2-2021

The Green Lectionary: Creation Care and the Revised Common Lectionary

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THE GREEN LECTIONARY:

CREATION CARE AND THE REVISED COMMON LECTIONARY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2021

Portland Seminary
George Fox University
Portland, Oregon

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

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has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on February 19, 2021
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership & Global Perspectives

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated:

- To Mary, for her constant encouragement
- To Joe, the best research librarian
- To Sue, who helped dream this into reality
- To my parents, who made the whole thing possible

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It has been a blessing to traverse this entire doctoral program with such an amazing cohort. I have also had the pleasure of working with a simply phenomenal advising group. This entire project would not have been completed without the compassion and support of Jenn Burnett, Rhonda Davis, Tammy Dunahoo, Mario Hood, and Chris Roush. To each of them I am ever grateful.

EPIGRAPH

"Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,

Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above

Join with all nature in manifold witness

To thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love."

- Thomas O. Chisolm

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ABSTRACT

As Christian communities become increasingly interested in engaging with humanity's biblical connection to the earth, and the spiritual response to this relationship, there is uncertainty regarding the most contextually appropriate methods to pursue. Impressive projects that conserve and honor elements of creation, activities such as community gardens or solar panel installation projects, are often disconnected from the liturgical life of the congregation. Conversely, honoring creation and the biblical connection people of faith have with nature is a widely under practiced liturgical activity. This paper argues that the most direct and practical method to enhance a congregation's awareness of their spiritual relationship with the earth, is by emphasizing the creation themes found in the readings of the Revised Common Lectionary in the routine liturgical gathering of the community.

Argued and applied throughout six sections, Section 1 names a plethora of biblical examples that state the relationship between humanity and creation and explores this spiritual bond. An overview of common methods congregations have attempted to best engage with the earth, their outcomes and shortfalls is the focus of Section 2. The main thesis is presented in Section 3. This section includes as an historical overview of the relationship between liturgy and lectionary, an analysis of the creation themes found in the Revised Common Lectionary, and culminates in a call for a new lectionary device that directly engages the biblical text, the liturgical year, and creation. Section 4 provides an introductory glimpse into the artifact, titled the Green Lectionary, a lectionary resource providing creation themed commentary for each reading found in the Revised Common Lectionary. Additional information regarding the Green Lectionary can be

found in Section 5. Section 6 includes an overview of key learnings and suggestions for further study.

SECTION 1: THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Jill is the minister of a relatively healthy church situated in the middle of a suburb just outside a major metropolitan city. The community she serves is vibrant: they have robust and deeply spiritual worship, they fervently pray for the world and one another, their mission and benevolence ministries touch the lives of those both near and far. And yet there is a sense amongst the leaders of the church that a new opportunity to theologically frame their connection to place, to one another, and to the natural world is emerging.

The winds of change have been blowing in many of the congregations nearby. A church of a different denomination recently dedicated an entire month of worship to exploring their scriptural relationship with the earth. A coalition of neighboring congregations started community gardens, one of which now collects so sizeable a harvest it supplies a community food bank with locally sourced vegetables and produce. Jill has heard of one faith community that encouraged everyone to walk or bike to worship, and then bought carbon credits to offset a portion of the carbon emitted in the preparation and officiating of holy worship. They were featured in the local newspaper because they worshiped out of doors in a nearby park on the Sunday closest to Earth Day.

Other local congregations have begun to think creatively as their buildings have started to show signs of decay. A couple of these congregations added solar panels to their roofs, and now can sell the additional energy they collect back to the power company. One put a wind turbine in the back of the property, alongside the old softball

field that hasn't seen a game played for at least a decade. One faith community refurbished their entire facility and installed geothermal power. A denominational representative just sent an email to Jill encouraging her to recommend her members replace their old light bulbs with more energy-efficient light bulbs as a cost saving and eco-friendly endeavor in an upcoming sermon. A congregant even shared that Oprah had dedicated an entire edition of *The Oprah Magazine* to earth care, naming it the "Love the Planet" issue.[1]

Green Teams. Earth Care. Eco-theology. These terms and ideas now permeate through the communities of faith that surround Jill and her parish, but the question remains, how can these initiatives inspire those in the faith community and, perhaps more importantly, how can the communities of faith that have undertaken this discernment and commenced some of these projects help inspire others to continue to reimagine what church life looks like when we are grounded to the earth and grounded in our faith? The church is the home of the prophetic voice and the power in that voice can be moving, inspirational, and transformational. And for centuries people of faith have found that prophetic voice in the words of scripture.

Biblical Connection

In the Beginning . . . the "Doctrine of Creation."

The energy many congregations like Jill's are experiencing with regards to their spiritual connection to nature and creation is both timely and ancient. Amidst the

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[1] *The Oprah Magazine*, April 2019.

backdrop of an energy crisis[2] and climate justice, people of faith are rediscovering the deep theological connection Christianity has with the earth.[3] Examples of this are abundant throughout scripture, but can be grounded in the truth that "the world—all of it, including the nonhuman world—matters to God. Indeed, it matters passionately to God."[4] The significance is imperative to God, the God who, as Scripture states, has deemed all of creation "good" (Genesis 1:10) and filled it with divine glory (Isaiah 6:3). Grounded in the first chapters of Genesis, but restated and reimagined, throughout Scripture, the Christian doctrine of Creation "begins with what scripture tells us about who the Creator is and tries to understand the created world in light of that."[5]

Shirley Guthrie writes the doctrine of Creation names key components about God. First, "God is the Creator of the whole world."[6]

> The creation story in the first chapter of Genesis says this in explicit detail: God is the Creator of day and night (and therefore time), the earth and seas, plants and trees, sun and moon, birds and fish and animals of all kinds—and finally of human beings. (If the writers of this ancient story had known what we know about the vast expanse of the universe, they would have said, . . . that God is the Creator not only of our little planet but of "all the worlds that are." But following them, we will restrict our discussion to "planet earth.") Christian tradition has always

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[2] Mario Molina and James McCarthy, "What We Know: The Reality, Risks, and Response to Climate Change," The AAAS Climate Science Panel, (n.d.): 14.

[3] Daniel Cox, Juhem Navarro-Rivera, and Robert P. Jones, "Believers, Sympathizers, and Skeptics: Why Americans Are Conflicted about Climate Change, Environmental Policy, and Science," (Washington DC: Public Religion Research Institute and the American Academy of Religion, 2014), n.d., accessed July 9, 2020, https://www.prri.org/research/believers-sympathizers-skeptics-americans-conflicted-climate-change-environmental-policy-science/.

[4] Marcus J. Borg, "God's Passion in the Bible: The World," in *Moral Ground: Ethical Action for a Planet in Peril*, ed. Kathleen Dean Moore and Michael P. Nelson (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 2010), 251.

[5] Shirley C. Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, rev. ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 147.

[6] Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine,* 147.

> affirmed that God is the Creator—and therefore also the Ruler, Preserver, Savior, and Renewer—of all things."[7]

Imperative in the doctrine of Creation is a God-centered view of the world, not a human-centered understanding. Scripture teaches that "the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it" (Psalm 24:1). Everything humans use, touch, manipulate, consume, and cultivate belongs primarily to God.

Additionally, Scripture informs us that humans have been made in the image of God, and with that knowledge comes a unique responsibility. "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness, and let them have dominion . . ." (Genesis 1:26-28). Sallie McFague describes the relationship humanity has with the rest of creation like this: "Human beings are not individuals with the power to use nature in whatever ways we wish. Rather, we are *dependent* on nature and *responsible* for it."[8] God's desire is to "befriend and help God's created world, so we creatures in the image of God are created to use our unique power over our fellow creatures . . . we alone are created to be 'stewards' of God who 'manage' God's property in the interest of the Creator's good will for the whole created world and all its creatures."[9] Brigitte Kahl continues this theme of service and mutual responsibility when she writes, "humanity is created for servitude . . . but there aren't any divine or human masters—just the earth who needs service."[10] As

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[7] Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 147.

[8] Sallie McFague, "A Manifesto to North American Middle-Class Christians," in *Moral Ground: Ethical Action for a Planet in Peril*, ed. Kathleen Dean Moore and Michael P. Nelson (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 2010), 246. Emphasis in original.

[9] Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 150.

[10] Brigitte Kahl, "Fratricide and Ecocide: Rereading Genesis 2-4," in *Earth Habitat: Eco-Injustice and the Church's Response,* ed. Dieter T. Hessel and Larry L. Rasmussen (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 55.

God "brings forth in love" the world, humanity is invited to participate in God's creative work, preserving and nurturing God's creation, while fulfilling God's creative work together.[11]

Though God is the first creator, and humanity has the blessed opportunity to participate in the care of Creation, it is vital to indicate that this participatory experience is an ongoing and ever-evolving activity. "The Bible says not only that God *was* but that God *is* and *will be* Creator. God's creative activity is not limited to the distant past . . . even now God 'gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist' (Romans 4:17.)"[12] The "radical dependence on nature" that humanity "exists" in, and the awareness of the impact human activity can be on the rest of creation, results in an ongoing, participatory creation story that is "a *functional* story, one that has practical implications for how we live at personal and public levels."[13] This role we play alongside God in bringing about, caring for, and loving God's good creation is a role that we must play in both our personal lives, and within the public spheres in which we reside.

The faith community that has traditionally been most intimately and immediately called to this spiritual work—the way we tend, steward, and take care of God's good creation—is the local parish. And each parish is rooted in the immediate geographic context in which it resides.

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[11] Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2004), 113.

[12] Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 151. Emphasis in original.

[13] McFague, "A Manifesto to North American Middle-Class Christians," 247. Emphasis in original.

Sacred Space, Sacred Relationship, Sacred Earth

An individual's faith may carry both a personal and public component. The way most people experience their relationship with creation is publicly within their immediate context, their neighborhood, backyard, block, or campus. And yet, the interaction a person has with their native land is personal, spiritual, communal, and profound.[14] Often, a deeply moving experience with nature can leave a lasting mark on an individual. These sacred experiences in nature can take place while one is in solitude, or occur while a community is already gathered, resulting in spaces that have been given the title of "sacred" throughout history and culture. The designation of sacred can come from many things: its beauty, its history, a people's communal memory, and even catastrophe.

Sacred traditions throughout history have observed the sanctity of place. Certain locations have been deemed holier than others either because something inspiring occurred there or because of a mystical aura that seems to permeate from the location.[15] Cities like Jerusalem, Mecca, Istanbul, Mexico City, Cairo, and Rome all carry this spiritual aura.[16] Distinct geographic features also have been considered sacred: pools, rivers, mountains, valleys, islands, and rock formations have inspired humans to look to the sacred as they stand in awe of the natural world. Throughout time, and across all cultures, communities have gathered to celebrate the mythic truth that "the deepest

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[14] Fletcher Harper, *GreenFaith: Mobilizing God's People to Save the Earth* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015), 19.

[15] Niánn Emerson Chase, "The Sanctity of Place," Global Community Communications Alliance, accessed June 25, 2020, https://gccalliance.org/articles/the-sanctity-of-place.

[16] Eric Weiner, "Where Heaven and Earth Come Closer," *The New York Times*, March 9, 2012, https://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/11/travel/thin-places-where-we-are-jolted-out-of-old-ways-of-seeing-the-world.html.

human wisdom [is] a simple spiritual reality: we're grounded" to the geographic location in which we reside and the customs and rituals that are native to, or derived from, that place.[17]

Biblical sources point to humanity's connection with the entirety of God's creation and the earth beginning in the first chapters of Genesis. In the first creation story included in the Bible, God created the world and it "was good" (Genesis 1:1-2:4). Water, sky, plants, and animals were all created by God. That same loving Creator then created humanity in the image of God (Genesis 1: 26-27). The Hebrew word for human (adam) is derived from the term used for earth (adama), linguistically binding humanity to the origins of life.[18]

Not only is there a divine connection between humanity and the earth, but for the fullest expression of this relationship to exist, God intends humankind's collective wisdom to help foster the overall health of creation as well. Francis Schaeffer applies this wisdom and writes, "If I am going to be in the right relationship with God, I should treat the things he has made in the same way he treats them."[19] We must live in a fashion that values what God values, honoring all that was created with love and care.[20] Pope Francis agrees with Schaeffer in the opening words of his Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si,* when he quotes Saint Francis of Assisi, who claims that the relationship humanity has with the

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[17] Diana Butler Bass, *Grounded: Finding God in the World—A Natural Revolution* (San Francisco, TX: Harper One, 2017), 19.

[18] Brayton Shanley, *The Many Sides of Peace: Christian Nonviolence, The Contemplative Life, and Sustainable Living* (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2013), 141.

[19] Francis Schaeffer and Udo Middelmann, *Pollution and the Death of Man* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1992), 13.

[20] Ben Lowe, *Green Revolution: Coming Together to Care for Creation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 29.

earth is so close it is like a relationship one would have with their sister: "Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs."[21]

This familial relationship has been an essential element of Christian faith since antiquity. The power found in the first chapters of Genesis is "that in it the remembrance of mankind's history is preserved as a self-contained whole, and that present-day man experiences himself as part of mankind's history."[22] Barack Obama writes, "one of the things I draw from the Genesis story is the importance of being good stewards of the land, of this incredible gift."[23] Created by God, in relationship with the rest of creation, humans have the divine responsibility—and the divine opportunity—to care for the beauty of the earth, as a living witness to the relationship God intends. The poetry of Scripture provides myriad examples that explore this relationship.

Water

An element used throughout scripture to demonstrate how humanity is spiritually connected to creation and one another is water. Sacramentally, Christians are bound to one another and to God through the living waters of baptism (John 7:37-39 and Romans 6:3). The "creation story" of Noah and the Great Flood contains promises of a new covenant of peace, one coming after a deep cleansing from the waters from heaven.

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[21] "Canticle of the Creatures," in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 1 (New York: 1999), 113-114.

[22] Claus Westermann, *Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 14.

[23] Barack Obama, "The Future I Want for My Daughters," in *Moral Ground: Ethical Action for a Planet in Peril*, ed. Kathleen Dean Moore and Michael P. Nelson (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 2010), 30.

> God said to Noah and to his sons with him, "I am now setting up my covenant with you, with your descendants, and with every living being with you—with the birds, with the large animals, and with all the animals of the earth, leaving the ark with you. I will set up my covenant with you so that never again will all life be cut off by floodwaters. There will never again be a flood to destroy the earth. (Genesis 9:8-11)

This foundational story demonstrates that God has broad intentions for saving an incredibly wide variety of God-created life. Every type of creature is guided into the ark, survives the flood, and then is blessed in a new covenantal relationship. "At the end of the story of Noah, God makes a covenant, an unbreakable commitment never again to destroy the earth by a flood. But the covenant isn't just with people. It's with every living creature."[24] The biblical text names the rainbow as the image that should bind us to, and remind us of, God's new covenant with Noah and all of creation.[25] This covenantal biblical image demonstrates the universal connection between water and faith.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at a well and they discuss the concept of "living water." The words Jesus carefully uses indicate his role as spiritual reservoir.

> A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said to him,

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[24] Harper, *Green Faith*, 28.

[25] Genesis 9:13.

> "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." (John 4:7-15)

Jesus does not claim to be a "living *well*"—particular to one location—but as "living water"—indicating a more universal and sacred trait. The love, wisdom, and hope of Jesus bubbles up like a spring. Reflecting on this passage, Diana Butler Bass writes, "Water is life; life is water. Living water is God; God is living water."[26] Living water and the water of life uniting creation together.

While floods and wells are prominent in many favorite Bible stories, rivers are also vastly important throughout scripture. The Garden of Eden supplied the headwaters of four great rivers.[27] The Nile is foundational, a character and a location throughout Exodus.[28] Jesus is baptized in the Jordan, the most prominent river in the area.[29] New ways of understanding human connection to God and spiritual relationship with water are stemming out of the "bioregionalism" movement. Ched Myers and Kirkpatrick Sale describe bioregionalism in detail below.

> Bio is from the Greek word for forms of life . . . and region is from the Latin *regere*, territory to be ruled . . . They convey together a life-territory, a place defined by its life forms, its topography and its biota, rather than by human dictates; a region governed by nature, not legislature.[30]

Bioregionalists tend to see the world through the resources most present in the immediate context of a given geographical region, and Myers and Sale apply this to the field of

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[26] Butler Bass, *Grounded*, 77.

[27] Genesis 2:10-14.

[28] Exodus 7:14-25.

[29] Matthew 3:13–17; Mark.1:9–11.

[30] Ched Myers, "Watershed Discipleship," in *Faithful Resistance: Gospel Visions for the Church in the time of Empire,* ed Rick Ufford-Chase (Stony Point, NY: UnShelved, 2016), 61.

theology. They have "emphasized an even more specific locus for re-inhabitory literacy and engagement, based on what is most basic to life: water."[31] This has tied Myers' work into region-specific sources of water, most particularly watersheds. Naming this type of theology "Watershed Discipleship," Myers asks, "What would it mean for Christians to re-center our citizen-identity in the topography of Creation, rather than in the political geography of dominant cultural ideation, and to ground our discipleship practices in the watersheds in which we reside?"[32] This turn to the local not only draws immediate context to the health of the watershed, but also harkens back to the imagery of the garden from the second chapter of Genesis. Adam and Eve were placed in a specific location, blessed with four rivers in its watershed,[33] and called to love it as God loves them.

The land and the water are both elemental locations, "characters" that spiritually bound our biblical ancestors together. As people of faith live out the mandate to care for all creation, these elements bind and remind the people of God of their universal connection to one another.

Air

An additional element of creation, intimately binding humanity to the earth and all that is in it, is the air all living creatures breathe. In the first chapter of Genesis, God created the heavens and deemed them good (Genesis 1:1). However, in the second chapter, a different creation story altogether, the breath of God was breathed into a type

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[31] Myers, "Watershed Discipleship," 61.

[32] Myers, "Watershed Discipleship," 62.

[33] Genesis 2:10-14.

of clay mold, as God fashioned humanity out of the elements that had already been created. “Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7). In the original Hebrew, the word for breath (ruach) can be translated as “breath,” “air,” or “spirit,” and it is that same “spirit breath” that all living creatures breathe in and out today. Larry Rasmussen writes of the air’s connectional features across space and time, describing how the air binds us to our ancestors, and to all who have come before. “The air we breathe, its oxygen the free gift of plants, is the same air breathed by Moses, Jesus, the Buddha, Muhammad, Dorothy Day, and Derek Jeter,” and its cleanliness and purity is vital to life for all.[34] The Hebraic tradition also harkens our memory to the connection between air and spirit. The breath of life, “this spirit is the sustaining force of the universe, the invisible presence necessary for all life, the breath of God at creation and through the words of the prophets.”[35] Clean air binds all of creation together with the memory, and the promise, of creation and is imperative for all life to flourish.

This same “spirit” or “air” or “breath” is also found in the New Testament book of Acts. On the day of Pentecost, “a rush of wind gives birth to the church, the spiritual body intended to carry on Jesus’s work in the world.”[36] Between the rushing winds and the dancing tongues of flame, the air has an active role to play in the story of Pentecost.

> When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were

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[34] Larry Rasmussen, *Earth Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 21.

[35] Butler Bass, *Grounded*, 111.

[36] Butler Bass, *Grounded*, 111.

> filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. (Acts 2:1-5)

This sacred wind both creates and recreates, drawing more people into the life-giving work of the spirit. This spirit fulfills two tasks: drawing people in and spiritually connecting them to one another.

The air, often alluded to as the sky by biblical writers, is also a constant reminder about God's awesome and unlimited power, poetically described in Psalm 8:

> When I look at your skies,
> at what your fingers made—
> the moon and the stars
> that you set firmly in place—
> what are human beings
> that you think about them;
> what are human beings
> that you pay attention to them? (Psalm 8:3-4)

While this Psalm invokes the author's awe of creation, people of faith must remember that though the beauty of creation is something to be admired, God also intends for creation to inspire an active participatory response regarding the nurture, tending, and care of the world that was created good.[37] Indicating again the connection humanity has with the earth, Pope Francis writes, "we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters."[38]

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[37] Harper, *GreenFaith*, 29.

[38] Pope Francis, *Laudato Si: On Care for our Common Home* (Vatican: Vatican Press, 2015), 2. http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html#_ftnref1.

As Walter Brueggemann writes, "the Bible is the story of God's people with God's land."[39] However, God's people were made in concert not only with the land, but also with the air, the water, and the other creatures who call earth home. As the story of Noah and the Great Flood reminds us, all of creation is bound together in covenant. "Covenantal bonds—between God and Earth, between God and humankind, between humans and one another and the rest of life—establish, order, and sustain creation as we know it. The way of covenant, for better or worse, is the way things *are*."[40] Taking Brueggemann a step further, the Bible is the story of God's people with the entirety of God's creation, bound tightly together in covenantal relationship.

Scriptural and Linguistic Analysis

Traditional Reformed theology claims that all creation is spiritually connected. Scripture indicates that geographic and topographic phenomena indicate this as well. So too does the ancient languages of Scripture, both Hebrew and Greek.

The Creation story found in the first chapter of Genesis says of humanity, "God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth'" (Genesis 1:28). The exact interpretation of the word dominion has been debated by scholars throughout church history. Yet dominion should never be confused with domination. The Hebrew concept of "nephresh nayya," which is often translated as "dominion over," historically

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[39] Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, Overtures to biblical theology 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 13.

[40] Rasmussen, *Earth Honoring Faith*, 17. Emphasis in original.

demonstrates that "humans are bound together with beasts, birds, fishes, and insects."[41] Dominion, according to Hebrew Scripture Scholar Claus Westermann:

> Does not even include the right to kill animals for food. Since the priestly creation story and the Yahwehist account in the second chapter of Genesis portray humans as vegetarians eating the fruits of the plants and trees for their food. People would forfeit their principal role among the living, were the animals made the object of their whim.[42]

The Bible explains throughout its sacred texts the deep love and compassion God has for all of creation. Ancient Hebrew cultures did not have a term for "nature" because "they didn't as humans see themselves apart from the natural world."[43] There was only one world, all of which was spoken into being through and by the love of the Creator God, in whose image humanity was formed. Humans were called to live in community with the ground, the animals, the plants, the water, the air, all the elements of life that are needed to survive, thrive, and live the redemptive call to "be fruitful" in many forms.

As beings created in the image of God, and spiritually bound to all of creation, both living and non-living, the Hebrew term that describes this human relationship and responsibility is *shamar.* This term has many translations, such as "to farm" and "to till," and is found in the Creation Story found in the second chapter of Genesis. "The Lord God took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden to farm it and to take care of it" (Genesis 2:15). Here we see the term *shamar* as "to farm" and "to take care of." *Shamar* as an agricultural term does mean to farm; however, "when it's used non-agriculturally, it is translated from Hebrew into English as *serve*, a meaning that provides an important

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[41] Shanley, *The Many Sides of Peace*, 141.

[42] Claus Westermann, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 159.

[43] Shanely, *The Many Sides of Peace*, 141.

clue to understanding the connotation of the word's deeper meaning."[44] Brigitte Kahl agrees, and writes that another agricultural translation can be "to till." Kahl indicates that this passage is where "humanity receives its original definition as 'servant of the earth,' being in a clearly dependent and subordinated position, which is expressed in the very naming Adam-of-Adama . . . [God] creates Adam to serve Adama. To get her green."[45] In other biblical uses such as these, the term is translated as "to guard, protect, or watch over" and is found in many famous verses of the Bible.

One such example is from Joshua: "But my family and I will serve the Lord," (Joshua 24:15) or, in the more familiar translation, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (KJV).[46] Shamar is also found in the first sentence of this famous blessing found in the book of Numbers: "The Lord bless you and protect you. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his face to you and grant you peace" (Numbers 6:24-26). Often used as a liturgical device, this passage from Numbers includes as one "of it's key verbs that expresses God's care for us, the verb translated protect, is the same verb used in Genesis 2:15 to express the care we owe to the earth."[47] As Claus Westermann describes the relationship, "What is decisive is the responsibility of man for the preservation of what has been entrusted to him . . . will he, like a noble lord, conscious of his responsibility for the whole and its future take care to see that the whole remains healthy?"[48]

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[44] Harper, *GreenFaith*, 33. Emphasis in original.

[45] Kahl, "Fratricide and Ecocide," 54.

[46] Harper, *GreenFaith*, 33.

[47] Harper, *GreenFaith*, 33.

[48] Westermann, *Creation*, 53-54.

It is clear that Presbyterian pastor and ancient language translator Eugene Peterson believes the best translation involves "divine maintenance," as he translates this verse: "God took the Man and set him down in the Garden of Eden to work the ground and keep it in order" (Genesis 2:15, The Message). For a Presbyterian who lived by the creed of "decently and in order," Peterson linguistically indicates the relational responsibility that humanity has with the rest of creation as a sacred, and ordered, element of God's plan.

God's wisdom and intention has been made clear through scriptures. All of creation has been formed as an interrelated web and has been deemed good, and the individual health of each element relies on the overall health of the whole. Formed when the breath of God entered the earth to create living soil, humankind made in the image of their Creator God has the sacred opportunity not merely to enjoy the beauty that God created, but most importantly to aid in the growth, preservation, and well-being of the entire earth. "The world—each fragment as well as the whole—is a window into the love of God. And as God's children, we are entrusted with the responsibility to protect God's creation."[49] The church, the people of God gathered to do the work of God in the world, are the keepers of the sacred. All of God's creation is worthy of reverence and respect. Pope Francis writes, "everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each . . . and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth."[50] Biblically based, textually bound, and theologically grounded, this

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[49] Jim Antal, *Climate Church, Climate World: How People of Faith Must Work for Change* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 1.

[50] Pope Francis, *Laudato Si,* 92.

research now turns toward the ways the intimate connection of humans to creation impacts theology and how one experiences God.

Theological Connections to Creation

The people of God have experienced a spiritual connection to creation since prehistoric times. The celebration of the divine found in creation throughout Scripture, theology, and liturgy is not new, and yet it has seen a "reformation" over the two centuries. Writers like Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Rachel Carson, Sallie McFague, Bill McKibben, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Diana Butler Bass have helped usher in what Norman Dieter Hessel refers to as an Eco-Reformation, "which takes seriously the reality of natural biophysical limits, the depths of the eco-justice crisis, and the intricate and interdependent relationships of humankind with the rest of nature."[51] As popularity in this field has grown, additional resources, such as books, compilations, and curriculum produced by writers and academics, have been added. This discipline is broad, diverse, and interfaith.

The academic field that explores the relationship between faith and the natural world is a theological discipline called ecotheology.

> Ecotheology is a form of study and thinking that combines the disciplines of ecology (the study of organisms and their environments) and theology (the study of God and religious beliefs). Ecotheology examines creation through the lenses of Scripture and Christian tradition, exploring questions like: "What does God say about the care of creation?" and "How does our theology influence our understanding of ecology?"[52]

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[51] Dieter Hessel, "The Church Ecologically Reformed," in *Earth Habitat: Eco-Injustice and the Church's Response,* ed. Dieter T. Hessel and Larry L. Rasmussen (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 187.

[52] "What Is Ecotheology?" Portland Seminary, accessed May 20, 2020, https://www.georgefox.edu/seminary/ecotheology.html.

Though ecotheology as a field of study is a recent phenomenon, Scripture is full of passages that describe the beauty of creation, the partnership humanity has with the created world, and the call humanity has to help care for nature. Much of biblical writing comes from an agrarian society. Images of nature abound and indicate key spiritual locations and concepts. Biblical images like garden, valley, river, vine, and shepherd resonate with the bounty and beauty of creation, and indicate the life-giving sustenance found in creation on which biblical writers relied. In that regard, little has changed since scripture was originally written; humanity still does rely on the land for sustenance, and the sacred responsibility to care for it has not changed either. However, humanity's awareness of this interdependence has shifted, as technological advances have removed much of humanity from lives of subsistence farming. Thus, humanity's relationship with creation itself and creation vocabulary needs to be reframed.

New Terminology—New Wineskins

New frames with which to discuss and study one's relationship with God means new names for the divine and one's relationship with God. God has gone by many names throughout time: Creator, Liberator, Mother, Father. The name that eco-theologian Norman Wirzba has deemed for God is "Gardener." "One of the most important truths about God is that God loves soil. Scripture portrays God as a gardener and farmer because God is constantly at work in the soil, holding it, breathing the breath of life into

it—all so that creatures can live and be fed."[53] Activist Ben Lowe takes the analogy even further as he labels our faith communities, along with college campuses, "seminaries and fellowship groups" as "Greenhouses." "These [communities] are the fertile soil where seeds of the creation care movement are planted. We come together in these venues ready to grow and eager to learn how to make the world a better place."[54] When conversations about God are framed with these new terms—God as Gardener, community as Greenhouse—new theologies and new ways humanity relates to the divine are imagined, explored, and embraced.

Using new imagery to describe God as new theological issues present themselves is an ancient practice. As Peter Enns writes:

> We can hardly turn a page of the Bible without seeing God imagined as a king, shepherd, rock, fortress, vine or potter. God isn't actually any of these things (obviously), but those ways of depicting God reflect the "givens" of an ancient culture that drew tribal boundaries, farmed, tended animals, and made their own pottery. It's like when eighteenth-century philosophers and theologians referred to God as a "divine watchmaker." Generations of smartphone and smartwatch users will come up with their own analogy.[55]

The titles given to God by the believers in God tend often to "reflect the cultural language used for God at the time."[56] Poignantly, the imagery used by the biblical writers to describe God is similar to the imagery used by modern eco-theologians. Both are inspired by the earth and the roles within a community whose sole responsibility is to ensure the

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[53] Norman Wirzba, "In God's Garden: Living the Good News in a Changing Climate," in *Sacred Acts: How Churches are Working to Protect Earth's Climate*, ed. Mallory McDuff (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2014), 89.

[54] Lowe, *Green Revolution*, 85.

[55] Peter Enns, *How the Bible Actually Works: In Which I Explain How an Ancient, Ambiguous, and Diverse Book Leads Us to Wisdom Rather than Answers—and Why That's Great News* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2019), 153.

[56] Enns, *How the Bible Actually Works,* 153.

land is maintained and tended. As the terminology of eco-theology has evolved, many shared themes and components have emerged.

Wirzba, while describing God as a Gardener, points to the fact that due to industrialization and modern commercial farming, many people are extremely distant from the cultivation and production of the food they consume. This was not the case for most of human history, including the people found throughout the Bible. For biblical characters, "the God they worshiped was daily encountered as the life-giving power at work in soils, plants and animals."[57] Wirzba writes that the God who creates in Genesis Chapter 1 is "a God who delights in the beauty and variety of life, a God who routinely pronounces that the world is good."[58] This story from scripture demonstrates the divine desire God has for all of creation to cultivate growth. In the second chapter of Genesis, God is not a violent God of battle, or one who attempts to outwit other gods or creatures, but is the holy one who "planted a garden in Eden, in the east" (Genesis 2:8) as a safe place for growth and cultivation to occur. God's "intimacy with and concern for creation become even more pronounced" in this second creation story, where the "goal of all human life is to participate in God's watering, weeding, composting, and soil-building life, and then to delight in it and with it in Sabbath rest."[59] God is the gardener and creates humanity to be co-gardeners, partners in the further creation, cultivation, and upkeep of the world.

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[57] Wirzba, "In God's Garden," 90.

[58] Wirzba, "In God's Garden," 92.

[59] Wirzba, "In God's Garden," 92-93.

Opportunities for the Earth

Living a life of faith with a deep appreciation for the sacred interconnectivity humanity has with the rest of creation is a timeless, and timely, response to the love and majesty of God. Based in scripture and traditional Reformed theology, universally bound to every person and community of faith, yet intimately tied to the exact location and context of a local parish, there are myriad ways for both individuals and faith communities to live out this call.

The remainder of this dissertation will argue that emphasizing the Creation themes found throughout the texts of the Revised Common Lectionary during worship is the most facile and tangible way a congregation can engage in this work. This section includes examples that indicate the spiritual connection to creation humanity has as named throughout Scripture. The next section will delve into a sampling of opportunities a community of faith may explore outside of worship as they engage in the intersection between creation and faith, embracing this work through property use, educational efforts, advocacy, and outreach. All are vital elements of a whole-church action plan, yet none of these primarily focuses on worship of the One True God or involve such readily available materials as the entirety of Scripture.

SECTION 2: OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Congregations have taken many routes as they live out the biblical call to faithfully care for the earth, and this section will turn toward the assessment of a sampling of those expressions. First, an examination of organizational models that congregations have utilized provides a framework to explore other solutions.

As many congregations begin by updating their energy and property use as a response to Earth Care, this is the first area addressed. Though profound impact can occur in this area, there are obstacles that need to be explored. This section continues with an overview of educational opportunities, such as classes and films; mission-based activities and community advocacy efforts, such as reforestation efforts and supporting local agriculture; and the worship life of a local congregation, all explored through an eco-theological framework. Suitability considerations and further analysis accompany each method explored.

Congregational Earth Care Praxis

Due to the uniqueness of each congregation's contextualization, it is important to emphasize that none of the methods examined can be qualified as "better than" any other method addressed. Considering local context, any one of these methods may be an appropriate or faithful expression for a community to undertake. It is impossible to analyze each distinct aspect of every congregation's contextualization here. However, while each of the explored methods has the potential to become a viable element of a whole-church action plan, this section states that none of these impact the spiritual life of an entire congregation like routine inclusion during weekly Sunday worship.

Additionally, the proclamation of Scripture amidst routine worship is a relatively probable endeavor in almost every congregation. While additional merits of this method are explored in Section III, the remainder of this section will explore a sampling of other methods, practices, and efforts.

Modeling Creation Care for the Good of the Earth

A common theme shared amongst nearly all leading advocates in the Creation Care movement is that no matter the praxis in which a parish or congregation decides to engage, they should make the effort to model their work for the greater community. "It is far better to do one thing, whether that is start and maintain a community garden, or install solar panels, or even just worship outside regularly, and to do it well," says Rev. abby mohaupt, Director of the Green Seminary Initiative.[60] Modeling their efforts encourages a community to hold themselves to high standards, while also sharing with others the good green work they are living out together. Jim Antal, Special Advisor on Climate Justice to the General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ, agrees:

> Often the case is that congregations understand their faithfulness as a body of behavior, acting in a faithful way, however what they don't always do is bear witness to other congregations. All too often a congregation lives in a world unto themselves, and they don't realize that their momentums might be useful to a neighboring congregation, whether that congregation is in or not in their denomination.[61]

Many congregations have stumbled upon the discovery that through green discernment they have been able to impact not only their own faith lives, but the lives of those around

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[60] Rev. abby mohaupt, telephone interview, November 11, 2019.

[61] Rev. Jim Antal, telephone interview, October 23, 2019.

them, improving the local community and enhancing ecclesiastical and interfaith relationships.

For many faith communities discerning the best way to live in a more healthy, sustainable, Earth Care–conscious fashion is a difficult choice; however, the better a community models their behavior, the easier it is for other congregations to understand the work and to feel confident that their own community could participate. "When a core group of people connects with another group of people, they find the benefit of being rejuvenated," says Rebecca Barnes, current coordinator of the Presbyterian Hunger Program and former Associate for Environmental Ministries for the PCUSA.[62] Finding other individuals or communities that have a similar passion, and then joining efforts, empowers more people along their faith journey and as Creation Care advocates. Additionally, the discovery of other people of faith with similar passions and convictions reminds us of our deep connections with one another. As the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. says, "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."[63] As a people created both in community and in the image of God, working collectively to help care for creation is indeed a holy endeavor. Going a theological step further, Antal writes, "The church must reawaken in people the moral clarity and resolve to build our lives—and our life together—around God's promises and gifts as we model a way of life and advocate

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[62] Rev. Rebecca Barnes, telephone interview, October 21, 2019.

[63] Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham City Jail," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr*., ed. James Washington (San Francisco, CA: Harper& Row, 1986), 182.

for laws that hold humanity accountable."[64] Pope Francis instructs this same idea in his *Loudato Si* encyclical. "We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it."[65]

Reformed theology agrees with the Pope. Humans do need one another and do have a shared responsibility for others and the world. The following pages will explore ways that communities of faith can work together to best model caring for the three things to which humans are most connected: ". . . God, . . . our neighbour and . . . the earth itself."[66]

Organization

"We are called to help in God's ongoing saving work in the world. This is our task: to learn to reshape our lives to honor rather than destroy God's creation."[67] Honoring God's creation is often the theological "common ground" from which a Creation Care effort is launched. Maintaining the communal and spiritual emphasis has allowed for many congregations to frame this conversation as a community effort.

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[64] Jim Antal, *Climate Church, Climate World: How People of Faith Must Work for Change* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 55.

[65] Pope Francis, *Laudato Si,* 229.

[66] Pope Francis, *Laudato Si,* 66.

[67] Rebecca Barnes, *50 Ways to Help Save the Earth, Revised Edition. How You and Your Church Can Make a Difference* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 8.

Green Teams

A common first step for a congregation is to designate a "green team"—a group that has the energy and desire to pursue Creation Care activities. This intentional allocation of resources and expertise will empower a group that has the authority to impact the rest of the work of the church.[68] Celebrating their formation with a commissioning service during worship would liturgically emphasize the congregational shift toward a further Earth Care emphasis.[69] This newfound group should not take for granted the power and location of the church within the broader community. Though not a universal truth, many churches are "planted in the same neighborhood for many years, where they can develop lasting relationships and initiate long-term projects to impact the local community."[70] This community cachet is a valuable asset when sharing the good news of Creation Care in the neighborhood and the world.

Praxis and Method

A Green Team often is given the authority to determine how a congregation will engage in this work. Therefore, it is the Green Team's responsibility to discern the type of engagement that best fits their community. Communities of faith vary greatly in the methods they implement as they share the "good news" with the world. Inspired by the gospel of Matthew, some employ a hands-on model, perhaps adopting a stretch of a local

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[68] Codi Norred, "How to Form a Green Team at Church," Reflections: Crucified Creation: A Green Faith Rising, accessed July 11, 2020, https://reflections.yale.edu/article/crucified-creation-green-faith-rising/how-form-green-team-church.

[69] "Presbytery Earth Care Program," Presbyterians for Earth Care, accessed July 11, 2020, https://presbyearthcare.org/presbytery-earth-care-program/.

[70] Lowe, *Green Revolution*, 87.

highway or preparing meals for a local soup kitchen.[71] Inspired by the words of the gospel writer Mark, some share financial resources in a fashion that enriches community-based environmental programs, educational efforts, and the like.[72] Many have a unique balance of the two and prayerfully discern how best to distribute the resources the community can provide.

The Green Team is empowered to champion this work so a congregation can best discern and implement their Earth Care action plan. Their task is to recognize praxis and fit. Each Green Team, and thus each congregation, is wise to keep their immediate context at the forefront of their decision-making process as they discern the praxis that best fits their community of faith.

Intergenerational Involvement

A profound Creation Care ministry opportunity is the possibility of organizing activities in an intergenerational format. Greta Thunberg, 2019 *Time Magazine* Person of the Year[73] and the Youth Global Climate Strike activists have demonstrated that youth have a passion for this work.[74] Children and youth can do so much more than merely change light bulbs or help in the garden. Their ingenuity and natural inquisitiveness provide a platform for their leadership and voice. As the health of the earth is a universal concern, so too can be the methods with which a congregation engages this work. All of

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[71] Matthew 25:35-40.

[72] Mark 12:13–17.

[73] Charlotte Alter, Suyin Haynes, and Justin Worland, "Greta Thunberg Is TIME's 2019 Person of the Year," *Time*, accessed July 11, 2020, https://time.com/person-of-the-year-2019-greta-thunberg/.

[74] "Global #ClimateStrikeOnline—Art, Training & Actions for Climate Strikers," Global Climate Strike, accessed July 11, 2020, https://globalclimatestrike.net.

these "sacrificial acts of service will be noticed and could inspire the whole church to embark on a journey toward good environmental stewardship."[75]

Planting and Reforestation

A popular Creation Care activity for a congregation with a newfound Green Team is to support reforestation efforts.[76] Biblically inspired by the passage "and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations,"[77] reforestation efforts can be scaled to fit almost any green vision. Tree planting efforts can be executed in three different ways. First, through the financial support of an organization the congregation holds in high esteem. There are many national and international organizations that specialize in this work and can accommodate donations of any size.[78] A more geographically specific model is through participating in local reforestation efforts, which can be done by contacting local and regional ecological specialists.[79] The third and most intimate method is by planting trees on the physical property of the church grounds. The Arbor Day

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[75] Lowe, *Green Revolution*, 88.

[76] Ben Guarino, "How Planting Trees Can Help in the Fight against Climate Change," *The Washington Post*, January 22, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/climate-solutions/trillion-tree-reforestation-climate-change-philippines/.

[77] Revelation 22:2-3.

[78] "One Tree Planted—Support Global Reforestation: One Dollar, One Tree," One Tree Planted, accessed July 11, 2020, https://onetreeplanted.org/.

[79] "Plant a Billion," The Nature Cnservancy, accessed July 11, 2020, https://www.nature.org/en-us/get-involved/how-to-help/plant-a-billion/.

Foundation,[80] local civic Parks Departments, and the U.S. Forest Service[81] can be invaluable resources for learning everything from when best to plant a tree on church property, to the potential participation in a communal work day at a local project. These types of experiences are cooperative and "hands on," can be communicated during worship or other platforms of the church and provide immediate tangible benefits to the community.

Examples of congregations engaging in this work are plentiful, both within an individual parish and in a collective fashion. In Granville, Ohio, the First Presbyterian Church is leading an initiative to plant 1,500 trees in their county as they strive to live out their call to environmental witness.[82] In a more regional effort, interfaith partners have teamed up through the organization Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake and have planted over 13,000 trees.[83] While these numbers and coalitions are powerful, they are not necessarily grounded in the weekly worship experience of the faith community.

As shown, numerous organizations, with little or nothing to do with scripture, worship, or faith, already go about the effort of reforestation and tree planting. As with many of the examples noted here, reforestation efforts fall short in their immediate connection to worship.

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[80] "Tree Planting & Care," Arbor Day Foundation, accessed July 27, 2020, https://www.arborday.org/trees/index-planting.cfm?TrackingID=404.

[81] "What Kind of Tree Do I Want?" United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conervation Serivce," accessed July 27, 2020, https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/newsroom/features/?cid=nrcs143_023578.

[82] Brandon Showalter, "Ohio Church to Plant 1,500 Trees in 5 Years in 'Restoring Creation' Effort," The Christian Post, accessed July 11, 2020, https://www.christianpost.com/news/ohio-church-to-plant-1500-trees-in-5-years-in-restoring-creation-effort.html.

[83] "Trees for Sacred Places," Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake, accessed July 11, 2020, https://www.interfaithchesapeake.org/tree_planting_program.

Connections with worship could easily be made. The congregational members that are engaged in the reforestation campaigns could be commissioned during worship. Their efforts could be discussed during the announcements or prayed for during congregational prayers. These efforts are worshipful, and certainly can deepen an individual's spirituality. For Earth Care to truly take root in the life of a congregation, it needs to become a routine element of the worship life of the congregation. The Green Team may become a worship experience for some, but without a liturgical connection, it will not become a worshipful experience for all.

Buildings, Grounds, and Property

Communities of faith, no matter their demographic or immediate context, wrestle with the routine maintenance and upkeep of their building and property. However, instead of thinking of this task as a burden, there is an emerging energy to reframe the conversation as an opportunity for earth-conscious witness. This opportunity should involve switching to renewable energy sources and sustainable building practice education events. These educational opportunities can then direct the community toward lower energy use and enhanced Creation Care behavior, and model for the greater community a decision that is both healthy and earth-conscious.

Eco-Audit

To ensure a congregation makes wise and well-informed decisions regarding their property use, many choose to perform an energy audit. An energy audit is a methodical inspection and analysis of the energy used in a building, with the intention of utilizing the

data for energy conservation.[84] Thermostat settings, window insulation, light bulbs, and the like will all be analyzed and suggestions on energy reduction will be supplied. As the ENERGY STAR website explains, "average energy savings of 30 percent or more are achievable in worship facilities with no-cost actions, strategic investment, and smart operations and maintenance. These savings can verify the careful stewardship of members' donations and can be repurposed to the mission and ministries of the congregation."[85]

Often, energy companies or local non-profits provide these audits for relatively low, or no, cost. "Most energy audits will include recommendations that are simple, economical changes as well as some longer-term, more expensive suggestions."[86] The suggestions found in the energy audit report often lead to reducing fuel cost, wiser property use practices, and lower overall energy use.

Additionally, this report can be used as an opportunity for further education. For example, if the audit recommends turning lights off when a room is not in use, it will require a community-wide effort. A congregation in Westchester County, New York, significantly reduced their energy consumption when they consolidated all their food storage from three refrigerators to one and simply unplugged the two that were then empty. Hebron Baptist Church in Dacula, Georgia, installed energy-efficient light bulbs and lowered their electricity bill by $32,000 annually.[87] The results from these audits are

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[84] "Do-It-Yourself Home Energy Audits," Energy.Gov, accessed July 27, 2020, https://www.energy.gov/energysaver/home-energy-audits/do-it-yourself-home-energy-audits.

[85] "ENERGY STAR for Congregations," EnergyStar, accessed July 11, 2020, https://www.energystar.gov/buildings/owners_and_managers/congregations.

[86] Barnes, *50 Ways*, 24.

[87] Barnes, *50 Ways*, 15.

unique to each situation; however, the knowledge is valuable and provides the foundation from which further discernment and decisions can be made.

Communal Outdoor Space

Many congregations located in suburban neighborhoods have large yards that require routine maintenance and upkeep. Though beautifully manicured, these expansive lawns do not provide the best habitat for local wildlife. Responding to this issue, some faith communities repurpose this space, reclaiming land in a more cooperative way with indigenous wildlife, and thus reconnecting the congregation to creation.

> Reclaiming land for wilderness absorbs carbon dioxide, provides habitat for wildlife, and inspires people to care about creation. Creating more green space in urban areas in particular can create peaceful settings, lessen stress, and help keep city-dwellers connected to the rest of creation. Rural areas naturally have more green space, but it is worth investigating if there are some areas needing to be reclaimed.[88]

Once repurposed, these outdoor areas have myriad potential uses. The following is a sampling of those potential uses.

Congregations of all sizes and configurations, from urban, suburban, and rural settings, can create community gardens to repurpose old space and rejuvenate community. Like many other green efforts, often this rejuvenation occurs both in the local congregational membership as well as throughout the local community. Some congregations have formed partnerships to share in the responsibility of planting, tending, tilling, and harvesting the garden.[89] Some have made this effort an interfaith initiative,

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[88] Barnes, *50 Ways*, 112.

[89] Christine Sine, "Creating a Faith Based Community Garden," Sustainable Traditions," accessed July 12, 2020, https://sustainabletraditions.com/2010/04/creating-a-faith-based-community-garden/.

holding worship services together to give thanks for the growing seasons and reconnect the communities to the earth and the annual refrain of birth, life, death, and new birth. Not only can these ideas be implemented in lawns, but also in unused and unclaimed space such as old parking lots, or land that has been left neglected. Urban faith communities have even turned their rooftops into community garden space.[90] The National Wildlife Fund[91] and the organization A Rocha[92] both provide splendid step-by-step guides to help a congregation move into this work.

Additional land repurposing efforts can include pollinator gardens,[93] intentional green space, rain gardens, even the installation of a labyrinth.[94] Some faith communities have demonstrated the foresight of repurposing a portion of their outside space not just with an immediate project in mind, but with the awareness that future discernment will occur and the outdoor space will require ongoing and creative adaptations. Seeing a piece of land take the journey from neglect to health is inspiring. Additionally, these efforts publicly model for the broader community the intersection of the spiritual and physical

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[90] "Rooftop Garden," Broadway Presyterian Church, accessed July 28, 2020, http://bpcnyc.org/community-life/rooftop-garden.

[91] Patty Glick, "The Gardener's Guide to Global Warming: Challenges and Solutions," The National Wildlife Federation (Reston, VA: The National Wildlife Federation), 40.

[92] "Guides & Curriculum: Resources," *A Rocha USA*, accessed July 12, 2020, https://arocha.us/curriculum.

[93] Casey Page, "Photos: Billings Church Creates Pollinator Garden on Earth Day," The Billings Gazette, April 22, 2020, https://billingsgazette.com/news/local/photos-billings-church-creates-pollinator-garden-on-earth-day/article_56c9da13-41e6-5877-b50a-5d0c3a6629d5.html.

[94] "Northeast Interfaith Peace Garden," Nature Sacred, accessed July 12, 2020, https://naturesacred.org/sacred_place/northeast-interfaith-peace-garden/.

lives of the faith community and demonstrate the biblical instruction laid out in Leviticus: "throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land."[95]

Renewable Energy

Installing or switching to renewable energy sources has proven to be a beneficial property use action, as well as a public demonstration of faith. However, the necessary processes involved are not "one size fits all," and require resource, geographic, and cost analyses.

Regarding solar energy, each property must have their solar income analyzed. Solar income is the "term used to describe the use of any energy source that is renewable and currently available" and, more particularly, the amount of sunlight a piece of property receives during a given period.[96] Due to elevation, tree cover, location, or other factors, not all properties are well-suited for solar panels. However, if solar is a meaningful theme for a community, many energy companies are now allowing consumers to purchase their electricity from renewable sources, and often solar is a robust component of that renewable equation.

Wind and geothermal are two other renewable energy sources that are worth investigating. Both wind and geothermal energy sources demand specific requirements to be appropriate alternatives. Wind needs high enough wind speeds and the appropriate

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[95] Leviticus 25:24.

[96] Jason F. McLennan, *The Philosophy of Sustainable Design: The Future of Architecture* (Kansas City, MO: Ecotone, 2004), 17.

terrain considerations,[97] while geothermal requires enough geothermal potential to make an installation prudent.[98] However, the possibilities of both wind and geothermal alternative energy resources are significant, and faith communities have made bold, prophetic statements by carrying out installation projects and retrofits.[99]

While the energy spent reviewing, installing, and switching over to renewable energy sources is a faithful activity, these efforts are not often enough enmeshed with the liturgical life of the church. And yet, Saint Thomas Lutheran Church of Bloomington, Indiana, led a prayer service, blessing their solar panels upon their installation.[100] The possibilities of connecting scriptural imagery to renewable energy projects and retrofits abound. A solar project could quote the prophet Malachi: "But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings."[101] A wind energy project could quote Psalm 104: "You make the clouds your chariot, you ride on the wings of the wind."[102] These are but a sampling of the possibilities. There are many scriptural allusions one can make to theologically bind these efforts to worship and the faith life of the congregation, and all are opportunities not to be missed.

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[97] "Wind Power: How to Determine If It Is Practical for You," AltE, accessed July 23, 2020, https://www.altestore.com/howto/wind-power-how-to-determine-if-it-is-practical-for-you-a30/#site.

[98] "Geothermal Energy Pros & Cons: The Ups & Downs of This Energy Source," *Renewable Resources Coalition*, December 17, 2016, accessed July 23, 2020, https://www.renewableresourcescoalition.org/geothermal-energy-pros-cons/.

[99] Toni Montgomery, "A Sustainable Mission: New York Congregation's Broken Boilers Lead to Renewed Emphasis on Environmental Responsibility," Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), June 13, 2012, https://www.pcusa.org/news/2012/6/13/sustainable-mission/.

[100] "Solar Panel Blessing," Let All Creation Praise, accessed September 6, 2020, http://www.letallcreationpraise.org/occasional-services/solar-panel-blessing.

[101] Malachi 4:2.

[102] Pslam 104:3.

Zero Waste

Zero Waste efforts made by congregations have proven to be both educational and inspiring. For a community to earn the title "Zero Waste," it must strive to organize and host waste-free common meals and programing.[103] Often this is pursued either from using reusable plates, cups, and cutlery, or from intentionally using compostable products.[104] Aside from the clear theological connection to resurrection and the biblical reference to gather things up so that nothing will be wasted after Jesus feeds the 5,000,[105] a key component of Zero Waste efforts is the educational emphasis. A Zero Waste initiative is not limited only to places of worship. Any building, private or public, may undertake the process of striving to become a Zero Waste Facility. The required practices can be implemented in schools and municipal buildings, for instance. There are even entire municipalities that are pledging to be Zero Waste.[106] By emphasizing the simplicity and earth-friendly nature of reusable dinnerware and food storage containers, as well as the resurrection-like practice of composting, Zero Waste efforts are full of theological

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[103], "How Communities Have Defined Zero Waste," Overviews and Factsheets, United States Environmental Protection Agency, last modified December 1, 2016, https://www.epa.gov/transforming-waste-tool/how-communities-have-defined-zero-waste.

[104] Jennifer McClellan, "How San Francisco's Mandatory Composting Laws Turn Food Waste into Profit," *The Arizona Republic*, August 3, 2017, https://www.azcentral.com/story/entertainment/dining/food-waste/2017/08/03/san-francisco-mandatory-composting-law-turns-food-waste-money/440879001/.

[105] John 6:12.

[106] "Striving for Zero Waste," Sfenvironment.Org, last modified October 15, 2011, https://sfenvironment.org/striving-for-zero-waste.

connections, from the daily bread of the Lord's Prayer, to the resurrection of Easter Sunday.[107]

Fiscal and Fiduciary Energy

Perhaps the most difficult piece of "property" for a congregation to discuss is the utilization of their endowment. Paradigms abound regarding how reserve funds should be managed, and few people feel like they have the financial acumen to provide concrete assistance. Additionally, not all communities of faith have a reserved foundation or endowment fund from which to draw from, financially seed new ministry initiatives, or intentionally invest their resources. For the congregations that do have these resources, however, if the conversation regarding how that money is invested is honest, forward-thinking, and earth-conscious, the use of these funds has led to impressive results.

As people of faith, utilizing the financial resources of a church to invest in an earth-conscious fashion is a spiritual practice. Mike Slaughter, author of *The Christian Wallet* writes, "I believe that God not only expects us to invest but that he expects us to be conscious investors, carefully evaluating that in which we choose to deploy our dollars. As best we can, we want to ensure that are socially responsible in our investments and supporting positive agendas."[108] Partnering Slaughter's suggestion that a congregation should use a socially responsible investment strategy with the biblical

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[107] Jacob Bolton, "Living Soil," The Presbyterian Outlook, August 28, 2014, https://pres-outlook.org/2014/08/living-soil/.

[108] Michael Slaughter, *The Christian Wallet: Spending, Giving, and Living with a Conscience* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 124.

statement that people of faith are "ambassadors for God,"[109] Jamieson and Jamieson further suggest investing in an intentional fashion, with an awareness that how the congregation does so demonstrates "an ethos grounded in the character of God."[110]

Though complete divestment from fossil fuel companies is an action many faith communities, academic institutions, and even municipalities have undertaken,[111] there are many other ways to intentionally utilize endowment and reserve funds in as sustainable and contextually true a fashion as possible.[112] It is an incredibly rich conversation for a congregation to wrestle with how they define justice and value through the management of their financial resources.[113] The ancient wisdom from Matthew applies here well: "where your treasure lies, there your heart will be also."[114] There is power in how a community oversees their resources; those that discern how best to faithfully spend, share, and grow financial resources prove the time spent is faithful and just.[115] As Adam Copeland writes, "We can nurture our gifts, generosity, and sense of gratitude as we seek to be better stewards of all that we have."[116]

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[109] 2 Corinthians 5:21.

[110] Janet T. Jamieson and Philip D. Jamieson, *Ministry and Money: A Practical Guide for Pastors*, 1st ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 13.

[111] "What is Fossil Fuel Divestment," Go Fossil Free, last modified December 6, 2019, https://gofossilfree.org/divestment/what-is-fossil-fuel-divestment/.

[112] Lowe, *Green Revolution,* 91.

[113] Walter L. Owensby, *Economics for Prophets: A Primer on Concepts, Realities, and Values in Our Economic System* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 141.

[114] Matthew 6:21.

[115] Slaughter, *The Christian Wallet,* 53.

[116] Adam J. Copeland, ed., *Beyond the Offering Plate: A Holistic Approach to Stewardship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 152.

Conclusion

Caring for the Earth and caring for the property of the church should be a marriage in coexistence. The efforts complement one another; caring for one can inspire further caring for the other. However, the routine "maintenance of divine worship" is a different, holier task than the routine maintenance of the church property.[117] When grounded in the worship life of the community, Earth Care can become a common theme, a unifying endeavor from which all may experience spiritual nourishment and inspiration.

Broader Expressions of Faith

No matter the local nomenclature, educational opportunities are imperative in a congregational church setting for teaching about the connections that humanity has with God, one another, the planet, and the scriptural call to care for these relationships. Additionally, these educational experiences are "a key component to the [green] movement because this is where discipleship starts."[118] There is great possibility in creating educational opportunities for all people of the church to better understand the spiritual connection with "the earth and its fullness."[119]

Educational Opportunities with a Creation Focus

A common starting point is to explore what pre-existing material and support is already available through denominational, parachurch, or interfaith programs. The

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[117] Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Part I,* 2014, F-1.0304.

[118] Lowe, *Green Revolution,* 88.

[119] 1 Corinthians 10:26.

Presbyterian Church (USA) Earth Care Congregation[120] program, the American Baptist Church Creation Justice Congregations[121] program, and the United Church of Christ Creation Justice Church[122] program are three such examples. A church can read, study, and learn much about what could work in their specific context. These resources can also provide a framework for a community so they are better able to "work within existing ministries . . . to develop a culture of creation care that will influence how the group operates."[123] The educational programs of the church can supplement worship, provide outreach activities, highlight a new creation-themed ministry of the church, and even help inspire the congregation into a new, more sustainable, future.

Showing films and inviting guest speakers to present issues surrounding the earth and humans' relationship to the earth are educational ministry staples. Denominational and parachurch resources all provide lists of films that would be appropriate to view, often including discussion questions for follow-up after the film has ended. Environmentally themed film festivals hosted regularly around the world—one of the largest occurring every March in and around Washington, D.C.[124]—will provide a library of film options. Guest speakers can be invited from a variety of sources, from local colleges or universities, to area clergy, even to members of local conservation groups. An

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[120] "Earth Care Congregations," Presbyterians For Earth Care, accessed December 6, 2019, https://presbyearthcare.org/earth-care-congregations/.

[121] "Creation Justice Congregations," American Baptist Churches USA, accessed July 23, 2020, https://www.abc-usa.org/creation-justice/creation-justice-congregations/.

[122] "Creation Justice Churches," United Church of Christ, accessed December 6, 2019, https://www.ucc.org/creation_justice_churches.

[123] Lowe, *Green Revolution*, 92.

[124] "Environmental Film Festival in the Nation's Capital," Environmental Film Festival in the Nation's Capital, accessed December 6, 2019, https://dceff.org/.

excellent opportunity a few communities have embraced is creating an interfaith component as a key aspect of the pedagogical design.[125] Most of the major world religions have themes about the environment, and sometimes those themes help enlighten ones understanding on their own faith tradition. Plus, a "broader understanding helps us build relationships with our neighbors, colleagues, and friends from different cultures and traditions."[126] The connections that can come from interfaith creation work are fruitful and often occur through shared educational experiences.

These interfaith and cooperative efforts need not stop prior to worship. Sharing sacred texts from other faith traditions can be an educational moment in a worship service. Prayers from other traditions and other faiths can be quoted, mentioned, or even prayed if appropriate given the local context. This need not be a divisive act but should be framed in a fashion to enhance understanding and further a congregation's relationship with the divine.

Prophetic Witness

Congregations can be effective generators of faith-based advocacy and community organization. The Earth Care movement has become home for many congregations and churches. This is a natural fit, as

> many of the most significant leaders of the great movements for justice of the twentieth century were people of great faith. In the civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King Jr., in the movements for justice in Central America, in the Central American Sanctuary Movement in the United States and in the farm

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[125] Harper, *GreenFaith,* 53-54.

[126] Harper, *GreenFaith,* 54.

> workers movement led by Cesar Chavez—we find faith at the heart and the root of each effort.[127]

Letter writing campaigns,[128] participation in large-scale demonstrations,[129] running for local office, and subversive and just distribution of resources[130] are all actions that congregations have engaged in as they advocate for Creation.

A significant result of this congregation-led community organization and advocacy is that it brings attention to the issue of Earth Care. "The environmental movement was once typecast as being dominated by radical tree huggers and animal rights activists who wanted to force everyone to become a vegetarian. But today these stereotypes no longer hold, as it has become more clear that everyone needs to practice environmental responsibility."[131] When a congregation participates in this type of public witness, it models for neighbors the values and energy of the congregation, and has often been an unintentional method of evangelism.

When grounded in the educational ministries of a church, an emphasis on Earth Care can be integrated at a developmentally appropriate level, and in a fashion that prepares the membership to bring the news to those outside the walls. "In every liturgical

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[127] Alexia Salvatierra, *Faith-Rooted Organizing: Mobilizing the Church in Service to the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 15.

[128] "PICA:Peninsula Working Group," California Interfaith Power and Light, accessed July 30, 2020, https://www.interfaithpower.org/get-involved-3/pica/.

[129] "'The Stakes Are Too High': Christian Faithful Take up Climate Protest," *Reuters*, April 9, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-climatechange-protests-faith-idUSKCN1RL0I5.

[130] Dennis A. Jacobsen, *Doing Justice: Congregations and Community Organizing* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 95.

[131] Adam Taylor, *Mobilizing Hope: Faith-Inspired Activism for a Post-Civil Rights Generation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010), 129.

celebration, and educational effort, a faith community announces its dream."[132] When these two arms of the church, education and liturgy, work together, the result can be profound. However, far too many congregations focus primarily on the educational connection to Earth Care, while the relationship is unfortunately liturgically silent.

Local Contextualization

A much more context-specific educational opportunity is to find out what local resources are already present in the neighboring community and involve the congregation in them. Instead of relying on denominational, or national, resources, this is the immediate context approach. If there is a local community garden the church can join, then there is no need to build a new one. If there are relationships the regional body of churches to which the church belongs, such as the Diocese, Presbytery, or Regional Conference, then they should be pursued. Many of these bodies already have leaders and programs that can inspire and resource congregational activity. An invitation to one of the leaders inquiring if they may make a brief presentation during worship can open the door to further partnerships and greater faith-based engagement.

Creation Immersion

An often-overlooked ministry opportunity, which is commonly mentioned as a spiritually renewing experience, is the practice of bringing more people of faith out of doors and immersed in creation itself. Many congregations have encouraged meetings, classes, excursions, coffee breaks, even worship to be held out of doors. Energy for this

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[132] Evelyn Eaton Whitehead and James D Whitehead, *Community of Faith: Crafting Christian Communities Today* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse.com, 2001), 85.

style of church experience has been harnessed by the Wild Church Network; however, even the most traditional congregation can hold an event outside.[133] Proper planning should be taken prior to the event (getting tables outside, having backup plans in case of inclement weather, making these activities accessible to all); however, true creation immersion enhances the likeliness of forming a relationship with all of God's creation. When a congregation intentionally sets aside outdoor space as a tool for ministry, it sets an example to both the faith community and the community at large that the congregation takes their relationship with Creation seriously.

Though profound experiences may occur when people of faith worship outdoors, these creation immersion encounters need not only involve the liturgical life of the church. Providing educational "cultural immersion" opportunities have also proven to be deeply transformative. Making plans to leave the regular worship and community space to visit the location from which the local water source flows can be a transformative experience. Visiting with local farmers, building a relationship, and intentionally purchasing their produce encourages local community and economic health. Community Sustainable Agriculture (CSA) programs empower local farmers, educate people about the seasonal growth cycles, build community as recipes and culinary ideas are shared, and promote local eating.[134]

Some communities have created their own outings on which participants can see environmental degradation firsthand in their local community. Two clergy created one of

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[133] "Wild Church Network," Wild Church Network, accessed July 23, 2020, https://www.wildchurchnetwork.com/.

[134] "Community Supported Agriculture," United States Department of Agriculture Natural Agricultural Library, accessed July 23, 2020, https://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/community-supported-agriculture.

these opportunities in the Hudson Valley of New York State, dubbing their experience a "Healing the Sacred Sites Tour." This experience was intentionally planned for the season of Lent, "so participants could see the journey from death to resurrection."[135] The Ironbound Community Cooperation hosts tours similar to this in Newark, New Jersey, home of the largest seaports on the East Coast, as well as the largest Federal Superfund site in the nation.[136] No matter the experience, "an actual visit to an environmentally significant site serves as a powerful eye-opener"[137] and can help lead both an individual and a congregation into deeper connection with the divine.

A deeper connection with the divine is an amazing outcome of any ministry experience, whether it is a tour of the Ironbound Community, maintaining a plot in a local community garden, or making the switch to renewable energy. And yet the primary reason people of faith gather is to worship, give thanks, ask for mercy, proclaim the good news, and renew their commitment to serving together. Weaving these shared experiences into the faith life of the congregation is imperative, for it is during worship where the church must honor the spiritual connection among Creation, God, and humanity, and utilize the theological imagination, doing so in a fashion that is both affirmative and inspirational.

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[135] Rev. Susan DeGeorge, telephone interview, December 13, 2019.

[136] "Environmental Justice," Iron Bound Community Corporation, accessed July 30, 2020, https://ironboundcc.org/environmental-justice/. A Superfund site is a highly polluted location requiring multi-year cleanup projects.

[137] Harper, *GreenFaith*, 129.

Liturgy and Worship

Though the bond among God, humanity, and the earth is grounded throughout Scripture,[138] the connection is not always made intentionally evident in worship. Though there is not one common resource from which to find all things "Creation Care" from a liturgical and worship preparation viewpoint, there are many simple avenues a congregation may explore.

From Festival Celebration to Seasonal Observance

One of the most common are church and societal days of celebration that connect directly with both creation and worship, such as Earth Day, Saint Francis of Assisi Day, or the holiday of Thanksgiving in the United States. For some congregations, these special celebrations and observances may provide an introductory opportunity to try something new liturgically, hold a joint action or effort, host a guest speaker, or spiritually honor the earth in whatever fashion is most meaningful and appropriate. Lessons can be learned as well from this model that can then be applied to a more long-lasting effort.

For a seasonal emphasis, a model that has been growing in popularity has been the recent liturgical "Season of Creation" which lasts during September and October.[139] "September 1 was proclaimed as a day of prayer for creation (World Day of Prayer for Creation, or Creation Day) by Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I for the Orthodox in 1989,

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[138] Leviticus 25, Psalm 66:4, Revelation 5:13.

[139] "Season of Creation," Season of Creation, accessed December 6, 2019, https://seasonofcreation.org/.

and was embraced by the other major Christian European churches in 2001 and by Pope Francis for the Roman Catholic Church in 2015."[140]

Inspired by this proclamation and the liturgical opportunities it provides,

> Many Christian churches started celebrating the "Season of Creation" (also known as Creation Time) between that date and October 4, which is the date of the feast many Western traditions observe for St. Francis of Assisi. St. Francis is widely associated with nature, and for Catholics is the patron saint of those who promote ecology.[141]

The Season of Creation is already included on the annual planning calendar of many mainline denominations and has preaching guides, activities, and numerous suggestions for any faith community to participate in.

Given the close theological connection to creation, gratitude, and stewardship, some churches have utilized the Season of Creation as their annual "stewardship season," intentionally linking the good news of creation and the outpouring of God's love as an inspiration for individuals to share their collective gifts and resources.

Liturgical Seasonality Emphasis

Though the Season of Creation does include a plethora of suggestions for worship, and is a more substantial effort than merely observing Earth Day, there are other seasons of the church year that are rife with Earth Care connections that mesh well within any community's context. "Scripture uses the images of the earth to convey the story of

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[140] Season of Creation, "Season."

[141] "About the Season of Creation," Season of Creation, accessed December 6, 2019, https://seasonofcreation.org/about/.

God's abiding love for all creation,"[142] and these images are found throughout the liturgical seasons of the church year.

Opening the liturgical year, Advent celebrates themes of anticipation, hope, and preparation for birth and rebirth. Many congregations honor these themes worshipfully without marking their connection to the earth. Utilizing these themes and making clear connections homiletically, prayerfully, and through the songs that are sung to the earth and God's creation can be profound.

The oft-undercelebrated season of Epiphany has lovely light, wisdom, and "journey" imagery as the arrival of the Magi is observed. Baptism of the Lord Sunday has become a holiday, especially in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, with a direct focus on water awareness, observing both the blessings of baptism and the call to care for rivers, lakes, streams, oceans, and watersheds.[143]

Lent, the most ancient of Christian liturgical seasons, may also be the season most ripe with Creation Care connections. Lent commences with a liturgical reference to the ash and dust from which all of humanity was formed and concludes with the good news of resurrection, an obvious tie to the wonder of compost and Zero Waste efforts. Congregations have been organizing Lenten Carbon Fasts, with participation on an international scale.[144] Easter sunrise services are a common practice and provide a

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[142] Paul Galbreath, *Leading into the World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 6.

[143] Fr. Vasile Tudora, "The Blessing of the Waters – A Perennial New Beginning," Holy Cross Orthodox Church, accessed December 6, 2019, https://holycrossoca.org/newslet/1501.html.

[144] Antal, *Climate Church, Climate World,* 26.

marvelous opportunity to connect the season to the "Sun of Righteousness" text from Malachi.[145]

Pentecost, tongues of fire, the swirling wind, and promise of making things new can provide an opportunity to renew collective hope and challenge those living in climate denial. And Ordinary Time is the season when many clergy, musicians, and worship planners are given the liturgical freedom to be as creative, blunt, and inspirational as they see fit. Further exploration of these themes will be discussed in detail in Section Three and in the artifact section of this dissertation.

Summary

Seasonal efforts are limited to their distinct timeframe, bound by the calendar in a fashion that time and creation are not. Thus, weaving creation themes into the entire church year is the most ideal worship planning practice. "I propose giving sustained attention throughout the year to caring for the earth . . . my particular concern is for Christians to learn a new hermeneutic . . . to see the earth and its health as integral to our Christian life and commitment,"[146] writes Paul Galbreath, Professor of Theology at Union Presbyterian Seminary. Barnes agrees: "When a congregation finds a way that caring for God's creation is integrated into their own church culture, when it is woven into their worship and their worship space, it is powerful."[147] As the attached artifact will

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[145] Malachi 4:2.

[146] Galbreath, *Leading*, 8.

[147] Rev. Rebecca Barnes, telephone interview, October 21, 2019.

more richly explore, scripture is full of creation references, allusions that are seasonally appropriate as well as intimately linked to our life of faith.

This is not to say the other solutions surveyed in this section do not have merit. All of them, especially given their local context, can provide spiritually transformative experiences for both individuals and communities of faith. However, none of the examples surveyed are as inclusive or as rooted in scripture as the routine, weekly worship life of a congregation.

Emphasizing the earth throughout the annual lectionary cycle of worship gatherings is not a gimmick or something to be taken lightly. As the imposition of ashes litany of Ash Wednesday reminds us, "from dust we have come and to dust we shall return."[148] Our birth, life, death, resurrection, indeed our entire life and very existence is intimately connected with the health of the planet and the health of our liturgical life together. Linking these through sacred worship is one of the most faithful acts of discipleship upon which the church can embark.

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[148] Ecclesiastes 3:20.

SECTION 3: THESIS

Introduction

Routine worship is the primary liturgical, teaching, and communal gathering of the church. This is where God's people "participate in God's plan for the redemption of time, space, and matter for the glory of God."[149] As such, worship needs to be the primary ecclesial element where caring for creation is honored, emphasized, and encouraged. It is through liturgical acts of worship, prayer, sermon, sacrament, and song that the congregational body routinely gathers to experience the holy. There is no activity the church can undertake that provides a more fertile opportunity than worship to make the connections between the divine and creation.

This thesis argues that the weekly texts provided in the Revised Common Lectionary are broad enough to include scriptural references to creation every Sunday, and that honoring these scriptural themes is the most powerful way to impact an individual's divine relationship with creation. The history of Christian liturgy is briefly explored, followed by the development of the first lectionary models. An overview of the fruition of the Revised Common Lectionary is then examined. Four Lectionary models other than the Revised Common Lectionary are discussed, followed by additional criticism of the Revised Common Lectionary.

The final portion of this section discusses the apparent allusions to creation each Sunday's Revised Common Lectionary texts provides, along with supporting material

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[149] Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Part I, Part I,* 2014, W-1.0201, Page77.

that further strengthens this thesis. As every congregation reads scripture and proclaims the Good News of scripture routinely in worship, seizing this opportunity to honor the creation imagery and biblical significance of the weekly texts is imperative in enhancing the spiritual connections every Christian has with creation.

The Lectionary and Liturgical Calendar

History and Formation

Worship has been the primary communal act of the Christian faith since the days of the apostles. The earliest worship gatherings stemmed from an informal union of liturgical practice from the early community of Jesus' followers based in Jerusalem and the home churches initiated by Paul and other early apostles throughout the Mediterranean Diaspora. Regarding the earliest forms of post-Easter worship, William Frend writes, "We may assume that Jewish feasts were celebrated," while within the first generation of believers, a new "Christian significance was being given to the traditional feasts."[150] Even within the New Testament, baptism[151] and the celebration of some sort of sacramental communion, or Eucharist, were common elements of each gathering.[152] Typically "held each Sunday—the day of Jesus' resurrection"—these services, including "hymns and prayers in anticipation of the second coming, were becoming part of the institution of the churches."[153] Initially not uniform in practice, leadership for each

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[150] William H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1991), 107.

[151] Romans 6:3.

[152] 1 Corinthians 11:24.

[153] Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, 108.

community belonged primarily to a single resident leader. Within this timeframe, the primary liturgical focus was a weekly gathering of early believers. Further, Thomas J. Talley describes this liturgical age as when "the boundaries between the formation of the gospels and their liturgical employment" result in the genesis of the liturgical year.[154]

Within a mere two generations, ceremonies "were expected to be the same in every Christian community."[155] As common prayers were written and shared, often drawing on imagery from the psalms and the Hebrew Bible, "church order, though in a form derived from Judaism, was developing its own Christ-centered liturgy by the end of the first century designed to knit together" Christians into a larger, more universal community.[156] Especially within significantly large churches, usually located in or near large metropolitan areas, "the clergy themselves were conscious of the unifying effects of the spread of Christianity," and the "standardization of organization and liturgies" was working in favor of further liturgical and calendar unification.[157] Justin Martyr, in the year 150, writes of worship on Sunday as the common time to celebrate the resurrection and the transformation of creation.[158] These gatherings would involve the practice of following "sequential readings from the Apostles and Prophets followed by a leaders

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[154] Thomas J Talley, *Origins of the Liturgical Year* (Minneapolis, MN.: Liturgical Press., 2000), 238.

[155] Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, 141.

[156] Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, 142.

[157] Frend, *The Rise of Christianity,* 559-560.

[158] Justin Martyr, *The Fathers of the Church: The First Apology, The Second Apology, Dialogue with Trypho, Exhortation to the Greeks, Discourse to the Greeks, The Monarchy of the Rule of God,* trans. Thomas B. Falls (Washington D.C.: Catholic University Press, 2008), 106-107.

homily on one of the readings, prayers offered by the people, Communion at the Lord's Table, and a collection of money offerings for the diaconate."[159]

While ritual, prayer, and proclamation were becoming more and more commonly administered across the sphere of early church geography, a system needed to be created that would regulate which Scriptures would be read during each church gathering.[160] In the early third century, a system was already being put into place that included "prayers and readings from Scripture, now arranged in lections taken from the Old and New Testaments, followed by a sermon based on a selection of the readings."[161]

By the fourth century, lectionaries were "known and used" as "major churches arranged the Scripture readings according to a schedule which followed the calendar of the church year."[162] The same basic format is still in existence today and is in concert with many of the common lectionary examples of the modern era. Perhaps Dietrich Hessel summarizes this maturation from a weekly cycle to an annual cycle best when he writes:

> Gradually, the Christian year evolved from three primitive festivals: Epiphany (which transformed a pagan celebration) and Pascha and Pentecost (which arose out of the Jewish environment). These three "unitive" festivals commemorated respectively incarnation and baptism, passion and resurrection, ascension and the Spirit. Good Friday and Easter vigils evolved in response to Holy Land pilgrims of the Constantinian era. Christmas developed in Jerusalem and Asia Minor to sacralize the winter solstice. Later, the Roman rite introduced a four-Sunday

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[159] Dieter T. Hessel, "Introduction: A Liberating Approach to the Lectionary," in *Social Themes of the Christian Year: A Commentary on the Lectionary*, ed. Dieter T. Hessel (Philadelphia. PA: Geneva Press, 1983), 24.

[160] Helmut Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), 191.

[161] Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, 407.

[162] Consultation on Common Texts (Association), ed., *The Revised Common Lectionary: Includes Complete List of Lections for Years A, B, and C* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992), 9.

> Advent, Epiphany devoted to the Magi, a three-Sunday cycle before Lent, and Ash Wednesday.[163]

Over time, special days were named in honor of martyrs or people who had lived particularly holy lives dedicated to the church. Saint Patrick's Day, Saint Valentine's Day, and Saint Andrew's Day are such examples. These further observances, and the distancing from a primary liturgical focus on Christ, led to reform and calendar revision during the time of the Reformation.

Reformation of the Lectionary

Bothered by the numerous feast days and lack of focus on Sunday worship, "the Reformers purged the calendar of everything that detracted from the proclamation of the fullness of the gospel on the Lord's Day."[164] As Swiss-German Reformer Heinrich Bullinger writes in the *Second Helvetic Confession*, "if in Christian liberty the churches religiously celebrate the memory of the Lord's nativity, circumcision, passion, resurrection, and of his ascension into heaven, and the sending of the Holy Spirit upon his disciples, we approve of it highly. But we do not approve of feasts instituted for men and for saints."[165] This limited, Jesus focused view of both the liturgical calendar and the suggested scriptural texts remained in place for at least another five hundred years.

However, during the first half of the twentieth century, there was a "growing acceptance" and development of a more broad understanding of the liturgical calendar,

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[163] Hessel, *"*Liberating Lectionary*,"* 24.

[164] Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and Cumberland Presbyterian Church, eds., *Liturgical Year: The Worship of God*, Supplemental liturgical resource 7 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 7.

[165] "The Second Helvetic Confession," *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A),* Part I, *Book of Confessions*, 5.226.

demonstrated with the publication of new *Book of Common Worship* editions in 1906 and 1932.[166] In one of the most "remarkable evidences of the work of the Holy Spirit . . . The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) led to profound changes" in the way the entire ecumenical community shapes their liturgical life.[167] With this renewed focus on the liturgical year, the newly unified worship life among much of Christianity became more "common" and, "since the liturgical calendar and lectionary are intimately related, the increase in lectionary use and the celebration of the liturgical year have been parallel developments."[168]

Current Calendar

The current church calendar is a marriage of two distinct cycles: extraordinary and ordinary. "Each cycle of extraordinary time commences with a period of preparation and anticipation and culminates in a season of celebration. One cycle spirals around incarnation, and the other around resurrection. Together they lead us through God's time."[169] When it comes to the readings that guide the liturgical journey through these two cycles, Christian worship includes "constantly retelling the memories from God's faithfulness in the past (story) and ritually enacting those memories (liturgical practice) in order to kindle hope in God's promised future and, thereby, be enabled to live freely in

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[166] Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *Liturgical Year: The Worship of God*, Supplemental liturgical resource 7, 10.

[167] Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *Liturgical Year: The Worship of God*, Supplemental liturgical resource 7, 10.

[168] Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *Liturgical Year: The Worship of God*, Supplemental liturgical resource 7, 11.

[169] Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *Liturgical Year: The Worship of God*, Supplemental liturgical resource 7, 24.

the present."[170] While the liturgical calendar draws from Christianity's Hebraic roots, rich history, and prophetic message of liberation, the Christian liturgical calendar began with the proclamation of the Word and continues to focus on that sustaining and powerful hope.[171]

What Is a Lectionary?

Designed as a model for many congregations to follow, "a lectionary is a collection of readings or selections from the Scriptures, arranged and intended for proclamation during the worship of the People of God."[172] Numerous lectionaries have existed throughout history; however, the bulk of this paper will focus on the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL). Stemming from the ecumenical and reformative Second Vatican Council:

> The Lectionary [1969, revised 1981] provided for a three-year cycle of Sunday readings. This Roman lectionary provided the basis for lectionary in The Book of Common Prayer 1979 as well as those developed by many other denominations. The *Common Lectionary,* published in 1983, was an ecumenical project of several American and Canadian denominations, developed out of a concern for the unity of the Church and a desire for a common experience of Scripture. It was intended as a harmonization of the many different denominational approaches to the three-year lectionary. It has been in trial use in the Episcopal Church and among the member denominations since 1983. *The Revised Common Lectionary*, published in 1992, takes into account constructive criticism of the *Common Lectionary* based on the evaluation of its trial use and like the current prayer book lectionary is a three-year cycle of Sunday Eucharistic readings.[173]

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[170] Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Liturgical Year: The Worship of God, Supplemental liturgical resource 7, 21.

[171] Talley, *Origins,* 231-238.

[172] Consultation on Common Texts, *Lectionary,* 9.

[173] "Understanding the Lectionary," ChurchPublishing.org, excerpts from *The Prayer Book Guide to Christian Education*, 3rd edition by Sharon Ely Pearson and Robyn Szoke (Morehouse, 2009), accessed April 1, 2020, https://www.churchpublishing.org/siteassets/in-service/nov15/UnderstandingtheLectionary.pdf

Each of the three-year cycles focuses on a particular gospel. Year A focuses on Matthew. Year B focuses on Mark. Year C focuses on Luke. Elements of John are often read during the Easter season and at other appropriate times throughout the liturgical year. "Except for occasional changes, the Revised Common Lectionary accepts the cornerstone of the Roman lectionary: the semicontinuous reading of the three synoptic gospels over a three year period."[174] The RCL pairs three other scripture readings with the gospel reading for each Sunday, one from the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament, one from the Psalms, and one from the Epistles, resulting in four total readings. Each of the four readings assigned per Sunday has been chosen due to thematic fit and appropriateness to the observance and season within the church liturgical year. The RCL demonstrates, "the relationship of the readings of one Sunday with those that come before and after it. Within each of the major seasons of Lent, Easter, Advent, and Christmas-Epiphany, the flow of the season is reflected in all the Scripture texts, taken together as a set for each Sunday."[175]

There are five primary aspirations of the Revised Common Lectionary. The first is to provide a "uniform and common pattern" for churches and denominations to follow for worship and proclamation. The second is to equip "clergy, preachers, church members, musicians, and Sunday School teachers" with a guide to follow as they plan what will be read week to week. The third is a guide for ecumenical fellowship as clergy and local church leaders may wish to "work and pray" together. The fourth is to provide a

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[174] Consultation on Common Texts, *Lectionary,* 12.

[175] Consultation on Common Texts, *Lectionary,* 10.

resource for "preaching aids, commentaries, Sunday School curricula" and many other liturgical, devotional, and spiritual aids. And the fifth is as a personal guide for those who wish to "read, study, and pray the Bible in tune with the church's prayer and preaching."[176] Stemming from the earliest church organizers' efforts to create a unified manner of liturgical universality, the RCL provides a Gospel-centric method for a community of faith to experience the church year, the teachings of Jesus, and the way in which the stories of the Old and New Testaments are textually and spiritually intertwined.

Criticism of the Revised Common Lectionary

While there are many attributes to the RCL, there are also many appropriate critiques. Here is a brief examination of the most common.

First, the primary critique is that the RCL "subordinates the canon to the calendar." By prioritizing the three-year Gospel-centric cycle, and the poetic-rhythmic flow from ordinary time to extraordinary time and back again, "the calendar tyrannizes the canon in the lectionary format as traditionally conceived. And [since] most of the festivals in the Christian calendar are but ancient agricultural and fertility-cult seasonal celebrations" that have been re-imagined under the eyes of Christian imagination and evangelism, "the canon is cut up into bits and pieces to serve the calendar."[177] This is strong critique, and Sanders comes startling close to naming the lectionary calendar as idolatrous. However, the focus of the RCL is to provide a cyclical experience of the

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[176] Consultation on Common Texts, *Lectionary,* 9-10.

[177] James A. Sanders, "Canon and Calendar: An Alternative Lectionary Proposal," in *Social Themes of the Christian Year: A Commentary on the Lectionary*, ed. Dieter T. Hessel (Philadelphia, PA: Geneva Press, 1983), 258.

retelling of the story of Christ and the redemptive story of God in the world. The hope is that this cycle would partner with the preaching, teaching, and sacramental life of a community, not lead it astray.

A second critique is that the RCL leaves out numerous important texts found throughout scripture. Many scholars feel "the Old Testament especially is subordinated in Christian lectionaries to at best a supporting role to the New Testament passages chosen."[178] In an article surveying the use of lectionaries in *The Christian Century,* Steven Thorngate describes both the RCL's shortcomings and its benefits. "There's not space here for even a brisk highlight reel of what's missing from the Old Testament," he writes, but then goes on to praise the RCL's advancement over previous lectionary efforts writing, the "*RCL* offers improvements" regarding the inclusion of texts from both the Old and New Testaments. These enhancements include further components of the story of David and a wider range discussing "the wages of sin, the day of salvation, the tree of life, the nontaming of the tongue. The lectionary Herods—once practically nonviolent—now slaughter the Holy Innocents and execute John. And there are many more women mentioned, especially in the OT selections."[179] This improved inclusion of different voices is an advancement in lectionary diversity, but it still lacks a fuller depth of the scriptural message for some scholars.

A third critique is that the entire RCL leads us to a Christocentric liturgical experience, as the RCL supports "the Christian bias that Christ revealed God."[180] While,

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[178] Sanders, "Canon and Calendar," 258.

[179] Steve Thorngate, "What's the Text: Alternatives to the Common Lectionary," The Christian Century, October 16, 2013, https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2013-10/what-s-text.

[180] Sanders, "Canon and Calendar," 259.

"this criticism is a bit like criticising synagogues for always having a reading from the Torah on the Sabbath," there is a clear distinction between reading the Bible from a Christocentric view and a Theocentric one.[181] As James Sanders concludes, "a theocentric reading of the Bible makes it clear that in due season and in the fullness of time God revealed Christ and world through him to bring God's story both to a climax and to the whole world, but such a reading also makes it clear that the gospel begins in Genesis, and that God cannot be co-opted to serve Christian needs."[182] Noting that the RCL was created with ecumenism in mind and a nod toward interfaith relationship-building, the Christocentrism of the RCL is a legitimate critique.

A fourth critique is that the RCL follows a Northern Hemisphere–based calendar paradigm. With a clear historical foundation from the Mediterranean region, some of this is to be expected. Despite that challenge, communities of faith in the Southern Hemisphere have been reimagining church observances for centuries. Voices from the Global South state it is time for the Eurocentric church to acknowledge the "post-Constantinian-Christendom reality: Christianity is moving to be a Southern-Hemisphere faith. Even the Pope, now, is from the Southern Hemisphere."[183] While the church wrestles with how best to live into its global context, Christianity has found a current

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[181] Bosco Peters, "Criticise Revised Common Lectionary?" Liturgy, accessed March 26, 2020, https://liturgy.co.nz/criticise-revised-common-lectionary.

[182] Sanders, "Canon and Calendar," 259.

[183] Peters, "Criticise Lectionary?"

statistical membership powerbase in the Southern Hemisphere.[184] This RCL needs to be adapted to best fit the liturgical needs of the majority of global Christians.

A fifth critique raises the power dynamic that undergirds many struggles the church has faced throughout her storied history. Power dynamics exist among the voices found in scripture, thus, decisions made surrounding voices deemed appropriate or inappropriate for worship inclusion involves an injustice of power. How often do worshipers hear a section from Scripture bearing a voice from the margins of Scriptural society? The importance of this component during worship cannot be understated, as the weekly gathering is the focal point of liturgical life for most Christians. "For a Christian, worship is the unique time/space where we remind each other and strive individually to recall that we are alive to glorify God and enjoy God."[185] As beings uniquely created both "good" and "in the image of God," the expectation that the RCL would include as many voices as possible stands on firm theological ground. Many lectionary options have been developed as a response to the RCL, which will be analyzed in the next section.

Analysis of Lectionaries Created as a Response to the Revised Common Lectionary

As the previous section demonstrated, the Revised Common Lectionary does have shortfalls. In response to those critiques, numerous alternative lectionary resources have been created. Four of the most common are surveyed below.

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[184] "Global Christianity: A Report on The Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, December 19, 2011, https://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/.

[185] Dennis J. Hughes, "The Priority of Liturgy: God's gift to the Community of Faith," *Call to Worship: Liturgy, Music, Preaching & The Arts* 38, no. 2, Liturgy and Spiritual Formation, (2004): 28.

Year D

Imagining the RCL as the first three of a four-year cycle, Timothy Slemmons, professor of homiletics and worship at Dubuque Theological Seminary, created a fourth year out of many biblical passages that were left out, resulting in what he has titled Year D. "Year D introduces missing OT books to the cycle—and gathers up most remaining NT passages, excluding only synoptic parallels and parts of Acts and Revelation. Taking the RCL's three years as given, Slemmons builds a fourth year out of what's left."[186] His rationale and more research and discussion can be found at his website, which also points to many additional publications Slemmons has written based on this project and RCL expansion.

In Slemmons's own words, Year D "proceeds from the conviction that the canon of Scripture is the true norm of the Church's 'common texts' and that the preaching rotation of the church should be expanded from the self-imposed limitations or censorship that results from a too rigid conformity to the RCL, and in the direction of canonical comprehensiveness."[187] His effort "to make the Word of God more fully known"[188] is respectable and provides RCL followers the resources to supplement their work with additional text, background, and commentary.

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[186] Thorngate, "Alternatives."

[187] "The Year D Project," The Year D Project, accessed April 15, 2020, http://theyeardproject.blogspot.com/p/start-here.html.

[188] The Year D Project, "Start Here."

The Narrative Lectionary

The four-year cycle that Slemmons offers with Year D is a trait that the Narrative Lectionary also prescribes. Initiated in 2010 by Professors Rolf Jacobson and Craig Koester of Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, the Narrative Lectionary acknowledges the good work of the RCL, but also names that "it doesn't present scripture —especially the Old Testament—in a way that helps people to become fluent in the first language of faith."[189] The language of faith that Jackson and Koester are referring to is the entirety of scripture. Thus, they present "a four-year cycle of readings for use in worship and preaching. The goal is to preach annually through the biblical narrative to center believers in God's story."[190]

The Narrative Lectionary provides weekly readings that walk through foundational themes, or "through the sweep of the Biblical story," narratively.[191] A clear demarcation between the RCL and the Narrative Lectionary is that the RCL is based on readings from the Gospels, while the Narrative Lectionary focuses much more on the intersection between the full biblical text and the church year. Further explanations can be found on the website Jacobson and Koester manage, which shares:

> Old Testament readings move through the story of God's dealings with Israel and culminate in Advent with the prophets who speak of longing and hope. Readings from the gospels fit the movement from Christmas and Epiphany to the Transfiguration, Ash Wednesday, Holy Week and Easter. Selections from the book of Acts and Paul's letters trace the outward movement of the resurrection message, culminating on Pentecost with readings focusing on the Spirit.[192]

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[189] "Narrative FAQ," Working Preacher, accessed April 15, 2020, https://www.workingpreacher.org/narrative_faqs.aspx.

[190] Working Preacher, "Narrative FAQ."

[191] Working Preacher, "Narrative FAQ."

[192] Working Preacher, "Narrative FAQ."

As the name suggests, the hope of the Narrative Lectionary is that the great story of God's activity in the world will be proclaimed and taught in a narrative fashion, improving overall biblical literacy, and thus taking a deeper root within the gathered people of faith.

The African American Lectionary

While the Narrative Lectionary tells the story of God's activity in the world, the African American Lectionary tells the story of God's activity through the lens of the African American community. Designed to create "new national conversations concerning the use of Scripture in worship and preaching . . . the African American Lectionary was designed specifically with the African American Christian faith community and historically African American churches in mind."[193]

Unlike either the RCL or the Narrative Lectionary, the African American Lectionary offers only one reading a Sunday, as "it offers a different calendar, one that includes the major [church] holidays but as part of a cycle of prevailing black church observances such as Women's Day, Men's Day and Watch Night."[194] The focus is not on covering the entirety of the Bible, or in navigating the redeeming work of Jesus by assigning each Gospel an entire year of focus, but in directing preachers to critical issues.

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[193] "Frequently Asked Questions," The African American Lectionary, accessed April 17, 2020, http://www.theafricanamericanlectionary.org/faq.asp.

[194] Thorngate, "Alternatives."

African American Lectionary resources abound and having "began in December of 2007,"[195] it is the oldest of the alternative lectionaries this paper addresses.

Season of Creation

The most recently created lectionary alternative this paper surveys is the Season of Creation. Though not offering a yearly cycle of texts or liturgical resources, "the Season of Creation is an annual celebration of prayer and action to protect creation. The season begins September 1, the Day of Prayer for Creation, and runs through October 4, the Feast of St. Francis, who is the patron saint of ecology in many traditions."[196] Similar to the RCL, the Season of Creation supplies numerous readings for each Sunday. Similar to the Narrative Lectionary, the Season of Creation emphasizes texts from both the Old and New Testaments. Similar to the African American Lectionary, the Season of Creation is structured around an issue or community. "Several statements from the past few years have called the faithful to observe this month-long Season of Creation, such as those of the Catholic Bishops of the Philippines *in 2003*, the Third European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu *in 2007* and the World Council of Churches *in 2008*." Through powerful endorsements and letters of support, the Season of Creation became much more prominent when it gained the embrace of Pope Francis in 2015.[197] Additional supplemental material is provided every year, with suggestions on how to observe the

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[195] "Frequently Asked Questions," The African American Lectionary, accessed April 17, 2020, http://www.theafricanamericanlectionary.org/faq.asp.

[196] "About : Season of Creation," Season of Creation, accessed April 17, 2020, https://seasonofcreation.org/about/.

[197] Season of Creation, "About: Season of Creation."

season with community-wide activities, educational opportunities, social advocacy involvement, and a global network to connect with via social media.

Conclusion

Although not an exhaustive list of lectionary alternatives to the RCL, this survey demonstrates the desire amongst many faith leaders for the inclusion of different voices, approaches, or texts from which to draw inspiration as they teach, preach, and guide congregations. Further, this summary demonstrates the space for both differing views on the importance of sacred text and for issue-based lectionaries. The realm of issue-based lectionaries will next be explored as this essay makes the case for an annual lectionary based on the deep biblical and spiritual connection to Creation.

The Green Lectionary

Section 1 of this dissertation examined the rich scriptural allusions to beauty, majesty, and the sacred nature of Creation, but many of the pericopes referenced in this paper are not assigned RCL texts. To address this lectionary shortcoming, and in order for a revitalization of earth-based liturgical emphasis to occur, an intentional effort must be made to emphasize these Creation-themed passages by preachers, worship leaders, music directors, educators, and leaders at every level of a faith community. Dr. Paul Galbreath leads us in that direction as he writes:

> Scripture uses the images of the earth to convey the story of God's abiding love of all creation. Thus, the first task for the church is to learn to listen again to the prominent place of creation in Scripture as it calls and prods us to see God's presence in the world around us. Once we become attuned to the many ways in which the authors of Scripture draw on earth images, then we will long for

> prayers and sermons that describe and explore ways that our lives can reflect this deep sense of connection between all of creation.[198]

Galbreath is not alone in his desire to see creation as a more integral component to the liturgical life of a faith community. Faith leaders across the spiritual spectrum have advocated for this spiritual reconnection. When congregations link the connection between creation and corporate worship, there becomes "a realignment of the relationship with our faith . . . we begin to understand that the God of the cosmos is so much larger than the God of our creeds. . . result[ing] in a deep reclamation of the dark-green roots of our very own tradition."[199]

Liturgies, prayers, and hymns can all mention "the beauty of the earth"[200] in ways that both reference scripture and emotionally move worshipers. However, that is not enough. Intentionally choosing sections from scripture that specifically name humanity's sacred connection to creation, and then appropriately applying them to the church year, is an invaluable offering to further all of Christianity's faith. Classes, guest speakers, communal experiences in nature, and any magnitude of the plethora of ideas surveyed in Section 2 of this dissertation can be positive, affirming, and transformative, and yet grounding the liturgical practice of ecotheology in worship and the word is imperative. "The Sunday sermon is how the preacher ministers to most of the people most of the time,"[201] and is trusted by most people of faith. Weaving elements of the earth into the

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[198] Galbreath, *Leading into the World*, 6.

[199] Andrea Cohen-Kiener, *Claiming Earth as Common Ground: The Ecological Crisis through the Lens of Faith* (Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Pub, 2009), 28-29.

[200] *Glory to God: Pulpit Edition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2013), 14.

[201] David Lyon Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds., *Feasting on the Word. Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), viii.

entirety of worship is much more practical when the texts a preacher draws from are specifically organized to lead them in this holy direction.

Worship

As explored earlier in this section, the evolution of the liturgical calendar and numerous lectionary forms have significantly impacted the way Christians worship. As the Presbyterian Book of Order states, "worship of the triune God is the center of our common life and our primary way of witness to the faith, hope, and love we have in Jesus Christ."[202] John Buchanan, former editor of *The Christian Century,* agrees, stating, "public worship is the primary activity of the church, the source of the congregation's life, and therefore the inspiration for its mission."[203] Proclaiming the scripturally sound and theologically rich good news of humanity's sacred connection to all of creation is

> religiously rich and suggestive; it has enormous worship and liturgical potential . . . this new model, which could be summarized by a version of Irenaeus's watchword—the glory of God is every creature fully alive—provides Christians with new ways to say that God is *with* us on the Earth and that God is *for* us, especially the oppressed. The new model suggests to Christians that the way to picture God's presence with us is the eschatological banquet to which all are invited, all people and all other creatures.[204]

Bound in worship, and acknowledging the spiritual connection to the Earth, the people of God can raise "all glory, laud, and honor"[205] in a new and universal fashion. For when

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[202] Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Part I, Part I,* 2014, (W-1.0107), 76.

[203] John M. Buchanan, *Being Church, Becoming Community* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 76.

[204] Sallie McFague, "A Manifesto to North American Middle-Class Christians," in *Moral Ground: Ethical Action for a Planet in Peril*, ed. Kathleen Dean Moore and Michael P. Nelson (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 2010), 246.

[205] *Glory to God: Pulpit Edition*, 196.

worship does not consider the earth-centered history of scriptural and faith, "we deny a fundamental relationship we have as earth creatures at home in this world. If our orientation in worship is not toward the world in which we live, our theology will reflect that."[206] Gathering around the earth-bound word in a worshipful manner will incubate an ecological theology that will spread throughout the ministry of the church.

Liturgy

Resolute that "liturgy is the communal ritual enactment and celebration of the priority of God's acts," which are celebrated whenever Christians gather to worship, liturgies that name spiritual connections between humanity and the earth are imperative for the community of faith.[207] Jim Antal recommends doing this not only by creating new earth-honoring liturgies, but also by reimagining ones that have been in use for years, saying "the church can and must transform its familiar liturgies to . . . inspire people to take action together."[208]

Many organizations and denominational resources named in Section 2 of this dissertation provide effective material for implementing this in a worship community. However, no matter the author, "liturgies must reclaim the resources of the earth as the tools of worship if we are to rebuild our relationship with God, each other, and the

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[206] Troy Messenger, "These Stones Shall Be God's House: Tools for Earth Liturgy," in *Earth Habitat: Eco-Injustice and the Church's Response,* ed. Dieter T. Hessel and Larry L. Rasmussen, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 174.

[207] Hughes, "The Priorities of Liturgy," 28-31.

[208] Antal, *Climate Church, Climate World,* 107.

environment."[209] Using the earth as a tool for worship allows liturgy to greatly accentuate the sacramental life of the church and the seasonal cycle of the church liturgical calendar.

There are numerous examples of the spiritual connection the sacrament of baptism has with the earth. Jesus' baptism took place in nature, with flowing water, and thematically connected him with the prophets John the Baptist and Elijah, both of whom shared holy experiences occurring at a river.[210] Additionally,

> Baptism by immersion into the earth's natural water is a clear reminder of our connection to creation. In the story of Jesus's baptism, the early church fathers saw a way of strengthening these ties. When Jesus entered the water of the Jordan River, all of creation was blessed by his presence . . . Jesus participates in the act of baptism as a way of sanctifying the baptismal way of life that runs through the course of nature. The renewal of the earth depends on the gift of water that sustains life. Living water brings forth, nurtures, and sustains life. Baptism is a way for participating in this elemental aspect of life.[211]

Honoring the theological connections baptism shares with creation, and routinely renewing the congregation's baptismal vows liturgically, bring this focus to greater prominence during worship.

Though most often celebrated with the words of institution found in Paul's letter to the church in Corinth, there are numerous scriptural references to meal celebrations that share the themes of the Lord's Supper. Jesus feeding the 5,000,[212] Jesus and the miraculous catch of fish,[213] and the devotion to shared meals and prayers by the early

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[209] Messenger, "These Stones," 176.

[210] Matthew 3.

[211] Galbreath, *Leading into the World*, 53.

[212] Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:31-44, Luke 9:12-17, John 6:1-14.

[213] John 21:1-19.

church in the days after Pentecost[214] all point to meals that share a communal energy, and include more than just bread and wine. The fish, the wine, the lamb, and the grain in these stories indicate the shared habitat and landscape of the early church leaders. "The power of Holy Communion certainly lies in the connection of sacred history, ritual action, and ordinary foods. The act of taking in our daily bread is hallowed, and all the table fellowship becomes a reflection of the liturgical archetype."[215]

The entire church calendar itself has clear connections to the natural cycles of the seasons and time. As Andrea Coen-Kiener, Director of the Interreligious Eco-Justice Network, writes,

> Just as the earth rotates around the sun, creating the ecological seasons from seed to harvest to table to seed, so too does the Catholic Church year cycle around saints' days and feast days, creating the liturgical seasons of Advent, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, the Transfiguration, the Assumption, the Feast of the Holy Cross, and the Immaculate Conception and return to Advent. The feast days celebrate a certain grounded timelessness, connecting us back to traditions that are based around the seasonal rhythms of agrarian culture and folklore. The feast days become our sabbaths, a period outside of work, time, and the global economy.[216]

John H. Westerhoff agrees, stating that the church is "a story-formed community, a nurturing, caring, faith family, a liturgical people on a pilgrimage through seasons of profane time made holy by the eternal cycle of sacred time . . . in relationship to God, self, neighbor, and the natural world."[217] Collectively, the people of God gather to worship through the sacred cycles of creation. As they do so, they travel through those

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[214] Acts 2:42-47.

[215] Messenger, "Stones," 176.

[216] Cohen-Kiener, *Claiming Earth,* 107.

[217] John H. Westerhoff III, *A Pilgrim People: Learning through the Church Year* (New York: Seabury Classics, 2005), 95.

seasons with God's creation, while faithfully becoming God's re-creation. Augmenting weekly liturgies with sacramental creation themes celebrates the natural world and the wonder of the life cycle and allows the congregation to honor the seasons in a fashion that is tangible and profound.

The Word Created and Recreated

As mentioned earlier in this section, the entire purpose of a lectionary is to provide appropriate texts for a certain time within the life of the church. The RCL assigns texts that, though flawed, thematically fit where they are liturgically placed. Clergy, music directors, and worship leaders need to emphasize the Creation themes that are already rampant throughout the text. As the artifact of this dissertation demonstrates, there are clear scriptural allusions to creation, sacred time, and the spiritual connection of all living things every single Sunday of the liturgical year. This is not a new phenomenon when it comes to sacred text.

> As they recalled the creation stories of Genesis, the first Christians (primarily Jews) remembered how God completed the work of creation in six days and rested on the seventh. On the eighth day of creation ("the first day of the week," according to all four Gospels), God continued the work of creation by raising Christ from the dead. This eighth day of creation/first day of the week is what became commonly known as the Lord's Day (Rev. 1:10), the day of resurrection.
>
> The Lord's Day was characterized by recollecting Jesus' words and deeds, and celebrating the presence of the risen Christ among them in the bread and cup of the Lord's Supper. A story and a meal formed the heart of worship each Sunday. Sunday was and is a festival in its own right.[218]

[218] Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and Cumberland Presbyterian Church, eds., *Liturgical Year: The Worship of God*, Supplemental liturgical resource 7 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 23.

Every time a congregation gathers to worship, creation and recreation are being praised as a festal celebration. This is historical, liturgical, and textual fact, grounded in the Hebraic roots of Christianity's past, and continued now as the people of God wrestle with how best to live out their divine call. The faith life of a congregation is made that much more robust when the spiritual connections found in sacred scripture are theologically emphasized and communally acted upon.

Despite the enormity of spiritual and textual history that can be found within the texts of the RCL, this thesis proposes additional work be done to create a new lectionary resource, one that intentionally partners creation-themed sacred texts with their matching liturgical year observances. This will provide direct creation-themed liturgical material for every Sunday of the liturgical year, as well as for liturgical seasons, special observances, and feast days.

Like every lectionary surveyed in this essay, the Green Lectionary will have an objective, a particular lens through which the lectionary creator sees the text, and its place in the liturgical and ecclesiastical world. Similar to every lectionary surveyed in this essay, the Green Lectionary will primarily strive to enhance the spiritual depth, textual understanding, and ultimately faith formation of the people who choose to implement its resources. This Green Lectionary can be found in Appendix A.

Conclusion

The central action of any non-sacramental service of worship is the reading and proclamation of the word. The sermon, the music, the liturgy, and the response of the people are all uniquely grounded primarily in the text, for from that text comes the

inspiration and direction of all that follows.[219] In my tradition, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the entirety of worship generates from the Word, as "reading, hearing, preaching, and affirming the Word are central to Christian worship and essential to the Service for the Lord's Day."[220]

Within the first two generations after Easter, attempts to provide order and direction into the routine worship life of communities of faith existed. Over the centuries, numerous lectionaries have been created, each with their own strengths and weaknesses, given their context and era. While many current models were surveyed earlier in this section, a clear lectionary gap currently exists. There is space for a new lectionary resource, the Green Lectionary, grounded in scriptural text and themes of humanity's sacred connection to creation.

The theological understanding of humanity's sacred connection to creation and a deeper awareness of the opportunities for Earth Care can be cultivated in a congregation through the implementation of two liturgical efforts. This can be achieved first by intentionally honoring the Creation themes already present in the sacred text, the Word that is central to the life of faith, and second, through the intentional selection of texts from within the biblical canon that particularly name, through glory or lament, location or utilization, the wonders of creation that continue to cultivate wonder, courage, and hope.[221] Designs on how to implement these efforts are discussed in the following sections.

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[219] Buchanan, *Being Church*, 87.

[220] Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Part I, Part I,* 2014, W-3.0301, 89.

[221] Antal, *Climate Church, Climate World,* 127-130.

SECTION 4:

ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

The artifact is a project entitled the Green Lectionary. The Green Lectionary is a liturgical resource that provides Creation themed scripture commentary for each of the four provided texts from every Sunday of the liturgical year according to the Revised Common Lectionary. The Green Lectionary covers the three "years" of the Revised Common Lectionary, and provides an additional resource for a fourth year, which suggests certain sections of scripture for each Sunday that intentionally honor the intersection of Creation and the liturgical season.

Grounded in scripture and the desire to empower worship leaders to honor creation directly, creatively, and faithfully in worship, this resource additionally provides scriptural commentary, suggested hymns, possible outreach activities, and sermon starters. This resource can be used by anyone who leads worship, or who would like a practical guide, surveying the high frequency creation is mentioned throughout scripture.

As the Thesis in Section 3 indicates, weaving the themes of creation that are prevalent throughout the biblical texts of the Revised Common Lectionary into the routine worship life of a congregation is the most universal and practical approach to honor the divine relationship humanity has with the earth. This method can be applied in a myriad of contexts and the Green Lectionary is a resource that can immediately aid in this initiative.

SECTION 5:

ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION

The primary goal of the artifact is to create a lectionary-based resource that provides Creation commentary for each of the four scripture readings suggested by the Revised Common Lectionary for each Sunday of the church year.

As surveyed in Section 3, The Revised Common Lectionary works in a three-year cycle consisting of Years A, B, and C. This artifact, the Green Lectionary, will provide resources for all three of these "years." It will also include a fourth year with an entire liturgical years' worth of suggested readings that partner Creation centric themed texts with an appropriate date on the liturgical calendar. Therefore, this entire project is a four-year endeavor consisting of Years A, B, C, and the fourth "Creation Year" of the Green Lectionary.

Artifact Goals

The primary aspiration for the artifact is that the Green Lectionary Resource will provide pastors, congregations, educators, and other parish leaders a resource that will allow a congregation to enhance the way they care for the earth as a spiritual practice, rooted in the regular worship life of the church. The Revised Common Lectionary provides four texts each Sunday: one each from the Old Testament, the Psalms, The Gospels, and the Epistles. Each Sunday these readings include themes that demonstrate the spiritual connection humanity has with the earth.

Ideally the Green Lectionary is a four-book series of Lectionary Commentaries that help guide faith leaders along the path of increased liturgical emphasis on the

spiritual connection humanity has with creation. However, additional goals are to plan and create the platform for this entire project to "take flight." These plans include a website, a Twitter handle, an Instagram account, and potentially a podcast.

Assessment and Continued Cultivation

There are a handful of ways that I can test a "beta-version" of this resource. The first is via a Westminster Presbyterian Church of Alexandria Adult Formation class. I am the Associate Pastor of Formation at the church and am planning to lead a class based on my dissertation research and artifact sometime in the spring of 2021.

A second avenue for beta testing this artifact is by hosting a virtual class or a webinar through the Reformed Institute of Metropolitan Washington. I am on the board of this organization and aid in both development and curricular planning. This relationship should provide both a great opportunity for me and a great outlet for this artifact.

A third avenue is by presenting at the Presbyterians for Earth Care (PEC), which is the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s denominational "green" gathering. I am blessed to know many of the leaders in this group and can work with them to provide the best possible method for leading a seminar. The Presbyterians for Earth Care are considering hosting virtual gatherings as well, so this is an additional opportunity to pursue.

The final avenue is through leading a workshop at APCE, the Associate of Presbyterian Church Educators annual conference. APCE is one of the larger PC(USA) annual conferences and I have led workshops at this gathering in the past. My hope is that not only do pastors find this resource useful, but so too do Christian Educators. It will be interesting to gauge the reaction at the APCE conference.

Each of these artifact "beta-test" opportunities will provide different audiences with which I can both share my research and receive feedback. With the COVID 19 pandemic, it is highly likely that each of these opportunities will take place in the virtual space. Though less than idea, this will allow me to attend these gatherings, lead these workshops, and then receive feedback in a much more cost-effective manner.

Ultimately, this artifact is more aligned with preaching and worship type conferences and clergy and worship leaders than just an academic or educational setting. The entire Green Lectionary is a project focused in the field of practical theology. Ideally, as I fine tune this resource and have a finished product, the next step will be to present this work at the types of conferences that focus on worship, preaching, and liturgy.

The primary way I will measure the success of the Green Lectionary is if it is published as a biblical commentary series. The feedback surrounding this project has been incredibly positive. My hope is that I can keep the quality of the product high and that it resonates with many individuals and communities.

However, there are many other ways for this artifact to be a success. First, if I can create an online platform to share the resource, even if the work is not published, that would be success. Second, if I can learn the best strategies for promoting my artifact via social media and a web platform that would be additional learning. Third, and most importantly, if I am able to simply share the good news of Creation Care, and shed light on how often the message of caring for the earth is mentioned throughout the texts chosen for Sunday readings in the Revised Common Lectionary, then this entire endeavor has been a triumphant success.

The most intimate way for me to gauge the success of this artifact however is in my own personal growth. What I did not realize would occur was how formative this research project would be for my own spiritual and pastoral development. I am spending a great deal of time researching, discerning, and praying over the texts of the Revised Common Lectionary. As a pastor serving in a local church and called to preach a sermon every Sunday, this practice is something I will be doing the rest of my career. As I continue to improve my own awareness and knowledge base with these texts, seasons, and the liturgical elements of the Revised Common Lectionary, I am becoming a better pastor and better agent of Christ.

If I can publish these resources, then I am going to have a multi-year project on my hands. Each book would be dedicated to a specific liturgical year, resulting in four total books. This means this could be a four to five-year project – maybe even longer. If the books do not get published, then I can still work on a potential website and generate as much excitement around the work as I can in that fashion. This could potentially still use much of the same platform building exercises, social media, website and potential podcasts I have mentioned elsewhere, but encouraging people to visit the website and interact there instead of obtain the resource would become the goal. It would not surprise me if the ultimate result is a combination of both, with some web material supplementing the concise and applicable resource that can be found in the printed and published books.

Audience

The primary members of the intended audience for the Green Lectionary, are clergy, church educators, and worship leaders. There definitely is a possibility that church

leaders that help plan the overall ministry and worship life of the congregation would find this resource valuable as well.

The intention for those that use this resource is that they come to the realization that including Creation Care spiritual themes into worship is a simple and faithful response to God's Word. I use the word simple because so many of the liturgical texts the Revised Common Lectionary provides for Sunday worship already mention creation, the earth, and their spiritual relationship. This is not a new program to initiate or a new committee that needs to be formed. The crux of this endeavor is to liturgically honor the Living Word of God Christians encounter in and through scripture, in a weekly and routine fashion.

When these themes of creation are rooted in the routine worship of a congregation, preached on, sung, prayed about, and acted upon, not because of a preacher's or congregation's agenda, but because they are already present in Scripture, the outpouring is a "greener" church and a congregation that is more aware of the earth and the spiritual connection they have to all of creation. The congregation will also gain the liturgical and spiritual vocabulary to describe their relationship with the earth in a fashion that promotes a deeper relationship with God, the earth, and one another. The Green Lectionary is the introductory material a church can utilize to make this shift happen. If the suggestions are followed, or at the very least adapted to the local context, the spiritual and liturgical shift can be transformative.

Any worship leader that is interested in the intersection between the spiritual and Biblical call to care for the earth, and the liturgy, my hope is they will find the Green Lectionary a valuable resource. For any worship leader who is interested in merely

looking at Scriptural texts from a more earth friendly viewpoint, this will be a valuable resource. For educators, congregational leaders, music directors or ministry planners of any definition, who strive to tie the ministry they lead to the scriptures that are preached each Sunday, and thus to the living Word of God, this will be a valuable resource. The hope is that every person who reads this resource will become a better "green leader" after they have read, and then applied, the information they read. Scriptural connections will be made in worship, that can then be made in educational contexts, service opportunities, and in the greater life of the church.

It is also important to note that this resource is not an upper level biblical commentary. This is a practical resource, based in practical theology and congregational life, not the textual study of an advanced level. This is an introductory level resource, striving to start conversations in both the appropriate contexts, and with the appropriate people, for healthy, faithful, positive congregational transformation in the realm of earth care.

Green Lectionary Scope

For the primary resource of the Green Lectionary, I will need a computer, a Bible, and the research done for my dissertation. However to enhance this project, to create a platform, and to ideally set the stage in motion to achieve publication I am further going to work to create a website, a Twitter handle, perhaps, an Instagram account, and the materials needed to potentially create a podcast. Initially my goal is to keep the costs low and the focus on the quality of the material I produce, shifting later to the podcast and other technical "splashes" later.

For the website, it will primarily be a "blog" style website, with the Green Lectionary resources made available at least a week before each Sunday they are the primary text for worship. This will give worship leaders enough time to see them, and then to prepare and plan for worship. My "launch plan" is to prepare the resources for Christ the King Sunday, or November 22 of 2020, through Baptism of the Lord Sunday, January 10, 2021, and post them sometime in October. My hope is that this is still possible given the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Budget

The primary resource, the Green Lectionary, only needs a few budgetary requirements, as the work is done on a computer and can even be emailed. Thus, the initial budget for this artifact are limited to:

- Computer – $0
- Toner Cartridges – $100
- Postage – $50
- Internet Connection – $1200

For the website portion of this artifact, the budget will need additional:

- Webhosting – $250 ($18 a month via Squarespace)
- Advertising Budget – $150

My hope is to utilize the power of the online platform I build through the website and social media, as well as the power of the publishing company to share this work with the world. Additionally, by producing a high-quality resource, and by building my platform in a fashion that is both healthy and productive, I should be able to reach the correct voices that would be drawn to this resource. Also, the same sorts of annual

conferences at which I plan to "beta-test" my artifact are the locations at which I can best market this material and product. Utilizing my time at these conferences, returning year after year, throughout the four-year cycle, and building relationships from those encounters, and gatherings, is the primary strategy I plan to utilize.

Standards of Publication

Regarding the standards of publication, my primary hope is that a denominational publishing house that publishes thematic Bible commentaries and lectionary aids finds this project a worthwhile endeavor to both support and publish. As a Presbyterian, Westminster John Knox Press is the most obvious choice, however there are numerous other publishing organizations with which I plan to dialogue. Additionally, there are a few non-denominational publishing houses that produce this type of material and I plan on being in dialogue with them as well. If none of these come to fruition, then I plan to self-publish, ideally partnering with the most earth friendly of organizations.

Action Plan

The final Green Lectionary "action plan" outlines how I will complete the Track 02 Artifact in a timely manner. I will need to fulfill the required components, create the necessary lectionary-based resource material – providing the Advent through Baptism of the Lord material for my final submission, and creating the virtual support for a website. My hope is to have the entire artifact completed and ready for submission by October 31, 2020. As the four-year lectionary resource project is a long endeavor, the plan is to lay the groundwork for the way the material can be created at a routine pace over the next "season" of my life.

SECTION 6:

POSTSCRIPT

My original intention was to pursue research in an area of Ecotheology that did not involve worship. As a parish pastor much of my weekly routine involves planning, preparing, and leading worship, and I was hoping to research something outside of that realm. However, I am thrilled that this intersection became the primary focus of my research. Not only is my research valid, every weeks RCL texts do reference, allude, or honor creation in some fashion, but the newfound Biblical knowledge I have gained by spending hours with these texts and themes has made me intimately more knowledgeable about scripture, the lectionary, the Presbyterian Hymnal, and about the annual liturgical cycles that make up the church year. Though it would have been fascinating to do further study in some other creation themed ecclesiastical niche, the research found in this dissertation, and ultimately in the Green Lectionary, is more universal, practical, and scriptural.

After consulting with numerous other scholars, clergy, and creation activists, there is no other resource available like the Green Lectionary. This resource will advance the conversations that are already taking place, and hopefully encourage much more study. Of the many additional areas of study that come to mind after concluding this dissertation, two endeavors seem the most obvious.

First, Christianity is not the only faith tradition that honors the scriptural connection humanity has with the earth. Thus, a fascinating study would be to look at many of the Revised Common Lectionary texts through an interfaith lens, exploring how traditions that either share sacred text, or have parallel or similar stories and myths,

would interpret the similar material. The intention would be to strengthen any bonds that were already in place, bringing people of many traditions together to honor creation most faithfully.

Second, there are many lectionary programs other than the Revised Common Lectionary. Analyzing their assigned texts and looking for creation themes in those would be a very worthwhile endeavor, especially for preachers who follow the Narrative Lectionary or the African American Lectionary. Creation images and themes run abundant through sacred scripture; it would behoove every Christian to see those instances named in other lectionary programs as well.

Finally, I have grown an even more robust spiritual relationship with the earth through this research and dissertation writing process. My family of four has severely cut our weekly waste output, as we recycle, compost, and wisely reuse whatever we can. Our backyard garden has become more productive and healthier as we have learned from seasons past and planned better for the future. Large portions of this dissertation were written out of doors. Both caring for and immersing myself in creation have become essential tenets of my personal faith.

However, I am fully aware that this work is not about me. This work is about scripture and faith. This work is about bringing the people of God into a deeper relationship with the God's bountiful creation and uniting communal efforts in that space. We all drink the same water. We all breathe the same air. Inspired by the Word of God may Christians of all kinds learn to care for the earth as we care for one another.

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