did you find realistic actions that would make a significant difference for you? Review the sheet on carbon footprints as needed.
6. **Recognize socio-economic differences:** If you want to explore Key Idea question 5, consider inviting two readers to dramatize the scene from *Flight Behavior*, the novel by Barbara Kingsolver, using the paraphrased version in the Session 10 essay. Which character do listeners identify with? The complete scene is found on pages 326-329 of this popular novel, available in most public libraries.

Session 11:

Creating Accountable Communities

Goals for Session 11

Circle your top priority.

By the end of the session, participants will:

- Have a deeper understanding of the Christian tradition's communion ritual: its relationship to table fellowship in the Gospels, its roots in the resurrection and coming of the Holy Spirit, its practical function in meeting human need.
- Understand sustainable living as a community-wide endeavor, not just an individual pursuit.
- Have encountered several different models for creating accountable communities and considered what elements might transfer to their own setting.
- Be motivated to create congregational structures that support sustainable behavior.

Advance Preparation

- **Get the lay of the land from a leadership perspective:** This is a crucial session. It encourages change on a broader level than just a few individuals. Consult with your pastor and church leadership for advice on what church-wide directions make sense and what level of support is likely. Come to class prepared with a couple of actions you think the congregation is ready to take.
- **Make use of MCCN resources:** Spend time with MCCN's [Greener Congregation Scoresheet](#) and their [Scoresheet Discussion Guide](#). Also review the stories archived on the [congregations](#) page to see what other Mennonite congregations are doing.

- **Pray for guidance:** This week's session calls for communal thinking that may be difficult for a group of North American individualists. Pray for an inviting, accepting yet challenging atmosphere.
- **Plan to assess** how the class went afterwards. Put some reflection time on your calendar and use it to journal or talk with a friend.
- **Idea 5** below requires a roll of paper, ruler, markers, and tape.

Options for leading Session 11

The Keep-It-Focused Option:

Main point: Spirit-filled, sustainable living is a communal endeavor, not an individual accomplishment.

Use Digging Deeper question 1 about buying a van as an icebreaker to get the conversation going. Then work with the bigger picture related to creating a sustainable community, as in Key Idea questions 1 to 3. Call on your Local Ecosystem Focus leader to lead a discussion on the natural and community resources your congregation shares (Local Ecosystem Focus Question #2). Conclude by planning when action steps might happen, if a direction emerges.

More Ideas

1. **Write before speaking:** Questions 1 to 3 are fairly personal. If you use one of them, you may have a better discussion if you give people scratch paper and a chance to write down their thoughts before sharing.
2. **Keep it practical:** As a group, scan this session's household and spiritual practices. Where is there energy for conversation or more? Break into small groups based on the practices that catch people's interest.
3. **Another way to use break-out groups:** Present MCCN's [*Greener Congregation Scoresheet*](#) mentioned in the *Study Guide*, Household Practice 1. People could divide by interests, with one group working on worship ideas, another on building ideas, and so on.
4. **Consumption Addictions:** Digging Deeper question 4 about consumption addiction could be especially interesting if you have a member of a 12-step group in the congregation who is willing to speak about his or her experiences there. Perhaps the whole congregation can benefit from this person's struggle. Be sure to ask the person to share in advance, not just assume he or she cares to share.
5. **Future people:** Digging Deeper question 3 asks about providing for future people as well as the present. This could bring fresh imagination to a somewhat tired question about human need. How can you bring these future people to life? Refer to the empty chair exercise referred to in the *Leader's Guide* suggestions for Session 1. The empty chair is used to represent future people. Another idea might be to borrow a roll of paper from the Christian education closet and make a timeline that encircles the whole room. Begin in the year 2000 and label 10-year periods so that your group is surrounded by the future. List the birth dates of your congregation's youngest children.

Think of a decision made in the past 100 years that has had a profound effect on your community and use it as an example of the long-term effects group choices can have on wellbeing. Things that fall in this category include conservation or depletion of groundwater, projects requiring debt, prudent versus imprudent buildings or community development, introduction of invasive species.

Session 12:

A Spirituality That Sustains

Goals for Session 12

Circle your priorities.

By the end of the session, people will:

- See worship as a sustaining force supporting their attempts to care for creation.
- Hear creation singing along with human worship.
- Be sustained by an active hope.
- Be eager to implement some of the worship ideas suggested, or to explore other resources.

Advance Preparation

(This is either your last session or second last session, depending on what you plan to do with the 13th Sunday of the quarter.)

If this is your second last session:

- **Give directions for next week:** Suggestion 1 in the *Leader's Guide* Summary Session invites people to bring an object that represents something they value from the quarter. If you want people to do that next week, remember to tell them. Also send a reminder email in a few days.
- **Review your Session 11 conversations:** If ideas for congregational actions surfaced last week, think about what needs to be done to keep the energy going before your group disbands next week. Do subgroups need to form? Do you need to involve the church leadership?

- **Review recent worship services** mentally or look at bulletins on your church website if they are archived there. It will be nice to recognize the ways your congregation already acknowledges creation in its worship.

If this is your last session:

- **Consider closure exercises:** If you already used your extra week, look ahead to the closure exercises suggested in the *Leader's Guide* Summary Session to see if you want to fit any of them in this week.
- **Keep creation care on people's minds:** One simple thing you can do to keep creation care on people's minds is to invite your class members to join Mennonite Creation Care Network if they haven't already. MCCN members get occasional emails containing resource suggestions, ideas from other congregations and news about events. You could prompt class members to go to the [Join the Network page](#) on the MCCN website, but you might get a better response rate if you download and print our email sign-up sheet to pass around and then send it to us.
- **Create a Creation Care Website:** Share locally relevant information about the steps your congregation is taking towards greener, more sustainable living. It will help to inform others and possibly attract newcomers who care about the environment.

Options for Leading Session 12

Remember, this is a list of ideas and options, not a lesson plan.

The Keep-It-Focused Option

Main Point: Worship that tells the truth about God’s faithfulness to all of creation sustains our hope and empowers our actions. It is one of the unique gifts the Church has to offer its struggling planet.

Analyze your congregation’s worship patterns. Briefly review the points in the introduction to the essay about worship in general and then spend your time on discussion question 4. What ideas for worship under household practices are appealing? See Local Ecosystem Focus Question #2 on a sense of place and apply it to your worship.

More Ideas

1. **On what sustains hope:** Key Idea questions 1 and 2 are a good place to start. Write comments down on a white board so that you can review them. You could learn a lot about each other this way. Be prepared for answers that don’t fit where you expected to go. Also try to bring in worship as a potential source of hope and sustenance, if people don’t go there themselves. How can your worship speak to issues like climate change and habitat loss?
2. **On Revelation:** This book of the Bible makes many people uncomfortable and is subject to misinterpretation. For guidance on how to read Revelation, see one of the following:
 - Kraybill, J. Nelson. *Apocalypse and Allegiance: Worship, Politics and Devotion in the Book of Revelation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2010.
 - Rossing, Barbara R. *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2005.
 - Yeatts, John R. *Believers Church Bible Commentary: Revelation*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003.
3. **Ask hard questions:** Our text from Revelation 5 is set within the context of plagues, disasters, big nasty monsters and martyrdom. It is, after all, a slain lamb, not just a lamb that conquers. Hope comes too easily if we

do not acknowledge the plagues and disasters of our own time. Can the victory of the lamb possibly make sense in the context of climate change, globalization, militarization and the other massive forces that seem to dictate our existence?

Remember this quote from Andrew Shepherd in Session 1?

To walk in the steps of the suffering Savior will surely involve coming face to face with degradation and pollution...the polluted stream, the toxic waste dump, the rubbish-filled gully... Inevitably, these places of environmental destruction will often be the places where those less fortunate, those blessed by God, also reside. A characteristic mark, therefore, of Christian ecological living will be an acceptance of and experiencing of suffering and pain.⁵

Do you agree that suffering along with creation and with the humans most affected by its devastation is a mark of Christian ecological living?

4. **Jesus and creation:** Key Idea question 4 is an important one and a good way to review the course as a whole. For example, you could repeat the seven-word Gospel exercise suggested in Session 2 of the *Leader's Guide*, and note any changes that have occurred.
5. **Listen to creatures singing:** Weather and location permitting, you could take your group outside and spend 10 minutes doing Spiritual Practice #3, either at the beginning or the end of class.
6. **Begin or end with a song:** You could play the "Worthy is the Lamb" portion of Handel's Messiah as a way of introducing today's text. Or you could listen to creatures singing via the Anabaptist Bestiary group listed in the resources.

5 Andrew Shepherd, "Creation and Christology: The Ecological Crisis And Eschatological Ethics." *Stimulus* 18.4 (2010): 51-57. An adaptation made for this curriculum is available [here](#).

Summary Session: Your Call

Goals for Summary Session

This session summarizes the material covered by the 12 sessions offered in the *Study Guide*. Focus on at least one outcome.

By the end of the session, people will:

- Have some grasp of God's love for all creation and our calling to live in harmony with it.
- Have reviewed what they learned in this course and reflected on how it applies in their lives.
- Be prepared to move forward in caring for creation in areas of concern to your community.

Advance Preparation

- If you plan to use suggestion 1, tell participants to bring an object.
- Scratch paper is needed for suggestion 2.

Suggestions for bringing closure to your course

The depth and weight of this curriculum can leave individuals feeling overwhelmed. Here are some ways to move forward.

1. **Hear from each person:** Ask attendees to each bring an object that represents something significant that happened for them in this class. Allow time for everyone to share about what they brought.
2. **Look for what has changed:** Pass out scratch paper and write the following question where everyone can see it. *“What feelings, ideas or behaviors have changed for you as a result of this course?”* Give people five to ten minutes to write or draw in response and then discuss.
3. **Affirm accomplishments:** Often, in an area where there is much complexity and much work is needed, people come away feeling like they have failed. List what you *have* learned and done. It might be helpful for people to have the titles of the curriculum sessions in front of them while you do this. Then, dwell with this thought, from Andre Gingerich Stoner, MCUSA’s director of Interchurch Relations:

“We often overestimate what we can do in a year and underestimate what we can do in ten years.”

4. **What does shalom with creation look like in your context?** Session 9 provided some additional resources from several authors (Wendell Berry, Roy Kauffmann), who described what their answers to that question might be like. Briefly review a few points from these examples, and then jointly, write your own answer to that question for your own local ecosystem.

5. **Set a direction:** Work in groups of three or four to identify areas where people sense an opportunity or a call. Together, make a list of what the groups came up with. Sort the list into a couple of categories. Then call for volunteers interested in moving each category forward in some way.
6. **Close with a spiritual practice:** Review the Suggested Spiritual Practices Overview found at the back of the *Study Guide* and choose one you can do together in class. Session 12, #3 would work well.
7. **Review the [Greener Congregation Scoresheet](#) and the [Scoresheet Discussion Guide](#)** together if you haven't already.
8. **Join MCCN:** One simple thing you can do to keep creation care on people's minds is to invite your class members to join Mennonite Creation Care Network. MCCN members get occasional emails containing resource suggestions, ideas from other congregations and news about events. Prompt class members to go to the [Join the Network page](#) on the MCCN website, or download and print our email sign-up sheet to pass around and then send it to us.
9. **Send a story, comment or suggestion to MCCN:** We'd love to hear how your time with the curriculum went and what your church is up to. We have a page on our website that features congregations. Send your write-up to mccn@goshen.edu.
10. **If you are serious about discerning** a congregational direction related to creation care, see [In Tune with God: The Art of Congregational Discernment](#) by Sally Weaver Glick.

