

How to Start an *Environmental Ministry (EM)* in Your Parish

There are many different ways to get an environmental ministry started in your parish. If your parish already has a group, we hope these resources help you expand your ministry. The Starter Kit could help you organize other groups in your area. You are encouraged to use these resources to promote the following:

- **Episcopal Ecological Network** mission - *to educate, encourage and facilitate congregations, dioceses, provinces and the National Church toward stewardship of God's Creation. "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world and all that dwells therein." Psalm 24:1*
- Priority Issues identified in Section G below.
- A ministry of **Reflection, Education & Action** that helps protect the environment, promote sustainable communities and preserve the sanctity of creation. See Section F below.

Note: the information in this document was inspired and shaped by various environmental ministry programs in Province IV and V; *One God, One Family, One Earth; Earth Ministry's Greening Congregations Handbook, Web of Creation's "Getting Started"* and the EpEN Web Site Resources.

FIRST STEPS

The eight steps below help you get started **or** expand your ministry:

1. First Meeting - Find the best way to get a group of people together for your first meeting and select a group coordinator. (Section A)
2. Name - Select a name for your group. (Section B)
3. Mission – Write a mission statement. (Section C)
4. Vestry – Present proposal and reports about your ministry. (Section D)
5. Collaborative Ministry –Find the best ways to work with other ministries. (Section E)
6. Define ways to promote a ministry of *Reflection, Education & Action*. (Section F)
7. Promote EEN Priorities. (Section G)
8. Communication - Select best methods for getting your work in church and in community news media. (Section H)

SECTION A - FIRST MEETING

Determine the best way to get a group of people together for your first meeting and select a group coordinator or co-leaders. A number of people in your parish may recycle, compost and do other sustainable practices that promote integrity of creation. There are probably people who read about environmental issues but have **never** connected them to their faith or parish community. During your first meeting, establish broad guidelines. These should enable your members to fully understand how this is a spiritual ministry of your parish and diocese. You may need several meetings to select a name for your group; to write a mission statement and to select program format, topics and projects.

There may or may not be a lot of people willing to jump in and take a leadership role in getting the congregation involved; but that doesn't matter, because it only takes a few folks to get started. Your first meeting could simply announce a gathering to explore how the parish members want to promote EM: Care for Creation.

Acknowledge different levels of commitment. Do not assume everyone will be involved at the same level. Some people may take leadership roles in initiating programs and ideas. Others may be part of the church governing board to authorize or approve plans and related budget items. Others may be members of committees (such as the property committee) that would carry out a project. Still others may teach children, youth or adults in one class or another. Virtually everyone may be involved simply by

participating in the bulletin recycling program after worship, or by turning out lights in the bathroom when they leave or requesting church news be sent via email rather than hard copy. Celebrate the level at which everyone does their part, without expecting everyone to be involved at the same level of commitment.

You will need a few people to get the ball rolling. This can be done whether you are a pastor or a lay leader or an interested parishioner. If you are a pastor, you may be in a position to give some impetus or direction to the process of becoming a creation-caring community. If you are a lay person, you may want to ask permission or inform the vestry about your programs and projects. It is best to keep the process as open as possible and let the leadership and the congregation know what is happening and what is being planned. There may be people who object to the presence of this issue in the church; however, it is not necessary to achieve consensus in order for those who wish to go forward to do so.

Defining your self as a group may promote stronger team efforts and commitment than organizing as a committee. Should your initial small group form as a ad hoc committee in the congregation, ensure it serves as leaven for the rest of the congregation and future expansions. A group may carry out projects on their own, propose projects for the church council to approve, and promote ecological concerns through education and other promotional means. During your first meeting you may want to consider an education series or retreat – see information below.

Educational Series (adapted from *Web of Creation* “Getting Started)

You may wish to have a series of classes in the evening or a series of forums on Sunday morning (perhaps coupled with sermons on our responsibility to creation). There are many resources available for such classes. Here are some ideas:

- Explore Biblical passages dealing with our human relationship with creation
- Study the Episcopal Resolutions and statements about the care for creation and on environmental justice. (Highlights about these are on EM Power Point slide show
- Invite speakers from a local high school or college who have expertise in environmental issues.
- Get speakers from local agencies that deal with eco-justice issues.
- Identify other churches in the area who have done environmental ministry and ask them to share their experiences.

The educational process may enable you to find out who has a commitment to do further work with environmental ministry in the congregation. The educational programs may inspire your first project. Many congregations like to conduct four or six-week study on Sunday mornings or Wednesday evenings before starting environmental projects. Other groups have one or two programs and begin projects like retrofitting all the lights in the building with energy efficient light bulbs, purchasing green renewable energy and planting draught resistant plants in church gardens.

Retreats

Some groups like to start or renew their EM focus and programs with annual retreat for a day or two in the country or out-door setting. These might include:

- discussion of people's concerns and experiences
- input from an informed person about the environmental state of the world
- opportunities to discuss particular local environmental problems
- the relationship between environmental and justice issues and life of faith

It may be possible for retreatants to commit themselves to a project, then meet again in few months to report on success of the project. Consider a project that the whole congregation can support.

Survey

A survey of the congregation could help you determine who is interested, who has a commitment, what concerns people have, how they view the environmental state of the nation and the world, what experiences they have had, what expertise they may have, and so on. Find good ways to share the results of the survey and set a direction for the group and the congregation.

There are other ways to go about this process. There may be an obvious need or project that captures the imagination of the congregation. Just do it! Each community is different. Sensitivity to the

history, personality and make-up of your community will be a real asset in knowing how to begin the process and engage others in it.

Keeping a Log, Scrapbook and Minutes

It would be helpful if one person were willing to keep a record of what was considered and how it was done and what the outcome was. This record will serve well in drawing others into the process who were not there from the beginning. It will also track all that you do so the congregation can begin to build an identity as a community that cares for creation. If you have a parish web site, keep your programs and mission statement updated on this electronic communication medium.

SECTION B - NAME

During the first meeting, select a name for your group. If your group likes *Environmental Ministry* or *Environmental Ministry: Care for Creation*, use one of these. Review the list of names below. You will find a variety of names in the Manual and Report sections of the Starter Kit. NOTE: after you select your name, be sure it is easy to find on your parish web site.

Select a Name (adapted from *Web of Creation Getting Started*)

- Care for Creation
- Care of the Earth
- Restoring Creation
- Healing Creation
- Earth Stewards or Creation Stewards
- Earth Ministry

In addition to naming your group, you may want to name (identify) the parish as a place to care for creation. You may examine ways to foster and display your ministry. This can serve as reminders of the community's responsibilities for creation - give the church an identity as a place where people care about all of life. Here are some possibilities:

- *Creation Awareness Center*. This is the phrase used by the National Council of Churches for congregations that covenant to model care of the earth. It emphasizes the church building as a place where the people and the buildings/grounds manifest an awareness of all creation and the human responsibility for it.
- *Covenant Community*. This is a different version that identifies the members of the congregation as people who are committed to all of God's creation. What about naming a new church the "Creation Methodist Church".
- *Earth-Keeping Center or Earth-Healing Center*. Some congregations already think of themselves as healing centers, and so their identity can be expanded to include not only the healing of persons and communities but also a commitment to the regeneration of nature.
- *Eco-Justice Community*. This phrase emphasizes the integral relation between ecology and justice, including the relationship between degradation of the environment and the exploitation of women, minorities, the poor, and third world countries. It identifies the community as a place where concerns for the environment are related to the concern for justice among humans -- a community of advocacy and action.
- *Green Zone*. This is a concept that is less explicitly religious in orientation, but emphasizes the area as a place safe for the environment and therefore also for humans -- similar to a drug-free zone as a place safe for children, or a hospital zone as a place dedicated to the healing of persons. A Green Zone is a place where the geographical area of the church, along with the community that gathers there, is a place that is earth-friendly. The advantage of this concept is that it can easily be applied also to homes and neighborhoods and businesses.
- *Sustainable House of the Lord* – model sustainable building practices and principles.
- *Other Names*. Consider biblical images, such as the Garden of God or the tree of life or a phrase that relates to your region or area of the country. Whatever it is, it should be a reminder to the congregation of their commitments and their mission.

Choosing symbols

During your first meeting you may not have time to select symbols or icons for your group; however, you want to get this on your agenda for the next meeting. It is important to find a way to get visual images that capture the essence of your work and help people to remember the focus of EM.

It may also be helpful to have one or more symbols of your commitment to the care of the earth. A symbol can be a very meaningful expression of environmental ministry. The symbol could be displayed as a logo or given artistic expression.

- The tree of life
- Earth as seen from space
- Water of life

See icons and symbols on the EEN web site and in ppt shows of the Starter Kit. Churches that buy green alternative energy often have decals on their doors and window that announce this stewardship promotion. Developing a public symbol like those described below will take time and come from your Reflection and Education activities. After a few programs, which should always include prayer, meditation and discernment of information, you may be ready to select a symbol. Note: The manuals in the Starter Kit provide resources that ensure you engage in experiential programs rather than committee meetings that only talk about environmental ministry and actions.

A public symbol can also give the congregation an identity with the larger surrounding community. Some of these symbols may display actual practices that are prophetic signs of future practices in a sustainable world. Here are some ideas:

- Create a community garden on your property. Make participation available to people in the neighborhood, especially the poor, or give the produce to a local food pantry.
- Create an orchard on the property. Share the produce with needy families.
- Plant many trees and shrubs for the protection of the building from the cold wind in winter and the hot sun in summer.
- Create a small natural sanctuary on the property with trees and shrubs and flowers. It may have a small path with benches. This would be a place for people in the church and the neighborhood to sit quietly and meditate.
- Examine returns on building small on-site wind mill to power a few SS classrooms.
- Put up solar panels to power the outside lights.
- Create an eternal light in the sanctuary that is powered by the light from the sun.
- Surround the baptismal font with a garden of life. Perhaps include a waterfall for the font of running water made possible by solar power.
- Put plants in the church building and sanctuary so that worship is always held amidst the praise of all God's creation.
- Where there are wall to ceiling windows and the climate permits, plant the same trees, shrubs, flowers, and other plants inside as there are outside, so that the artificial separation from creation is overcome.
- Use recycled materials in your church insulation or some outside furnishings or a sculpture for the church yard.
- Your parish and diocesan buildings can be a symbol – search the web for examples of sacred spaces that model sustainable green building principles

The symbols you choose may come from the Bible, your religious tradition, your bio-region, from nature itself, from technology or from your imagination!

A Certificate of Commitment is available from the National Council of Churches as part of their program to make churches become Covenant Communities or Creation Awareness Centers. Star Energy Congregations have banners and awards for posting.

SECTION C - MISSION STATEMENT

You may use the mission statement* below or write your own. See mission statements of various parish groups around the country in the Reports Directory in Starter Kit.

**The Episcopal Ecological Network mission is to educate, encourage and facilitate congregations, dioceses, provinces and the National Church toward stewardship of God's Creation.*

Incorporate care for creation into the mission statement of the congregation. For example: Christ Church Cathedral in Nashville (Diocese of TN) wrote:

In keeping with the mission of Christ Church Cathedral to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ by being good stewards of God's resources, and to value joy in and care of God's creation.

The mission of the **Christ Church Cathedral (Ecology Group) Environmental Ministry** is to pursue a focused ministry of *Reflection, Education and Action* that promotes:

- Remembrance that every element of creation is a gift of God and a revelation of God, with the understanding that how we relate to the natural world reflects also our relationship with God
- A deepening knowledge of the theological and spiritual issues, as well as scientific and practical ecological issues
- A heightened awareness of our responsibility to live in ways that protect, heal and honor the integrity of God's creation; leading to intentional changes in lifestyles that reflect a reverence for God's creation.

If your congregation has a mission statement, it is important to include your commitment to the environment in it. Including creation care in your documents of purpose serves to keep before you, at the most fundamental level, your ongoing covenant to serve and protect creation as part of your mission. Yearly planning will then be sure to include this vital dimension of religious life.

SECTION D – VESTRY

Give your vestry a written proposal about your mission and scope of work. Ask the vestry their preferred mode for making a presentation that would inform the congregation about environmental ministry as an important part of parish life and mission. The vestry may recommend that your group become a task force or standing committee or a subcommittee of the Social Concerns Outreach committee (cluster group) to begin the process of environmental ministry. The vestry and church staff may recommend that your group be under the care of Stewardship or CE, Christian Formation. It may take a few weeks to discern the best place or “fit” for your ministry. Consider the benefits of a retreat for vestry and EM group. A retreat could enhance the working relation and enhance communication about EM, Environmental Ministry.

SECTION E – COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY

Your EM group can be a collaborative ministry. It is important to network with Christian Education, EYC, ECW, Stewardship, EYC and/or Outreach groups. Co-sponsoring programs and projects with other ministries enables you to expand the scope of your work and ensures more people are involved. Once your church council places EM in a group, be sure to reach out to other groups that can help you promote Reflection, Education and Action – Care for Creation. As your ministry grows, you may want to pursue a Commission in your diocese. See www.env-steward.com to learn how the *Environmental Stewardship Commission* - Episcopal Diocese Minnesota works.

Many dioceses have environmental programs at their camp sites and conferences centers. Be sure to help people understand the connections between these programs and Environmental Ministry. The EMEN team will develop guidelines for expanding environmental ministry in each diocese; recruit people for EM network; determine best mode for communicating EM priorities and programs; compile list of

environmental programs offered at Episcopal camps, conference centers and contribute suggestions for proposals and grants.

EM coordinators should encourage all diocesan parishes, missions, schools, offices, camps and conference centers to live more clearly the deep spiritual significance of our relationship with the Earth. Encourage your diocese to offer the following:

1. Prayer, study and reflection together at all age levels on the calling of God to us through the revelation of the Creation
2. Guidelines for becoming fully engaged in the process of becoming a model of the stewardship of God's Creation and compliance to environmentally friendly policies and practices
3. Environmental audits of property, buildings and programs
4. Dialogue in each parish among people of all ages on the environment, stewardship and economic/social justice to encourage individual and congregational witness
5. Sermons and homilies which reflect creation stewardship and care of all creation
6. Educational materials and exhibits at diocesan meetings, annual convention, offices, camps and conference centers
7. Link parishes and dioceses to web sites; communicate with those who provide newsletters

Other parishes and houses of faith - ecumenical and interfaith programs

You may want to involve people from a nearby church or from other another religious tradition. Some congregations naturally yoke well together. There may be a community project that needs the commitment of several organizations and more people. For example in Province IV, several dioceses in TN and KY are encouraged to work with the Cumberland River Compact to protect the watersheds in these states. The religious groups are asked to do hands-on activities as well as attend educational programs. This collaboration is synergistic from a number of perspectives and saves duplication of effort.

Cooperation among several congregations ascertains financial resources that would not be available from one parish. A project such as habitat restoration or opposition to an incinerator might best be done by many local groups. Many CBG – Community Based Gardens, gleaned projects and Food Security programs are supported by several congregations. Finally, the cooperation with people from other traditions gives an opportunity to learn from each other's ways of addressing the environmental situation from theological, spiritual and ethics perspectives.

All of these suggestions are shared in order to affirm there are many ways to proceed with EM. Find what is best for your congregation - given the interest you already have, the personality of the congregation and your procedures for decision-making.

SECTION F - REFLECTION, EDUCATION AND ACTION

EM is effective when it engages in an environmental ministry of **Reflection, Education and Action** that helps protect the environment, promote sustainable communities and preserve the sanctity of creation. Your group may quickly learn that it is hard to keep these three components balanced as you plan and facilitate programs and projects. Some of your members will be more interested in one than the other two. Few will attend and promote all three; however, it is important to keep all three vibrant.

Reflection - Open our hearts through scripture, prayer, theology and liturgy.

Education - Open our minds to learn and teach the issues before us through individual study groups and forums. Deepen our understanding of the threats to Creation.

Action - Open our hands to implement projects. Live in ways that protect, heal and honor the integrity of God's creation.

Note: see Province IV EM Fact Sheet, the EpEN website and *EM Overview* Power Point slide show to learn more about **Reflection, Education and Action**.

SECTION G – PRIORITIES, SPECIAL CONCERNS

Find your way to promote priorities below. The Province IV *EM Overview* Power Point slide show illustrates these priorities from a number of perspectives.

The **Episcopal Ecological Network** includes all Episcopalians who are helping our Church assume a leadership role in environmental ministry, just as our Church leads in other peace and justice issues. See www.eenonline.org to learn more about the priorities, programs, projects and structure.

Priority Issues

Source of Light & Breath - promote green renewable energy, energy conservation, energy efficiency and clean air and respond to global warming through *Episcopal Power & Light*.

House of the Lord - Promote sustainable building practices, continue greening our churches, camps, and conference centers.

Gift of Water - protect and enhance all watersheds, restore water quality.

God's Covenant with Noah - preserve biodiversity, native habitats and wilderness areas.

Trees of Life – encourage sustainable forest management, endorse road-less forests.

Garden of God – implement healthy practices for agriculture and land, support community based gardens.

Celebration of the Word – integrate creation into liturgy, celebrate God as Creator.

SECTION H – COMMUNICATION

Keep the highlights of your programs and projects in your parish and diocesan communications – the Sunday bulletins, newsletters and on web sites. Be sure your ministry is easy to find on the web site. Since this is new ministry many web masters and communication professionals forget to cover your news. They may not know where to place your information. Provide suggestions that ensure your news will be easily found and read (include graphics that get the attention of the reader and ensure memory of the ministry and activities.) Be sure to write how you are promoting Reflection, Education and Action as well as the priority issues.

APPENDIX

TALENTS & GIFTS

A List of Some Things to Keep in Mind As You Select EM Leaders and Projects
(Adapted from *Web of Creation Principles*)

1. Remember the reasons for your Environmental Ministry: love for God's creation; a responsibility as God's people to care for creation; a concern for the deteriorating ecological state of the world; a means to create community around mission for creation. Identify from your own tradition the images, ideas and resources that foster care for the earth.
2. Seek to gain the broadest support possible. Be sure to include and involve all ages in your various plans and projects. A few people planning, getting information, and proposing can make an enormous difference. One, two or three people are enough to make things happen for everyone.
3. Develop a comprehensive vision for your parish and keep filling in the pieces. There is much to be done. Enter the process at any point and over any issue and then keep it going.
4. Work on projects that have the greatest chance of success and have the greatest impact on the environment.
5. Celebrate what does get done and don't grieve what does not get done. Enjoy and be renewed by your efforts. Do not let those who don't participate keep those who do participate from their delight in caring for creation. Show by example, education and opportunity. Don't become environmental police or a new form of political correctness.
6. Keep in mind the issues of human justice that are always intertwined with the environmental problems. Build human community as you restore creation.
7. Learn from people who are community organizers. Find the most positive approaches to carry out what you seek to accomplish. Faith-based communities represent the largest grassroots organization in the country. Draw up its strengths and possibilities.
8. Look for partners among other faith-based communities and agencies. Learn from others. To face the Times New Roman problems we face, we need to work together.
9. Have an overall plan. It is helpful to work out of a larger model of the whole parish. Don't get discouraged, but see the possibilities at work in so many different areas.
10. Make use of the assets of the members who have commitments or experiences or expertise, especially those who have credentials for promoting sustainable practices and principles. Correlate the assets with the environmental circumstances of greatest need or opportunity when selecting an EM project. Consider the three pegs that hold up the stool of sustainability: ecological, economic and communal. Find an expert leader who can facilitate discussions re questions below:

Does the project and the way it is done sustain the natural environment?

Does the project and the way it is done sustain the economic support of the people with fair and equitable distribution?

Does the project and the way it is done sustain the community? That is, can the project be thought of as a way to build and strengthen the community?

Note: We need to utilize many talents and gifts of our parish members as we promote renewal of reverence. The issues involved in our transformation to creation-caring communities are matters of life and death. We are choosing to secure the future for our children and grandchildren by acting so as to sustain life, restore nature, and build hope that our environment will support those who come after us. The projects we promote and how we do them are of utmost importance. Our daily life of faith should impact all environmental stewardship issues.

Role and Responsibilities of Diocesan EM, Environmental Ministry Leaders

Environmental Coordinators may work closely with the Christian Education, Stewardship and/or Outreach leaders in their diocese and with their Provincial Environmental Ministry, EEN Representative. Working with other ministries enables you to promote the integrity of creation in a collaborative manner. Ideally, the diocesan coordinator should appoint one person in each parish to promote environmental stewardship.

Each coordinator is encouraged to develop a mission statement and/or guidelines for environmental ministry. These will provide a foundation and focus for each diocese. The Province IV EM leader can provide samples of mission statements developed by local churches, dioceses, and provinces. Study the Province IV EM Fact Sheet that outlines the components of *Reflection, Education and Action* as well as priority issues.

Coordinators should encourage all diocesan parishes, missions, schools, offices, camps and conference centers to live more clearly the deep spiritual significance of our relationship with the Earth.

Encourage every parish to offer the following:

1. Prayer, study and reflection for all age levels regarding the calling of God to us through the revelation of the Creation
2. Guidelines for becoming fully engaged in the process of becoming a model of the stewardship of God's Creation and compliance to environmentally friendly policies and practices
3. Environmental audits of property, buildings and programs
4. Dialogue in each parish among people of all ages on the environment, stewardship and economic/social justice to encourage individual and congregational witness
5. Sermons and homilies which reflect creation stewardship and care of all creation
6. Educational materials and exhibits at diocesan meetings, annual convention, offices, camps and conference centers
7. Post EM Parish activities and resources on your diocesan web site and in parish and diocesan newsletters