

Care of Creation: Confirmation

Setting: *Bring things in from nature and set them out where the students can see them (sea shells, rocks, pine cones, flowers, etc.)*

Idea for the Day: We are created and called to be partners with God in caring for creation.

Learning Goal: The students will understand that our actions affect people, ecosystems, and animals all around the world. We need to care for creation to care for our neighbor.

Opening Prayer: Good and gracious God, you have created us and all that we need for a good life. Yet many people in this world do not enjoy the good life that you want them to have. Open our minds, eyes, and hearts to how we can be your hands and feet in the world to care for your creation and help our neighbors live the good life you want to them to live. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Sharing: What place in nature makes you feel especially close to God? *(You may want to start by telling them about a place(s) that are especially meaningful to you.)*

Making Connections, Our Web of Resources: *From the Hunger Education Toolkit, ELCA, Module 1 (attached). If you are unable to meet in person, you can use the whiteboard function on Zoom to draw the different elements of creation and how they are connected.*

Bible Reading:

- Have the students open their bibles to Genesis 1:1. Explain that this is the first of two creation stories found in the book of Genesis. The second one starts at Genesis 2:4b. Ask for volunteers to read Genesis 1:1- 2:4a.
- Ask the students, "What did God say at the end of each day?"
- Now have volunteers read Genesis 2:4b-24. Have the students compare the two creation stories. How are they the same? How are the stories different? What does God do in each story? What are humans called to do?

What does "Dominion Over" look like in God's kingdom?

Humans are given "dominion" or rule over creation, but it is clear in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) that God does not condone the abuse of authority or abuse of those under someone's charge, including animals.

- Leviticus 25:43 - You shall not rule over them with harshness, but shall fear your God.
- Deuteronomy 25:4 - You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.

Even the land is given a Sabbath:

- Leviticus 25:3 - Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in their yield; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of complete rest for the land, a sabbath for the Lord: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard.
- Leviticus 26:35 - As long as it lies desolate it shall have rest, the rest that it did not have on your Sabbaths when you were dwelling in it

Finally, if we look to Jesus as the model of Savior-Messiah-King, he is a servant. Never would Jesus abuse anyone or anything that he rules over.

How Are We Humans Doing?

Ask the students how humans are doing at caring for God's good creation. Let them come up with ideas. If they are not able to come up with any ideas, below are some facts that could be used sparingly. Do not overwhelm your students with facts. Try to help them see how things may be changing, such as more frequent and more severe hurricanes in coastal areas, and more severe droughts and wildfires in other areas. Perhaps you remember that there was more snow in Northwest Wisconsin when you were their age than there is now, more severe weather such as tornadoes, or some other local change in the environment or weather patterns.

Some Facts:

66% of the world's wild forests are gone.ⁱ

40% of our lakes (United States) are polluted with excess nitrogen or excess phosphorous.ⁱⁱ

The planet's average surface temperature has risen about 2.05 degrees Fahrenheit (1.14 degrees Celsius) since the late 19th century, a change driven largely by increased carbon dioxide and other human-made emissions into the atmosphere.ⁱⁱⁱ

Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, the acidity of surface ocean waters has increased by 30%.^{iv}

Globally, monitored population sizes of mammals, fish, birds, reptiles, and amphibians have declined an average of 68% between 1970 and 2016, according to World Wildlife Fund's (WWF) *Living Planet Report 2020*. Populations in Latin America and the Caribbean have fared worst, with an average decline of 94%. Global freshwater species have also been disproportionately impacted, declining 84% on average.^v

What causes climate change?

Certain gases in the atmosphere block heat from escaping. Gases that contribute to the greenhouse effect include: Carbon Dioxide, Methane, CFCs, and Nitrous Oxide.

Over the last century the burning of fossil fuels like coal and oil has increased the concentration of atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂).

The Intergovernmental Panel on climate change concluded there's a more than 95 percent probability that human activities over the past 50 years have warmed our planet. The panel also concluded there's a better than 95 percent probability that human-produced greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide have caused much of the observed increase in Earth's temperatures over the past 50 years.^{vi}

What human activities would contribute to these greenhouse gases? *(driving cars, burning coal for energy, the production of metals and plastics, agriculture, methane from cows, shipping fruits and vegetables long distances, landfill gasses)*

What countries produce more of these gases?

The 20 countries with the highest carbon dioxide emissions (in million tons (Mt)) are:

1. China (9,300 Mt)

2. The United States (4,800 Mt)
3. India (2,200 Mt)
4. Russia (1,500 Mt)
5. Japan (1,100 Mt)
6. [Germany](#) (718.8 Mt)
7. Korea (600 Mt)
8. Iran (567.1 Mt)
9. Canada (547.8 Mt)
10. [Saudi Arabia](#) (532.2 Mt)^{vii}

God's Preference for the Vulnerable:

All of these changes have a large negative effect on vulnerable populations: those who live in poverty and have the fewest resources to do something about the changes to our world.

When climate change causes stronger hurricanes to hit the coastal areas in the south more frequently, it is the poor that suffer most. When climate change causes drought and forest fires, it is the poor that suffer the most. They may not have the resources, such as savings and insurance, to recover from natural disasters. They may not be able to relocate as easily as someone who has more money or a higher education.

Videos that show the effects of climate change on the poor:

If you have the ability, show one or more of the following videos.

Why Fighting Climate Change is Important to Ending Poverty

<https://youtu.be/0ByWYFLlcCA>

Face the Music: climate change hits poor people first and worst

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ghfirMLNfNA>

Oxfam talks about how climate change increases hunger:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zsKI41in8y0>

Fight Climate Poverty with Oxfam

<https://youtu.be/xo1zM3Okjag>

We know from our holy scriptures that God has a preference for the poor and the vulnerable in society. Here are a few of the many scriptures that affirm this.

Luke 4:18 ESV

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed,

John 13:34-35 ESV

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Matthew 25:40 ESV

And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’

Jeremiah 5:28 ESV

They have grown fat and sleek. They know no bounds in deeds of evil; they judge not with justice the cause of the fatherless, to make it prosper, and they do not defend the rights of the needy.

Isaiah 1:17 ESV

Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.

Deuteronomy 15:11 ESV

For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, ‘You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.’

Proverbs 14:31 ESV

Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him.

Deuteronomy 15:7-8 ESV

“If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be.

James 2:15-16 ESV

If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?

Based on these words from scripture and what you have learned about how climate change affects the poor and vulnerable more negatively than it does the rich, what do you believe Christians are called to do about climate change?

What are some specific things that you can do at home to help with climate change? *Have the students brainstorm some ideas. Here are some additional ideas.*

- Stop using single-use plastics such as straws, grocery bags, plastic cutlery, and cups.
- Buy less stuff.
- Recycle whenever possible.
- Turn off lights when you are not in the room.
- Turn off your computer, TV, and other electronics when you are not using them.
- Walk or ride your bicycle instead of asking for a ride in the car.
- Take shorter showers. Take showers instead of baths.
- Turn off the water while brushing your teeth.

Ask others to conserve energy by:

- Turning down the temperature of your water heater.
- Lowering your thermostat a couple of degrees when it is cold outside and raising it a couple of degrees when it is hot outside.
- Asking your parents not to leave the car running needlessly, for example, when waiting to pick you up at school.
- Change your incandescent light bulbs to LED bulbs.
- Run appliance on energy saver mode.
- Keep your car tuned up and tires inflated to the proper pressure for the best fuel economy.
- Avoid unnecessary trips in the car. Plan your trips so that several can be done at the same time.

What are some specific things we could do as a congregation to help with climate change?

- Change your incandescent light bulbs to LED bulbs.
- Have an energy audit.
- Stop using single-use cups and cutlery.

Closing Prayer:

Thank you, God for this amazing world that you have given us. Help us learn to care all of it, the plants, ecosystems, and all of the animals, so that all may thrive; and so that our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren may enjoy it to Your glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Additional Ideas:

If you have time, there are additional activities in the ELCA "Making Connections, Our Web of Resources Toolkit" that teach about climate change and how it contributes to hunger.

Bring in an organic farmer (or visit a farm) to talk about how they care for the land so that it will feed others for generations from now.

Bring in someone from the Department of Natural Resources to talk about how they manage wildlife populations or water quality, and changes they are seeing. Have them explain what we can do about any declines in natural resource quality or wildlife populations.

ⁱ <https://www.theworldcounts.com/challenges/planet-earth/forests-and-deserts/why-is-deforestation-a-problem/story> Accessed 12/28/2020

ⁱⁱ EPA 2012 National Lakes Assessment Accessed 12/28/2020

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/monitoring-references/faq/indicators.php> Accessed 12/28/2020
<https://crudata.uea.ac.uk/cru/data/temperature/> Accessed 12/28/2020
<http://data.giss.nasa.gov/gistemp>

^{iv} <https://www.noaa.gov/education/resource-collections/ocean-coasts/ocean-acidification> Accessed 12/28/2020

^v <https://www.worldwildlife.org/press-releases/68-average-decline-in-species-population-sizes-since-1970-says-new-wwf-report> accessed 01/05/2021

^{vi} <https://climate.nasa.gov/causes/> accessed 01/04/2021

^{vii} <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/greenhouse-gas-emissions-by-country>