

2002 Edition

It's God's World: Christians, Care for Creation and Global Warming

A five session study for congregations by Vera K. White



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It's God's World: Christians, Care for Creation and Global Warming

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This resource, first published in 1997 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, was written by Vera K. White, a Christian Educator and revised in 2002 by members of the Eco-Justice Working Group of the NCCC.

The Eco-Justice working Group consists of representatives of twenty-three participating Protestant and Orthodox communions. For more information on the Eco-Justice Working Group go to www.webofcreation.org. The phone numbers are 212-870-2385 or 2386. The address is 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115.

Those who wish suggestions on how to respond to climate change in their own homes, in congregations and by joining with others as well as updates on important federal legislation are urged to join the Interfaith Climate Change Network. Learn more by going on line at www.protectingcreation.org.

Those using this resource are also encouraged to order the following:

- The Global Warming Strategy and Information Packet contains a variety of materials you can use in your congregation. Order number EJ9900. Price \$3.00.
- God's Creation and Global Warming is a 12 minute video tape on the nature of the problem and why people of faith care about it. It is an excellent supplement to this study. Order number EJ 0017. Price \$10.00.

These materials can be ordered from Environmental Justice Resources, National Council of Churches, PO Box 968, Elkhart, Indiana 46515, 800-762-0968.

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It's God's World: Christians, Care for Creation and Global Warming

Introduction

We have been hearing a lot about threats to the environment. Is this merely the opinion of environmental fanatics or is our world facing real crises?

Often people tune out the warnings. It's so confusing. It can't be that bad. It's a shame other people are trashing the earth, but what does this have to do with me. There are enough pressing social problems to keep me busy for a lifetime. What good does it do to worry about the environment? The earth is a big place and one person can do very little.

It is understandable that people react this way. But Christians cannot ignore the prospect that the environment is being seriously harmed by our industrial/consumer way of life.

■ As Psalm 24 tells us, "the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it." We are called by God to treasure and care for the earth as a sacred trust.

■ Jesus instructed us to "love our neighbor as ourselves." Harm to the earth brings harm to people, and we are responsible for each other's well being.

■ God requires that we deal justly with one another. Environmental harm falls most heavily on the poor, and will fall even more heavily on those yet to be born.

We are only now coming to recognize many of the ways our industrial/consumer society is harming the earth and its people.

One of the most challenging is global warming: a rise in the earth's temperature because gases that trap heat are being added to the atmosphere by human activity.

Global warming has been hard to detect with certainty. Its effects are delayed. It is irreversible on a human time scale. Everything on earth will be affected in ways that cannot be known until they happen. The only way to slow global warming is to stop adding more heat-trapping gases to the atmosphere. This won't happen unless we all resolve to act together, in our personal lives, in our local communities, and in the global community.

Using This Resource

This resource contains five sessions designed to help Christians make some sense of the issues relating to global warming from the perspective of their faith. For each session there is a suggested format for a one-hour study session. Leaders may want to adapt the study to fit another time frame.

It's God's World: Christians, Care for Creation, and Global Warming can be used:

- by an adult church school class
- as part of a retreat
- by an adult Bible study group
- for a Lenten study
- as the basis for a sermon series
- by a women's group or men's group
- for personal study and devotions
- for an environmental justice group
- for an ecumenical study group

A chalkboard or newsprint pad will be useful for the leader, and each participant will need a Bible. Please photocopy the pages of this resource you will need for group study.

It's God's World: Christians, Care for Creation and Global Warming

Session 1: "And God saw that it was good."

Scripture: Genesis 1:1-2:3, Psalm 148

Theme: The earth was lovingly created by God who called it "good." The creation exists in a delicate balance, suitable to the nurturing of all life. We experience the nature of God through the creation.

Materials Needed:

- Bibles
- newsprint and marker or chalkboard and chalk
- copies of page 3

Session Plan

20 minutes Open with prayer. Introduce yourself. Introduce the theme of the study, *It's God's World: Christians, Care for Creation and Global Warming*, using some information from the Introduction on page 1. Describe the theme of session 1.

Ask participants to introduce themselves by telling their names and describing an aspect of God's creation that gives them particular joy. If your group is ecumenical or interfaith, you may ask people to name their faith community when giving their introductions. If the group is large, the introductions can be done in small groups of 5 or 6 people each. Then ask these questions of the whole group:

1. How has the natural world made you more aware or appreciative of God?
2. How does nature help you to understand the character of God?

Comment that nature is complex and at times seems unpredictable to human beings. Destruction can be a part of the natural world. Then ask the following questions:

1. When have you experienced the fearsome or destructive quality of nature and how did you feel?
2. What was your experience of God during this situation?

10 minutes Comment that although we know that God is with us always and in all places, there has been a tradition going back to biblical times of people having an experience of God in the natural world. Remind the participants that as people of faith, we understand that the creation helps us to experience God, but we do not worship the creation.

Ask :

- What examples can you name of biblical characters who have encountered God within the natural world? Examples may

include: Jesus (Matthew 4:1-11), John the Baptist (Matthew 3:1-6), Moses (Exodus 3:1-6, 19:1-6), Hagar (Genesis 16:6-13), Elijah (1 Kings 19:1-15), etc.

If people are not able to suggest examples themselves, ask volunteers to look up some of the Bible passages.

10 minutes Ask a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 1:1-2:3. Since this reading is long, you may choose to have two readers read alternate verses. Lead a group discussion using the following questions:

1. What parts of God's creation are "good" and what makes them good?
2. What does this suggest about how humans are to treat the creation?

15 minutes Ask the following questions:

1. What qualities are needed for human life to flourish?
2. What qualities are needed for the natural world (plants, animals, land, etc.) to flourish?

Distribute copies of page 3.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud, "What Is Climate and How is it Shaped?" on page 3. Then lead a discussion using the Questions for Discussion.

5 minutes Close by reading Psalm 148 responsively by dividing the group into halves and have the two groups read alternate verses.

It's God's World: Christians, Care for Creation and Global Warming

What is Climate and How is it Shaped?

Climate is the sum of all the weather conditions in a certain place over a period of years. It includes all the variations in daily and seasonal weather, and unusual events such as tornadoes, floods or droughts. Climate is shaped by complex interactions among many factors. These include the sun's energy, the rotation of the earth, and conditions in the atmosphere, the oceans, and on land surfaces. Climate seems to vary from year to year, but over a period of years it is usually quite stable.

The earth's climate system is driven by the light and heat of the sun. Warmed by the sun, the earth sends heat back toward space. The atmosphere contains very small quantities of carbon dioxide (CO₂), and even smaller quantities of a few other gases

that absorb some of the earth's heat that would otherwise escape into space. For thousands of years there has been just enough CO₂ in the atmosphere to keep the earth about 60 degrees F warmer than it would otherwise be. This heat-trapping feature of CO₂ is called the greenhouse effect, and it is necessary for life as we know it.

CO₂ has another vital function. It provides carbon needed by plants to make cells through photosynthesis. Because of photosynthesis, carbon circulates over time between the atmosphere and the biosphere, which is made up of all living things and the organic matter they create. Plant growth helps regulate the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere. Plankton in the ocean and forests on land are particularly important in balancing the carbon cycle.

The carbon cycle is only one of many biological cycles that help create stable conditions on the earth so that living communities can flourish.

When people hear about climate change, they often think about what's been happening with the weather. But weather and climate are two different concepts. Weather changes constantly - by the hour, day, season and year. Climate changes too. Until recently, any climate changes that occurred were due to natural causes: shifts in the intensity of the sun's rays, the position of the earth in relation to the sun, and the shape and location of the continents. As climates gradually change, plant and animal species evolve new forms to adapt to new conditions, and the wonders of God's creation continue to unfold.

Before Industrialization: The Greenhouse effect



The atmosphere, containing carbon dioxide (CO₂), and other gases, acts as a blanket trapping just enough of the sun's heat so life can flourish and permitting the extra heat to escape into space.

Questions for discussion

1. From your reading of Genesis 1:1-2:3 and "What Is Climate and How is it Shaped?" what can you gather about God's intentions for the balance of nature?
2. What is the greenhouse effect?
3. How does God provide for the survival of all living species?
4. What do you think happens to the created world when this balance is disrupted?

It's God's World: Christians, Care for Creation and Global Warming

Session 2 "The whole creation groans"

Scripture: Genesis 1:27-31, Genesis 2:4-9, 15-25, Genesis 9:8-17, Psalm 24, Leviticus 25:1-12, Romans 8:18-28, Genesis 8:22, Psalm 104:27-29, Psalm 74:16-17

Theme: Humans are called to be servant-stewards of creation. Because they have neglected this call, the earth is suffering from accelerated climate change that is having harmful effects on many parts of creation.

Materials Needed:

- Bibles
- copies of pages 5 and 6

Session Plan

5 minutes Open with prayer. Review session 1. Introduce the theme of session 2.

20 minutes Divide the participants into five small groups. Assign to each small group one of the following scripture passages:

- Genesis 1:27-31
- Genesis 2:4-9, 15-25
- Genesis 9:8-17
- Psalm 24
- Leviticus 25:1-12

Have each small group meet for ten minutes, reading its passage aloud and discussing Questions for Discussion No. 1.

Bring the entire group back together, and ask the small groups to report on their discussions. Then ask the participants:

- What have you learned about the role that human beings are called to play within the creation?

17 minutes Distribute copies of pages 5 and 6. Ask a volunteer to read aloud the article, "Global Warming: the Human Factor" while others follow along. Ask the group to look at the two drawings on page 5. Then ask the following questions:

1. What is climate change?
2. How does human activity upset the balance of creation?

3. How do you think human beings have done in their role as servant-stewards of God's creation?

18 minutes Read aloud "Human Creatures as Part of the Whole of Creation" on page 6. Read aloud Romans 8:18-25. Use Questions for Discussion No. 2 to lead a group discussion. Pray the unison prayer on page 6.

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Global Warming: The Human Factor

In 2001, 2500 scientists of the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) officially confirmed what many expected was happening: humans are contributing to rapid climate change due to our expanding numbers and technologies. When automobiles, power plants and industries burn fossil fuels, carbon is added to the atmosphere. Since the middle of the last century, the concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere has been increasing steadily, and the earth has warmed about 1 degree F. There has also been a rise in sea level of about 7 inches, and global precipitation has been increasing.

The climate change that is now occurring is different from earlier episodes of climate change due to the speed of global warming. Plants and animals may not

be able to adapt to changes that occur so quickly. Human activities are also adding other greenhouse gases to the atmosphere, like methane, nitrogen dioxide, and synthetic chemicals. Though the amount of these other gases is much less than CO₂, they absorb more heat than CO₂, thus adding significantly to the size and complexity of the problem.

Scientists are certain that the earth is warming, but there is no way to be certain about the rate or effects of future warming. The IPCC projects that there will be an increase in global temperature of 3 - 10 degrees F and a rise in sea level of 10 - 30 inches by 2100. Over land and at higher latitudes, temperatures are apt to increase more than the global average. Evaporation and precipitation

will increase, creating more frequent and severe heat waves and heavier storms and floods. Extreme events will damage crops and limit the ability of natural systems to adapt. The distribution of vegetation and wildlife is already beginning to shift. With rising temperatures, insects and rodents that carry diseases move into new areas. Recent US outbreaks of dengue fever, malaria, and encephalitis have been linked to climate change.

Scientists have estimated that greenhouse gas emissions must be reduced by at least 60% to stabilize their concentrations in the atmosphere, and that global warming and its effects will become increasingly severe until emissions are reduced.

Before Industrialization



The atmosphere, containing carbon dioxide, (CO₂) and other gases, acts as a blanket trapping much of the needed warmth provided by the sun and permitting only some of the sun's ray's to escape back to outer space.

Today



A thicker atmospheric blanket has been created as we add carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other emissions from automobiles, power plants and industries which burn fossil fuels. More heat from the sun is being trapped. This is warming the earth and causing climate changes.

It's God's World: Christians, Care for Creation and Global Warming

Human Creatures as Part of the Whole of Creation

Climate change reminds us that we are frail creatures in a world of precarious balance ordained and sustained by the Creator. According to the biblical witness, God's creation is both reliable and fragile. "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease" (Gen. 8:22). But God's creation is reliable only for the reason that God guarantees its order. Everything on earth owes its life to God and depends on God's faithfulness. "These all look to you to give them their food in due season....When you...take away their breath, they die and return to their dust" (Ps. 104:27-29).

Many biblical passages praise God for maintaining and constantly renewing the order of creation. "Yours is the day, yours also the night; you established the luminaries and the sun, you have fixed all the bounds of the earth; you made summer and winter" (Ps. 74:16-17). As human beings, we have to respect this order if we are to live on earth. When the limits set by God are transgressed, the fragile balance can easily be broken. Climate change drives this lesson home. It makes the vulnerability of human existence plain and suggests that when humans think of themselves as masters of creation they have taken the course of self-destruction.

Humans are creatures whose life flourishes only as they respect their connection with the whole. Eating and even breathing remind us of our dependence on the cycles of nature.... With our unique freedom, however, we tend to forget or deny our continuing dependence on the rest of creation. The patterns of behavior and industry that we establish for ourselves are often at odds with the ecological cycles into which they need to fit. These cycles have their own time scales that we cannot change; particularly important are the times required for nature's regenerative processes.

Accelerated climate change demonstrates dramatically the disruption that comes when human agency violates natural processes. We human beings have transgressed the cycles of nature that provide the framework for all created life.

(From, "Human Creatures as Part of the Whole of Creation," *Sign of Peril, Test of Faith: Accelerated Climate Change*, WCC, 1993, p. 32.)

Questions for Discussion Nº 1

1. How are human beings called to treat creation?
2. How have human beings violated creation?
3. According to this reading, what is the hope for humankind and for creation?

Questions for Discussion Nº 2

1. What does this scripture passage suggest about the relationship of God to the entire creation?
2. What does it suggest about the relationship of human beings to the rest of the creation?
3. What examples from contemporary life can you give that show a proper relationship between human beings and the creation? What examples can you give that show human abuse of the creation?

Unison Prayer

Creator of the Universe, your creation is too wonderful and great for our small and finite human minds to comprehend. We find that the only response to the magnificence of creation we can muster is a humble awe. O God help us to realize our smallness in the face of a vast universe. Help us to join in the rest of your creation in singing your praises to eternity. Amen.

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Session 3 "Standing at the Crossroads"

Biblical background: Hosea 4:1-3, Jeremiah 4, 6:13-16

Theme: Theme: Human greed and misuse of resources are among the causes of global warming. Christians in the US have special responsibilities. People of faith confess their sins against the Creator and seek the shalom and healing of God's creation.

Materials Needed:

- Bibles
- newsprint and marker or chalkboard and chalk
- copies of pages 8 and 9

Session Plan

5 minutes Begin with prayer. Review sessions 1 and 2. Introduce the theme of session 3.

10 minutes Distribute copies of pages 8 and 9. Read aloud Hosea 4:1-3 as participants follow along. Then read verse 3 only and pause to ask "Why?" Tell the group that verse two gives an answer.

Read verse two. Ask "Why?" Explain that verse one contains an answer. Read aloud verse one.

Read the responsive reading on page 8 as a group. Use the Questions for Discussion to lead a group discussion.

10 minutes Ask a volunteer to read aloud the article "Christian Care for Creation" On page 8. Lead a group discussion using the following questions:

1. How do the values of our culture get in the way of caring for creation?
2. How faithful has the church been in caring for creation?
3. What is the connection between care for creation and personal or congregational spiritual growth?

10 minutes Ask volunteers to read aloud "Global Warming and the Community of Nations" on page 9. Ask these questions:

1. What is the responsibility of wealthy, highly-developed nations such as the United States in responding to climate issues?
2. What responsibility do you think the church has regarding global warming and the community of nations?

20 minutes Read responsively the litany on page 9 that is based on Jeremiah 4. Suggest that one of the lessons we can learn from the book of Jeremiah is that there is a time to complain. Such complaining is called lamentation in Jeremiah and elsewhere in the Bible, and it consists of crying out against injustice. Create your own lamentation in a responsive reading format using the following process:

1. Ask participants to tell about their biggest fears or sadnesses concerning the abuse of creation? Make a list of the ideas offered on newsprint.
2. Choose one line from Jeremiah 4 to repeat as a response. Consider using one of the following: "The earth shall mourn" (4:28) or "I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void" (4:23) or "I cannot keep silent" (4:19).
3. Alternate a statement created from the list of concerns mentioned by the group with the response line. Write the responsive reading on a chalkboard or newsprint. Suggest that the lament be used as part of a worship service at your church.

5 minutes Read responsively the lament that the group has written. Then read aloud "Declaration of Hope" on page 8.

Responsive reading

Leader: "The land mourns, and all who live in it languish; together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are perishing." (Hosea 4:3) Why do the land and its creatures suffer?

People: "Swearing, lying, and murder, and stealing and adultery break out; bloodshed follows bloodshed." (Hosea 4:2)

Leader: But why should such terrible things occur?

People: "There is no faithfulness or loyalty, and no knowledge of God in the land." (Hosea 4:1b)

Christian Care for Creation

The Christian church has been criticized for being slow to show concern for the ecological problems facing our world. Yet people of faith have a unique reason to care about the natural world and Christians have taken the lead in helping our society to deal with many forms of injustice.

Because of our faith, we understand that healing the earth is a spiritual issue. The selfishness and greed that have contributed to damaging the earth also separate us from God and from each other. Frederick W. Krueger, in his book *The Lord's House: A Guide to Creation Careful Management*

of Church Facilities, concludes that "prayer must pave the way for any lasting ecological changes. We cannot grow in any substantial caring for creation without a corresponding increase in our caring for the Creator."

Those of us who live in the US constitute about 4% of the world population. Our nation produces 21% of the annual global emissions, more than any other country. As Christians we have a special responsibility. Let us begin to remove the beam from our own eye so we can see more clearly how to help our neighbors with the speck in theirs.

Questions for Discussion

1. According to this passage, what are some results of turning our backs on God?
2. What is the relationship between faithfulness to God and the prosperity of the creation?

Declaration of Hope

We have been guilty of greed and materialism. We have abused and abandoned the creation that God called good. Jeremiah condemned the people of ancient Judah with these words: "From the least to the greatest of them everyone is greedy for unjust gain.... They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace." (Jeremiah 6:13-14)

Yet God's promises are true and eternal. God responds to unfaithfulness with these words: "Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls." (Jeremiah 6:16)

We are standing at a crossroads. Let us seek the good way and find healing for all God's creation.

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Global Warming and the Community of Nations

A Framework Convention on Climate Change was adopted by 160 nations at the Rio, Brazil, Earth Summit in 1992. It sets a goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions until their concentrations in the atmosphere are stabilized, and provides for annual conferences to achieve this goal. The Framework Convention was signed by former President Bush, and ratified by the Senate in 1993.

The first major agreement under the Framework Convention, called the Kyoto Protocol, was negotiated in 1997 in Kyoto, Japan. In it each industrialized country agreed to meet a specific reduction target by 2012, for a global reduction of 5% below 1990 levels. The rules to implement this agreement were to be negotiated at later conferences.

In July 2001, in Bonn, Germany, 178 nations agreed on rules to implement the Kyoto Protocol. This agreement was reached even though President Bush said

the Protocol was "fatally flawed," and the US did not participate in the negotiations. Agreements on rules were completed in Marrakech, Morocco, in November, 2001. The Protocol is now ready for ratification.

To take effect, the Protocol must be ratified by more than half the industrialized nations that are responsible for more than 55% of the world's greenhouse pollution. This can happen without US participation. The U.S. is the only industrialized country not supporting the Protocol that ratified the Framework Convention.

The agreements in Bonn and Marrakech sent a strong signal to the global corporate community to begin reducing its greenhouse pollution. Some US states and corporations are setting voluntary reduction targets. But it will not be possible to reach the global target of 5% reductions below 1990 levels without full US cooperation, since the US is responsible for about 25% of all greenhouse pollution.

Litany (from Jeremiah 4)

Leader: A destroyer of nations has set out; he has gone out from his place to make your land a waste.

People: Because of this put on sackcloth, lament and wail.

Leader: A hot wind comes from the desert toward my poor people, not to winnow or cleanse—a wind too strong for that.

People: Woe to us, for we are ruined!

Leader: Your ways and your doings have brought this upon you. This is your doom; how bitter it is!

People: Disaster overtakes disaster, the whole land is laid waste.

Leader: I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light.

People: I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking, and all the hills moved to and fro. I looked, and lo, there was no one at all, and all the birds of the air had fled. I looked and lo, the fruitful land was a desert.

Leader: For thus says the Lord: The whole land shall be a desolation.

People: Because of this the earth shall mourn.

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Session 4 "Reconciling the world"

Scripture: Micah 6:8, Colossians 1:15-20, 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Theme: There is injustice in the use and distribution of the world's natural resources. God's plan of redemption is for the entire creation. People of faith are called to be part of God's ministry of reconciliation and justice.

Materials Needed:

- Bibles
- newsprint and marker or chalkboard and chalk
- small slips of blue, pink, green, yellow, and red paper
- snack items such as fresh fruit, cookies, cheese, crackers, fresh vegetables with dip, juice, water, etc. (see activity below)
- small plates or napkins
- tablecloth (optional)
- Copies of page 12

Session Plan

5 minutes As people enter the gathering space, give each one a small slip of colored paper. Use the following colors in this ratio (numbers are based on there being 20 people in your group. Adjust the numbers proportionately depending on the expected size of the group):

- blue: 12 slips
- pink: 2
- red: 1
- green: 2
- yellow: 3

Do not explain the reason for the paper slips at this time. Begin with prayer. Review the first three sessions. Introduce the theme of session 4.

10 minutes Ask the following question, listing the responses on newsprint:

- What are the natural resources upon which you depend during your daily life?
Choose two resources from the list, and ask:
 - How would your life be different if your supply of this resource were:
 - temporarily unavailable,
 - permanently depleted,
 - more expensive?

20 minutes Prepare in advance a buffet table of snack foods such as fresh fruit, cookies, cheese, crackers, fresh vegetables with

dip, juice, water, etc. Although there should be choices of food, you do not need large quantities. If you want to simplify the buffet, only the crackers (like Saltines) and water are essential plus one more desirable treat, such as cookies. You may wish to have the food covered with a tablecloth to conceal it as people enter the room.

Remove the tablecloth and ask the person with the slip of red paper to come to the buffet table and fill a plate or napkin with snacks. Encourage that person to try some of everything even if he/she is not hungry. Then invite that person to take the most comfortable seat in the room right next to the snack table even if you have to ask someone else to move.

When that person has finished making selections, remove one item from the table and invite those with yellow papers to come up and help themselves and then go to their seats. (If you have chosen to provide a simplified snack table, do not remove an item at this time.)

Next, remove everything except the crackers and water, and invite those with green papers to come forward and help themselves and return to their seats.

Finally, remove all except a few broken bits of crackers and a small amount of water and invite the rest of the group to come up. While they are up, remove their chairs from the room so that they will have to sit on the floor.

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Explain that the distribution of food at your snack table roughly represented the distribution of material resources including food, water, housing, fuel, and technology in the world. The person with the red paper represented the residents of the United States and Canada; the yellow-Europe; green-Latin America; blue-Asia; pink-Africa. Write the colors and place names on the chalkboard or newsprint.

Ask these questions:

1. How did you feel about the distribution of food and chairs?
2. What changes do you think should have been made in the distribution?

Read aloud the article, "Distribution of Resources" on this page. Ask:

- What does this inequality of resources have to do with the abuses to the environment which have led to global warming?

Note: During the simulation game, there may be requests or even demands that the food be shared more equally. Allow the participants to discuss the issue without any interference from the leader until a resolution is reached. Then ask:

1. How did you resolve your disagreement?
2. Were you satisfied with the resolution? Why or why not?

If this kind of a discussion should occur, it can be an important learning activity, and you probably will not want to discourage it. However, you may find that your time will be limited for the rest of the session activities.

10 minutes Distribute copies of page 12. Ask a volunteer to read aloud the article "Global Warming and the Earth's Bounty" on page 12.

Ask the following questions:

- What issues of injustice are apt to be caused by global warming?
- What national or international conflicts might result from these issues?

- How are Christians called to respond to the needs of those who are suffering?

10 minutes Explain that God has a plan for the redemption of all of the creation in Christ Jesus. People of faith have a calling to be a part of that ministry of reconciliation. Have two volunteers read aloud Colossians 1:15-20 and 2 Corinthians 5:16-21. Ask the following questions:

- What is the good news for creation?
- What is the human role in the redemption process?

5 minutes Close by reading the unison prayer on page 12.

Distribution of Resources

Food is only one of the resources that is unequally distributed in the world.

Plumbing is a luxury in parts of Mexico City. Human wastes have contaminated much of the drinking water supplies, spreading diseases.

Many people in Africa have to gather scarce firewood each day in order to cook their family meals on outdoor stoves or campfires. The deforestation is causing land erosion.

There are people in Calcutta who have spent their entire lives out of doors, never living in a house.

Technology is slow to catch on in many parts of the world. The country of Malawi has no television stations. TVs are expensive and hard to come by.

Medical care is unavailable in many places. When available, it may be lacking in sterile equipment and standard medicines we take for granted.

Bicycles are luxuries in parts of China. People walk wherever they have to go or, occasionally, use public transportation. Many have never ridden in a car.

Global Warming and the Earth's Bounty

Since 1850, when CO₂ levels began to increase, the human population has grown from about 1 billion to 6 billion. During this time, automobiles, airplanes, refrigerators, vaccines, antibiotics, televisions and computers have become part of everyday life in the US.

During most of the past century, food production has increased faster than population due to irrigation and new technologies, but this is no longer happening. Yields from ocean fisheries are now declining. There are water shortages in many places, and the pollution of water by agriculture and industry continues. Each year more forests are cut and more garbage and trash is put in dumps and landfills. These are the circumstances in which global warming is beginning to disrupt climate.

Higher temperatures cause increased evaporation and changing rainfall patterns. Heavier rains contribute to flooding. Inland regions are subject to more frequent and prolonged drought which affects farming and reduces the water flow in streams and rivers. As water supplies diminish and are used more heavily, they become more susceptible to contamination.

The sea level will continue to rise because ocean water expands as it warms and because glaciers are melting. Flooding due to sea level

rise and more severe storms are already having disastrous results for thousands of people each year, especially in densely populated coastal regions and small island states. A new kind of refugee is emerging - the environmental refugee. Many of these displaced people will gather in squatter settlements in large cities, placing huge strains on urban infrastructure, and even on international relations as nations seek to protect their borders.

Deaths due to heat waves compounded by urban air pollution are increasing. As temperatures rise, tropical diseases such as malaria, carried by mosquitoes, and cholera, spread by contaminated water, are occurring at higher latitudes among populations with little natural resistance.

Everyone and everything will be affected by global warming, but the first victims already are poorer nations and impoverished people who lack the technical, financial and social resources to adapt. In the US, those who are economically disadvantaged, especially the elderly and the children, will be disproportionately affected by heat waves, storms, floods, and disease. The issue of global warming is not just a scientific study of temperature charts and chemical concentrations. It's also a story of God's children facing homelessness, disease, and starvation.

Unison Prayer

O God of heaven and earth, you desire a reconciliation of the whole creation. We confess that we too often make choices that separate and destroy. Forgive us our selfish ways. Help us to seek justice, O God, and to walk humbly beside you as we seek a life that is more simple and more centered on You. Help us to join joyfully in your work of bringing new life to a broken world. Amen.

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Session 5 "A new heaven and a new earth"

Scripture: Jeremiah 6:16, Genesis 2:2-3, Exodus 20:8-11, Isaiah 65:17-25, Ezekiel 37:1-14, Rev. 21:1-4

Theme: God is creating a new heaven and a new earth and calls us to joyful participation in the ministry of redemption and reconciliation.

Materials needed:

- Bibles
- newsprint and marker or chalkboard and chalk
- copies of pages 14, 15, 16, 17
- pencils

Session Plan

8 minutes Open with prayer. Review the previous sessions. Introduce the theme of session 5. Read aloud Isaiah 65:17-25 and Revelation 21:1-4.

Comment that God is redeeming and transforming the entire creation. Christians are blessed to be witnesses and participants in the plan for the transforming all of creation.

20 minutes Explain that people of faith who become aware of the abuses of God's creation feel called to join in the process of restoration and rebuilding. Sometimes, however, Christians come to this decision reluctantly, fearing that they are being asked to sacrifice the comforts and luxuries that the society values.

Distribute copies of pages 14 to 17. Ask a volunteer to read

aloud the articles "What Does the Lord Require?" and "Rediscovering Christian Teaching."

Then divide the group into five small groups. Read aloud the introduction of "Be Glad and Rejoice" on page 14. Ask each of the groups to read one of the sections of the article, "Be Glad and Rejoice" on pages 14 and 15. Use the discussion questions provided.

When the entire group reconvenes, ask each small group to tell something about their small group discussion.

Ask the question:

- What benefits can you see in making lifestyle changes for the sake of God's creation?

20 minutes Divide the group into four small groups. Assign to each group one of the stories told in "Stories: Making a Difference"

on page 16. Ask each group to discuss the following question which should be written on the chalkboard or newsprint:

- What does this story teach about how congregations or Christian groups can work to restore God's creation, slow global warming, and promote justice?

Then have each group report what they have learned to the whole group.

12 minutes Distribute pencils. Ask participants to read silently the article "What Can We Do about Global Warming?" on page 17. After considering prayerfully the commitments they feel led to make, have each person write their ideas in the first section of "Making a Commitment." If volunteers would like to tell the rest of the group what they intend to do, encourage them to do so.

Then discuss actions that you could take as a congregation or community group in working to heal or restore the creation, and write your ideas on the second part of "Making a Commitment." Close by reading aloud Ezekiel 37:1-14 and praying the unison prayer on page 17.

What Does the Lord Require?

“And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8) Those who love and serve God cannot help feeling concern that the effects of global warming will be most harmful to the most vulnerable of the world's people. We cannot help feeling concern that human activities may destroy much of the exquisite unfolding of God's creation on earth.

Global warming calls us all to these tasks in our personal lives and as US citizens:

- to take responsibility in our own choices and actions before expecting or demanding this of others;
- to reduce our use of energy and of things we don't really need that require energy to make and to use;
- to help those in need improve their quality of life without using more energy from damaging energy sources;

Rediscovering Christian Teaching

“The ecological crisis calls into question the values of acquisition and material accumulation that pervade modern technological civilization. Harmony with the created order depends upon an attitude of restraint toward wealth and consumption. As we seek to respond to this challenge, we realize that the gospels provide resources which Christians in recent times have largely neglected.

Jesus invites the disciples to a lifestyle of simplicity sufficient for their needs. The beauty and the gifts of creation are for all to enjoy, but Jesus warns against becoming slaves of the material world. This leads to an illusion of security and inevitably causes injustice.

“Take heed and guard yourselves from all covetousness, for a man's life does not consist in

- to inform ourselves about public policy relating to global warming at all levels - local, regional, national and international.

Some may ask “why should I be making sacrifices? I worked hard to buy my car and my house. I take pleasure in new clothes and shoes. I like steak and having strawberries in February. Why should I change my lifestyle?”

Our society tells us to seek fulfillment through material goods. We are urged to find community in shopping malls and happiness in our possessions. But if we examine our experiences carefully, they give us a different message entirely. Lasting fulfillment and joy seldom comes from acquiring new possessions, but from pursuing a vision, serving others, sharing time and experiences with those we love, and discovering God's presence through the creation. This understanding is the basis for the suggestions and questions in this session.

the abundance of his possessions.’ (Luke 12:15) A simple lifestyle of sufficiency encourages cooperation and friendship in community, enjoyment of nature, and worship of God. The ascetic tradition has been a self-evident part of Christian teaching for centuries. We may rediscover its meaning for today....”

“Technology will be a blessing if it meets the most important needs, serves God's created order, and respects the cycles of nature.

Technological development must not be regarded as an end in itself but as an instrument in the service of life. Climate change confronts us with the task of rediscovering technology's servant role.”

(From, “Sign of Peril, Test of Faith: Accelerated Climate Change,” WCC, 1993, p. 33-34.)

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“Be Glad and Rejoice”

Living a simpler, more God-centered lifestyle should not be viewed as a sacrifice. Those who make such changes discover rich rewards. Here are five ways, with related questions, that living more in harmony with the Creator and the creation can enrich life:

1. Living in community. Something is lacking in our technology-driven consumer culture. We are rich in material possessions but we pay a big price: in stress, isolation, busyness and missed opportunities to experience and celebrate the creation. Living in community with humankind and otherkind and with God is essential for physical and spiritual health.

1. What recent experience have you had of enjoying the presence of family, of friends, of natural surroundings?
2. Where do you find the sense of community that is so necessary to nurture faith?
3. What lifestyle changes would help you put less emphasis on things and more on experiences and relationships?

2. Envisioning a future. Vision is one of God's gifts. With vision, we receive the inspiration and guidance to learn and grow, and the confidence of having something to offer others. “Without vision the people perish.”

1. Where do you turn to seek a vision of God's plan for the earth and your offering to fulfill it?
2. How does your vision of God's plan influence your actions?
3. How do you share your vision with others—in your family, church, community?

3. Creating a better world. Technology has provided innumerable benefits to humankind. Few of us would want to live without modern medicine, transportation, or communication. However, technology has made inordinate demands upon both nature and human nature.

1. In what ways has technology improved or enhanced your life?
2. In what ways has technology complicated your life or made you feel you have become a servant of technology?
3. What “conveniences” could you give up at home, work, or church to reduce energy consumption so as to care for the creation? How could this be done so as to enhance your experiences and relationships?

4. Showing our faith to the world.

Christians are called to live joyfully in a way God intends, and to show that way to others. Making needed lifestyle changes can be a way of witnessing to the joy of our redemption in Jesus Christ.

1. How might you initiate or support activities in your church, neighborhood, or workplace to live more in harmony with God's creation?
2. What witness can Christians make to our larger society by taking on more simple and faithful lifestyles? How might such changes set you apart from others in your neighborhood or workplace?
3. How will what you have learned about global warming as a religious issue affect your attention to and involvement with public policy?

5. Honoring the Sabbath. Honoring the Sabbath is one of the Ten Commandments. The Bible emphasizes its importance as a gift from God for all creation, not just humans. Animals as well as humans are to rest on the seventh day. Crops are not cultivated, allowing the land to rest, during the Sabbath year.

1. Why is the Sabbath essential for all of creation?
2. How do you honor the Sabbath in your own life?
3. What happens when individuals and societies neglect to honor the Sabbath?

Read aloud Genesis 2:2-3 and Exodus 20:8-11.

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Stories: Making a Difference

I. The Augustana Lutheran Church Energy Conservation Story

Members of Augustana Lutheran Church in Hyde Park, Illinois, decided that they needed to do more than just discuss their environmental concerns. They took on a major project to reduce unnecessary energy consumption within their church building. The congregation began with a thorough energy audit of the church facilities to measure the results in energy and money savings.

When the audit showed that work was needed in the areas of heating, lighting, and water consumption, the committee proposed replacing inefficient incandescent bulbs in the sanctuary, outdoors, and in the exit signs with lower wattage halogen and florescent bulbs. Timers would also save energy on nighttime illumination. Although some members are skeptical when proposed changes were estimated to cost \$3,000, the congregation agreed to authorize the alterations.

Church members provided as much of the labor as possible, building community and deep friendships in the process. Following the upgrades, energy consumption had been reduced by 40 percent which translation into a savings of \$1,200 as compared with expenditures. The reduction in carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere was the equivalent of removing ten cars from the streets of Chicago.

Dr. Job Ebenezer, the director of environmental stewardship for the Evangelical Lutheran Church said, "If 2,000 congregations made similar renovations, it would be like taking 20,000 cars off the road, and it would save \$2.4 million annually."

II. Dr. Wes Jackson and the Land Institute

Dr. Wes Jackson traded in a promising career in botany at the University of California at Sacramento to return to his 28-acre family farm near Salina and his deep roots in the United Methodist Church. He and his wife Dana turned the small farm into a research center for sustainable agriculture and land stewardship.

The institute looks to nature as a model for an agriculture that will save the soil, support a diversity of life, and rebuild the endangered rural community. Dr. Jackson believes that modern farming with its accent on monocropping, fossil fuels and chemicals is 'unnatural.' In the process both soil and human community are destroyed. He claims that for every bushel of grain produced in America today, two bushels of soil are lost. In fact three billion tons of topsoil are washed and blown away each year in the U.S.

Because of the loss of topsoil and the high cost of agriculture, the small family farm has all but disappeared putting at risk the entire rural way of life that is so much a part of the American tradition.

III. Fowler Camp and Conference Center

The Fowler Camp and Conference Center of the Reformed Church in America in New York's Adirondack Mountains models a lifestyle "that is built upon God's command that we care and keep God's earth. It is also a lifestyle that is joyful and liberating and creative. It is a lifestyle of wonder!" according to camp program director Ken Busman.

The camp helps children gain a greater understanding of their role

in caring for God's creation. At meals children are urged to help themselves to only the amount of food that they think they can eat. At the end of each meal, the food scraps are weighed and the total amount is announced to the whole group. A cheer can be heard echoing through the dining hall at a particularly low number. The weight of discarded is posted on a chart each day.

The collected food scraps are then carried to the compost center where they are mixed with leaves and soil. In eight weeks food scraps have turned to soil which is then used for the next summer's vegetable garden, illustrating to the campers the cycle of food to compost to soil to food again.

IV. Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

Rapid population growth threatens the quality of life that attracts many to Portland Metro Area of Oregon. Fortunately, the region has the means to plan for a just and sustainable future through its regional government, Metro, the only elected regional government in the nation.

The Interfaith Network for Earth Concerns and other religious groups are giving voice to the critical moral issues involved in urban planning. Six religious leaders gave testimony in support of a plan to help reverse sprawl and urban decay which included a proposed light rail system designed to provide an alternative to heavy vehicular traffic and reduce carbon dioxide emissions. The leaders' concerns centered on watershed protection, street designs promoting a sense of community, and provision of affordable housing in all areas of the region.

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What Can We Do About Global Warming?

As congregations we can...

- Become an Environmental Justice Covenant Congregation - promising to engage in environmental ministries through worship; teaching and learning; congregational lifestyle; and community, national and global involvement. Covenant Congregations receive periodic mailings from the NCC about caring for creation.
- Make a commitment to good energy stewardship in your congregation's facilities by improving the

efficiency of your building and equipment, and by curtailing unnecessary energy use. The NCC offers an Energy Stewardship Guide for Congregations that suggests steps you can take and resources for guidance to use less energy.

- For the Energy Stewardship Guide for Congregations, see the Web of Creation (www.webofcreation.org) or call 800-762-0968 and ask for Form EJ 9960. The price is \$2.00.

As individuals and families we can...

- Use electricity and water, especially hot water, only when needed.
- Use thermostat settings and insulation to conserve energy with heating, air conditioning, and hot water heating.
- Use a car less and a bike, bus, train or the side-

walk more.

- Buy the most efficient appliances, lighting equipment, and cars available.
- Discover new ways, and rediscover old ways, to have fun and enjoy God's creation without using electricity or fuel.

As US citizens we can...

- Inform ourselves about public policy issues relating to global warming, which may include agriculture, defense, economics, energy, taxation, trade, and transportation.
- Attend candidate forums and ask questions.

- Vote.
- Write letters to industry and government officials.
- Volunteer time with faith-based and secular citizens' groups.

As global citizens we can...

- Remember that God is the God of all creation; there are no boundaries in the atmosphere.
- Inform ourselves about negotiations and agreements to reduce greenhouse emissions.

- Work with people of faith throughout the world toward strong international agreements and sustainable life-styles for all.

Making a Commitment

1. As a follower of Jesus Christ within a broken world, I can

2. As members of congregation

_____, we can

Unison Prayer

Healing God, forgive us that we see dry bones in the places where you see the full vitality of life. Help us to remember that life comes from you alone. You alone are the Creator of the universe; you alone are the Savior of the whole world. Help us to celebrate the vision of life and to tend to the needs of your world. Amen.

Additional copies of this resource (#EJ-9701)
are available for \$2.00
or 5 or more copies @\$1.00 from:

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