

Earth Stewardship in Church & Society

Reciprocal Relationships that Matter

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January 2017

Living Water Synod, ELCA

- “RESOLVED that the Living Water Synod, meeting in assembly, recognize Creation Care as integral to each faith practice, lived out in worship, service, study, and witness as a vital component of the church’s identity and vocation today.” – May 2014

Research Question

- *How do leaders perceive and practice creation care in congregations and in everyday life, and what is the missional character of their perceptions and practices?*

Interpretive Lenses

- Theoretical
 - Sustainability
 - Globalization
 - Global Civil Society
- Biblical & Theological
 - Nature as Active Subject
 - Stewardship
 - Perichoresis
 - Eschatology
 - Sacramental Imagination

Theoretical: Sustainability

- A non-religious description of caring for creation that views the earth as an interdependent system of geological and biological processes on which human society depends and that takes action to ensure the welfare of those processes so that human society can exist indefinitely within them.
- → *The Natural Step*, framework for sustainable conceptualizing and decision-making used worldwide by organizations, businesses, cities.

Theoretical: Globalization

- An emerging phenomenon of social, economic, political, and cultural interrelatedness worldwide. Our resource consumption, actions and inactions, systems of infrastructure, worldviews, and communication not only impact human society and the environment locally but also have global connections and implications.
- → Rebecca Todd Peters, *In Search of the Good Life: The Ethics of Globalization* (2004)

Theoretical: Global Civil Society

- The public participation of people through non-profit and non-governmental organizations toward the development of better living conditions throughout the world.
- "...the sphere of ideas, values, institutions, organizations, networks, and individuals located *between* the family, the state, and the market and operating *beyond* the confines of national societies, polities, and economies."*
- → Center for Civil Society Studies, Johns Hopkins

*Helmut Anheier, Marlies Glasius, Mary Kaldor, "Introducing Global Civil Society" (2001)

Biblical: Nature as Active Subject

- All creation worships God, shares in God's first covenant, receives God's care and redemption
- Corrective to the commodification of nature and to anthropocentrism
- Nature has value beyond its usefulness to human beings
- Recovering the idea of viewing the rest of nature as a *thou* rather than an *it*
- → St. Francis of Assisi and John Muir

Biblical: (Earth) Stewardship

- A comprehensive view of stewardship in which humanity participates in the work of Christ, the preeminent steward, assuming responsibility for all that has been entrusted to him and voluntarily limiting himself for the life of the world.
- → Douglas John Hall, *The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age* (1990)

Theological: Perichoresis

- The theological concept of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as a Trinitarian community of co-equal, interdependent persons finding unity in their dynamic interactions of self-giving love for other.
- Indwelling becomes basis for reimagining the missional church's *reciprocal relationships* with *members of its community* and with *all creation*.
- → Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (1998); Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation* (1993)

Theological: Eschatology

- A biblical/ theological concept of the end times, includes themes of judgment, the consummation of history, and the redemption of all creation.
- *Redemption*
- *Reformation*
- → David Rhoads, “Reflections on A Lutheran Theology of Creation” (2012); Larry Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith* (2013)

Theological: Sacramental Imagination

- Christ’s presence *in, with, and under* the elements.
- Luther says Christ’s presence in the Eucharist testifies to God’s presence in the *whole creation*
 - “God is substantially present everywhere, in and through all creatures, in all their parts and places, so that the world is full of God and He fills all, but without His being encompassed and surrounded by it.” *Luther, WA 23:134*
- → Larry Rasmussen, “Lutheran Sacramental Imagination” (2014)

Segue into Practical Ministry

- “What suffice are not good ideas, critical though they be, but good communities; in our case anticipatory communities meeting adaptive challenges. *Anticipatory communities* are home places where it is possible to reimagine worlds and reorder possibilities, places where new or renewed practices give focus to an ecological and postindustrial way of life.” – Rasmussen (2013)
- Church as “demonstration plot” – Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church* (2000)
- Church as “sign, foretaste, and instrument” of God’s mission – Leslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret* (1995)
- A congregation is an ideal setting for modeling the kind of creation care needed for a more sustainable world.

Methodology:

Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods

- First collecting quantitative data (survey) and then explaining the quantitative results further through qualitative data (interviews).
- Conducted a *census survey* by administering a questionnaire to all pastors rostered in synod
- Pastors serving congregations asked to choose three lay members to complete the questionnaire, if possible
 - (1) a congregational president/ elected leader
 - (2) congregation’s creation care team member
 - (3) someone between the ages of 18 and 29
- Sampling: *non-probability purposive snowball type*

Methodology: Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods

- Quantitative – 136 participants
 - 63.2% clergy, 36.8% lay (43.4% of rostered leaders)
 - 56.9% male, 43.1% female; average age 56
 - 82.1% Democrat or Democratic-leaning; 14.7% Republican or Republican-leaning
 - Represented 84 congregations (61.3% in the synod)
- Qualitative – 4 congregations, 13 interviewees
 - Selected 2 congregations that had active creation care teams and 2 that did not
 - Transcribed and coded recorded interviews

Results - Quantitative

How concerned are you about the following challenges facing the earth?

	n	Mean	% Concerned or Very Concerned
• Climate change/global warming	136	3.60	90.5
• Water issues	134	3.57	94.0
• Energy issues	136	3.56	92.7
• Loss of biodiversity/habitat	134	3.43	89.5
• Food/Agriculture issues	136	3.40	89.7
• Mineral/Mining issues	134	3.12	77.6
• Forestry issues	136	3.11	78.7
• Global population growth	132	3.00	75.7

% Ranked in descending order of mean. Scale:

1="Not at all concerned"; 2="A little concerned"; 3="Concerned"; 4="Very Concerned"

Results - Quantitative

Perceptions: society and creation care

	(n ranged 122-129)	% Agree or Strongly Agree
• Humanity's well-being is dependent on the earth's well-being		99.2
• Human activity is a significant factor in global temperature increase		96.0
• Overwhelming scientific evidence that current use of earth's resources is unsustainable		93.6
• U.S. should reduce its carbon emissions even if some other countries don't do the same		93.4
• The average surface temperature of the earth has been increasing		95.1
• I have become more concerned about the environment in recent years		92.3

Results - Quantitative

Perceptions: church and creation care

	(n ranged 115-128)	% Agree or Strongly Agree
• The Bible teaches creation care		99.2
• The Lutheran Church teaches creation care		98.4
• Jesus' teaching about loving the "neighbor" should be interpreted to include non-humans		90.9
• A congregation is an ideal setting for modeling creation care needed for a more sustainable world		93.2
• Our congregation's global connections through ELCA World Hunger/disaster relief → creation care's importance		86.8
• Our congregation's global connections through ELCA or companion synods increase creation care importance		73.0
		% Disagree or Strongly Disagree
• The church should not be involved in helping to shape environmental policy		92.7

Results - Quantitative

Perceptions: potential allies for creation care

	% Agree or Strongly Agree	Don't Know
• Native American tribal organizations	86.0	7.0
• Sportsmen and women (hunting/fishing)	83.7	8.5
• Utility companies	66.7	14.7
• I can name a non-profit in community open to collaborating on creation care	86.3	32.3
• Primary employers in our community open to collaborating on creation care	84.4	50.0

In this table, valid ns include "Don't Know;" n ranged 127-129.

Results - Quantitative

How essential are these practices for Christian identity and/or participation in God's mission in the 21st century?

	% Important or Very Important	Mean
• Caring for the poor	100.0	3.88
• Praying regularly	99.2	3.80
• Worshiping God regularly	97.7	3.78
• Caring for God's creation	98.4	3.72
• Giving generously	99.2	3.69
• Reading scripture regularly	94.5	3.65
• Sharing our faith with others	98.5	3.64
• Inviting someone to church	91.1	3.45

% Ranked in descending order of mean. N ranged from 124-128. Scale:

1="Not at all important"; 2="A little important"; 3="Important"; 4="Very Important"

Results - Quantitative

Which of the following creation care practices describe your congregation's current involvement lifting up God's love for all creation, our connection to the rest of creation, or our role in its well-being – in WORSHIP?

Valid Responses*	n	% Yes	% No
• In prayers	82	96.3	3.7
• In hymns	79	91.1	8.9
• In sermons	80	80.0	20.0
• In liturgy	81	58.0	42.0
• In specific services, Sundays, or seasons	80	48.8	51.2
• In outdoor services	81	46.9	53.1
• In local sanctuary plants or altar flowers	76	43.4	56.6
• In locally made communion elements (bread, wine)	81	38.3	61.7
• In locally made altar cloths, banners, artwork	80	32.5	67.5

*Ranked in descending order of percentage agreement.

Results - Quantitative

Which of the following creation care practices describe your congregation's current involvement lifting up God's love for all creation, our connection to the rest of creation, or our role in its well-being – in EDUCATION?

Valid Responses*	n	% Yes	% No
• In involvement with Lutheran outdoor ministry (camp)	79	62.0	38.0
• In Vacation Bible School	74	60.8	39.2
• In Sunday school	75	53.3	46.7
• In Confirmation programming	75	46.7	53.3
• In adult forum or bible study	80	35.0	65.0
• In congregation outings: hiking, camping, skiing, stargazing, etc.	75	26.7	73.3
• In book study groups	74	24.3	75.7
• Through guest speakers: scientists, theologians	82	15.9	84.1

*Ranked in descending order of percentage agreement.

Results - Quantitative

Which of the following creation care practices describe your congregation's current involvement lifting up God's love for all creation, our connection to the rest of creation, or our role in its well-being – in CONGREGATIONAL LIFE?

Valid Responses*	n	% Yes	% No
• In recycling paper	83	94.0	6.0
• In recycling glass, plastic, and/or aluminum	82	90.2	9.8
• In signage for energy conservation:	82	58.5	41.5
• In encouraging the use of local food sources	79	48.1	51.9
• In offering fair trade coffee/ items for sale	80	46.3	53.8
• In using fair trade coffee at church functions	81	29.6	70.4
• In encouraging carpool, bike, bus to church	81	23.5	76.5
• In composting food waste	80	11.3	88.8

*Ranked in descending order of percentage agreement.

Results - Quantitative

Which of the following creation care practices describe your congregation's current involvement lifting up God's love for all creation, our connection to the rest of creation, or our role in its well-being – in BUILDING AND GROUNDS?

Valid Responses*	n	% Yes	% No
• In replacing regular light bulbs with CFLs	75	74.7	25.3
• In policies that discourage Styrofoam use	76	56.6	43.4
• In replacing a church furnace to be more efficient	74	50.0	50.0
• In conducting an energy audit of church building	67	47.8	52.2
• In maintaining a church garden with native plants	76	32.9	67.1
• In providing wildlife habitat / Monarch area	78	20.5	79.5
• In growing vegetables / hosting community garden	81	18.5	81.5
• In installing renewable energy (solar or wind)	80	1.2	98.8

*Ranked in descending order of percentage agreement.

Results - Quantitative

Which of the following creation care practices describe your congregation's current involvement lifting up God's love for all creation, our connection to the rest of creation, or our role in its well-being – in COMMUNITY ACTION?

Valid Responses*	n	% Yes	% No
• In adopting a portion of highway or beach to clean up	81	38.3	61.7
• In collaborating with non-profit, non- governmental organizations to work for environmental sustainability	76	19.7	80.3
• In hosting conversations about environmental issues in our area	79	19.0	81.0
• In writing to elected leaders about caring for the earth	70	14.3	85.7

*Ranked in descending order of percentage agreement.

Results - Quantitative

How concerned are you about the following challenges facing the earth?

Valid Responses for:

	n	Mean	t	df	p
<i>Democrat or leaning Democrat</i>					
<i>Republican or leaning Republican</i>					
• Climate change/global warming	106	3.79	4.483	20	.000
	19	2.84			
• Water issues	104	3.63	1.654	121	.101
	19	3.37			
• Energy issues	106	3.62	1.611	123	.110
	19	3.37			
• Loss of biodiversity/habitat	104	3.58	3.395	20	.003
	19	2.74			

Scale:

1="Not at all concerned"; 2="A little concerned"; 3="Concerned"; 4="Very Concerned"

Results - Quantitative

How concerned are you about the following challenges facing the earth?

Valid Responses for:

	<i>Democrat or leaning Democrat</i>	<i>Republican or leaning Republican</i>	<i>n</i>	Mean	t	df	p
• Food/Agriculture issues	106	19	106	3.45	1.399	123	.164
			19	3.21			
• Mineral/Mining issues	104	19	104	3.29	4.487	121	.000
			19	2.47			
• Forestry issues	106	19	106	3.19	2.309	123	.023
			19	2.74			
• Global population growth	104	18	104	3.11	2.500	120	.014
			18	2.61			

Scale:

1="Not at all concerned"; 2="A little concerned"; 3="Concerned"; 4="Very Concerned"

Results - Quantitative

Possible Challenges and Political Preference

Valid Responses for:

	<i>Democrat or leaning Democrat</i>	<i>Republican or leaning Republican</i>	<i>n</i>	Mean	t	df	p
• Other problems in the world are more pressing.	104	17	104	1.86	-3.455	119	.001
			17	2.47			
• The added expenses in dealing with this problem are not worth it.	106	18	106	1.42	-2.787	122	.006
			18	1.83			
• Elected leaders are not moving fast enough to make and enforce stricter environmental policies.	103	17	103	3.32	3.239	118	.002
			17	2.71			

Scale: 1="Strongly Disagree"; 2="Disagree"; 3="Agree"; 4="Strongly Agree"

Results - Quantitative

Society, Caring for the Earth, and Political Preference

Valid Responses for:

	<i>Democrat or leaning Democrat</i>	<i>Republican or leaning Republican</i>	<i>n</i>	Mean	t	df	p
• I have become more concerned about the environment in recent years.	105	19	105	3.41	2.615	29	.014
• The average surface temperature of the earth has been increasing.	102	17	102	3.60	6.123	117	.000
• Human activity is a significant factor in global temperature increase.	103	17	103	3.67	5.369	118	.000
• Humanity's well-being is dependent on the earth's well-being.	105	19	105	3.82	4.902	122	.000

Scale: 1="Strongly Disagree"; 2="Disagree"; 3="Agree"; 4="Strongly Agree"

Results - Quantitative

Society, Caring for the Earth, and Political Preference

Valid Responses for:

	<i>Democrat or leaning Democrat</i>	<i>Republican or leaning Republican</i>	<i>n</i>	Mean	t	df	p
• There is overwhelming scientific evidence that current resource use is unsustainable.	104	16	104	3.63	4.435	118	.000
• The media have overemphasized the urgency of caring for the environment.	104	17	104	1.71	-3.609	119	.000
• For the sake of the global community, the U.S. should reduce its carbon emissions even if other countries don't do the same.	103	16	103	3.58	2.961	117	.004

Scale: 1="Strongly Disagree"; 2="Disagree"; 3="Agree"; 4="Strongly Agree"

Results - Quantitative

How essential are these practices for Christian identity and/or participation in God's mission in the 21st century?

Valid Responses for:	<i>Clergy</i>	<i>Laity</i>	<i>n</i>	Mean	t	df	p
• Worshiping God regularly			82	3.90	3.470	57	.001
			46	3.56			
• Praying regularly			82	3.88	2.460	64	.017
			45	3.67			
• Reading scripture regularly			82	3.83	4.429	57	.000
			45	3.31			
• Inviting someone to church			81	3.59	3.433	122	.001
			43	3.19			

Scale:

1="Not at all important"; 2="A little important"; 3="Important"; 4="Very Important"

Results - Quantitative

How essential are these practices for Christian identity and/or participation in God's mission in the 21st century?

Valid Responses for:	<i>Clergy</i>	<i>Laity</i>	<i>n</i>	Mean	t	df	p
• Sharing our faith with others			82	3.74	3.109	79	.003
			45	3.44			
• Caring for God's creation			81	3.74	0.504	125	.615
			46	3.70			
• Giving generously			82	3.84	4.790	69	.000
			46	3.41			
• Caring for the poor			82	3.94	2.335	62	.023
			46	3.78			

Scale:

1="Not at all important"; 2="A little important"; 3="Important"; 4="Very Important"

Results - Quantitative

Possible Challenges and Gender

Valid Responses for:	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>n</i>	Mean	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
• This problem is too big for me to make a meaningful difference.	74	55	2.04	1.75	2.467	127	.015
• Other problems in the world are more pressing.	73	53	2.12	1.72	3.331	124	.001
• Not enough collective will has been generated to make a difference.	72	53	2.97	2.43	3.861	123	.000

Scale: 1="Strongly Disagree"; 2="Disagree"; 3="Agree"; 4="Strongly Agree"

Results - Quantitative

Possible Challenges and Age

Valid Responses for:	<i>Ages 18-49</i>	<i>Ages 50+</i>	<i>n</i>	Mean	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
• Not enough collective will has been generated to make a difference.	36	90	2.50	2.84	-2.191	124	.030
• This issue is too divisive to bring up.	35	93	1.94	1.61	2.815	61	.007
• Primary employers in my area would not be open to creation care ideas.	32	76	2.72	2.30	2.919	106	.004

Scale: 1="Strongly Disagree"; 2="Disagree"; 3="Agree"; 4="Strongly Agree"

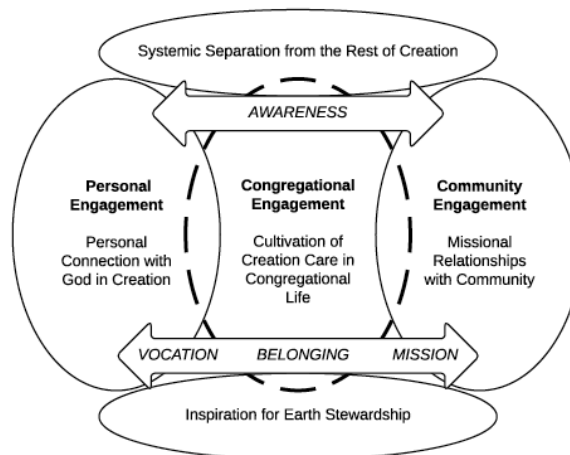
Results - Quantitative

Christian understanding of how humans should relate to earth

Valid % (n=126)

- | | |
|---|------|
| • Humanity's interdependent relationships with God and the rest of creation make us participants with God in God's creative and redeeming work for the whole earth community. | 60.3 |
| • As people created in God's image, we act on God's behalf to protect the earth and its creatures for future generations. | 34.9 |
| • God has given humanity dominion over the earth in order to utilize its resources for the progress of humanity. | 3.2 |
| • None of these. | 1.6 |

Results - Qualitative Themes



Conclusions

- (1) Leaders in the synod are concerned about several challenges facing the earth.
- (2) The Synod exhibits awareness of and openness to biblical and theological connections to earth stewardship.
- (3) Political preference is a major factor relative to creation care perceptions.
- (4) Congregational creation care practices are less pronounced than personal practices.
- (5) Integrating congregations demonstrate greater capacity to exhibit the missional character of creation care than do those without creation care teams.