God Calls Us to Care for Creation and One Another

Love neighbor as ourselves: teachings from several faith traditions
Intro to Caring for Creation= as Expression of our faith in action:
  Loving our Creator
  Loving our Neighbor
  Loving our Children and Grandchildren
“How we treat water is a reflection of our relationship with God.” “Respect for water shows love for our brothers and sisters and all of Creation.”

Watershed twist on the Golden Rule: *Do unto others downstream as you would have those upstream do unto you.* - Wendell Berry

Environmental degradation impacts the poor the most
Faith communities respond to social justice issues such as poverty, homelessness, joblessness – how do we compete with that?
  - We don’t have to compete – in fact, caring the Earth is caring for each other
  - Bay health = job security for oystermen
  - Clean Anacostia = source of reliable food for the poorest of the poor
  - Reduction in flooding = less disruption and financial loss for vulnerable populations

Connect the dots for them
  - Concept of Watershed Communities – help them see who else is in their community
Let Justice Roll down like Waters  (Amos 5:24)

Water is an Environmental & Social Justice issue: Examples of disparities in justice (recreation, working environment):

Some can cool off in a local pool, perhaps even in their own back yard, while others go to the local stream or creek, where water is probably not safe. Some can shop the periphery of the grocery store to find their seafood, while others go to the local river to fish. - e.g. documented 17,000 people a year fish in the Anacostia River, among the top 10 most polluted rivers in the US. Some can work in a climate controlled office, with a huge carbon footprint of energy use, while others, like the watermen work on the water where the fishing catch has severely declined.
From the beginning of Genesis, God has a relationship with water.
Water As GOD’s First Relationship
GOD Chose Water

To show that water is a primary element essential for life

All life depends upon water.
WATER in the Bible

Isaiah 43:16-21
See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.

Psalm 104:10-13
You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills, giving drink to every wild animal; the wild asses quench their thirst. By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation; they sing among the branches.

John 4:7-15
Samaritan woman: Give me a drink.... Where do you get that living water? Jesus: The water that I give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.

Some examples of the many references to water in the Bible. But teachings about the sacredness of water and care for Creation are not limited to the Jeudo-Christian traditions.
Faith Teachings on care for the environment

- Christian - connect water with baptism and stewardship; broaden “love thy neighbor” to natural world
- Jewish - Tikkun O’lam, repair and restoration of the whole world. Mikvah – a ritual bath
- Muslim - unique role and responsibility of the human to be guardians of God’s Creation. Ablution – preparing for prayer
- Buddhist – interconnectedness of all life, compassion for the suffering of the natural and human world
- Sikh - Air is the Teacher, Water is the Father and Earth is the Great Divine Mother of All and we must respect and protect her – Guru Nanak
Another faith “lens” with which to view our human role with Creation is viewing the whole universe as one body. Some refer to this as Gaia – the whole earth as one interrelated and interdependent organism.
Faith teachings on “one body”

• Christian: Colossians 1:16-17  For in Christ all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, ….. Christ is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

• Jewish: according to mystical Kabbalah tradition tzelem elohim, the Image of God extended the sense of the Image not only to the human species but to the universe as a whole and therefore all the beings within it.

• Buddhist: The whole universe is interdependent (like parts of a body) and we must listen with compassion to cries of the earth suffering
IPC’s motto: Forming Faithful Stewards, Caring for Sacred Waters

“We’re way upstream – we go for the soul!”
- Board Chair
  Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin
Our Local Context:  
**Watershed Stewardship**

We are persuaded that the best way to orient the church’s ecological work and witness is through bioregional literacy, planning and action, which focus on the actual watersheds that we inhabit.  
~ Ched Myers, Theologian  
[http://watersheddiscipleship.org/](http://watersheddiscipleship.org/)

3 Elements:
1) Ecological Readings of Scripture
2) “Re-placed” Theology, Spirituality and Practices
3) Watershed Ecclesiology

*We live in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed*

**What is a Watershed?**

A watershed is the area of land where all of the water that is under it or drains off of it goes into the same place. John Wesley Powell, scientist geographer, put it best when he said that a watershed is:

"that area of land, a bounded hydrologic system, within which all living things are inextricably linked by their common water course and where, as humans settled, simple logic demanded that they become part of a community."

Our churches are well-situated to become centers for learning and loving local places as well as defending and restoring them. But we must ourselves “re-inhabit” these places as church, letting the landscapes around us shape our symbolic life and imagination as well as our material habits.

We think such a working alliance can focalize and amplify these perspectives, and help build capacity for a Christian discipleship defined by commitment to healing our world by restoring the health of our respective watersheds. If our churches can “do their work” around these issues, we can not only recover the soul of our tradition, but will also make an enormous contribution to the wider historic struggle to reverse our ecological catastrophe.
The Chesapeake Bay Watershed is that vast area (64,000 sq. miles) within which all surface water drainage—ditches, creeks, streams, rivers, tributaries of all sorts—ultimately empty into the Chesapeake Bay. The watershed extends from Western New York State, though Pennsylvania, Maryland, the District of Columbia, parts Delaware, West Virginia and central and northern Virginia. The condition of the Chesapeake Bay is rated a "D" with fish and marine life severely impacted by pollution.
God Makes the Rain

…But we make the runoff

Rain falls here and combines with pollutants

Heads to the drains and brings with it all pollutants in its path – it is now polluted runoff

Polluted runoff empties into our streams and rivers which lead to the Bay

Runoff is the #1 source of water pollution into the Chesapeake Bay from urban and suburban locations.
What can your congregation do?

- In-the-ground projects on their property
  - Tree-plantings
  - Rain gardens
  - Rain barrels
  - Downspout disconnection
  - Community gardens
  - Parking lot changes to control runoff
- Letter-writing on public issues
- Host IPC speakers

Trees for Sacred Places project is offered here in Montgomery County. This program is a collaboration with our partner, the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay. Along with free trees, we offers spiritual and environmental education. Contact IPC if you have congregational property that can accommodate more than 40 trees.
Why Plant Trees?

Benefits for whole ecosystem/ harmony in Creation
Contributes to: health & healing the web of life

• Watershed stewardship
• Restore habitat for wildlife
• Filter pollution, prevent runoff, improve water quality
• Prevent soil erosion
• Reduce carbon footprint

“the leaves of the tree for the healing of the nations” Rev. 22:2

+Planting trees is an expression of our faith / spiritual traditions which call for our stewardship of the earth.
+Reforestation provides homes and food for native plants, animals, and birds to flourish. E.g. A native oak tree provides food for 534 species of beneficial insects and small mammals.
+In one day, one large tree can lift up to 100 gallons of water out of the ground and discharge it into the air. For every five percent of tree cover added to a community, stormwater runoff is reduced by approximately two percent, increasing the cleanliness of water for all human and other-than human inhabitants.
+Tree roots hold soil in place, and tree branches help lessen the impact of rain on the soil. Fallen leaves improve soil quality. Forests act as reservoirs, providing natural flood control.
+A tree can absorb as much as 48 pounds of carbon dioxide per year, and can sequester one ton of carbon dioxide by the time it reaches 40 years old. Trees properly placed around buildings can reduce air conditioning needs by 30 percent and save 20-50 percent in energy used for heating.
The net cooling effect of a young, healthy tree is equivalent to ten room-size air conditioners operating 20 hours a day.
Symbols of both water and the tree of life signifying healing are found in many cultures and religions.
Imagine the Potential…

- Montgomery County, MD : 733
- Maryland : 5,336

*Data from the Association of Religion Data Archives http://www.thearda.com/rcms2010*

Reiterating that individual parcels of privately owned institutional land can add up to making a huge difference in watershed restoration, consider these possible ripple effects of engaging and collaborating with the faith community.
Our faith calls us to be healers of the earth

We are called to assist the earth, to heal her wounds and in the process heal our own—indeed, to embrace the whole Creation in all its diversity, beauty and wonder.

When we plant trees, we plant seeds of peace and hope.

~Dr. Wangari Maathai
2004 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate
founder, Green Belt reforestation movement, planted over 51 million trees planted in Kenya

Wangari Maathai won the Noble Peace Prize in 2004 when she organized to respond to the terrible deforestation in her country by teaching women how to plant trees. Restored clean water, prevented soil erosion, and helped land to become fruitful again. Over 30,000 women trained in forestry, food processing, bee-keeping, and other trades that help them earn income while preserving their lands and resources. Communities in Kenya (both men and women) have been motivated and organized to both prevent further environmental destruction and restore that which has been damaged.
Contact us for more resources you can use for worship planning, workshops, and religious education.

www.interfaithchesapeake.org
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