



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

—Psalm 104:24

Throughout Scripture, God promises to restore God's people to health and wholeness, a promise that includes the renewal of all creation. This promise is depicted dramatically in the final pages of the book of Revelation as a grand vision of a new heaven and a new earth. The earth and its inhabitants are weary and uncertain, battered by plagues and death, wars and destruction. But God is still there, persistent and faithful. At the last, God reveals a renewed heaven and an earth permeated by the presence of God, transformed from pain to be a place of healing and wholeness for all things. The 2021 Earth Day theme, "Restore Our Earth," reminds us of this vision and the holy work God entrusts to us — of seeking the well-being of creation as inseparable from the wholeness of humankind.

In the past year the world received a jolt from its collision with the COVID-19 pandemic, which laid bare persistent racial disparities in health care access and outcomes in our nation. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([CDC](#)) noted the disproportionate impact (increased hospitalizations and deaths) of the pandemic on some racial and ethnic minority groups. The CDC found that "inequities in the social determinants of health, such as poverty and healthcare access, affecting these groups are interrelated and influence a wide range of health and quality-of-life outcomes and risks."

The racial reckonings of 2020 illuminate how the legacies of slavery, the Doctrine of Discovery and colonization continue to diminish life for people and creation. The glaring inequities exposed through the pandemic are being intensified by the global impacts of climate change. The final 2020 update of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI) found last year to be one of historical extremes. There were 22 separate billion-dollar weather and climate disasters across the United States, which shattered the previous annual record of 16 events in 2011 and 2017. All these disasters disproportionately affected people of color and the most vulnerable populations. We are one people and one earth in need of restoration.

Repenting the sin of racism and repenting our destruction of creation should happen together. Because God gave humans the vocation to be stewards of the earth, we proclaim that, for Christians, care of the earth is not an "environmental cause." Instead, it is central to our holy calling to treasure the earth and care for it as our home, fully integrating creation care into our love of God, neighbor and all in the environment. Recalling the good earth and our call to be stewards of creation in hope and faith, we know our recovery from the pall of 2020 will, in many ways, be a transition to a new way of life.

Dear church, we can "testify to the good news of God's grace" (Acts 20:24), which empowers us to move forward. We know that healing is possible — for the planet and for our communities. We are not too late. The time is now. To us, God is calling; through us, God wants to work a miracle; through our finite and inadequate efforts, God can and will bring about "a new heaven and a new earth." God provides us with diverse gifts as protectors and guardians of creation. We affirm, therefore, the many stewards of the land who have been and are conserving the good earth that the Lord has given us.

As stewards of creation, we have many ways to lovingly serve the earth:

- Explore and use ELCA Care for Creation resources, including video, study and action guides with information about the Creation Care Ambassadors initiative.
- Read the Lutherans Restoring Creation story "[5 Ways to Celebrate Earth Day as Church Together but Apart.](#)"
- Accept the ELCA Young Adults [No Plastics for Lent](#) challenge this Easter season.
- Participate in a local cleanup (with appropriate distancing) if permitted by local authorities, or participate in the Earth Challenge 2020 citizen scientist initiative, focused on plastic pollution and clean air.
- Join with the ELCA's ecumenical partner [Creation Justice Ministries](#) in advocacy, education and prayer.
- Participate in [Faith and Frontline Call to Action: Good Trouble for Justice](#) on April 19, an ELCA-sponsored consultation focusing on climate migration, food security and just transition. This event brings together people of faith at this watershed moment and calls for the inclusion of the voices, ideas and expertise of the front line and faith communities alongside career politicians and others to address and implement climate solutions.

Envisioning a world that is just, sustainable and resilient, we, as Lutherans, heed God's call and take concrete steps to repair inequities and wealth divides locally, nationally and globally. A framework built on hope and connecting climate to economic and racial justice is essential to our reimagining of communities as resilient and inclusive, void of poverty and leaving no one behind.

In Christ,



The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop
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