



The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners. Isaiah 61:1

Sunday Morning Sustainability

Eco-justice Impacts and Opportunities

Many of us have similar Sunday morning routines. These routines, like our other daily activities, create an ecological “footprint,” which impacts God’s Creation—both people and planet. As we examine our routines and adjust them to create smaller ecological footprints, we can be better caretakers of God’s Creation and we can improve lives around the world.

TURNING ON THE LIGHT

Sunday mornings, when we turn on lights in our homes, most of us connect to power plants. These power plants, especially if they generate electricity from fossil fuels, create air pollution and contribute to the warming of the planet. The pollution from power plants causes human health issues like asthma and heart disease. These health issues particularly impact low-income communities because they are more likely than moderate and high-income communities to be located near power plants. In addition to pollution issues associated with power plants, the extraction of coal and oil to run the power plants can pollute land, waterways, and nearby communities. Even the greenest of these energy sources—hydropower, solar power, and wind energy—has environmental impacts, but renewable energy sources have a less negative impact on God’s Creation.



PATHWAYS FOR CHANGE

Individuals and Churches

Find out where your electricity comes from. Some utilities provide the option to purchase electricity from renewable resources. Look for ways to decrease your electricity consumption. Resources are available at www.energystar.gov.

Community

Support efforts to create renewable energy in your community, and contact your elected officials and policymakers to ask them to support infrastructure for renewable energy.

CHANGEMAKERS

Eleven churches from NCC member communions received an Energy Star award in 2012 from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), including Saint Alban’s Episcopal Church in Monroe, GA, Bridgewater United Methodist Church in Bridgewater, NJ, First Lutheran Church in Bothell, WA, and Southwest Church of Christ in Chesterfield, VA. Churches that received the award reduced their energy use by at least 20 percent. To learn more about the awards, visit www.energystar.gov.¹

LOGGING ON, NETWORKING IN

For some of us, logging on to computers, smart phones, and tablets to check the news and catch up with friends and family is a morning routine. With more than 250 million internet users in the United States, the data stream that travels to and from each personal computer, tablet, and phone adds up to a flood of energy use. Much of this information passes through data centers filled with servers that are often continuously on, regardless of demand, sometimes wasting 90 percent or more of the electricity they use. In 2010, data centers consumed two percent of all electricity used in the United States. What’s more, diesel generators supply backup power for these data centers, creating significant emissions.²

But data centers represent just a fraction of the hidden costs of our digital devices. Child and slave laborers in places like the Democratic Republic of the Congo often mine the minerals used to make the inner workings of consumer electronics, a direct affront to our faith values for justice.³ In addition, manufacturing and delivering computers requires significant energy. And computers and other electronics create e-waste once they are discarded. The United States discards 30 million computers each year. The EPA estimates that only 15-20 percent of e-waste is recycled. The rest of these electronics go directly into landfills and incinerators, leading to greater environmental harm from the hazardous materials in electronic equipment—things like cadmium, lithium, mercury and lead. People living in poverty are typically disproportionately exposed to the heavy metals and toxic chemicals from this e-waste since landfills are often sited near low-income communities.



PATHWAYS FOR CHANGE

Individuals and Churches

The average life span for a computer in the United States is less than two years.⁴ Consider ways you and your church can cut down on the electricity used from computers and how you can lengthen the lives of your electronic devices to reduce the amount of e-waste created.

When it is time to get rid of a device, donate it to a charity that wants it or find an e-Stewards certified recycler at <http://e-stewards.org>.

Learn how modern-day slavery impacts the goods you buy at www.slaveryfootprint.org.

Community

If there is an e-waste collection event in your community, encourage organizers to use an e-Stewards certified recycler. If there is none, consider hosting one.

Tell recyclers in your community that you are concerned about the global impacts of e-waste and encourage them to become e-Stewards certified.

“Ecological footprint” is another term for environmental impact. It is the mark or “footprint” that your actions and activities leave on the planet.

MAKING COFFEE

For some, drinking coffee on Sunday (or any other day) is a critical activity. Coffee is the second most widely traded commodity after oil. But modern coffee cultivation requires the removal of large swathes of tropical forests. These forests are important for maintaining clean air and water in addition to protecting valuable, rare plants and animals, including migratory songbirds. Naturally occurring varieties of coffee plants are shade-loving shrubs that do not require clear cutting of the rainforest. Until two decades ago, all coffee was grown in the shade. Then new full-sun hybrids were developed that produced higher yields. This created a rise in agribusiness-style plantations that used clear-cutting.⁵ Clear-cutting destroys not only ecosystems, but also impacts indigenous communities, which rely on forests for food, shelter, and their livelihoods.

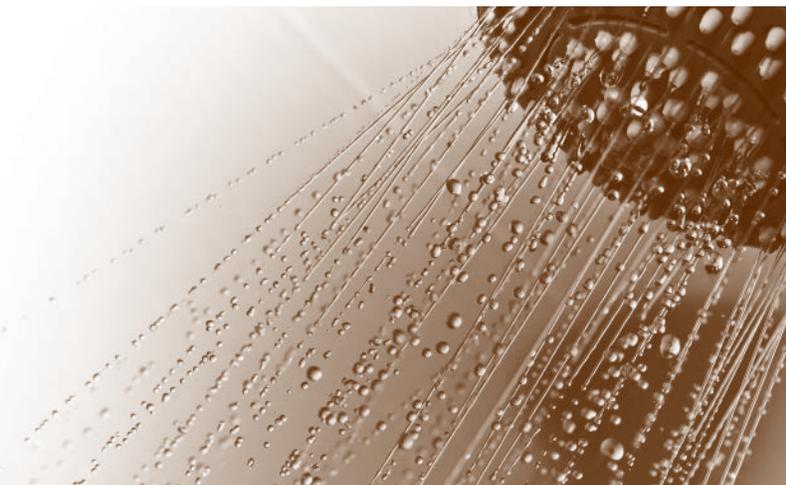


PATHWAYS FOR CHANGE

Individuals and Churches

Purchase shade grown, fair trade coffee for your home and encourage its use in your faith community. Two great sources are Equal Exchange (www.equalexchange.coop) and Just Coffee (www.justcoffee.coop).

Support coffee shops that purchase their coffee from shade grown, sustainable sources, and be sure to bring your own mug.



PATHWAYS FOR CHANGE

Individuals and Churches

Install water-saving toilets and low-flow faucets, run dishwashers and laundry loads when they are full, and water outdoors in the evening to avoid rapid evaporation.⁷

Use less water for landscaping by replacing lawns with native plants or walkable shrubs that require less water and fertilizer than grass.

Look for water-saving resources at www.epa.gov/watersense/.

Community

Identify, report, and stop polluters. Join a local clean water or environmental group to help monitor waste discharge into local water supplies.

Ask government officials to make clean water and developing a water ethic for the community priorities in their legislative decisions.

Voices of Faith

“I don’t know what tallies as sacred for you but if water doesn’t qualify, you should check your pulse to see whether you are among the quick or the dead.”⁸

Larry Rasmussen, Reinhold Niebuhr Professor Emeritus of Social Ethics at Union Theological Seminary

TAKING A SHOWER

Many people living in the United States are blessed with the ability simply to turn on a tap to enjoy fresh, clean water. It is easy to forget that freshwater is vital to our existence. A typical Sunday morning shower will send about five gallons of water down the drain for every two minutes spent washing up.

Yet even in some parts of the United States, freshwater is scarce. In communities where there is overdevelopment or high industrial or agricultural use, groundwater is extracted at a faster rate than it can be renewed. Home water use in the United States, which includes not only bathing, washing, cooking, and lawn care, increases every year. And nearly every region in the country has experienced shortages in the last five years. According to the EPA, “at least 36 states are anticipating local, regional, or statewide water shortages by 2013, even under non-drought conditions.”⁶

GETTING DRESSED

Many of us aim to look our “Sunday best” when we get ready for church. And while the tags on our clothing reveal their country of origin and the fibers from which they are made, they do not tell the full story of what is in our clothes. A simple cotton shirt, a cotton dress, or even a baby’s cotton reusable diaper leaves a significant environmental footprint. Cotton is a thirsty crop. The fiber required to make a t-shirt needs 400 gallons of water to grow; the cotton for a pair of jeans needs 1,800 gallons.⁹ What’s more, cotton crops use a tenth of the world’s chemical fertilizers and 25 percent of the world’s insecticides, which can have negative impacts on human health for the farmworkers.

Other clothing materials can also be energy-intensive and toxic. Polyester and nylon are made from petroleum-based chemicals, which are not renewable. Non-organic wool is coated with pesticides. Rayon is a wood-based fiber that is energy and water intensive to produce.

It is important to pay attention not only to what our clothing is made from, but also to what has been added to it. For example, some wrinkle-free fabrics contain chemicals such as formaldehyde, which can cause cancer and other health problems for textile and garment workers.

CHANGEMAKERS

A United Methodist women's group had some old fashion fun when Valley and Mountain Fellowship in Seattle, WA, hosted a clothing exchange. They gathered in a large space where people could easily stack, organize, and try on clothes. Each person introduced the items they brought, sharing stories about where each item came from and where they wore it, and others got to try them on. Clothes that weren't claimed at the end of the night were donated to several different organizations, including one that gives office attire to homeless women going to job interviews.

For many, church clothes are clothes that need to be dry-cleaned. Dry cleaning is harmful to the environment and to people because the process uses a chemical called perchloroethylene, or PERC. Long term or chronic exposure to PERC can lead to loss of short-term memory and concentration or loss of muscle coordination. It can also increase risks of certain cancers, and may be carcinogenic.¹⁰ Not only are dry cleaning workers exposed to PERC, but PERC lingers in dry-cleaned clothing and escapes into cars and homes. It can also show up in municipal and well water supplies because of unsafe dumping practices.

In addition to the energy and toxics issues involved in clothing, there is also the issue of consumption. People are buying and throwing away more clothing than ever before. People in the U.S. purchase an average of eight pairs of shoes and 68 pieces of clothing each year,¹¹ while we throw out an average of 68 pounds of clothes per year.¹² Textiles comprise 4 percent of the solid waste stream.¹³ And we're giving away clothes faster than they can be sold second-hand: for example, one New York Salvation Army store receives five tons of clothing donations per day but only sells 11,000 pieces per day.¹⁴



PATHWAYS FOR CHANGE

Individual

Think before you buy. How many pieces of clothing do you need?

Look for clothing made from organic fibers. Avoid wrinkle-free clothing.

Avoid exposure to PERC by buying machine-washable clothes. For clothes that can't be machine-washed, look for cleaners that offer "wet-cleaning" or CO2 cleaning, or try hand-washing your dry clean clothes. If you must dry clean your clothes, air them out to reduce your exposure to PERC.

Community

Get involved in local efforts to regulate or ban PERC in dry cleaning. A successful movement in California is requiring dry cleaners to phase in new technologies that are more environmentally friendly.



GOING TO CHURCH

Harnessing our own power to get to church is the lowest impact way to travel, whether by foot, bike, skates or scooter. Public transportation is a good option too. But even public transportation has a footprint. For example, buses often idle for hours in bus depots. These depots are often located in or near low-income communities, causing asthma and other health issues among the people who live in them.

Most of us drive to church, whether by force of habit or lack of better options. In areas where homes are spread out and public transportation options are limited, gas-dependent drivers create significant environmental impacts. In 2011, petroleum accounted for more than 40 percent of the United States' CO2 emissions.¹⁵ The federal government has issued new fuel efficiency standards for vehicles that will double the fuel efficiency of new cars, reducing carbon pollution by 580 million metric tons—the amount of emissions produced by 140 coal-fired plants.¹⁶ Even with fuel efficiency improvements, the best way to green our transportation is to improve our public transportation and cycling infrastructure as well as to limit our driving.



PATHWAYS FOR CHANGE

Individual and Church

Organize bike-to-church and carpool-to-church events.

Community

Advocate for government investment to improve public transportation and bike lanes.

CHANGEMAKERS

Northhaven UMC in Dallas, TX, holds a hybrid car show as part of its annual Earth Day celebration.

Kern Road Mennonite Church in South Bend, IN, has built a summer Sunday tradition on biking to church, with a mid-ride stop for breakfast and fellowship.

Grace Episcopal Church in Bainbridge Island, WA, hosts a monthly Carless Sunday, encouraging parishioners to carpool or bike to church.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Examining these issues can feel overwhelming, and to a certain degree, we are bound by the systems in which we live and operate. We have some ability to make choices that will reduce the impacts of our morning routines and our daily lives, but many of our options are dependent on the communities in which we live and the infrastructure at our disposal.

This is not to say that we have no power to change things. Indeed, early Christians lived in the shadow of the Roman Empire, a society in which poverty, discrimination, and injustice dominated. By organizing around shared faith and values, early Christians built new kinds of communities that provided food for the hungry, care for the sick, and hope for the future.

Our world yearns for transformation of our broken systems once again. As Christians, we can draw strength and guidance from our shared faith, committing together to place our communal values over our individual desires. We can change our own ways of consumption as we work to transform political, economic and social systems for justice and sustainability.

Footnotes available at <http://www.ncccojustice.org/earthday/EarthDayReferences2013.php>

SERMON STARTERS

CREATED FOR COMMUNITY

People are created in God's image, born to be in relationship with one another and with all the earth (Gen 1:26-27; Gen 2:15, 19-20). The goal of life, according to Duke Divinity School Professor Norman Wirzba, is "to enact relationships with each other so that the life people experience here and now can share in the divine, Trinitarian life that creates, sustains, and fulfills Creation."¹⁷ Christ calls all people to love their neighbors as themselves, placing love of neighbor second only to love of God (Matt 22:36-40). From our love of neighbor flows concern for the most vulnerable of God's Creation—from the sick and those living in poverty to the creatures, the water, and the land. Yet too often, the vulnerable have no voice, and our desire to consume products and services subverts our care for people and the planet.

The environmental and social impacts of our consumption are often hidden. Yet, we are connected with the communities of people—both at home and around the world—who are impacted by the choices we make. If we personally knew the people and places we are affecting through our consumption, we would be far more likely to reduce our consumption or seek changes in the systems that harm them. Identifying the people and places that experience the impacts of our consumption is the first step in transforming our relationships with them.

Though we may never encounter these people face to face, we are called by God to care for them and to care for the world they inhabit.

GREENING THE LORD'S TABLE

The celebration of the Eucharist is a time to enter into fellowship with Christ and one another; to be nourished both physically and spiritually; and to become empowered to share God's love, peace and justice with the world. The elements we serve during communion should be a reflection of that love, peace, and justice.

The communion ritual is a reenactment of one of our most fundamental experiences—a shared meal. It is an acknowledgement that Christ is present in our midst all the time, in our most routine and our most transcendent moments. And it is a reminder that we are called to transform even the most mundane acts into opportunities to bring hope and healing to people and the planet.

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The apostle Paul writes that nothing you eat or drink should cause your brother or sister to stumble (Rom 14:20-21). In this passage, Paul was telling the Christ-following community in Rome to respect the religious dietary restrictions of their brothers and sisters in Christ so as not to interfere with their experience of eating as an expression of faith. Rereading this through a modern lens invites us to consider how our own eating expresses our faith and values, not only when we share a meal, but also before the food reaches the table. When we create the communion table, we can strive for a table that is set by the values of love, peace, and justice represented in the actual wine and bread that we serve. This might mean learning how the grain and grape that go into the meal are cultivated and processed, and ensuring the bread and wine are sourced ethically. This creates an opportunity for the table to reflect not only the brokenness of Christ's body, but also the hope and healing that is found in the resurrected Christ.

Communion is not only a reenactment of a meal; it is also a reminder of Christ's sacrifice. As we feast together, we are called, as Paul writes, "to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God... Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God..." (Rom 12:1-2). This transformation is marked by putting the needs of the community, both local and global, before our own, so that the meal we share in the form of communion becomes an affirmation of and thanksgiving for Christ's sacrifice and our redemption.



Eco-Justice Programs
 National Council of Churches USA
 110 Maryland Avenue, NE
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 Washington, DC 20002

The National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Program develops Earth Day Sunday materials each year to help congregations celebrate and care for God's Creation. For more information about the Program, to make a donation, or for additional Earth Day resources, visit www.nccecojustice.org or email info@ncecojustice.org. For more information on how your congregation can practice stewardship of God's Earth visit www.nccecojustice.org or contact info@ncecojustice.org



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www.pcusa.org/environment

Environmental Ministries works to inspire and equip congregations and presbyteries to work for eco-justice for all of God's earth.

Office of Public Witness

100 Maryland Avenue NE #410
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www.pcusa.org/washington

The Presbyterian Office of Public Witness is the public policy information and advocacy office of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Its task is to advocate, and help the church to advocate, the social witness perspectives and policies of the Presbyterian General Assembly.



Earth Day Sunday 2013

Bulletin Insert

Sustainability: Looking for Green in Your Morning Routine



Many of us have similar Sunday morning routines. They include tasks we hardly think about, like turning on a light, taking a shower, and eating breakfast. Yet, our routine actions impact people and places around the world, often contributing to environmental degradation, hunger, poverty, and chronic illness. We can help bring healing to God's people and God's earth by examining our routines and changing our habits to live more simply and sustainably. In doing so, we respond to Jesus' call to feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, and care for the sick (Matt 25:34-45).

To learn more about how individuals and communities of faith can care for God's people and God's planet, visit www.ncccojustice.org.

OPENING PRAYER

Creator God, we give you thanks for the great abundance and nourishment that you provide us through your Creation and through your great love. As we come together to worship you, reveal to us ways we can honor you and your created world. Inspire our worship and shape our lives to reveal your glory. **Amen.**

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Morning has broken!

Many: We gather to greet the new day by praising God.

One: God created us for relationship with God, one another, and the earth.

Many: Let us honor those relationships today and every day.

One: We seek to care for our brothers and sisters around the world and to God's good Creation.

Many: Let us honor those relationships today and every day.

One: May we commit to new ways of honoring your Creation as a means of sharing Jesus' transforming love,

Many: And let us seek God's grace, justice and mercy for all.

All: Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Gracious God, forgive us for the ways in which we contribute to the disfigurement and destruction of your Creation. Transform our hearts and minds, that we may place the welfare of your earth and your people before our fleeting desires. Embolden us to give voice to the voiceless in our communities and ecosystems, and grant us divine wisdom that we may replace systems of destruction and oppression with systems of justice and sustainability. **Amen.***

SENDING FORTH

May we live mindfully through our days, praying for and working on behalf of all whose lives are impacted by our own. Go forth to share the light of Christ with all of Creation. **Amen.**

*Inspired by the 2012 Encyclical Letter written by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople.