
LUTHERAN STUDY GUIDE TO POPE FRANCIS' LETTER ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Week 1

Introduction: Climate Change and Faith

What you will need

- Bible
- Copy of Pope Francis' Letter, *Laudato Si'* (can be found at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html#_ftn165)
- Lutheran Study Guide
- Introductory video/audio on climate change (links below, choose those best for your context)

Opening Prayer

Gracious God,

Your amazing love extends through all time and space, to all parts of your creation, which you created and called good. You made a covenant with Noah and his family, putting a rainbow in the sky to symbolize your promise of love and blessing to every living creature, and to all successive generations. You



Claimed, Gathered, and Sent in a Changing World

If you are concerned about the effects of global warming for your great-grandchildren your information is out of date. The effects of climate change are being seen more quickly than scientists originally anticipated. In his recent letter on climate change to the church and all people of “good will” Pope Francis writes, “It is no longer enough...simply to state that we should be concerned for future generations. We need to see that what is at stake is our own dignity,” (160).

The most recent **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Report** suggests we have until about 2030—about 15 years—to make major changes in our environmental practices, economic policies, and lifestyles to avoid potentially devastating changes. The report suggests two responses: mitigation and adaptation. As we make efforts to curb the effects of climate change (mitigation) we also need to start learning to adapt to new climate realities.

This is why Pope Francis' recent letter on climate change is so important. Not only do we need to make serious changes and crucial decisions, but thus far—after 30 years of science supporting the belief that these changes are, in great part, the result of human activity—the moral and political will to take significant action has not emerged.

made a covenant with Abraham and Sarah, blessing them and their descendants throughout the generations. You made a covenant with Moses and the Israelite people to all generations, giving them the 10 commandments and challenging them to choose life. In Jesus, you invite us to enter into another covenant, in communion with all who seek to be faithful to you. As people of faith, we are called into covenant. Your covenant of faithfulness and love extends to the whole creation. We pray for the healing of the earth, that present and future generations may enjoy the fruits of creation, and continue to glorify and praise you. *(from the National Council of Churches)*

Scripture

"Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb..."

Read together Revelation 22: 1-22

Notes and Glossary

The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is a scientific body under the umbrella of the United Nations. Thousands of scientists around the world contribute to the IPCC on a voluntary basis. The scientists review current studies and issue regular reports based on these studies. <http://www.ipcc.ch/organization/organization.shtml>

The IPCC's fifth, and most recent, report (2014) can be found here: <http://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/syr/>

Climate change is a religious issue. **Many have argued that the environmental crisis is a result of religious world views** that have encouraged us to see nature as something to be used and controlled rather than honored with gratitude. As much as religion may have been part of the problem we now face, **it is equally true that it can and must play a part in the solution.**

Climate change is also a particularly Lutheran issue. We stand in a theologically paradoxical tradition; Luther embraced paradox in his theology as God's way of keeping humanity from working our way to God (justifying ourselves) through reason. From a certain point of view **we also stand in an ecologically paradoxical tradition.** Rather than a liberating turning point in the church and world, many associate the Reformation with a series of ambiguous historical shifts paving the way for the **social and economic factors contributing to the climate crisis.**

Paradoxically, many ecumenical theologians also suggest that the **ecothological** movement first began to find its voice in Lutheran Pastor Joseph Sittler. Sittler started speaking about ecological issues already in the 1950's. He argued in his 1961 World Council of Churches speech, "Called to Unity," that ecumenical unity can only be found in the wider scope of the cosmic unity of all things in Christ. In Christ our shared home becomes a place of communion, honoring and reconciling differences of creed, tradition, race, nationality, economic status, and biology.



Oikos—the ancient Greek word for household or shared home—etymologically links economy, ecology, and ecumenism. Pope Francis' letter comes at a crucial time for ecumenical cooperation for the sake of our *oikos*—our shared home. We share this home with billions of people and other life forms who bear significantly less responsibility for the causes of climate change than most of us in the US—and yet they are more likely to face its devastating consequences. On the doorstep of the 500th year of the Reformation let us grasp the outstretched hands of our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters, our native religious brothers and sisters suffering most immediately from climate change, and all other "people of good will" (Pope Francis) to **"fight, work, and pray"** (Brother Martin) for climate-justice—an eco-Reformation.

Many have argued that the environmental crisis is a result of religious world views: Lynn White's 1967 essay, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," for example, set off an important (and continuing) debate about Christianity's role in the environmental crisis.

It is equally true that it can and must play a part in the solution: See Lutheran ethicist Larry Rasmussen's book, *Earth Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key*, for more on how religions hold potential to be part of an environmental solution.

We also stand in a ecologically paradoxical tradition: Lutheran ecotheologian Paul Santmire emphasizes the tension and ambiguity of the Christian and Protestant tradition in relation to ecological concerns in *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology*

social and economic factors contributing to our climate crisis: Sociologist Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is the most famous argument in this regard. While his argument is frequently criticized from a historical perspective and some argue he misinterpreted Luther and

Introductory Media on Climate change

Choose one of the following. Watch or listen to together.

- On faith and climate change skepticism, CNN (4 min) <http://www.cnn.com/2015/08/03/opinions/sutter-climate-skeptics-woodward-oklahoma/index.html>
- 2014 NBC report, "Our Year of Extremes: Did Climate Change Just Hit Home?" (26 min) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8EXhJmUkNE>
- PBS, "Global Warming, the Signs and the Science" (55 min) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVQnPytgwQo>
- NPR, "Hot in my Backyard," *This American Life* (1 hr) <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/495/hot-in-my-backyard>

Media and Scripture Discussion

After listening and/or watching, share some initial reactions.



- How do you react to news about climate change. With incredulity? Despair? Anger? Sadness? Confusion? Uncertainty? Empowerment? Share these reactions.
- What stories from the videos affected you most deeply?
- Considering your reactions, where do you see yourself in the Revelation 22 passage? Given our current situation, what resonates with you from this passage? How might God be speaking to us?
- Many times climate change is seen as an "environmental issue"—implying more concern for plants and animals than humans. In light of the human costs outlined in these media segments, how helpful do you find this description? What justice issues are at stake?

Calvin, more recently others have taken up the argument with impressive theological sophistication. (For example: see the work of John Milbank, Stephen Long, and William Cavanaugh).

Ecotheology: a branch of theology that pairs religious faith with care for creation and eco-justice.

“fight, work, and pray”: “You must feel with sorrow all the dishonor done to Christ in his holy Word, all the misery of Christendom, all the unjust suffering of the innocent, with which the world is everywhere filled to overflowing. You must fight, work, pray, and—if you cannot do more—have heartfelt sympathy,” (Luther, “On the Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ,” LW 35:54).

Introduction to the Encyclical

Read sections 13-16 of the encyclical, including Pope Francis’ “appeal” and outline of the letter.

Discussion

- What caught your attention here?
- In 14 Pope Francis urges a “new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet.” In your view, what needs to change in the conversation in order to move forward toward solutions and change? Or what would need to change to open the conversation in the first place?
- On a large piece of paper outline together the main issues the letter will address. Bring this back each week and post it up to retain a sense of the scope of the letter.
- Also add to this paper a list of the topics Francis says he will repeatedly return to (16).
- Is there anything on this list that surprised you? Anything missing you would have expected or liked to see?

Closing

Close with final reflections or comments. Invite a volunteer to close in prayer

Preparation for Week 2

- Return next session with Bible, Study Guide, and Encyclical
- Optional: Reading ahead
 - Read chapter 2 of *Laudato Si’*
 - Read *The Lutheran* (2004) article, “Weathering the Storms: Global warming and faith intersect in the ELCA’s northernmost congregation,” http://www.thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article_id=1028 and optional reading, on Shishmaref in 2014: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/12/14/shishmaref-alaska-climate-change-relocation_n_6296516.html

Questions or comments on the study can be sent to Terra S. Rowe, trowe03@gmail.com

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Week 2

Claimed by God, Claiming our Calling

What you will need

- Bible
- Copy of Pope Francis' Letter, *Laudato Si'*
- Lutheran Study Guide
- Article: "Weathering the Storms: Global warming and faith intersect in the ELCA's northernmost congregation," *The Lutheran* (2004) http://www.thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article_id=1028
- Barbara Rossing's short video on eco-Reformation: <https://vimeo.com/lstchicago/review/123208390/40aa084650>
- Optional readings:
 - David Rhoads' essay on eco-reformation in *The Seminary Ridge Review*, Autumn 2012: <http://www.ltsg.edu/about-us/news/seminary-ridge-review>
 - Shishmaref, ten years later: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/12/14/shishmaref-alaska-climate-change-relocation_n_6296516.html



Opening

Prayer

Merciful and most high God, creator and giver of life, you have called creation from darkness into light, from error into truth, from death into life. Grant grace to us with all creation and bless us. Raise us by your Spirit. Revive us by your word. Form us by your hand. Bring us to the water of life and the bread and cup of blessing, that with all creation we may bear witness to your grace and praise you forever, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

(Adapted from *ELW* prayer for those preparing for baptism, p. 75).

Scripture

Read Psalm 104 together.



In love, through Christ, God has claimed us as daughters and sons. Luther's famous "Freedom of a Christian" recounts the freedom flowing from this claim: we are freed from pouring our resources into achieving God's love and freed for love and service to neighbor. In 2017 we will commemorate 500 years since the beginning of the Reformation. In the scope of the Reformation tradition little thought has been given to our non-human neighbors. It is now becoming increasingly clear that where we do not care for our non-human neighbors our human neighbors—and we ourselves!—suffer the consequences also. In light of this situation and the upcoming anniversary of the Reformation, a number of Lutheran scholars suggest a new kind of reformation would be a fitting tribute to the one Luther and others initiated: an

eco-reformation. Describing this call, New Testament scholar and Professor Emeritus at The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, David Rhoads, writes,

"I am proposing that we inaugurate a new reformation. We Lutherans have always considered "perpetual reformation" to be an ongoing dimension of our common life. Nevertheless, what I am proposing is more than mere adjustments in Reformation trajectories. We are facing unprecedented changes in our life on Earth and the times are calling for something much more substantial. If we are to be prepared to face these crises and to address them, some paradigm shift, some foundational transformation of our church, needs to take place.

The ecological crises, particularly the alarming progression of global climate change, are rapidly becoming matters reaching to the heart of faith.

Twenty years ago, in the social statement "Caring for Creation," the ELCA issued a warning for the church to respond to the looming ecological crises and the social justice issues related to them. Now it is time to meet the challenges presented by that document. This is a clarion call for a new re-formation.

The list of crises we are facing as a planet is long and substantive. To name a few: global climate change; unpredictable weather patterns; increase in frequency and intensity of storms; drought; rampant wildfires due to dry conditions; deforestation; desertification; shifting agricultural conditions; movement of species of plants and animals; loss of species diversity; deterioration in air quality; pollution of fresh water sources and oceans; degradation of soil; rise of seas levels, human overpopulation, and more—all of which produce negative impacts on human life, particularly the most vulnerable people and societies. Every eco-system on Earth is under stress. Earth itself is under stress.

Father Thomas Berry has said that humanity is entering a new era, the Ecozoic Age – an age in which ecological issues will dominate our global life together. He argues that creating a sustainable environmental lifestyle on the planet is the "great work" of our time. It is a work in which all people can participate, a work that all must embrace if human life on this planet is to be sustained. This work will require intention and sacrifice; and it can be joyful.

The environment is not a fad. It is not an add-on, not one more issue alongside others. It is not just for those who happen to be interested in this cause. Earth is our home. It involves everyone. It has an impact on all living things. And we humans, we Christians, we Lutherans, need to step up and embrace dramatic changes in ourselves and in our life together for the sake of Earth – and for the sake of the God we confess to be the creator and preserver of our planet and the whole universe.”

What would it look like for the church to claim a calling to what Berry refers to as the “great work” of our time? What would it look like to claim this calling *as Lutherans*? What resources might we draw from? Where do you see this work being done? What Lutheran themes would be most fruitful in this regard? These may not be questions you are prepared to answer yet! Hopefully, in the course of engaging in this study you will begin to find resources for reflecting on these questions.

The rest of Dr. Rhoads’ essay can be found in *The Seminary Ridge Review*, Autumn 2012: <http://www.ltsg.edu/about-us/news/seminary-ridge-review>

The ELCA social statement Rhoads references, “Caring for Creation,” can be found at <http://www.elca.org/en/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Caring-for-Creation#sthash.AH1TvXKc.dpu>

***Laudato Si’*, “What is Happening to our Common Home”**

Chapter One of Pope Francis’ encyclical lists several areas of ecological concern:

- pollution and climate change
- water
- loss of biodiversity
- decline in the quality of the human life and the breakdown of society
- global inequality
- weak responses from global leaders to these problems

Discussion

Choose one area of concern that seems most relevant to your local community and one that may most affect people far from your local community. Read both sections corresponding to these areas of concern. Share with the group:

- What issue seems closest to home for you? How do you see this issue emerging on a local level? Who is or will be the most affected by it? Who has the power to change it?
- What issue seems the farthest away for you? Who is (or will be) the most affected by it? Although the issue seems far away are there ways you are indirectly impacted by it or that you and your community directly or indirectly contribute to this issue? Who has the power to contribute to change in this area of concern?
- Identify the parallel or repeated concerns Dr. Rhoads and Pope Francis articulate.

Laudato Si', "The Gospel of Creation"

Read or review together The Lutheran 2004 article, "Weathering the Storms: Global warming and faith intersect in the ELCA's northernmost congregation."

In Chapter two (section 84) of *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis writes, "The history of our friendship with God is always linked to particular places which take on an intensely personal meaning; we all remember places, and revising those memories does us much good. Anyone who has grown up in the hills or used to sit by the spring to drink or played outdoors in the neighborhood square; going back to these places is a chance to recover something of our true selves."

Discussion

- What places in the world hold special meaning for you? Are there places where you feel God's presence most profoundly? What places or experiences come to mind when reading Psalm 104?
- Think of one of these places that holds special sentimental, ancestral, spiritual, and even economically sustaining meaning. What would you do to protect this place if it was in danger? How do you imagine the people of Shishmaref feel?
- Some Lutheran congregations and institutions are doing exemplary work, honoring their particular place in the world. The Lutherans Restoring Creation website gives several examples (under the "Stories" tab: www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org)

Eco-Reformation Video

Watch Barbara Rossing's short video on eco-reformation (link above)

Discussion

- How do you and your congregation plan to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017?
- Which of Rossing's ideas for celebrating an eco-Reformation would make most sense in your context?
- Rossing suggests this can be a hope-filled time in spite of dire circumstances. Where do you find hope? What actions might your church and community take to share that spirit of hope for a sustainable future?
- Could you envision cooperating with a local Roman Catholic congregation on an eco-Reformation project?
- Do a little brainstorming. What other ideas can you come up with for marking 500 years of the Reformation with an eco-Reformation?
- Find inspiration from other Lutheran communities at the Lutherans Restoring Creation website (link to the left) or get involved with ELCA Advocacy.

Preparation for Week 3

- Return next session with Bible, Study Guide, and encyclical
- Optional: Reading ahead
 - In Chapter Four ("Integral Ecology") read subsections: "Integral Ecology," "Environmental, Economic, and Social Ecology," "The Principle of the Common Good," and "Justice Between the Generations."
 - Read Joseph Sittler's "Called to Unity" speech: <http://www.augie.edu/pub/values/sittler.pdf>

Questions or comments on this study can be sent to Terra S. Rowe, trowe03@gmail.com

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Week 3

Gathered into an Integral Ecology

What you will need

- Bible
- Copy of Pope Francis' Letter, *Laudato Si'*
- Lutheran Study Guide
- Joseph Sittler's "Called to Unity" speech: <http://www.augie.edu/pub/values/sittler.pdf>
- Optional video on ecology and salvation, Norman Wirzba lecture: <http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/55257942> (start at 7:35 and watch as much as is helpful)

Opening Prayer

God of our weary years, God of our silent tears, you have brought us this far along the way. In times of bitterness you did not abandon us, but guided us into the path of love and light. In every age you sent prophets to make known your loving will for all humanity. The cry of the poor has become your own cry; our hunger and thirst for justice is your own desire. In the fullness of time,



Gathered through Christ in Cosmic Communion

“Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all thing in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the good of his cross,” (Colossians 1:15-20, NRSV).

you sent your chosen servant to preach good news to the afflicted, to break bread with the outcast and despised, and to ransom those in bondage to prejudice and sin. Give us faith to trust in your love and courage to hear and respond to your prophets and the cries of those affected by climate change. (Adapted from ELW Eucharistic Prayer VIII, p. 67)

Discussion

After reading Colossians 1:15-20, Sittler's speech, and Laudato Si' Chapter One, section II on St. Francis and integral ecology, Chapter Two, section 5, and Chapter Four, subsections 1, 4, and 5, discuss the following questions:

- What surprises you about Christ's role as described in Colossians?
- Have you ever thought of Christ suffering in nature or with nature?
- Have you ever thought about what the reconciliation of the cross means for all things—including non-human creation?
- How do you understand what is meant by "ecology"? Does Pope Francis' understanding of "integral ecology" sound different or unique?

We might say Sittler inaugurated an eco-reformation movement in 1961 when he chose to vastly expand the subject on which he was invited to address the World Council of Churches: church unity. Speaking to the assembly gathered in New Delhi, Sittler expanded ecumenism to cosmic proportions, suggesting this unity is only rightly understood in the scope of God's cosmic redemptive work of ecological unity in Christ.



He also had a specific message for the other Protestants at the gathering. Recognizing the important emphasis the tradition has placed on redemption and salvation he argued that, "A doctrine of redemption is meaningful only when it swings within the larger orbit of a doctrine of creation." In short: any theology of salvation worth its weight in salt must be creation loving rather than creation evading.

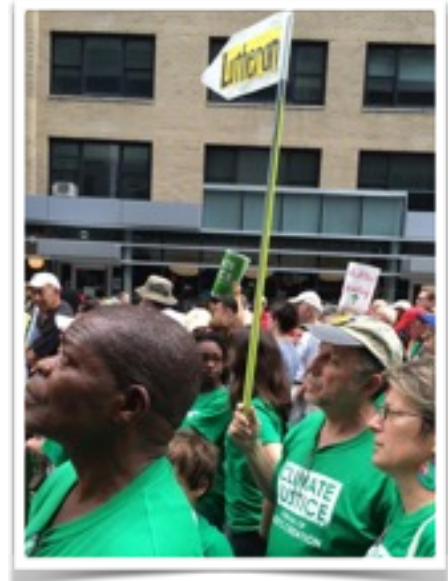
Pope Francis' letter urges a perspective he calls "integral ecology"—the integration or interconnection of all things. More than just environmental interconnections though, Francis is urging an expansion of the scope of even ecological interconnections. The concern for social justice can commonly be left out of environmental concerns. However, climate change tragically demonstrates the interconnection of social and ecological justice. "We are not faced with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social," Francis writes, "but rather one complex crisis which is both social and environmental." Since ecology and economy are interconnected, "strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature," (139).

The letter highlights the ways in which our most pressing issues of human injustice (racism, colonialism, income disparity, etc.) are also issues of ecological injustice. Lutheran ethicist Cynthia Moe-Lobeda has similarly highlighted the interconnectedness of social and eco-justice. In *Resisting Structural Evil* the scholar demonstrates the injustice of the fact that those who contributed the least to

- How do you generally think of salvation? What are some of the implicit views or values of the created world in most modern Christians' understanding of salvation? Do they affirm the goodness of creation? If not, what would need to change in that understanding of salvation?
- Think back to some of the introductory media you watched or listened to. What issues of social justice do you recall coming up with regard to climate change? How do you think a relatively economically privileged, caucasian person in the US might see climate change differently than a native person in Shishmaref or an African American survivor of Hurricane Katrina from the Ninth Ward?
- Reflect on Patriarch Bartholomew's connection between the sacrament of communion and the ecological communion of the world. Do you think about or experience a connection between a cosmic and ecological communion when you share the wine and bread in communion? Whether you do or not, what do you attribute this to?

global warming are likely to suffer the first and most profoundly from it. This injustice is compounded by the fact that the populations most likely to feel the effects of climate change first and with most disruption or devastation to their livelihoods are most likely to be not white, impoverished, and politically underrepresented.

Where eco-justice and social justice are intimately linked human salvation and redemption cannot be purchased at the expense of either. Early on in the encyclical Pope Francis quotes Patriarch Bartholomew, leader of the Eastern Orthodox church, who links the Christian ritualization of communion with the ecological communion of the world. Patriarch Bartholomew urges us to



“accept the world as a sacrament of communion, as a way of sharing with God and our neighbors on a global scale. It is our humble conviction that the divine and the human meet in the slightest detail in the seamless garment of God’s creation, in the last speck of dust of our planet,” (8).

If Colossians 1 is to be trusted, this must surely be the case since all things have been created through Christ and for Christ; in Christ all things hold together and through Christ all things have been reconciled to God.

Conclusion

Invite any concluding reflections and then ask a volunteer to close in prayer.

Preparation for Week 4

- Return next session with Bible, Study Guide, and Encyclical
- Optional: Read chapters 5 and 6 of *Laudato Si'*

Questions or comments on the study can be sent to Terra S. Rowe, troweo3@gmail.com

LUTHERAN STUDY GUIDE TO POPE FRANCIS' LETTER ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Week 4

Sent: Eco-Reformation

What you will need

- Bible, *Laudato Si'*, Lutheran Study Guide
- Optional reading: Desmond Tutu's article, "We need an apartheid-style boycott to save the planet" here: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/apr/10/divest-fossil-fuels-climate-change-keystone-xl>

Opening Prayer

Invite a volunteer to open in prayer

Scripture

"Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

Read Matthew 25: 31-46

Discussion

Focus discussion on Chapters 5 and 6 during this final session.

- In chapter five identify key actions Pope Francis calls for



The Reformation inspired many changes in theology, ecclesiology, and liturgy. One of the more under-emphasized reforms was the institution of community or common chests. Reformation church historians Carter Lindberg and Samuel Torvend are bringing these social/liturgical reforms to light once again.

The common chests held funds for community needs. They supported projects like infrastructure maintenance and building community schools, hospitals, roads and bridges; doctors were hired with the expressed purpose of providing free health care for those who couldn't afford it; no-interest loans were given in times of emergency and to help start new businesses; and orphans, the sick, and the elderly were given basic livelihood support.

Luther and the reformers consciously linked social reforms with liturgical reforms. The community chests, for example, were coherently integrated into new

in order to address the climate crisis. Create a list together. Are there unfamiliar terms? If you have access to the internet do some searches to help clarify terms.

- Where do you see opportunities for these actions to come about? What are the challenges?
- Based on the model of the community chests, what role could the Protestant churches take in these necessary shifts? What role could you see your own congregation taking? What role could you take as a global citizen and person of faith?
- Having trouble coming up with ideas? Check out the ELCA Advocacy website for toolkits and advocacy resources: <http://www.elca.org/Resources/Advocacy> or the Lutheran's Restoring Creation site: <http://www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org/Home/stories-about-creation-care>
- Take note especially of section 206 where Pope Francis discusses the strategic power of a change in lifestyle. Several ELCA synods have voted to enact boycotts like Francis suggests through divestment campaigns. These synods have voted to remove investments in fossil fuels and reinvest them in companies making positive steps toward sustainability. See also Desmond Tutu's article on the subject (link above).

liturgical practices. Luther interpreted the “collect”—traditionally the prayers of the church—as the general collection of funds to be distributed to the poor. After the funds were collected the celebration of the eucharist flowed directly into service and justice for the neighbor through the distribution of the funds in the community chest as any had need. Luther himself describes the intended flow from the eucharistic table to the concerns of the world:

“When you have partaken of this this sacrament [of the altar], you must in turn share the misfortunes of the fellowship...Here your heart must go out in love and learn that this is a sacrament of love. As love and support are given you, you in turn must render love and support to Christ in his needy ones. You must feel with sorrow all the misery of Christendom, all the unjust suffering of the innocent, with which the world is everywhere filled to overflowing. You must fight, work, pray and ...have heartfelt sympathy...For here the saying of Paul is fulfilled, ‘Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ’ (Gal 6:2).”



These documents demonstrate that for Luther and the reformers social reforms were a key focus for the Reformation vision. They demonstrate a certain flow between worship and the concerns of the world. What went on within church walls flowed out in service to and justice for the neighbor. Reciprocally, the concerns of the world were not checked at church doors, but informed and influenced liturgical practice.

In her video on eco-reformation Barbara Rossing refers to the major shift of the industrial revolution since the Reformation. Since this time, carbon in the atmosphere has increased exponentially. We could also add another significant shift: the interconnection of communities far across the world through a globalized economy. The choices and lifestyles of one community have effects on other communities around the world like never before. The reach of our daily mundane decisions and actions has never before been so nonlocal. The connections between ecological, economic, and social have never been quite so clear.

Look together at the list of ELCA synods that have voted for divestment. Note also that the 2016 church wide assembly has been memorialized to take similar action for the entire ELCA. You can find a list of synod actions as well as templates for resolutions on the Lutherans Restoring Creation website at <http://www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org/synod-and-church-wide-resolutions>

- If your synod has not yet passed such a resolution have any been attempted? What are some of the challenges and barriers?

Chapter 6

- In the section “Educating for the Covenant Between Humanity and the Environment” Pope Francis mentions several spheres for potential ecological education. Identify these as a group. Which is the closest to your daily experience? What might ecological education look like here? What would it change? What would it affirm that has been done all along?

Pope Francis’ “integral ecology” provides a way to account for these precarious interconnections. He identifies St. Francis as “the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically.” The patron saint of animals is the model of “the inseparable bond between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.” Might this “inseparable bond” also call for significant shifts or reformations in our church, theology, and liturgical practices? For example, might the Lutheran tradition more clearly communicate an integral connection between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and the personal forgiveness of sins?

During this final session, focus on chapters five and six of Pope Francis’ letter: the specific actions needed to address our climate crisis and develop ecological education and spirituality. Let Matthew 25:31-46 frame your conversations. Who (or what!) might “the least of these” be today? How might we be called to be “little Christs” (as Luther writes in *The Freedom of a Christian*) to these neighbors both near and far? Reflect together on how these might inform an eco-reformation for the next 500 years of Lutheran witness.



- In the section “Ecological Conversion” Francis makes suggestions for a Christian eco-spirituality “since the teachings of the Gospel have direct consequences for our way of thinking, feeling and living.” He is particularly interested “in how such a spirituality can motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world.”
 - What are some of Francis’ suggestions? What does he mean by an “ecological conversion”?
 - Reflect on the relationship between action and contemplation or between advocacy and a life of prayer, worship, and study. How do these relate in your experience?
 - Note here how a certain flow is suggested between the contemplative life of the Christian and acts of justice in the world. Compare this to the example of the Reformer’s community chest. How do you see this flow functioning in your congregation, another congregation or the broader church? What untapped resources might Lutheran churches utilize to better express this dynamic between praise/contemplation and service/action?

- In section 233 Francis writes: "The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face. The ideal is not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things. Saint Bonaventure teaches us that 'contemplation deepens the more we feel the working of God's grace within our hearts, and the better we learn to encounter God in creatures outside ourselves.'"
- Read the following quotes from Luther and reflect together on these questions: What does it change if we profess God's presence in creation? What affect might this acknowledgement of God's all embracing presence have on our daily lives?
 - "[God is] with all creatures, flowing and pouring into them, filling all things," (Luther, WA 10:143).
 - God's "own divine essence can be in all creatures collectively and in each one individually more profoundly, more intimately, more present than the creature is in itself, yet it can be encompassed nowhere and by no one. It encompasses all things and dwells in all, but no one thing encompasses it and dwells in it." (Luther, LW 57:57)

Conclusion

Invite any concluding reflections. Close with the prayer at the end of Laudato Si':

All-powerful God,
 you are present in the whole universe
 and in the smallest of your creatures.
 You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.
 Pour out upon us the power of your love,
 that we may protect life and beauty.
 Fill us with peace, that we may live
 as brothers and sisters, harming no one.
 O God of the poor,
 help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of
 this earth, so precious in your eyes.
 Bring healing to our lives, that we may protect
 the world and not prey on it,
 that we may sow beauty, not pollution and
 destruction.

Touch the hearts
 of those who look only for gain
 at the expense of the poor and the earth.
 Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,
 to be filled with awe and contemplation,
 to recognize that we are profoundly united
 with every creature
 as we journey towards your infinite light.
 We thank you for being with us each day.
 Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle
 for justice, love and peace.

Amen