

Leadership Training for Lutherans Restoring Creation

Five Principles in Caring for Creation

This training session is designed to train you as leaders in greening your congregation. Your role is to be a catalyst for everyone to bring care for creation into all areas of parish life—worship, education, property, home/ work, and public ministry. Here are five principles for this work.

1) First principle: Lutheran theology provides a strong foundation to care for creation.

1. For Lutherans, God created and continues to create the world in a process of continual creation. God is in, with, and under creation influencing and shaping but not controlling outcomes. Creation is good, and God is in all things working for good.
2. Life is sacred and to be valued for its own sake, not just for what it can do for humans. Christ is in the sacraments. So also, Luther said, the fullness of God is in every leaf and grain. We are called therefore to reverence life and enjoy it as the basis for wise use.
3. Creation is the focus of God’s saving activity. God loves what God created. We are part of creation, not separate from it. Human history is part of “creation history.”
4. Sin includes our injustices toward other humans and our violations of nature— lack of limits on behavior, exploitation of Earth, pursuit of a lifestyle without regard for consequences. Jesus lived, died, and was raised to break sin and reconcile all creation.
5. The Lutheran doctrine of justification frees us from having to please God and liberates us for a vocation to love the neighbor and to care for creation.
6. For Lutherans, the promise of life after death with God is not an escape from creation but an assurance that frees us to give ourselves for the good of the world.
7. The Holy Spirit inspires and guides us to renew and to sustain all creation.

Why is this principle important?

The first principle is important because *how we think* about God, our neighbor and creation shapes *how we live*. Deepening our Lutheran faith will therefore lead us to care for creation.

2) Second principle: Lutherans have an ethical tradition of caring for the most vulnerable.

1. Lutheran theology of the cross leads us to see God and ourselves in solidarity with suffering— among humans and in all creation.
2. Lutherans have a legacy of organizations that care for those who suffer: Lutheran social services, Lutheran hospitals, Lutheran homes for the aged, Lutheran orphanages, Lutheran Immigration Services, Lutheran World Relief. Lutherans now seek to extend Lutheran commitments to those of all Earth community who are vulnerable to ecological degradation.
2. We cannot separate our commitment to justice for humans from the environment. The most vulnerable bear the brunt of ecological devastation—third world countries, the sick and elderly in localized issues like Katrina, and people of color from environmental racism.
3. Lutherans have an understanding of sin as “people curved in on ourselves.” We can apply that insight to ourselves collectively—organizations, corporations, nations, and humanity as a whole— curved in on ourselves such that we use the rest of creation without caring for it.
4. Lutherans have a situational ethic that is not bound by legalism and that is thus able to address complex issues and new challenges with wisdom based on our theological and ethical traditions.

Why is this principle important?

The love for neighbor and the care for creation are part and parcel of the same commitment to love God by loving others.

3) Third principle: The Bible mandates that care for creation is fundamental to our human vocation.

1. Lutherans value what the Bible says about creation and our human vocation to care it.
2. Human creatures belong to the Earth (“adamah”): “Adam” means “earth-person.”
2. All creation is *good*—birds of the air, fish of the sea, land animals, vegetation, land, water, sun, moon, and stars. Not only humans but also animals are to “be fruitful and multiply.”
3. Humans are called to care for Earth: “to exercise dominion” is to “take responsibility for.” We were created to “serve and preserve” Earth, as Jesus called us to be “servants of all.”
4. All creation is sacramental, because it is “filled with God’s glory”
5. All creation is called to praise/worship God—hills, seas, animals, fields, trees.
6. Human justice is related to the state of creation. Where injustice exists, the land withers.
7. Jesus served the most vulnerable, which now also includes endangered creation.
8. Jesus died to reconcile all things “in heaven, on earth, and under the earth” (Colossians).
9. Salvation is “new creation” with a renewed “heaven and earth” where God dwells.

Why is this principle important?

The “environment” is *not* one more social issue among others. Rather, care for creation is fundamental to our vocation as humans.

4) Fourth principle: Care for God’s good creation: “serve and preserve”

1. Justified by grace, we have nothing to prove and no need to deny about the state of the world. We need to learn about the degradation of creation and our human role in it. We need to know the size of the problems if we are to know the size of the solutions.
2. Lutherans are strong on education. Now we need education about creation: the ways in which Earth is under stress in many areas of life—global climate change; pollution of air, land, and water; loss of biological diversity; loss of forests and arable land due to stripping and overuse; waste disposal; ozone depletion; the impact of population.
3. As Lutherans, we should be aware of the ways in which we—individually and collectively—contribute to the degradation of creation and what we can do about it.

Why is this principle important?

We cannot be naïve about the consequences of our actions. We need to see the consequences of the personal choices and the larger systemic changes needed to address these issues.

5) Fifth principle: Earth-care is a spiritual matter about our relationship with nature.

1. Humans have become estranged from nature. We need to be reconnected.
2. In communal worship, God reorients us to a loving relationship with creation.
3. Daily decisions in our homes become spiritual disciplines to care for Earth.
4. We can bring our commitments to work—factories, businesses, organizations, institutions.
5. We can advocate for earth-friendly laws and policies in the public realm.
6. We can do hands-on restoration of habitats as part of our caring relationship with creation.
7. We can examine the ways our commitments are blocked—by personal habits, religious beliefs, cultural assumptions, apathy—and then offer confession and recommitment.
8. Justified by grace, we are motivated not by fear or anger or guilt or shame or grief but by reservoir of grace out of which we live—to act in love and joy.

Why is this principle important?

We need to embrace spiritual ways to be sustained for the changes of lifestyle, the commitments, and the sacrifices needed to bring new ways of living for a just and sustainable world. We will not save what we do not love.