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# Earth Stewardship and the Missio Dei: Participating in the Care and Redemption of All God Has Made

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EARTH STEWARDSHIP AND THE *MISSIO DEI*:  
PARTICIPATING IN THE CARE AND REDEMPTION OF ALL GOD HAS MADE

by  
DAVID M. CARLSON

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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## ABSTRACT

*Earth Stewardship and the Missio Dei:  
Participating in the Care and Redemption of All God Has Made*

by

David M. Carlson

This explanatory sequential mixed methods research project surveyed leaders and conducted focus group interviews in an ELCA synod. It evaluated earthkeeping practices and perceptions using several lenses: sustainability, globalization, global civil society, nature as active subject, stewardship as participating in God's mission, perichoresis as modeling reciprocal relationships with nature, eschatological themes of redemption and reformation, and sacramental imagination. Results revealed concern about environmental challenges, openness to earth stewardship, significant differences by political preference, and more pronounced personal than congregational practices. Congregations with creation care teams have promising capacity to exhibit earth stewardship's missional character through personal, congregational, and community engagement.

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Thanks to my friends and mentors Larry Rasmussen, David Rhoads, and Barbara Rossing for sharing their inspiring scholarship and practical wisdom with the Living Water Synod from 2013-15. I thank them for their comments from reading earlier drafts, for stretching our synod's creation care team and the wider church toward deeper ecological reflection and action, and for articulating the urgent calling of eco-reformation today with courage and hope. Many thanks also to my advisors at Luther Seminary, Craig Van Gelder and Alvin Luedke, for their missional vision and insightful suggestions, and other members of my D.Min. cohort for their collegiality, faith, and friendship.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
CNP	Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project
ELCA	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
ICNPO	International Classification of Nonprofit Organizations
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
VBS	Vacation Bible School
WA	Weimarer Ausgabe

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The Living Water Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) considered a resolution at its 2014 assembly to “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.”<sup>1</sup> While creation care may fall under the particular congregational concern of stewardship, it occurred to the synod team drafting the resolution that the well-being of all creation is not one ministry focus among many but should be seen as essential to each committee’s decisions and to each of the traditional faith practices: invite, pray, study, worship, give, encourage, and serve.<sup>2</sup> A related guiding concept was that creation care teams function most effectively in congregations not as isolated entities but as round tables with representation from other committees, or at least as dialogue partners with other ministry teams, when decisions are being made. The resolution passed overwhelmingly. But how accurately does it reflect the perceptions and practices of church leaders and their congregations?

The purpose of the resolution was not only to heighten awareness of creation care within congregations in the midst of faith practices already lifted up by the ELCA and by

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix A. All proper names have been changed to pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality.

<sup>2</sup> The resolution lists these faith practices as described by the ELCA; see Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, “Education Program Planners,” Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2016, [http://www.elca.org/en/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Program-Planners?\\_ga=1.50457130.2085530141.1389235572](http://www.elca.org/en/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Program-Planners?_ga=1.50457130.2085530141.1389235572) (accessed April 11, 2016).

the synod in recent years, but also to identify creation care as a critical element of participation with God in mission for the life of the world. The resolution framed such missional involvement as “encouraging congregations to engage this calling to Creation Care boldly and creatively in their local communities, trusting and participating in God’s creative, redemptive, and sustaining love for the world” (see appendix A).

Even small ecological practices within regular parish life can be seen as missionally valuable in such a framework. For example, members of the congregation I serve put out a food waste bin during coffee hour and other meals, and we give compostable bags to people to use at home. Sometime after this became routine in our congregational life, a third grader came to me. It was September and school was starting. She noticed that the practice at her school lunchroom was different from home and church—food scraps were going in the garbage along with everything else, she said, “including sporks!”<sup>3</sup> Together we wrote a letter to the principal and, after an initial meeting with her, began a green team at the school composed of parents and students. Since then, this team has not only implemented food waste composting into the school lunchroom but has also reclaimed a green space across the street and has partnered with a local paper mill to raise extra school funds by collecting shiny paper. Composting food waste may seem like a thankless task, but in the context of the congregation’s worship and discipleship that also regularly lift up creation care, it helped cultivate a broader vision of God’s redeeming love and enabled a third grader to act boldly as a participant in it and engage the wider community. If creation care is seen not as an add-on to current

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<sup>3</sup> Personal conversation. A spork is a disposable plastic utensil, a cross between a spoon and fork.

ministries but as leaven that influences each facet of congregational life, then its missional significance has greater potential.

Seeing earth stewardship as tangential to or even as separate from Christian identity and vocation is symptomatic of a diminished view of God's Trinitarian life and mission. In light of current systematic patterns of ecological degradation and growing anxiety, such a view is also irresponsible. This thesis explores how a congregation is a necessary and ideal setting for modeling the kind of creation care that is required for a more sustainable world and called for by the *missio Dei*.<sup>4</sup> The Holy Spirit empowers congregations to be "anticipatory communities" as they embrace an ecological way of life and to participate in Christ's stewardship as they rediscover the perichoretic relationality that is essential to God's creative, redemptive, and sustaining love for the world.<sup>5</sup>

### Research Question

Missional theology understands earth stewardship as an essential component of the *missio Dei* and of faith practices. At a time of increasing urgency regarding global environmental instability, the perceptions and practices of earthkeeping congregations and their leaders may help deepen our awareness of the church's missional identity and purpose today. My research question examines the extent to which ELCA congregations in a specific area express this component of the *missio Dei*:

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<sup>4</sup> Literally, "mission of God," *missio Dei* is the theological understanding of the Triune God creating, redeeming, inspiring, and sending the church to discern and to participate with what God is doing for the sake of the whole world. See, e.g. Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 3-7.

<sup>5</sup> Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 226-27. Douglas John Hall, *The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age*, Rev. ed. (New York: Friendship Press, 1990), 43-44.



In light of the recent resolution passed by the Living Water Synod ELCA, how missional are current creation care perceptions and practices among church leaders in the synod?

### Variables

In this question, the action of the synod emphasizing the importance of creation care for Christian missional identity and vocation is an independent variable, and current perceptions and practices are dependent variables. Identifying a particular component of the Christian faith as vital does not necessarily make it so in practice. But readily associating creation care with traditional faith practices in a synod assembly may indicate an emerging perception among church leaders that relates creation care to God's mission and a desire to participate more fully in God's stewardship of the earth. Of course, it is possible that congregations or leaders may be practicing elements of earth stewardship without perceiving them as missional. It is also possible that, whether or not church leaders perceive earth stewardship as important, their congregational practices may fall short. Nevertheless, examining both perceptions and practices of creation care in congregations and among leaders can reveal how central this component of the *missio Dei* is in their theology and discipleship. How this thesis assesses the missional character of creation care perceptions and practices is discussed in the theoretical, biblical, and theological perspectives below.

Possible intervening variables that may impact the earthkeeping perceptions and practices of respondents include: the congregation's location, primary employers in the area, and the age, gender, leisure activities, and political beliefs of respondents. Questions to test for the impact of these control variables were included in a survey as part of my research and helped to assess different hunches I had. Whether a congregation is in an

urban, suburban, or rural context may determine what recycling services and public transportation are available as well as how accessible natural settings are to people. If there are primary employers in the area involved with mining, manufacturing, or energy production, respondents may perceive less openness toward creation care collaboration in their community. How the political affiliation of respondents relates to their perceptions about climate change is a topic investigated by national surveys.<sup>6</sup> I was interested in exploring this and further perceptions, such as how reciprocally respondents with different political loyalties view their relationship with non-human elements of creation. What about those who prefer more motorized forms of recreation or pursue wild game for sport? Do these respondents' views of earth stewardship differ significantly from those who prefer other forms of recreation? Finally, I thought age might be an important factor in this study, perhaps more than gender, as younger respondents may have adapted to earthkeeping practices and perceptions in a time of public awareness of climate change.

### Significance

Although the adoption of the 2014 synod resolution on creation care provides a timely impetus for my research question, my motivation for exploring ecological stewardship in the synod as essential to the *missio Dei* began long before. I helped draft this resolution in addition to previous resolutions passed by this synod, which launched the synod-wide creation care team in 2008 and encouraged all synod congregations to conduct energy audits, establish their own local creation care teams, and recommit themselves to earthkeeping in the face of climate change. As co-chair of the synod

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<sup>6</sup> E.g., A. Leiserowitz, Maibach, E., Roser-Renouf, C., Feinberg, G., & Rosenthal, S., "Politics & Global Warming, Spring 2014," (2014), <http://climatecommunication.yale.edu/publications/politics-global-warming-spring-2014/> (accessed April 11, 2016).

creation care team, I continue to collaborate with others to plan and lead synod-wide opportunities for growing in areas of creation care through retreats, speaking events, and advocacy.

Members of the synod creation care team clearly value creation care as an important component of the church's missional identity and vocation today. But how widespread and intense is the value of creation care in the synod conceptually and habitually? Knowing how synod congregations practice creation care in their ministry and in everyday life and how church leaders understand it in relation to their faith could help the synod creation care team provide more informed leadership and support for creation care as a missional practice. The implementation and results of this research may enhance the capacity of the synod bishop and synod youth coordinator to expand the synod's emphases on faith practices and missional planning in congregations to include creation care. This research may also be useful to church leaders from other ELCA synods and other Christian denominations seeking to deepen the understanding and practice of earth stewardship in congregational ministry.

The congregation I serve as pastor regularly participates in community conversations on this topic and, in 2008-2009, was one of several organizations trained as "early adopters" of The Natural Step framework for understanding the human impact on ecology and making organizational decisions toward environmental sustainability.<sup>7</sup> This training over several months brought our congregational team into a working relationship with local municipal, business, and non-profit teams to assess current practices and

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<sup>7</sup> The Natural Step framework is discussed in chapter 2. See Sustainable Twin Ports, "The Early Adopter Project," Sustainable Twin Ports, 2015, <http://www.sustainabletwinports.org/earlyadopt.htm> (accessed March 20, 2015).

envision individual and communal goals. By its very scope, creation care looks outward and naturally leads to collaboration with people and organizations in the community that share environmentally sustainable values. Understanding how congregations and their leaders engage others in their contexts to address ecological issues may illustrate creation care as an important missional opportunity for the larger church. Hearing and sharing stories similar to this, and to the account of the third grader above, may inspire congregations in the synod to cultivate deeper missional and ecological imagination.

Finally, the well-being of all creation is a concern among missional theologians but does not yet seem integral to the missional church movement. When mentioned, concern for the environment or for creation care as a vital practice of participating with God in mission for the life of the world either tends to appear within a list of several concerns or is referred to briefly but left undeveloped. As Craig Van Gelder and Dwight Zscheile observe in *The Missional Church in Perspective* regarding the missional conversation, “It is striking ... how little theological attention is paid to creation.”<sup>8</sup> Although they only suggest a direction for theological research, they clearly articulate the need to connect the missional movement and caring for all creation: “Missional theology begs for a robust understanding of creation and culture existing within the life of the Trinity and as integral to God’s missionary ends of bringing the whole cosmos to fulfillment.”<sup>9</sup> While this objective is beyond the scope of this thesis, the aim of my literature review and research implementation to follow their direction may be of interest

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<sup>8</sup> Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*, The Missional Network (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 111.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 139.

to other researchers in missional theology. Chapters 2 and 3 are thus intended to help bridge the gap between the missional church movement and the well-being of creation.

### **Theoretical Lenses**

This thesis employed three theoretical lenses in the development of the research design: sustainability, globalization, and global civil society. The inclusion and interplay of these three lenses situates this thesis and the missional church in conversation with scientists, businesses, non-profits, and non-government organizations that are seeking a more ecological civilization for the benefit of all.

*Sustainability.* If we view the earth as an interdependent system of geological and biological processes on which human society depends, then sustainability is the capacity of human society to exist indefinitely within those cycles. This thesis draws its definition of sustainability from The Natural Step, a framework for sustainable conceptualizing and decision-making, originally developed in Sweden and used worldwide by organizations, businesses, and municipalities.<sup>10</sup> The Natural Step's *Four System Conditions for Sustainability* articulate the necessary and sufficient requirements for sustainability and helped to provide a scientific basis by which to assess the direct environmental impact of congregational practices.<sup>11</sup> This includes their commitment to eliminate their contribution to dependence on fossil fuels and to wasteful use of metals and minerals, to eliminate their contribution to dependence on persistent chemicals and synthetic substances which nature cannot break down, to eliminate their contribution to human encroachment upon

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<sup>10</sup> Sarah James and Torbjörn Lahti, *The Natural Step for Communities: How Cities and Towns Can Change to Sustainable Practices* (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> See The Natural Step, "The Four System Conditions of a Sustainable Society," The Natural Step, 2015, <http://www.thenaturalstep.org/sustainability/the-system-conditions/> (accessed March 20, 2015).

nature (e.g. land, water, ecosystems), and to meet human needs fairly and efficiently.

This understanding—in which human society, the economy, and the environment are not competing but working together—has already created a shared language for sustainability and for congregations may provide a conceptual bridge for cultivating creation care partnerships with others in their communities.

*Globalization.* We live in a world that is increasingly interconnected and influenced by political, cultural, and economic forces. Advances in technology, communication, and transportation characterize the development of those forces over history. The effects of globalization have promoted international cooperation, cross-cultural understanding, and even the emergence of a global consciousness, in which people look beyond individual, tribal, or national concerns to the one world that is shared by all. But despite its benefits, globalization has also seen the development of a dominant worldwide economic paradigm—neoliberalism. This thesis draws upon the analysis of Christian eco-feminist Rebecca Todd Peters, who critiques this dominant paradigm of globalization. In her discussion of four theories of globalization, she shows how neoliberalism has not only subjugated indigenous peoples through a history of colonialism, which continues to perpetuate an imbalance between the global north and south, but has also created a global economy built on the illusion of limitless growth that is ecologically unsustainable.<sup>12</sup> By articulating an ethic that lifts up the social well-being of all people, democratic relationships as the context for moral deliberation, and caring for the planet as humanity's chief purpose, Peters describes post-colonial and earth-centered paradigms as important alternatives to the globalization theories of both

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<sup>12</sup> Rebecca Todd Peters, *In Search of the Good Life: The Ethics of Globalization* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 183.

neoliberalism and social development. Congregations may already think globally and act locally through international relief and companion synod relationships. This lens helps frame the wider context in which congregations may also act for the well-being of the planet.

*Global Civil Society.* Along with globalization, the growth of non-profits and non-governmental organizations indicates an increase in the capacity of people to address issues of social justice and the common good through associations and efforts that are independent of private enterprise or government involvement. Considering the realm of civil society helps this thesis in two ways. First, it points to the area in which many environmental organizations work both internationally and locally, organizations that may be potential partners for congregations in caring for creation. Second, it describes how secular scholars categorize religious organizations, including the church. The Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project of the Center for Civil Society Studies at Johns Hopkins University describes the significant role congregations play in civil society by providing direct services to those in need, leading innovation, advocating for the powerless, protecting values, and building community.<sup>13</sup> Missional theologians Gary Simpson and Mary Sue Dreier see civil society as a realm for articulating congregations' public participation with God in the *missio Dei*.<sup>14</sup> Seeing global civil society as a realm

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<sup>13</sup> These are five potential contributions of non-profit organizations suggested by the Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project of Johns Hopkins University's Center for Civil Society Studies. See Center for Civil Society Studies, "Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project," Johns Hopkins University Center for Civil Society Studies, 2015, <http://ccss.jhu.edu/research-projects/comparative-nonprofit-sector-project/> (accessed March 30, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> Gary Simpson, "God in Civil Society: Vocational Imagination, Spiritual Presence, and Ecclesial Discernment," (Unpublished Essay, Required reading for course CL7531 at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN in spring 2013.). See also Mary Sue D. Dreier, "Five Congregations and Civil Society: An Imagination for God's World," (Unpublished Essay, Required reading for course CL7531 at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN in spring 2013.).

for ecological partnership and action may cultivate a missional imagination for the church to reach beyond itself to participate in what God may be doing in the world.

### **Biblical and Theological Lenses**

This thesis assesses the missional character of creation care perceptions in terms of familiarity with biblical and theological articulations of ecological stewardship in relation to the *missio Dei*. This involves a preference for seeing humanity in reciprocal relationship with God and the rest of creation, seeing all creation eschatologically within God's redemptive scope, and seeing the church as participating in God's Trinitarian life and mission for the sake of the world. The lenses used include the following.

*Nature as an active subject.* The Bible is full of examples of nature personified: animals teach, stones cry out, and trees clap their hands. Creation yearns for fulfillment and the Spirit renews the face of the ground. In the biblical witness, not just humanity but all creation receives God's care and redemption. In contrast to the modern objectification of nature, this biblical lens emphasizes a reciprocal relationship between humanity and the rest of creation and seeks to recover the view of nature as a *thou* rather than an *it*. This biblical view of nature as an active subject is reinforced in Lutheran liturgy and in the lives and writings of ecological exemplars Francis of Assisi and John Muir. This biblical lens helps assess the extent to which congregational leaders and members view the reciprocal relationship between humanity and the rest of creation as a community of subjects.

*Stewardship.* According to Douglas John Hall, the term steward is an important biblical symbol that has come of age, but only if we allow our view of it to be



expanded.<sup>15</sup> The concept of stewardship must involve care for the earth—not only as a necessary response to environmental degradation and scientific warnings, but also because *steward* characterizes who Jesus is and what he does. Hall sees Jesus as the preeminent Steward who defines and fulfills that role and enables those who are “in Christ” to participate in his stewardship.<sup>16</sup> Our illusion of ownership and lack of accountability are overcome in Christ, who enables us by grace to share in God’s self-giving love for the life of the world. Viewing the church as steward, and articulating an expanded view of stewardship in terms of mission, Hall offers timely and theologically grounded images for inspiring the missional church’s earthkeeping participation with God in the *missio Dei*. This biblical lens helps articulate this thesis’ view of stewardship as characterizing not just one aspect of a congregation’s ministry but impacting the whole of Christian life.

*Perichoresis*. This thesis’ emphasis on reciprocal relationality finds theological grounding in the circulation and mutual embeddedness of divine persons for one another within the Trinity. The Trinitarian communion of Father, Son, and Spirit honors the distinction of each person yet affirms their unity in dynamic, self-giving love. Through the work of Jürgen Moltmann, Miroslav Volf, and Craig Van Gelder, the insights from this Eastern patristic concept help counter the anthropocentrism of contemporary society and strengthen this thesis’ support for relationships of equality and reciprocity not just with fellow human beings but with other creatures in the wider ecological community.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Hall, *The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age*, 5-20.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>17</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, “Perichoresis: An Old Magic Word for a New Trinitarian Theology,” in *Trinity, Community, and Power*, ed. M. D. Meeks (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2000), 111-125. Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, Sacra Doctrina (Grand Rapids,

According to Moltmann, a perichoretic view changes our thinking about humanity in relation to the rest of creation from an objectifying stance to a more participatory posture, and it changes our thinking about God from a tendency to overemphasize divine transcendence toward affirming God's immanence in and among all creation.<sup>18</sup>

*Eschatology.* The concern of this thesis is both the care and the redemption of creation. Eschatology affirms the biblical vision of creation's fulfillment, alleviation from suffering, and consummation when "the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay" (Rom 8:21). The vision of the new heaven and the new earth signifies that God has not abandoned this world but is actively involved in its redemption. In this view, creation is not just the background or environment in which human redemption occurs but is itself a recipient of God's redeeming love. An eschatological view of creation being fulfilled in the new creation also supports the theme of reformation. Huge paradigm shifts are required in perspective and behavior to embrace a new reformation, and insights from Lutheran scholars David Rhoads and Larry Rasmussen find parallels between the Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century and the ecological reformation of today.<sup>19</sup> God's future intentions breaking into the present call for communities that anticipate proleptically in their words and actions the ecological healing and harmony needed for a sustainable planet.

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MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 208-213. Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 88.

<sup>18</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, The Gifford Lectures 1984-1985, 1st Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 17-42.

<sup>19</sup> David Rhoads, "Reflections on a Lutheran Theology of Creation: Foundations for a New Reformation," *Seminary Ridge Review* 15, no. 1 (2012): 1-7. Larry L. Rasmussen, "Waiting for the Lutherans," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 37, no. 2 (2010): 93-98.

*Sacramental Imagination*. This final lens brings together elements of the previous two: God's immanence in creation and God's eschatological salvation breaking into the present. The sacramental view that the finite elements of water, bread, and wine are capable of bearing the divine presence in the sacraments Martin Luther extends further to affirm God's presence "in, with, and under" all created things.<sup>20</sup> Rhoads, Rasmussen, and Paul Santmire, discuss the implications of rediscovering these insights from the Reformer for our perceptions of the rest of nature.<sup>21</sup> This lens helps lift up every aspect of creation as a potential bearer of the divine presence and encourages faith communities to cultivate what Rasmussen calls "sacramental imagination" in our faith practices and decision-making.<sup>22</sup>

### Methodology

This study followed an *Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods* design. This involved first collecting quantitative data and then explaining the quantitative results further through qualitative data.<sup>23</sup> I chose this methodology because it was conducive to assessing how widespread different creation care perceptions and practices are in the Living Water Synod and because I could investigate my findings further through in-depth

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<sup>20</sup> Martin Luther, *Daß diese Wort Christi "Das ist mein Leib" noch fest stehen, wider die Schwermgeister* (1527), in WA 23:134.34—23:136.36. Quoted in David Rhoads, "Reflections on a Lutheran Theology of Creation: Foundations for a New Reformation," 14-15.

<sup>21</sup> H. Paul Santmire, *Before Nature: A Christian Spirituality* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), 135-143.

<sup>22</sup> Larry L. Rasmussen, "Lutheran Sacramental Imagination," *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, <http://www.elca.org/JLE/Articles/42> (accessed December 31, 2014).

<sup>23</sup> John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2014), 224.

interviews. To use a photographic metaphor, this study examined the creation care of the synod through a wide-angle lens and a few close-ups.

In the quantitative phase, I conducted a census survey of all pastors and other rostered leaders in the synod by administering a questionnaire over the period of one month, primarily through SurveyMonkey. I asked these pastors to invite three others from their congregation to participate in the survey: a council president or other elected leader, a creation care team member if the congregation had one, and someone between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine inclusive. With the help of the synod office, the synod creation care survey was advertised in online announcements, and I sent the invitation and follow up e-mails thanking respondents and encouraging more participation. Seven months later, I contacted pastors and rostered leaders whose congregations were not represented in the initial round and provided another opportunity, over a period of three weeks, for them to take the survey and to invite others in the same way just described. I obtained e-mail addresses from the synod office and sent the invitations and follow-up e-mails directly. I analyzed the data I collected with SPSS software.<sup>24</sup>

In the qualitative phase, I conducted interviews with four congregations through a focus group protocol, primarily with people who had participated in the questionnaire, though some had not. Using the biblical, theological, and theoretical lenses above, I explored the missional character of respondents' creation care perceptions and practices and their emphasis in congregations' worship, education, discipleship at home and work, building and grounds, and public ministry.<sup>25</sup> The congregations I interviewed represented

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<sup>24</sup> The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences currently produced by IBM.

<sup>25</sup> These categories are from David Rhoads, ed., "Lutherans Restoring Creation: Training Manual for Congregations," (2010),

a variety of perceptions and practices. I field-tested the questionnaire and the focus group protocol with pastors and lay leaders from other denominations. Since one question of the protocol was specific to the synod resolution, I conducted a second field test with a group from the Lutheran church I serve, whose qualitative results are not included in my report. I recorded and transcribed the interviews, and coded these data according to the method developed by Charmaz.<sup>26</sup>

## Other Matters

### Definition of Key Terms

*Anticipatory community:* A community of people that practices ahead of time a vision of earth stewardship that participates in God's redemptive love for all creation.

*Creation care perception:* One's view as to how God's whole creation should be cared for. The preferred perception in this study sees humanity theologically as an interdependent member of God's creation and co-participant with God in creation's fulfillment and redemption.

*Creation care practices:* Cultivated habitual actions with and for the benefit of both human and non-human members of God's creation.

*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.

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<http://www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org/Home/congregations/congregational-earthkeeping-manual> (accessed March 20, 2015).

<sup>26</sup> Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006), 42-66.

*Environmental 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.

*Eschatology:* A biblical and theological concept of the end times that includes themes of judgment, the consummation of history, and the redemption of all creation.

*Faith practices:* Habitual actions and rituals of the followers of Jesus Christ including: regular worship, prayer, and scripture study to grow in relationship with God; serving one's neighbor as a reflection of Christ's love; giving one's time and resources for God's purposes; encouraging one another in faith within the church; and inviting others to participate with the church in God's life and mission.

*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.

*Global civil society:* The public participation of people through non-profit and non-governmental organizations toward the development of better social conditions throughout the world.

*Missio Dei:* The theological understanding of the Triune God creating, redeeming, inspiring, and sending the church to discern and to participate with what God is doing for the sake of the whole world.

*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 each other.

#### Ethical considerations

I conducted this thesis project in compliance with the ethical standards of Luther Seminary and its Institutional Review Board (IRB). As the sole researcher, I made every effort to ensure that all participants in the project were treated respectfully. This project relied on voluntary participation and I obtained proper consent from all participants prior to their completion of the questionnaire and before each focus group interview. The same focus group protocol was used for each congregation interviewed. Recordings of the interviews were made with the knowledge and informed consent of all interviewees.

I was responsible for maintaining confidentiality throughout the project. All proper names including participants, the synod, congregations, and their locations were changed to pseudonyms to protect their identity. Only my advisors, Dr. Craig Van Gelder and Dr. Alvin Luedke, and I have access to the data from the questionnaires and interviews, and I keep them locked in a secure file at Ponderosa Lutheran Church. These data will be kept until May 31, 2019 and will then be destroyed.

Participants were made aware of the anticipated benefits of this research. These include greater awareness of our synod's involvement with creation care and the possibility of further conversation and actions within congregations with the support of the synod creation care team. A final copy of the thesis has been shared with the synod office and the synod creation care team.

As someone who cares deeply about creation care, I took appropriate steps to limit the effects of personal bias during this project. This included cultivating self-awareness throughout the invitation and administration of the questionnaire and the conducting of the focus group interviews. I made every effort to ensure that non-participants and participants with whom I disagreed received no negative effects from me as a pastoral colleague or synod creation care team co-chair.

### **Summary**

This thesis project explores many facets of creation care for the missional church and discusses evidence for them in the perceptions and practices of congregational leaders and members of the Living Water Synod. The theoretical perspectives of sustainability, globalization, and global civil society position this study in conversation with scientists, businesses, and organizations, seeing them as potential ecological and missional partners. The biblical perspectives place humanity in reciprocal relationship with nature as an active subject and in an empowering relationship of participating in Christ's stewardship of all that belongs to God. The theological perspectives of perichoresis, eschatology, and sacramental imagination situate the care and redemption of all creation firmly within the biblical witness and theological tradition and at the same time call for the rediscovery of such deep spiritual resources to reimagine humanity's relationship with the rest of creation, to sustain an ecological reformation, and to inspire creative expression of the divine presence active in the world. Each of these lenses is discussed in further detail in chapters 2 and 3. We begin in the next chapter with theoretical perspectives.



## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

The well-being of the earth is clearly a global concern. From local to international levels, scientific reports as well as political, social, and economic factors are relevant to how people in the church frame their understanding of the natural world and discern how to respond to its challenges. This chapter discusses three key theoretical perspectives that influenced the research design of this thesis: sustainability, globalization, and global civil society.

Environmental sustainability views the earth as an interdependent system of geological and biological processes on which human society depends and within which action is taken to ensure the welfare of those processes so that human society can exist indefinitely within them. A scientific understanding of sustainability is essential for this research project not only as a basis for assessing the creation care practices of survey respondents but also as a non-religious concept for informing congregations' possible collaboration with other organizations to address environmental and social concerns.

Globalization is an emerging phenomenon of social, economic, political, and cultural interrelatedness worldwide. The Christian church itself is global in scope and composition. This section describes how certain models for understanding and responding to globalization are more environmentally sustainable than others. It also shows that even as the church has been in the process of shaping globalization, it is also being shaped by it.

Global civil society is the public participation of people through non-profit and non-governmental organizations toward the development of better conditions throughout the world. The church itself—understood as both congregations and associations of congregations—has been seen as one such organization that participates with God in civil society in the ways it serves its community.<sup>1</sup> Yet the church alone cannot address the challenges faced by the earth. Members might work for more sustainable changes from within for-profit companies and pursue governmental advocacy toward stronger environmental policies. But congregations must also begin to discern the potential for civil society organizations, especially in their local areas but also beyond them, to be partners in creating a more ecologically stable future.

Together, these three lenses provide a theoretical grounding for viewing earth stewardship and the *missio Dei*. They enable the church to see its creation care practices and perceptions in conversation with scientific findings and within a wider context of many organizations and global factors. They help the church to recognize the urgency and complexity of the issues facing the planet and also to imagine possibilities for ecological innovation and collaboration. More importantly, they remind the church of the broad arena in which God is at work and compel us to participate with God at local and international levels in the care and redemption of all God has made.

### **Sustainability**

There are many definitions and assumptions that characterize the idea of environmental sustainability. In concept or in practice, the answer to the question, “What

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<sup>1</sup> Simpson, “God in Civil Society: Vocational Imagination, Spiritual Presence, and Ecclesial Discernment.”

is sustainability?” may differ greatly whether one asks a business owner, a city administrator, or a scientist. Even within such categories, there is likely to be individual variety and nuance. The theoretical understanding of sustainability in this research project is based on The Natural Step.<sup>2</sup> Originally conceived in 1988 by Swedish oncologist Karl-Henrik Robèrt, this framework evolved through a process of consensus building with scientists and business people, engagement of households and schools across Sweden, and continued refinement through international dialogue, pilot projects, case studies, and trainings.<sup>3</sup> Cultivating a shared language of sustainability is one of the goals of the training. So an advantage of using this framework to deepen the understanding of sustainability for this project is the common understanding shared by many scientists and across organizations, businesses, and municipalities that have participated in The Natural Step training worldwide.<sup>4</sup>

### System Conditions for Sustainability

*Systems thinking* is at the heart of The Natural Step framework, viewing the ecosphere as a system of biological cycles supported by geological cycles in which all human activity occurs (figure 1).<sup>5</sup> Several things characterize this system: (1) It is open with respect to energy; i.e. it receives energy from the sun and gives off radiation. (2) It is

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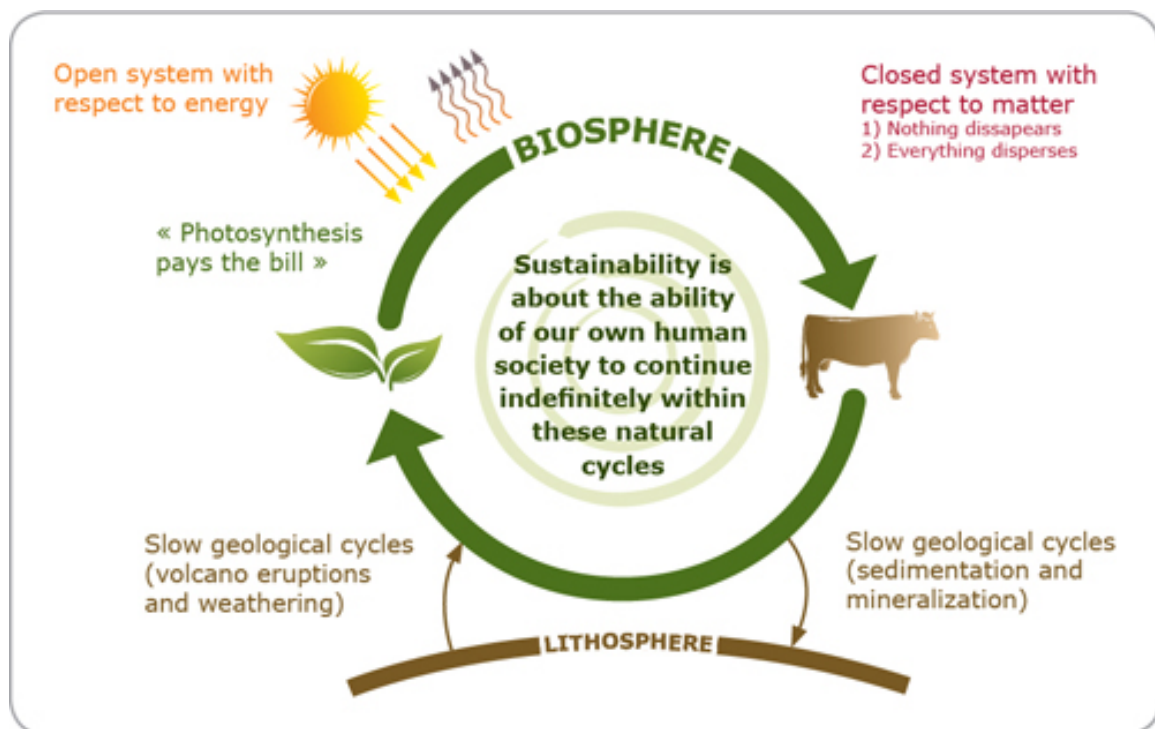
<sup>2</sup> Karl-Henrik Robèrt, *The Natural Step: A Framework for Achieving Sustainability in Organizations*, Innovations in Management Series, edited by Kellie Wardman O'Reilly (Cambridge, MA: Pegasus Communications, Inc., 1997). See also <http://www.naturalstep.org> (accessed March 16, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Karl-Henrik Robèrt, *The Natural Step Story: Seeding a Quiet Revolution* (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> These include Whistler, BC, Madison, WI, Duluth, MN, and Swedish eco-municipalities, as well as businesses like IKEA and Panasonic, nonprofit organizations, and foundations.

<sup>5</sup> The Natural Step, “The Science Behind Our Approach,” The Natural Step, 2015, <http://www.naturalstep.org/en/the-science-behind-our-approach> (accessed March 16, 2015).

closed with respect to matter; i.e., compounds either derived directly from nature or man-made may be reconfigured over time but they do not disappear (there is no “away”). (3) Entropy drives everything toward disintegration and dispersion. (4) Photosynthesis counteracts the force of entropy by using outside energy to restructure compounds into greater order and complexity. (5) Human beings exist physically within relatively quick biological cycles shown by the relationship between plants and animals. (6) The biosphere interacts with the lithosphere through relatively slow geological cycles. The Natural Step understands *sustainability* to be the capacity of human society to exist indefinitely within these cycles of nature.

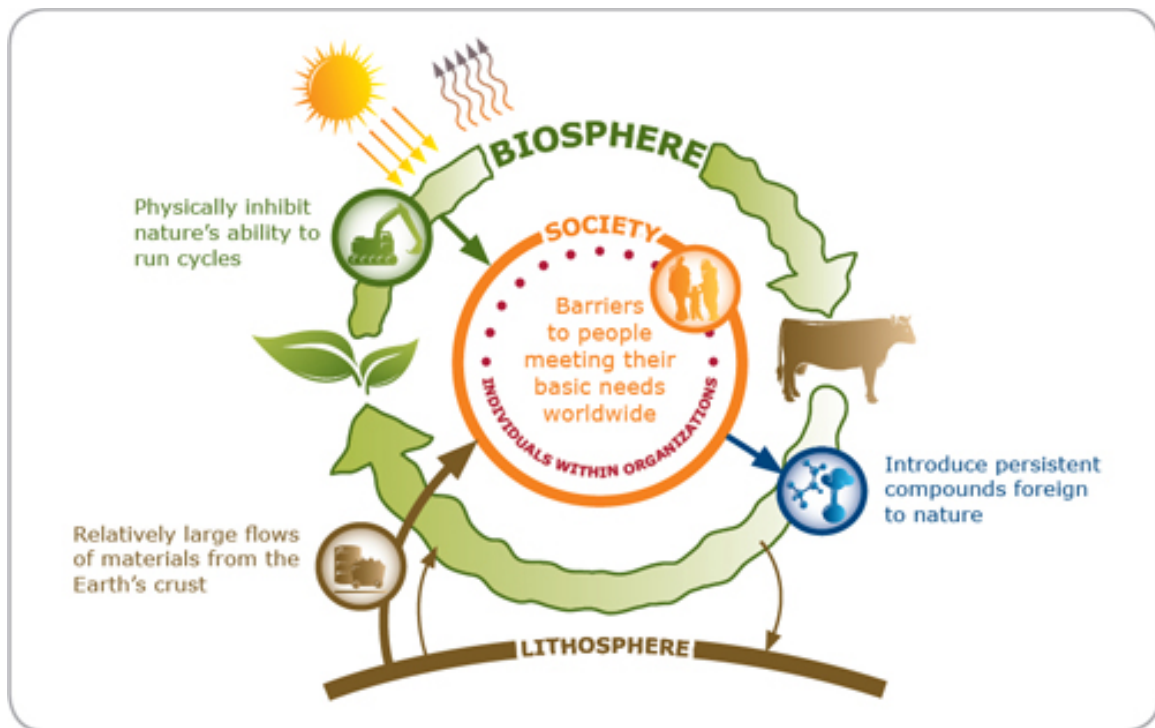


**Figure 1. Cycles of Nature<sup>6</sup>**

The root causes of *unsustainability* can be seen in the human impact on biological and geological cycles in three increasingly systematic ways (figure 2). First, we are

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

extracting relatively large amounts of material from the earth's crust such as fossil fuels, indicated in the figure by the arrow from the lithosphere to the social sphere. Second, we are introducing synthetic compounds that are foreign to nature and that nature cannot break down, depicted in the figure by the arrow from society into the biosphere. Third, we are inhibiting the natural cycles themselves through physical degradation such as pollution and deforestation, illustrated in the figure by the distortion of the biosphere itself. The framework also identifies a fourth, social element of unsustainability in the systemic barriers that keep people from meeting their basic needs. These unsustainable trends are accelerating with population growth, increasing consumption patterns, and the decline of natural resources and services.



**Figure 2. How We Influence Nature's Cycles<sup>7</sup>**

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Complementing its analysis of the root causes of unsustainability, The Natural

Step articulates a vision of sustainability through *Four System Conditions*:

In a sustainable society, nature is not subject to systematically increasing:

1. concentrations of substances extracted from the Earth's crust
2. concentrations of substances produced by society
3. degradation by physical means,  
and, in that society,
4. people are not subject to conditions that systematically undermine their capacity to meet their needs.<sup>8</sup>

This is the scientific basis for The Natural Step, outlining the necessary and sufficient conditions to achieve sustainability. Framed as principles, the system conditions read:

To become a sustainable society we must eliminate our contributions to ...

1. the *systematic increase* of concentrations of substances extracted from the Earth's crust (for example, heavy metals and fossil fuels)
2. the *systematic increase* of concentrations of substances produced by society (for example, plastics, dioxins, PCBs and DDT)
3. the *systematic* physical degradation of nature and natural processes (for example, over harvesting forests, destroying habitat and overfishing); and ...
4. conditions that *systematically* undermine people's capacity to meet their basic human needs (for example, unsafe working conditions and not enough pay to live on).<sup>9</sup>

By connecting the system conditions to such examples, we can begin to see the implications for congregations seeking to assess their own practices in their church buildings and grounds, homes, and communities, and to take steps to become more sustainable.

For this research project, The Natural Step understanding of sustainability helped with the framing of questions to assess the direct ecological impact (positive and negative) of individual and congregational practices. For example, replacing a church

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<sup>8</sup> James and Lahti, *The Natural Step for Communities: How Cities and Towns Can Change to Sustainable Practices*, 23.

<sup>9</sup> The Natural Step, "The Four System Conditions of a Sustainable Society."

furnace with a more efficient one, recycling, composting food waste, serving fair trade coffee, and advocating for social justice can be seen as assets to meeting one or more of the system conditions. The unsustainability of certain practices can also be understood more objectively through system conditions that are well-defined.

### Sustainable Strategies, Actions, and Tools

The Natural Step clarifies different levels of thinking and assessment in its *Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development*, so that an organization's language and actions can be mutually supportive and consistent with the vision and conditions for sustainability.<sup>10</sup> We have just looked at two levels of that framework: the *systems level*, seeing the earth as a system and recognizing current systematically threatening trends, and the *success level*, defining the necessary and sufficient conditions or principles to achieve sustainability. At the next levels, practitioners of The Natural Step consider context-specific *strategies*, *actions*, and *tools* that help an organization conform to those principles.<sup>11</sup>

The *strategic level* follows the "ABCD process" of sustainable decision-making.<sup>12</sup> This process begins with an *Awareness* of the big picture from understanding ecological trends and sustainable principles, taking a *Baseline* analysis of the organization's current practices that violate or support the Four System Conditions for Sustainability, and creating a *Compelling vision* of their sustainable organization or brainstorming *Creative solutions* by which the organization could fulfill the conditions. Participants then *Decide*

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> The Natural Step, "The 5 Level Framework," The Natural Step, 2015, <http://www.thenaturalstep.org/sustainability/5-levels/> (accessed March 16, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> Robèrt, *The Natural Step Story: Seeding a Quiet Revolution*, 104-106.

on priorities through the exercise of “backcasting,” projecting backwards from a future vision of sustainability to the present and taking steps that would move the organization toward that vision.<sup>13</sup> Those steps would characterize the *action level*.

For congregations, cultivating Awareness might occur through sermons or emerge in the education of children and adults, an energy audit or questions about cleaning supplies might be part of a Baseline analysis, scripture and theology could be part of describing the Compelling vision for sustainability, and discernment and prayer could enhance the Decision-making stage. This thesis explored to what extent such practices were occurring in congregations. Finally, individuals bring a variety of skills, resources, and insights that complement the sustainability framework and become *tools* that both inform the actions and help reinforce the concepts articulated in the preceding levels. Examples of such tools might be anything from scientific expertise in the congregation to social statements, from carbon footprint computation websites to gardening techniques.

#### Relating Social and Economic Factors to Sustainability

Recall that the fourth system condition for sustainability involves eliminating contributions to patterns that systematically undermine the capacity for people to meet their needs worldwide. To articulate these basic needs, The Natural Step draws on the work of Chilean economist Manfred Max-Neef, who identifies nine fundamental needs consistent across cultures: subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, creation, leisure, identity, and freedom.<sup>14</sup> “Max-Neef points out that these fundamental

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 102. See also The Natural Step, “What Is Backcasting,” The Natural Step, 2015, <http://www.thenaturalstep.org/sustainability/backcasting/> (accessed March 16, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> Manfred Max-Neef, “Development and Human Needs,” in *Real-Life Economics: Understanding Wealth Creation*, ed. Paul Ekins and Manfred Max-Neef (London, UK: Routledge, 1992), 199.



human needs cannot be substituted one for another and that a lack of any of them represents a poverty of some kind.”<sup>15</sup> Alternative approaches to conceptualize the social dimension of sustainability have been proposed, even within The Natural Step community.<sup>16</sup> Yet significant to The Natural Step and to this research project is the idea that social needs are not put at odds with environmental needs but are seen as an integral component of the definition of sustainability.

The Natural Step also brings economic concerns into dialogue with sustainability. The broader term for seeking to create favorable outcomes for environmental, social, and economic objectives is *Sustainable Development*, articulated on the world stage in 1987 by the United Nations Commission on Environment and Development. Also known as the Brundtland Commission, it states, “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”<sup>17</sup> Sustainable Development is sometimes elaborated through the phrase “triple bottom line,” coined by John Elkington, who suggests that businesses must measure their success in terms of 3 *E*’s (or 3 *P*’s): not only with the conventional bottom line of financial or *Economic* performance (expressed as Profits), but also by their impact on the *Environment* (or Planet) and concerns of social *Equity* (i.e., People).<sup>18</sup> Here we see

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<sup>15</sup> The Natural Step Canada, “The Four System Conditions of a Sustainable Society,” The Natural Step Canada, 2015, <http://www.naturalstep.ca/four-system-conditions> (accessed March 16, 2015).

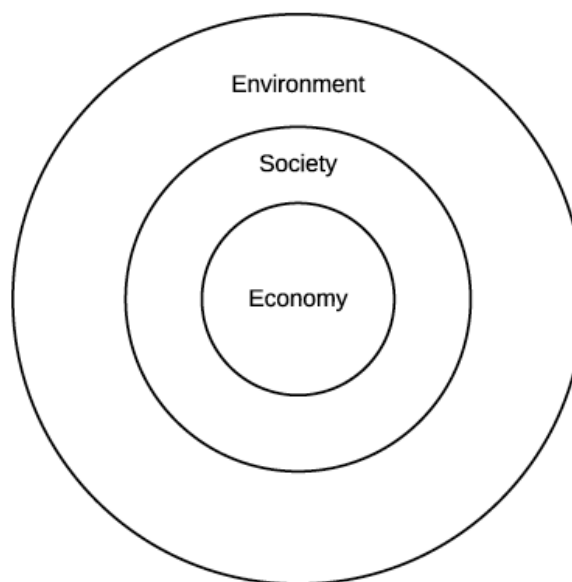
<sup>16</sup> Merlina Missimer, “The Social Dimension of Strategic Sustainable Development” (Licentiate Thesis, Blekinge Institute of Technology, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> “Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future,” (United Nations, 1987), Part I, Ch. 2, par. 1. See <http://www.un-documents.net/wced-ocf.htm> (accessed March 16, 2015). See also James and Lahti, *The Natural Step for Communities: How Cities and Towns Can Change to Sustainable Practices*, 16.

<sup>18</sup> John Elkington, *Cannibals with Forks: The Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business*, Conscientious Commerce (Gabriola Island, BC; Stony Creek, CT: New Society Publishers, 1998).

the connection of social equity to the fourth system condition of sustainability in The Natural Step. Working often with corporations, proponents of Sustainable Development try to dispel the myths that sustainability is bad for business and will only cost more. Former IBM executive Bob Willard, for example, cites several case studies in which implementing systematic changes toward the sustainable principles in The Natural Step has, in the long run, lowered costs and increased social well-being while helping the environment.<sup>19</sup>

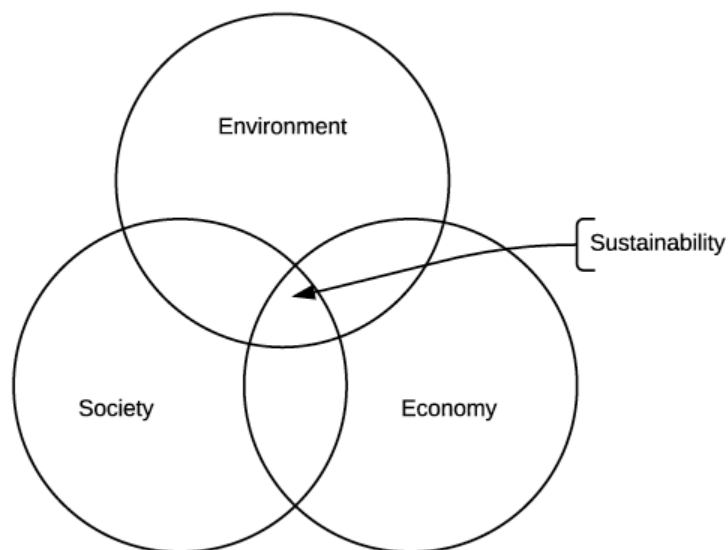
*Nested circles* best illustrate this triple emphasis, with the economy as a subset within society, and society as embedded in the (natural) environment (figure 3).



**Figure 3. Nested Circles**

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<sup>19</sup> Bob Willard, *The Sustainability Advantage: Seven Business Case Benefits of a Triple Bottom Line* (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2002).



**Figure 4. Conventional Model**

A conventional model of circles with those same entities depicts sustainability as where the three overlap (figure 4). But as Willard points out, a circular model with overlapping arcs wrongly assumes that there are places where the economy exists independently from the society and the environment.<sup>20</sup> By contrast, the nesting image properly places the economy and society as existing within and depending on the ecosphere. As the economic subsystem gets larger, its impact on society and natural systems increases. At the same time, societies on which economic models depend can change them if they are not working equitably or sustainably.

How congregations relate social and economic factors to sustainability was a significant consideration for this research project. Is the well-being of the local economy considered to be in conflict or harmony with environmental sustainability? Are major employers in the area seen as potential partners or adversaries in debates about the long

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<sup>20</sup> Bob Willard, "3 Sustainability Models," Sustainability Advantage, 2010, <http://sustainabilityadvantage.com/2010/07/20/3-sustainability-models/> (accessed March 16, 2015). See also Willard, *The Sustainability Advantage: Seven Business Case Benefits of a Triple Bottom Line*, 146.

term sustainability of the area? In terms of the triple bottom line, social equity may be an important value for many congregations, but is environmental impact? The nested circles model helps cultivate a broader picture of the society and the ecosphere as the location in which the church does every aspect of ministry. It supports spatially the idea that all faith practices are done within the context of creation and that attention to our relationship with creation is integral to everything we do as church. Those who already see a connection between faith and social justice, for example, can be encouraged to see those concerns embedded in the larger sphere of creation justice.

### **Globalization**

Globalization is the emerging explosion of technological and social processes increasing the connectivity of economic, political, and cultural forces throughout the world. We may think of it as a relatively new phenomenon but, as political science scholar Manfred Steger ably describes, its first phases can be traced to the transmigration of people between continents, early trade routes, and the rise of nation states.<sup>21</sup> Further developments in transportation, communication, and technology have resulted in the creation and multiplication of new networks that cut across traditional boundaries.

Key to this concept is recognizing the interdependence of local and global concerns, which is an important capacity this research project explored. Anthony Giddens, Former Director of the London School of Economics, defines globalization as an “intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice

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<sup>21</sup> Manfred B. Steger, *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction*, Very Short Introductions 86, 3. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

versa.”<sup>22</sup> Steger also highlights the emergence and growth of *global consciousness*: “Without erasing local and national attachments, the compression of the world into a single place has increasingly made global the frame of reference for human thought and action.”<sup>23</sup> Such global consciousness continues to be shaped by the Internet and international events like the modern Olympic Games, as well as worldwide threats of terrorism, epidemics, and climate change. According to ethicist Peter Singer, the reality of globalization requires a morality whose circle of concern is larger than tribal or national interests: “how well we come through the era of globalization (perhaps whether we come through it at all) will depend on how we respond ethically to the idea that we live in one world.”<sup>24</sup> Not least among the influences on global consciousness is the photograph taken by astronaut William Anders on December 24, 1968, showing the blue and white swirl of earth rising above a lunar landscape. According to NASA, *Earthrise* is “one of the most reproduced space photographs of all time” and “has been credited for inspiring the beginning of the environmental movement.”<sup>25</sup> This theoretical lens provided the basis for questions that recognize global awareness and local participation.

### Theories of Globalization

Perhaps the most significant dimension characterizing the contemporary period of globalization that pertains to this research is the emergence of the *global economic order*

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<sup>22</sup> Quoted without reference in *ibid.*, 13.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Singer, *One World: The Ethics of Globalization*, The Terry Lectures (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 13.

<sup>25</sup> NASA, “Apollo Astronaut Shares Story of Nasa's Earthrise Photo,” NASA, 2015, <http://www.nasa.gov/centers/johnson/home/earthrise.html> (accessed April 11, 2016).

after World War II, an economic order in which American society is deeply embedded. International economic institutions now known as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO) were initially created to help rebuild postwar Europe. Soon afterward, the scope of these institutions expanded to include financial assistance for developing countries, often in exchange for natural resources. When state control of industrial and international capitalist movements failed to provide the competitive responsiveness desired by consumers in an age of increased flows of world goods, however, another economic approach emerged known as *neoliberalism*. Its concrete strategies include:

1. Privatization of public enterprises.
2. Deregulation of the economy.
3. Liberalization of trade and industry.
4. Massive tax cuts.
5. “Monetarist” measures to keep inflation in check, even at the risk of increasing unemployment.
6. Strict control of organized labor.
7. The reduction of public expenditures, particularly social spending.
8. The down-sizing of government.
9. The expansion of international markets.
10. The removal of controls on global financial flows.<sup>26</sup>

Through neoliberal policies, transnational corporations have risen in assets and influence on a par with nation states, and the geographical concentration of their headquarters reflects an asymmetry of power relations between the global North and South.<sup>27</sup> The Global Financial Crisis of 2007-2009 showed the instability of a deregulated global financial infrastructure, with many countries experiencing the negative effects of global interdependence in lasting economic recession. But despite important critiques,

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<sup>26</sup> Steger, *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction*, 42.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-55.

which we discuss below, neoliberalism remains the dominant economic paradigm in this globalizing age, perpetuating wealth disparity, undermining sustainable development, and resisting environmental regulation. Understanding these patterns of globalization helps explicate the systemically unsustainable trends identified by The Natural Step above.

What is the faithful role of the church in the midst of these trends? Christianity has already played a significant role in globalization, though some models of the church's worldwide mission, based largely on the Great Commission from Matthew 28, have operated symbiotically with colonialism and dominant, paternalistic theories of globalization. As theologians Neil Ormerod and Shane Clifton observe,

Christianity is not a spectator to globalization but one of its agents, one of the forces at work which have extended interconnection between peoples, shared ideas and promoted social, political and cultural links. Some have even “credited” Christianity with the rise of capitalism in the West.<sup>28</sup>

What is needed, they rightly suggest, is “a critique of the way in which the political, economic and technological dimensions of globalization are giving rise to injustice, poverty and environmental destruction, and an affirmation of how they can be reframed to reverse the problem.”<sup>29</sup>

*In Search of the Good Life: The Ethics of Globalization* by Rebecca Todd Peters provides an excellent evaluation of neoliberalism and other theories of globalization from a Christian feminist perspective. It shows how the meaning and impact of globalization represent different realities to different people, depending on their social location. In addition to neoliberalism, Peters identifies three more theories of globalization: social

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<sup>28</sup> Neil Ormerod and Shane Clifton, *Globalization and the Mission of the Church*, Ecclesiological Investigations 6 (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), viii.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 4.

development, earthism, and post-colonialism. Within each theory, she traces how different worldviews, actions and inactions, systems of infrastructure, and resource consumption not only impact human society and the environment locally but also have global consequences.

Simply stated, the version of globalization that we embrace—as people, as countries, as institutions, as businesses—has profound implications for how planetary, cultural, and human survival will take place in the twenty-first century.<sup>30</sup>

The ethical framework Peters develops asks three questions of each theory. First, how does it understand the context of moral agency? That is, who has voice and power to influence outcomes and why? Second, how does a theory view the *telos*—the chief end or purpose—of humanity? Third, for each theory, what constitutes human flourishing?<sup>31</sup> Each answer is a window into a theory's core values and how it envisions the good life.

Peters describes herself as Christian, feminist, and materialist (i.e. grounding theories in the material lives of actual people rather than being content to stay at a level of abstraction). Her own position favors a democratized understanding of power as the preferred context of moral agency, caring for the planet as humanity's chief purpose, and the social well-being of all people as the basis for human flourishing. This research project shares these preferences, which also form Peters' plumb line for assessing the four competing theories of globalization. A summary of her interpretation of these questions in light of the four theories is shown in table 1.

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<sup>30</sup> Peters, *In Search of the Good Life: The Ethics of Globalization*, 10.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.



**Table 1. Theories of Globalization**

	Neoliberalism	Social Development	Earthism/ Localization	Post-Colonialism
What is the context of moral agency?	individualism	responsibility	mutuality	community
What is the telos of humanity?	prosperity	progress	justice	culture
What constitutes human flourishing?	freedom	equity	sustainability	communal autonomy

At the heart of *neoliberalism*, Peters suggests, is the illusion of the human being as *Homo economicus*: “an atomistic, male individual who exists outside of time and space, with no obligations to family or community that might impinge on his freedom to pursue prosperity.”<sup>32</sup> In reality existing only for the global elite, this approach increases the rights and authority of multinational corporations while compromising the power of local governments and indigenous communities to participate in decision-making to determine their own future. Not only does this model neglect the reality experienced by most of the world’s population, including women, the poor, and marginalized, but it also promotes endless economic growth based on a level of consumption that the earth cannot sustain. For Peters, the neoliberal vision of the good life is, therefore,

morally bankrupt on the grounds that it is incompatible with the image of the good life rooted in the Christian tradition that is oriented toward caring for our neighbor and for creation in addition to ourselves. These three moral norms—individualism, prosperity, and freedom ... somehow work together to create a community of people who are more concerned about their own welfare and freedom to do what they want than what will advance the common good.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 177.

The prevalence of neoliberalism in American society presents a daunting challenge for congregations, whose members consciously or unconsciously support the power of multinational corporations through their consumption, investment, and employment. In contrast to the individualism and freedom of the neoliberal vision, this thesis project asked participants whether, for the sake of the global community, the U.S. should reduce its carbon emissions even if other countries do not do the same right away. It asked about participants' political affiliations as a way to compare the creation care perceptions of those who identify themselves as Republican, a party that tends to promote privatization and deregulation, with overall respondents' views.<sup>34</sup> On a local level, it asked whether participants believe they can promote environmental stewardship in their workplaces and whether they seek out local alternatives to national or international goods, e.g. food.

The *social development* theory of globalization stresses state responsibility for social welfare and represents the dominant alternative or reforming economic worldview whose ultimate goal is social equity through progress. Its ideological roots can be traced to British economist John Maynard Keynes, whose philosophy was instrumental in addressing the problems of the Great Depression. He championed public-work projects, arguing that if private corporations were unable to initiate investment in the economy then the government should intervene to fill that role: "What he offered was a correction to the laissez-faire economists who argued that the markets worked best when governments left them alone."<sup>35</sup> Social development theory proponents find motivation in the moral obligation to help the global poor and hold the assumption that the way to help

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<sup>34</sup> See, e.g., Neela Banerjee, "G O P Primed to Blunt Environmental Rules," *Duluth News Tribune*, November 9, 2014 A3.

<sup>35</sup> Peters, *In Search of the Good Life: The Ethics of Globalization*, 77.

the so-called *two-thirds world* is through development. While this seems a noble cause, social development is found wanting when measured against Peters' plumb line. She shows that the concept of responsibility for others can lead to a sense of paternalism that privileges outside experts over local communities. Moreover, the stated goal of equity often does not match reality, where the benefits of economic development are far from distributed equally. Finally, like neoliberalism, social development is rooted in classical economics and is fueled by a concept of economic growth without explicit consideration of the planet's capacity to meet its demands.

Peters concludes that the two dominant theories of globalization are based upon a capitalist model of industrialization that is environmentally unsustainable. Pursuing these theories has privileged developed countries, favored experts rather than local community leaders, resulted in gross economic inequalities, and placed a heavy burden on indigenous peoples and on the biosphere. However, she argues, a serious engagement with the two resistance theories—earthism and post-colonialism—could help transform globalization's future toward a democratized understanding of power, caring for the planet, and the social well-being of all people.

An *earthist* theory of globalization pulls together different voices that offer an alternative to *economism*, the idea in the first two theories that the expansion of the economy should be the primary political and social consideration. Peters shows how economism values the accumulation of wealth over people and the planet and argues that its promises of the elimination of poverty have not materialized even during periods of economic growth.<sup>36</sup> She adds to these critiques how the dominant economic growth

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 109.

models are perpetuating environmental degradation through patterns of overconsumption, environmental racism (i.e. the reality that the ethnically marginalized bear the brunt of exposure to toxic waste and poor living conditions), and a shift from organic subsistence farming to genetically engineered crops for export. Peters rightly identifies as *anthropocentrism* the root of these patterns that are ignoring the interdependence of humanity with all life, increasing pollution, threatening the Earth's biodiversity, and diminishing the capacity of soils, air, and water.

It is critical for Western human society to work toward a transformation of our worldview that will allow us to see other species, as well as the natural resources of our ecosystem, not as objects, but as subjects that possess an intrinsic value that qualifies any instrumental value they might hold for human purposes.<sup>37</sup>

Earthist proponents call for a future of smaller economies that prioritize a turn toward *bioregionalism* and cultivating local relationships between producers and consumers. This research project asked questions about such relationships, as well as synod leaders' and members' concerns regarding global warming, loss of biodiversity, agriculture and water issues. It also explored the contrast between anthropocentrism and interdependence through questions about respondents' views of humanity in relation to the rest of creation.

*Post-colonialism* is the fourth theory of globalization Peters explores. Its adherents view the dominance of multinational corporations as a form of neo-colonialism and emphasize the empowerment of indigenous and local grassroots efforts to mobilize resistance and promote alternatives. In the dominant models of economic globalization, especially neoliberalism, Peters traces how multinational corporations seek to avoid taxes and ensure their own rights independently of democratic processes that may or may not

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 27.

exist in other countries, how profits tend not to be distributed evenly or reinvested in local economies, how free trade forces small farmers out of business to rely on wage labor, and how the financial indebtedness of poorer nations is being perpetuated by a capitalist system that is ethnically Eurocentric. These economic burdens are compounded by the colonialism and commodification of culture through “Americanizing” trends:

When people buy a Coke or McDonald’s hamburger, particularly in the “two-thirds” world, they are attempting to buy access to U.S. culture. The message that has been sent by the media and that is quickly being absorbed by global consumers is that culture is not something indigenous to a particular group of people, but can be bought and sold.<sup>38</sup>

This combination of unfettered capitalism and Americanization devalues the uniqueness of local cultures and challenges traditional ways of life in many rural communities. In response, post-colonialism reinterprets globalization as global solidarity, championing the awareness of human diversity and of peoples’ movements where strength is rooted in the autonomy and moral agency of the community. With the awareness of Living Water Synod’s global connections through companion synod relationships, the ELCA World Hunger Appeal and Disaster Response, and Lutheran World Relief’s fair trade coffee and chocolate projects, this research project explored this dimension of globalization, asking whether and how these relationships of global solidarity impacted respondents’ earthkeeping perceptions and practices.

Peters is by no means alone in calling for a different approach to the theories of neoliberalism and development. Ethicist Peter Singer and political scientist Manfred Steger also document the need for an ecological and social paradigm shift in global

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 151.

economics.<sup>39</sup> Former chief economist of the World Bank Joseph Stiglitz adds his lament, saying that in a competitive world economic interests often trump ecological concerns: “A mining company that is willing to skimp on safety and environmental safeguards will be able to underbid one of comparable efficiency that pursues sound environmental policies.”<sup>40</sup> He notes further that companies are becoming adept at “image manipulation,” so that by hiring public relations firms “even the worst polluters and those with the worst labor records” can be seen as concerned for the environment and workers’ rights.<sup>41</sup> Promoting an eco-friendly image while evading deeper transformative changes is known as “greenwashing.”<sup>42</sup>

Peters recognizes that it is almost impossible to escape the dominant models of globalization. Yet, for the sake of justice and the well-being of the planet, she concludes, “a healthy and sustainable life on this planet requires a transformation of dominant ideologies as well as the unsustainable habits and lifestyles of the global elite.”<sup>43</sup> For this research project, Peters provided a helpful foundation for assessing globalization theories and articulated well the urgent challenge for Western citizens to face the reality of our overconsumption and examine more deeply our society’s participation in systems and structures that systematically harm the environment and perpetuate the poverty of others.

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<sup>39</sup> See chapters “One Atmosphere” and “One Economy” in Singer, *One World: The Ethics of Globalization*. See also chapter 5, “The Cultural Dimension of Globalization” and chapter 6, “The Ecological Dimension of Globalization” in Steger, *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction*.

<sup>40</sup> Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Making Globalization Work* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006), 199.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> This term is widely used. See Pong Leung and Margo Schulte Long, “How Can Sustainability Help You Create a Brand That Differentiates and Avoids Greenwashing?,” Toronto Sustainability Speaker Series, <http://tsss.ca/2011/06/how-can-sustainability-help-you-create-a-brand-that-differentiates-and-avoids-greenwashing/> (accessed April 11, 2016).

<sup>43</sup> Peters, *In Search of the Good Life: The Ethics of Globalization*, 208.

Peters' framework of various globalization theories helped me to assess the functional perspectives of the people I interviewed. She also proved a helpful dialogue partner in envisioning a missional response to globalization. In contrast to a colonial understanding of global mission, the missional church understands itself as connected worldwide through reciprocal relationships of accompaniment through companion synod and friendship congregation relationships and harbors sensitivity to the alternative voices and resistance theories in the globalization debate. As Christian ethicist Max Stackhouse observes, globalization can be seen as synonymous with mission in this age, but only when it "demands the recognition of a wider public, one that comprehends and relativizes all the particular contexts in which we live."<sup>44</sup> The actions, inactions, and perceptions that are cultivated and expressed by congregations have implications both within and far beyond their communities that either perpetuate or counteract dominant globalizing powers and systems that oppress people and the earth.

### **Global Civil Society**

Global civil society refers to the public participation of people through non-profit and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) toward the development of better living conditions throughout the world. Responding to globalization at the same time as depending on it, global civil society is what Helmut Anheier et al. describe as "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,

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<sup>44</sup> Max L. Stackhouse et al., *God and Globalization*, Theology for the Twenty-First Century, edited by Max L. Stackhouse, 4 vols., vol. 4: Globalization and Grace (New York: Continuum, 2007), 77.

polities, and economies.”<sup>45</sup> The prevalence and growth of associations in global civil society, buffeted by technology and funding streams, indicates increasing potential for people to address issues of social justice and the common good through self-organization independent of private corporations or government involvement. While the element of advocacy remains, global civil society’s shared values of equality, solidarity, and democratic engagement have targeted practical objectives, including ecological ones, through participatory action:

In recent decades, fewer and fewer people have been joining political parties, and more have joined environmental, peace, and human rights groups like Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth, Amnesty International, and the anti-nuclear movement. The name increasingly given to this phenomenon is “civil society.”<sup>46</sup>

### Globalization and Global Civil Society

Discussions about globalization sometimes point to global civil society as the arena for hopeful transformation. Manfred Steger describes global civil society also as “justice globalism” and heir to the social justice movement:

It emerged in the 1990s as a progressive network of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that see themselves as a “global civil society” dedicated to the establishment of a more equitable relationship between the global North and South, the protection of the global environment, fair trade and international labor issues, human rights, and women’s issues.<sup>47</sup>

In articulating the need for and scope of *public theology* at the end of four volumes on *God and Globalization*, Max Stackhouse suggests, “one of the tasks of theology is to work with philosophy, science, and social analysis to form and sustain the moral

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<sup>45</sup> Helmut Anheier, Marlies Glasius, and Mary Kaldor, “Introducing Global Civil Society,” in *Yearbook* (London: School of Economics and Political Science, 2001), 17.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>47</sup> Steger, *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction*, 118.



architecture of civil society.”<sup>48</sup> He further believes that globalization “may well be the new form of missions, a mandate for our time to invite all the peoples of the world to become participants in a global civil society” that is marked by their empowerment.<sup>49</sup>

Rebecca Todd Peters’ concluding remarks on the ethics of globalization call for reimagining the role of economics, rethinking the role of politics, and revisioning the role of civil society.<sup>50</sup> By this she means confronting policies that put profit making over people and the earth, targeting the increasing political power of corporations through campaign contributions, and calling for the rebuilding of authentic community and grassroots mobilizing for the public good. For the church to participate in a restorative transformation of globalization, she rightly observes that the way forward for all Christians must begin with critical introspection regarding our personal assumptions, lifestyles, and practices and our societal participation in broader systems that oppress the earth and the global poor. It is under the heading of revisioning civil society that she writes about “the roles and responsibilities of the institutional church in moving globalization processes and strategies toward a justice-and life-oriented model of globalization and away from the dominant forms of globalization rooted in individualism and greed.”<sup>51</sup> Questions in the quantitative survey of this thesis project, as well as the process of participating in the survey itself, invited respondents into such a critical introspection of creation care practices and perceptions. Some were framed with

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<sup>48</sup> Stackhouse et al., *God and Globalization*, 240.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 246.

<sup>50</sup> Peters, *In Search of the Good Life: The Ethics of Globalization*, 193-206.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 204.

possibilities intended to inspire congregational imagination toward a more justice-and life-oriented model of participation in global civil society.

### Center for Civil Society Studies

The Center for Civil Society Studies at Johns Hopkins University has provided notable leadership in researching the interplay of government, business, and civil society organizations to address public problems. Since 1991, its Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project (CNP) has collected data on the role of nonprofit organizations and their local significance in a growing number of countries, forty-five at the time of this writing. This collaborative project has provided valuable comparative measures for nonprofit philanthropy and volunteering for the United Nations, governments, and other agencies. Its methodology employs an International Classification of Nonprofit Organizations (ICNPO) so that appropriate comparisons can be made between similar nonprofits across national contexts. Within this classification, under the heading “Religion,” the CNP lists both “congregations” and “associations of congregations,” designating them as part of the nonprofit sector and as civil society organizations.<sup>52</sup>

The ICNPO also lists several possible categories of nonprofit organizations pertaining to earth stewardship. Under the classification “Environment,” it includes the following subcategories:

*Pollution abatement and control.* Organizations that promote clean air, clean water, reducing and preventing noise pollution, radiation control, treatment of

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<sup>52</sup> Center for Civil Society Studies, “Methodology and Data Sources: The Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project,” 22, <http://ccss.jhu.edu/publications-findings?did=105> (accessed March 16, 2015). Congregations are defined as “Churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, shrines, monasteries, seminaries, and similar organizations promoting religious beliefs and administering religious services and rituals.” Associations of congregations are identified as “Associations and auxiliaries of religious congregations and organizations supporting and promoting religious beliefs, services and rituals.”

hazardous wastes and toxic substances, solid waste management, and recycling programs.

*Natural resources conservation and protection.* Conservation and preservation of natural resources, including land, water, energy, and plant resources for the general use and enjoyment of the public.

*Environmental beautification and open spaces.* Botanical gardens, arboreta, horticultural programs and landscape services; organizations promoting anti-litter campaigns; programs to preserve the parks, green spaces, and open spaces in urban or rural areas; and city and highway beautification programs.<sup>53</sup>

In the same place, under the classification “Animal Protection,” it includes these additional subcategories:

*Animal protection and welfare.* Animal protection and welfare services; includes animal shelters and humane societies.

*Wildlife preservation and protection.* Wildlife preservation and protection; includes sanctuaries and refuges.

*Veterinary services.* Animal hospitals and services providing care to farm and household animals and pets.<sup>54</sup>

These categories concerning the environment and animal protection point to the immense variety of nonprofit organizations with which congregations might cooperate in creation care. They also encourage a missional imagination for the church that reaches beyond itself to participate in what God may be doing in the world. Many congregations already do so with civil society organizations that fight hunger or promote social justice. What about environmental justice? Building on such missional imagination, this thesis project asked congregation leaders and members to what extent they see nonprofits and NGOs in their area as potential partners in caring for creation, and whether or not they could name one.

Although congregations can never be reduced to civil society organizations, they themselves play a significant role in civil society. The CNP listing of congregations and

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

associations of congregations—such as the Living Water Synod—as nonprofits helps identify them with other insights from the Center for Civil Society Studies that further describe their role. In analyzing the characteristics and impact of nonprofits, for example, the CNP suggests five “hypothesized contributions” of nonprofits: providing direct services, leading innovation, advocating, expressing values, and building community.<sup>55</sup> Mary Sue D. Dreier utilized this CNP framework to study the functional contributions of congregations in civil society and found them evident in varying degrees in each congregation studied.<sup>56</sup>

While most examples of congregational contributions to civil society involved meeting social needs in her study, I believe this framework could be extended to include ecological needs. For example, congregations act as ecological *service providers* when adopting a highway to clean up or installing solar panels to generate renewable energy, activities explored in this project’s survey. They act as *innovators* in their communities by identifying unaddressed environmental problems and by being on the early end of adopting ecologically sustainable practices like food waste composting, also explored in the survey. In terms of *advocacy*, the CNP views nonprofits as especially instrumental in effecting policy change, seeing them as

a link between individuals and the broader political process, providing a way to bring group concerns to broader public attention and to push for policy or broader

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<sup>55</sup> Lester M. Salamon, Leslie C. Hems, and Kathryn Chinnock, “The Nonprofit Sector: For What and for Whom?,” *Working Papers of the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project* (2000): 5-7, <http://ccss.jhu.edu/publications-findings/?did=115> (accessed March 16, 2015). The CNP also suggests five hypothesized drawbacks: particularism, paternalism, excessive amateurism or professionalism, resource insufficiency, and accountability gap.

<sup>56</sup> Dreier, “Five Congregations and Civil Society: An Imagination for God's World.”

social change, not only on behalf of those belonging to a group but also on behalf of the general public.<sup>57</sup>

Congregations act as advocates on behalf of the whole creation in writing or speaking to elected leaders about ecological concerns, or at least believing that the church should be involved in helping shape environmental policy—again, practices or perceptions explored in this project’s survey. They function as *values guardians* by expressing the inherent value of God’s creation through special worship services as well as regular worship and prayer, scriptural study and interpretation, and explicitly connecting earth stewardship to the faith formation of children and leaders. Finally, in terms of *building community*, the CNP hypothesizes that

nonprofit organizations make an important contribution in fostering sentiments of trust, social obligation, and belonging both among their own members and between these members and others in society and that they consequently function as “schools of democracy” and of community.<sup>58</sup>

In this sense, congregations act as community builders by hosting conversations about environmental issues in their contexts, seeing everyone in their community as a potential partner in earth stewardship, and modeling graceful engagement of those who may vocalize other opinions. This thesis project therefore asked church leaders and members to what extent they see utility companies, sportsmen and women (involved in hunting and fishing), and Native American tribal organizations as allies for collaborating on creation care. On the other hand, not all environmental organizations may see the church as a potential ally, observes Jeffrey Loudon, who documents the problem of the church

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<sup>57</sup> Salamon, Hems, and Chinnock, “The Nonprofit Sector: For What and for Whom?,” 6.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 7.

interpreting creation anthropocentrically.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, he suggests that congregations listen to environmental groups outside the church to find common ground for shared vision and action. From my experience representing a congregation while collaborating with other organizations as trainees in The Natural Step framework, I believe such public participation is an important missional opportunity for the church.

Missional theologians describe congregations as public companions with God in global civil society through discernment and co-participation. Dreier asserts that congregations' intentional public companionship in civil society is "a component of becoming the missional church which God is creating in this present era of mission" and "formative as God develops a congregation's vocational identity."<sup>60</sup> By asking what God is up to in their local context as well as in the world, congregations broaden the scope of their theology and practice. As Gary Simpson argues, they also may begin to imagine global civil society "as an emerging preferential location of God's presence, passion, and action within God's creative relationship with the contemporary world."<sup>61</sup>

### Summary

In this review of theoretical perspectives, we have explored the relevance of sustainability, globalization, and global civil society for understanding the challenges facing the earth and working to ensure the long-term well-being of God's creation. The

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<sup>59</sup> Jeffrey D. Loudon, "Toward Congregational Ecological Activism: A Critical Comparison of Reasons for Environmental Activism in the Rocky Mountain Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Mt. Sopris Group of the Sierra Club" (DMin Thesis, San Francisco Theological Seminary, 1995), 82, 86.

<sup>60</sup> Dreier, "Five Congregations and Civil Society: An Imagination for God's World," 2.

<sup>61</sup> Simpson, "God in Civil Society: Vocational Imagination, Spiritual Presence, and Ecclesial Discernment," 13.

scientific framework articulated by The Natural Step provides a non-religious definition for sustainability shared by many businesses and municipalities worldwide as well as an important grounding for this project's ecological evaluation of the practices of respondents and their congregations. Taking the science of sustainability seriously is a significant step for acknowledging the severity of the problem as well as envisioning what concrete transformations a truly sustainable society requires. While the strategies and tools of different congregations may vary, the framework's well-defined system conditions may provide the basis for a common language for public dialogue about earth stewardship.

Understanding different theories of globalization clarifies how deeply American society is embedded in a dominant economic worldview that perpetuates unsustainable trajectories through unlimited economic growth fueled by patterns of overconsumption, global wealth disparity, and environmental deregulation. While the church has shared in the rise of globalization, it has an important opportunity to become a transformative agent within globalization. In addition to confronting consumerism and anthropocentrism, it can cultivate alternative economic models that value indigenous cultures globally and bioregional relationships with energy and food producers. The church's companion synod relationships and global service, disaster relief, and advocacy organizations are significant built-in networks for accompanying others in solidarity and connecting global consciousness with local participation for the well-being of people and the planet.

Global civil society helps inform this thesis project as a sphere of public awareness and involvement to assess how congregations understand God's work in the world and to what extent they may cultivate collaboration with organizations in the

community on environmental concerns. The concept of global civil society itself can also be seen to complement the activity of the church, both by those who include congregations and associations of congregations within civil society organizations, and by missional theologians who view civil society as an arena for participating with God in the world. Congregations sometimes partner with nonprofits and NGOs in their communities in order to address emerging or enduring needs, and such collaboration is a missional opportunity.

A key assumption of this thesis is that a congregation is an ideal setting for modeling the kind of creation care needed for a more sustainable world. When viewed from the perspective of the church, these three theoretical lenses highlight the capacity of congregations to look critically at their own unsustainable patterns and to demonstrate sustainable practices in their life together. As partners with God in civil society, congregations are empowered to cultivate global relationships of solidarity and accompaniment for a more ecologically just economy and to practice local collaboration and innovation in their communities for the sake of the whole creation. We now turn to biblical and theological perspectives that complement this view.



## CHAPTER 3

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

#### **Biblical Perspectives**

Of the many scriptural themes that could be cited to describe the significance of creation care, the two biblical lenses I want to emphasize involve reciprocal relationships. The first is a relationship between human beings and nature as an active subject, lifting up an important biblical contrast to anthropocentrism and the modern industrial objectification of nature. The second is a relationship whereby Jesus Christ draws the church to participate in God's stewardship.

#### Nature as Active Subject

Scripture abounds with wonderful images of the whole creation as a participant with humanity in worshiping God, serving God, and discerning God's action in the world. At the beginning of creation, God blesses all living creatures and instructs them to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:22).<sup>1</sup> God makes a covenant after the flood not only with Noah and his descendants but also with "every living creature" (Gen 9:9-17) and "the earth" (9:13). The psalmist speaks of all creatures praising the LORD:

Praise him, sun and moon;  
praise him, all you shining stars!  
Praise him, you highest heavens,  
and you waters above the heavens!

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<sup>1</sup> All scripture references are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version* of the Bible, unless otherwise noted.

Let them praise the name of the LORD,  
 for he commanded and they were created.  
 He established them forever and ever;  
 he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.  
 Praise the LORD from the earth,  
 you sea monsters and all deeps,  
 fire and hail, snow and frost,  
 stormy wind fulfilling his command!  
 Mountains and all hills,  
 fruit trees and all cedars!  
 Wild animals and all cattle,  
 creeping things and flying birds! (Ps 148:3-10)

Other writers tell of the mountains and hills “breaking into song,” the trees of the field “clapping their hands” (Isa 55:12), and the stones that “would shout out” in witness to Jesus if his disciples were silent (Luke 19:40). Ravens serve God by feeding Elijah in the wilderness (1 Kgs 17:4-6), and a bush and worm are appointed by God to teach Jonah (Jonah 4:6-8). In one of his replies to Zophar, Job appeals to the capacity of other creatures to recognize God’s movements:

But ask the animals, and they will teach you;  
 the birds of the air, and they will tell you;  
 ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you;  
 and the fish of the sea will declare to you.  
 Who among all these does not know  
 that the hand of the LORD has done this?  
 In his hand is the life of every living thing  
 and the breath of every human being. (Job 12:7-10)

Jesus’ forty days in the desert are spent “with the wild beasts” (Mark 1:12), and his death and resurrection are both marked by earthquakes (Matt 27:51; 28:2).

In addition to humanity, the rest of nature is also included as a recipient of God’s care and redemption throughout the biblical narrative. The “birds of the air” which God feeds and the “lilies of the field” which God clothes model reliance on divine providence that Jesus wants of his disciples (Matt 6:25-30). The same Spirit of God that hovered over the waters at the beginning of creation (Gen 1:2) also “renews the face of the ground” (Ps

104:30). The salvation God envisions extends beyond rebuilding human institutions or relationships to the creation of “a new heaven and a new earth” in which even the enmity between non-human creatures is overcome (Isa 65:17-25; cf. Revelation 21:1). Paul speaks not only of the whole creation “groaning” and waiting “with eager longing” to be “set free from its bondage to decay” (Rom 8:18-25) but also of the risen Christ, through whom “God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross” (Col 1:19). Finally, the risen Jesus commissions his disciples saying, “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15).

Lutheran liturgy reflects this biblical lens. The Easter preface for the Eucharist joins our voices “with earth and sea and all their creatures” in singing “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; heaven and earth are full of his glory” (Isa 6:3).<sup>2</sup> Suggested prayers also indicate the active role of both human and non-human creatures:

*Creation and new creation*

Sovereign of the universe, your first covenant of mercy was with every living creature. When your beloved Son came among us, the waters of the river welcomed him, the heavens opened to greet his arrival, the animals of the wilderness drew near as his companions. With all the world’s people, may we who are washed into new life through baptism seek the way of your new creation, the way of justice and care, mercy and peace; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

*Creation’s praise*

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ, who in your self-emptying love gathered up and reconciled all creation to the Father. Innumerable galaxies of the heavens worship you. Creatures that grace the earth rejoice in you. All those in the deepest seas bow to you in adoration. As with them we give you praise, grant that we may cherish the earth, our home, and live in harmony with this good creation, for you

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<sup>2</sup> *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, Leaders Desk ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 187.

live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.<sup>3</sup>

For an industrial world that often sees nature simply as a storehouse of resources for human consumption, this biblical lens provides a corrective to commodification and helps recover the idea of viewing the rest of nature as a *thou* rather than an *it*. A brief look at two celebrated figures who epitomize this interaction with nature shows how this theme has been further articulated.

Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) is remembered as a befriender of animals and is often depicted in Christian art surrounded by them. He referred to fish, donkeys, and cicadas, as well as sun, moon, fire, and water as his “brothers” and “sisters.”<sup>4</sup> Francis was shaped by the medieval view of creation as the Book of Nature and derived moral lessons from larks, lambs, birds, and ants about devotion, piety, greed, and worry.<sup>5</sup> Yet his regard for other creatures also transcended that of his contemporaries. In his famous *Sermon to the Birds*, for example, Francis’ love for the natural world began merging with his fervor for evangelical mission when he exhorted a flock of birds to praise God in gratitude for clothing them with feathers, endowing them with the ability to fly, and graciously nourishing them with food.<sup>6</sup> As Roger Sorrell observes, “No saint before Francis, it appears, had addressed birds as creatures in the sustained homiletic manner he did.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, Pew ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 81.

<sup>4</sup> Roger D. Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature: Tradition and Innovation in Western Christian Attitudes toward the Environment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 43, 48-49, 101.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

Sorrell goes on to discuss Francis' beloved *Canticle of Brother Sun*, arguably his best-known written work and the basis for the hymn, *All Creatures Worship God Most High*. The *Canticle* begins by praising the "Most High, omnipotent, good Lord," along "with all your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun, who brings the day, and you give light to us through him. How handsome he is, how radiant, with great splendor! Of you, most high, he bears the likeness."<sup>8</sup> The *Canticle* continues to praise God "for Sister Moon and the Stars," "Brother Wind," "Sister Water," "Brother Fire," "for our Sister, Mother Earth, who nourishes and governs us," and even "Sister Death." Although parallels can be found in Psalm 148 and monastic liturgy, Sorrell argues that the phrasing of the *Canticle* is distinctive in its vision of the universe and its intimate portrayal of the interconnections between creatures, humans, and God. He concludes that the message of the *Canticle* is not only appreciative but also ecological: "It is ecological in that it explicitly rejects a view of creation that would objectify it and take for granted as being worthless and irrelevant unless it proves serviceable to humanity."<sup>9</sup> For Francis, the God-given qualities of creation reflect a worth that is beyond its usefulness to people.

A similar affection for non-human creatures and their intrinsic value can be seen in John Muir (1838-1914), widely considered the father of the conservation movement. His published accounts of wilderness explorations, especially in the Sierra Nevada Mountains and Yosemite Valley of California, are full of references to the active agency of nature and its components. In *My First Summer in the Sierra*, for example, he writes,

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 123. Sorrell explains his use of the term *ecological* in an endnote: "Not in a scientific, but in an attitudinal sense—that is, oriented toward a responsible vision of humanity's relationship to the environment" (178). Franciscan scholars continue to see such ecological relevance in Francis' views of creation, theology, and reflective action; see Ilia Delio, Keith Warner, and Pamela Wood, *Care for Creation: A Franciscan Spirituality of the Earth* (Cincinnati, OH: Franciscan Media, 2008), 1-16.

“Every morning, arising from the death of sleep, the happy plants and all our fellow animal creatures great and small, and even the rocks, seemed to be shouting, ‘Awake, awake, rejoice, rejoice, come love us and join in our song. Come! Come!’”<sup>10</sup> He speaks of “making the acquaintance” of birds, listening to the “psalms of the falls,” and not giving but *receiving* a sermon—from a grasshopper.<sup>11</sup> For Muir, other creatures are “insect people” and “precious plant people,” lizards are “gentle fellow mortals, enjoying God’s sunshine,” the winds “seem the very breath of Nature, whispering peace to every living thing,” and he is not alone at his campfire but accompanied by “columbines, lilies, hazel bushes, and the great trees” which “form a circle around the fire like thoughtful spectators, gazing and listening with human-like enthusiasm.”<sup>12</sup>

Muir sees nature personified as a “poet” and an active force: “How fiercely, devoutly wild is Nature in the midst of her beauty-loving tenderness!—painting lilies, watering them, caressing them with gentle hand, going from flower to flower like a gardener while building rock mountains and cloud mountains full of lightning and rain.”<sup>13</sup> Yet a close relationship of nature and creatures to God is evident throughout: mountains are “holy,” and “filled with God’s beauty,” and “every crystal, every flower [is] a window opening into heaven, a mirror reflecting the Creator,” while Muir takes opportunity to “thank God” for the fragrant air and suggest where “God seems to be

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<sup>10</sup> John Muir, *Nature Writings: The Story of My Boyhood and Youth, My First Summer in the Sierra, the Mountains of California, Stickeen, Selected Essays*, The Library of America 92 (New York, NY: Library of America: distributed to the trade in the U.S. by Penguin Books USA, 1997), 191.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 190, 212, 233.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 224, 231, 176, 172, 203.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 245, 229.

always doing his best.”<sup>14</sup> For Muir, what interests God should interest us as we enter into deeper relationship with nature and discover increasing interdependence: “When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe. One fancies a heart like our own must be beating in every crystal and cell, and we feel like stopping to speak to the plants and animals as friendly fellow mountaineers.”<sup>15</sup>

Muir’s emphasis on nature’s agency is worth noting not just as an example of this biblical lens. It is true that, as the son of an itinerant Presbyterian minister, he had so internalized scripture that by age eleven he could recite three-quarters of the Old Testament and the entire New Testament by heart.<sup>16</sup> But the countless hours he spent in the wilderness and his keen observations equally impacted his eloquent prose, which not only introduced others to his mountain temples but also helped ensure their protection. As one of the earliest advocates of the national park system and founder of the Sierra Club, Muir may both inspire congregations to get outdoors to know their surroundings and also serve as a bridge between the missional church and non-religious environmentalists.

How aware are congregational leaders and members of our co-participation with the rest of creation, especially in the context of worship? In my research, I asked whether or not participants recognize in their congregational prayers, hymns, liturgy, and sermons God’s love for all creation, our connection to the rest of creation, or our role in its well-being. I asked if congregations worship outdoors or observe specific services, Sundays, or seasons that highlight creation care. This lens also informed my framing of questions

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 228, 243, 187.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 20.

about how leaders perceive the rest of nature in relation to God and humanity—under our God-given dominion for human progress or more interdependently? Should Jesus’ teaching about loving the “neighbor” (Matt 22:39) be interpreted to include non-human members of the earth community? What leisure or educational activities involving interaction with nature cultivate a reciprocal relationship? In this thesis, viewing nature as an active subject is a presupposition of the theological lenses that follow.

### Stewardship

The biblical concept of stewardship deepens our understanding of the reciprocal relationships between God, humanity, and the rest of nature. This thesis follows the approach of Douglas John Hall, for whom the scope of stewardship goes beyond the management of money and property within the church and encompasses our relationships to God and creation. Quoting Jürgen Moltmann, Hall pinpoints the problem of stewardship in our time as a problem of *identity*: “What we call the environmental crisis is not merely a crisis in the natural environment of human beings. It is nothing less than a crisis of human beings themselves.”<sup>17</sup> To face the historic problems of our time, a new way of imagining what it means to be human is needed, and Hall sees recovering the biblical symbol of the *steward* as essential to that task. There are obstacles, of course: its meaning in the church has become truncated to connote fundraising and a specific time of year for budget planning, it is an archaic word not used in everyday language, and it tends not to function beyond the sense of considering one’s time, talent, and treasure for God’s purposes through the ministry of the church. Yet Hall’s exploration and enlargement of

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<sup>17</sup> Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, xiii. Quoted in Hall, *The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age*, 9.



this biblical concept shows how accurately and profoundly stewardship can illustrate the entire life of discipleship and indeed the church's whole mission.

The mandate to “till and keep” the earth is often invoked as a primary image of creation care (Gen 2:15). But Hall begins with a word study on *steward* to elucidate its role. In the Old Testament, for example, we find “the steward of Joseph’s house,” an intermediary who at Joseph’s bidding supplies his brothers with hospitality and provisions when they come from Canaan to Egypt (Gen 43:16, 19; 44:1). Here the terms are *haish asher al*, “the man who is over,” or *asher al bayit*, “who is over a house.”<sup>18</sup> The Chronicler mentions the “stewards of all the property and cattle of the king and his sons” (1 Chr 28:1), naming as a steward (*sar*) each who oversees the treasuries, vineyards, trees, oil, camels, donkeys, and flocks (1 Chr 27:25-31). In Daniel, a “guard” (*sar*) is appointed over Nebuchadnezzar’s prisoners (Dan 1:11, 16). Related words identify Shebna, a steward “that is over the household” (*asher al habayit*) who is threatened with severe punishment and replacement at the hands of the LORD for seeking his own self-interest (Isa 22:15-21). In all these instances, the steward is someone who identifies with and is highly regarded by his master and has considerable authority over property or people. Yet the last example is a reminder that the steward is not the master or owner of what he manages: “however important the steward may be in the scheme of things, he is neither ultimately authoritative nor irreplaceable.”<sup>19</sup>

A similar concept of the steward as a manager of someone else’s property is also present in the New Testament. For example, Jesus tells a parable about vineyard workers

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<sup>18</sup> Hebrew transliterations from Hall, *The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age*, 40-41.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

and a “manager” (*epitropos*) who pays them according to the landowner’s instructions (Matt 20:8); he tells another about a shrewd “steward” (*oikonomos*) who settles accounts with his master’s debtors (Luke 16:1); and at the wedding in Cana the one who tastes the water become wine is the “chief steward” (*architriklinos*) (John 2:8). But Hall sees an important progression of the concept of stewardship in New Testament when it assumes a theological or metaphorical meaning. For example, in Luke 12:42ff Jesus reflects with his disciples about the actions of a manager (*oikonomos*) who is also referred to as a “slave” (*doulos*): when the master is delayed, will the steward be at work when he arrives or will he get drunk and mistreat the other slaves? As Hall points out, it is understood that the master who is coming is not simply an earthly king but the risen Christ and that stewardship and watchfulness are characteristics of his faithful followers, to whom he has entrusted his household and all who dwell in it.<sup>20</sup> This is what Hall describes as the *theological dimension* of Christian stewardship. Stewards are chosen and given responsibility not for their own sakes but on behalf of the whole, like Abraham was called to be a blessing for “all the families of the earth” (Gen 12:3). Moreover, God is the master or owner of that with which they have been entrusted: “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it” (Psalm 24:1).

The *christological dimension* of stewardship hinges on 1 Corinthians 3:21—4:2, not only in the use of the term steward (*oikonomos*) but also in Christ’s unique role:

So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—*all belong to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God*. Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God’s mysteries. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 35.

Hall says, “This is perhaps the supreme ecumenical/ecological statement of the Bible. We are all bound up with one another. No one can claim or have claimed for her- or himself any independent dignity, authority, or worth. Even Jesus Christ is part of this chain of mutuality. Even the Christ is accountable—he is God’s steward.”<sup>21</sup> This is Hall’s brilliant move, identifying Jesus as the *preeminent steward*, who defines that role and fulfills human accountability to God and responsibility for all creation, not desiring anything for himself but giving his life for the sake of others.

Yet, Jesus is more than an example; stewardship is not just a command for imitation. Rather, its basic presupposition is God’s grace, as Paul writes in Ephesians 3:1-2: “This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—for surely you have already heard of the commission (*oikonomia*) of God’s grace that was given me for you.” Paul is not alone in this stewardship/commission but the Ephesians, too, share “in the household of God” (*oikeioi tou theou*) (2:19), for they are “in Christ Jesus” through his reconciling work (2:13-22). For Hall, those who are *in Christ* are “taken up into his stewardship. It is not that we achieve the stewardly status through our works, our imitation of him. We are graciously brought into a stewarding of God’s grace that has already been enacted by God’s chief steward.”<sup>22</sup> Thus Christian stewardship is fundamentally *participatory*. It is Christ who overcomes the sin within us that would prevent us from becoming stewards—our illusion of ownership as well as our lack of responsibility—and enables us by grace to share in God’s self-giving love for the life of the world. “In short,” Hall declares, “the Christian view of stewardship starts with

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 36-37.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 44.

the stewardship of the One who did not grasp at equality with God, but was obedient (Phil. 2). It is his stewardship in which we participate.”<sup>23</sup>

More implications of stewardship flow from this central participatory insight. In the *ecclesiastical dimension*, Hall states, “The church is a stewarding community. As the body of Christ, the disciple community is being incorporated into the work of the great steward.”<sup>24</sup> Rather than an end in itself, the church that participates in Christ’s stewardship exists for a purpose greater than its own preservation and instead witnesses to the one who empties himself for the sake of others, and indeed for all creation, ultimately through kenosis and the cross. For Hall, “the stewarding of this beloved world is of the very essence of our belief,” and “the resurrection faith of the people of the cross must mean, quite concretely, that this world must not be abandoned; that this world is worth all the care and love and sacrifice that we can devote to it.”<sup>25</sup>

In the *anthropological dimension*, the stewardship of Jesus is a fundamentally human calling and signifies what God desires for all people, not just the church: “The human being is, as God’s steward, accountable to God and responsible for its fellow creatures.”<sup>26</sup> Lutheran prayers reflect the participatory character of these ecclesiastical and anthropological dimensions, addressing God who, “in giving us dominion over things on earth,” has “made us coworkers in creation” and showing “respect and care for your creation.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 44-45.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>27</sup> *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, 80, 81.

Finally, there is an *eschatological dimension* of stewardship:

The end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards [*oikonomoi*] of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. (1 Pet 4:7-10)

The urgency here not only speaks to our current ecological crisis but also echoes other places in scripture where people are asked to give an account of their stewardship (e.g. Luke 12) and called to be stewards that are trustworthy (1 Cor 4:2) and blameless (Titus 1:7). First Peter reminds stewards that it is God's grace with which stewards are entrusted. Yet a few verses later give reason for the church to be self-critical: "judgment will begin with the household of God" (1 Pet 4:17). Hall concludes, "Because those who are being incorporated into the life and work of the Great Steward have been given much, their failure to give much in return is especially serious."<sup>28</sup>

Hall's rich treatment of this biblical concept presents the idea of stewardship as a summary of the gospel, a way of understanding Christ's work and how we participate in it through our baptism in Christ. Returning to his opening theme, the proper approach to stewardship is therefore seeing it as first of all not an action but an *identity*, "descriptive of the being—the very life—of God's people. Deeds of stewardship arise out of the being of the steward."<sup>29</sup> How would the world be different if the church understood itself primarily as *steward*? "Stewardship does not describe any one dimension of the Christian

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<sup>28</sup> Hall, *The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age*, 48.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

life,” Hall says further, “it describes the whole posture called ‘Christian.’”<sup>30</sup> Convinced that “the direction of the Christian gospel is human-ward and earthward,” he thus brings

the being and mission of Christians down to earth. ... Their business is the being of stewards in all phases of life—in their relationships with one another, in their everyday worldly existence, in their attitude towards nature, and in their conduct of individual and corporate public life.<sup>31</sup>

It is in this biblical symbol’s ability to capture both the needs of the present economic and ecological crisis, as well as a central meaning of Christian identity, that Hall also suggests the universal *priesthood* be reframed as the “stewardship of all believers.”<sup>32</sup> Similarly, stewardship is not just one aspect of mission or even a means to another end (mission). Rather, Hall boldly asserts, “What I mean is that *stewardship is the church’s mission*.”<sup>33</sup>

The expanded view of stewardship as mission and the participatory character of stewardship we have just explored provide a helpful bridge between a familiar creation care concept and missional theology. This biblical lens helped me conceptualize stewardship more as an identity and all-encompassing term from which to assess the perceptions of this thesis project’s participants. How broad is the functional perception of stewardship among leaders and members of the Living Water Synod? In recognizing creation care as integral to all faith practices, the synod resolution reflects Hall’s view of stewardship as encompassing the whole of Christian life, not just one dimension of it. But are people aware of the resolution and, more importantly, does it accurately characterize their understanding? How essential do they think creation care is for Christian identity

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 117, 241.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 244. Emphasis added.

and God's mission today? Is earth stewardship seen as an activity we do on God's behalf or in participation with God? Do congregations have a functioning creation care team? To this biblical lens, Hall offers timely and theologically grounded images for inspiring the missional church's earthkeeping participation with God in the *missio Dei*.

### **Theological Perspectives**

Three theological lenses in this thesis reinforce the biblical lenses of reciprocal relationships and participation with the Triune God in the care and redemption of all creation. These lenses are perichoresis, eschatology, and sacramental imagination.

#### **Perichoresis**

The concept of reciprocal relationality is grounded in an understanding of Trinitarian *perichoresis*, the mutual indwelling of the three divine persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each exists in the other and empties itself for the sake of the other in self-giving love. Rather than beginning with the unity of divine essence from which the three persons emanate, this Trinitarian concept from the Eastern church emphasizes the primacy of a dynamic community of equal persons finding unity within the Godhead.<sup>34</sup> In perichoresis, the otherness of each person is distinguishable, and yet their exchange of energy produces a unity by which they live in and through one another. As Jürgen Moltmann explains, "They are unseparated and unmixed. The existence of the one 'in' the other (that is, their perichoretic unity) expresses this singular unity in the best way."<sup>35</sup> Examples of perichoretic language can be found in the Gospel of John, where Jesus says,

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<sup>34</sup> Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*, 103.

<sup>35</sup> Moltmann, "Perichoresis: An Old Magic Word for a New Trinitarian Theology," 114.

“the Father is in me and I am in the Father” (John 10:38; cf. 14:10-11; 17:21). Affirming their unity with one another and with the Spirit involves not simply appealing to a shared divine substance, which would eliminate personal differences, but expressing it in the dance-like circulation of the divine life among co-equals.

Western appreciation of this theological concept, particularly through the work of Moltmann, has impacted ecclesiology in recent decades. Miroslav Volf draws upon the concept of perichoresis to describe the community of Trinitarian life in which we as the church participate by grace. Again, it is the circulation of divine life that is important: “It is not the mutual perichoresis of human beings, but rather the indwelling of the Spirit common to everyone that makes the church into a communion corresponding to the Trinity, a communion in which personhood and sociality are equiprimal.”<sup>36</sup> The church becomes the image of the Trinity through the Spirit enabling people to share in the divine life of the Son who dwells in them (John 14:20; 17:23). Contrasting and drawing from Roman Catholic and Orthodox sources, Volf employs the concept of perichoresis to develop a Free Church ecclesiology that seeks to avoid the postmodern extremes of individualism and authoritarianism. For Volf, a nonhierarchical ecclesiology based on a nonhierarchical doctrine of the Trinity has the capacity to hold both personhood and community in dynamic interplay, and thinking of “free and equal persons as communal beings from the outset” is crucial for the viability of the church today.<sup>37</sup>

Van Gelder illustrates how missional theologians combine the perichoretic social reality of God with an understanding of the *missio Dei* to describe “the church, through

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<sup>36</sup> Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, 213.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.



the redemptive work of Christ, as being created by the Spirit as a social community that is missionary by nature in being called and sent to participate in God's mission in the world."<sup>38</sup> If the basic meaning of perichoresis connotes the circulation of persons in a neighborhood and their mutual indwelling of one another, then mission is best understood as participating in this activity of the Triune God: the Father sending the Son; the Father and the Son sending the Spirit; and the Father, Son, and Spirit sending the church into the world. The interior life of the Trinitarian persons in their self-giving love for *the other* also becomes the basis for the missional church that enters into reciprocal relationships with *members of its community*. Mirroring the Trinity, the relational emphasis in ministry is on equality rather than paternalism or hierarchy, recognizing others as uniquely gifted persons through whom God has the power to work, and viewing ministry as ministry not only *for* others but also *with* others as partners with God in God's work in the world.<sup>39</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Van Gelder and Dwight Zscheile identify the need to connect the missional movement to the care of all creation. Significantly, they point to perichoretic relationality as the starting place: "God makes space within God's own Trinitarian life for creation, and creation participates relationally in that life."<sup>40</sup> They clarify the need for the church's reciprocal engagement with the world to be part of its participation in God's ongoing activity and presence, engagement that identifies with the suffering neighbor (including the non-human neighbor) and leads to concrete acts of solidarity. "Mission is not the transmission of a particular set of properties, ideas, goods,

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<sup>38</sup> Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*, 88.

<sup>39</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series; No. 16 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 375.

<sup>40</sup> Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*, 112.

or concepts to people, but rather the entering into relational webs that transform us even as we engage in shaping others.”<sup>41</sup> The concept of perichoresis that characterizes the Trinitarian divine life points then to the kind of missional, reciprocal relationships we have been created for—not only in relation to other human beings but also to other fellow creatures, which share the breath of life (Gen 2:7; 1:30; 7:15). Viewing the world through perichoresis therefore helps counter the anthropocentric myopia of the church’s ministry; issues of social justice are rightly seen as inseparable from eco-justice or creation justice concerns in the wider earth community. This thesis project thus asked not only whether participants view non-human creatures as neighbors, but also whether they have engaged in public advocacy efforts for creation’s well-being.

Moltmann bases his own *ecological doctrine of creation* also on perichoresis: “Our starting point here is that all relationships which are analogous to God reflect the primal, reciprocal indwelling and mutual interpenetration of the Trinitarian perichoresis: God *in* the world and the world *in* God.”<sup>42</sup> Perichoresis thus implies *rethinking creation*: moving away from an analytical, objectifying, reductionist approach of knowing the natural world that is predominant in our society to a more participatory way of knowing. Such *participatory* knowledge assumes that no fully objective observer exists, that even scientists participate in experiments. For Moltmann, this participatory knowledge applies not only to the lab but also to life itself, which he sees in terms of reciprocal relationship. “To be alive means existing in relationship with other people and other things. So if we want to understand what is real *as* real, and what is living *as* living, we have to know it in

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 121-22.

<sup>42</sup> Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, 17.

its own primal and individual community, in its relationships, interconnections, and surroundings.”<sup>43</sup> We have already seen an inspiring illustration of this participatory knowledge in Muir, above, whose knowledge of nature was so intimate he could understand its history and appreciate how everything was “hitched to everything else in the universe.”<sup>44</sup>

Both Muir and Francis perceived nature as a *thou* rather than an *it*, as we have seen. A perichoretic relationship with creation assumes this kind of subject-subject rather than subject-object relationship. On this point Moltmann’s ecological doctrine of creation draws from the *nature-as-subject* philosophy of Ernst Bloch, whom I quote at length to support the biblical lens explored above:

It is only when nature ceases to appear merely as “nature for the human being”—that is to say, his object and raw material—but is recognized in its individual character as a “subject” of its own that the history of nature can be perceived as something on its own, independent of human beings: and it is only then that nature’s own independent future can be heeded. And only then, too, can a community between human beings and nature come into being.<sup>45</sup>

Rather than a reductionist or instrumental view of nature, where nature is valued only for human purposes or progress, this communal relationship between human beings and the rest of nature is best described theologically in perichoretic terms. As Moltmann puts it, “There is no such thing as solitary life. ... All living things—each in its own specific way—live in one another and with one another, from one another and for one another.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>44</sup> Muir, *Nature Writings: The Story of My Boyhood and Youth, My First Summer in the Sierra, the Mountains of California, Stickeen, Selected Essays*, 245.

<sup>45</sup> Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, 42.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 17.

The perichoresis at the heart of Moltmann's ecological doctrine of creation also implies *rethinking God*: "The centre of this thinking is no longer the distinction between God and the world. The centre is the recognition of the presence of God in the world and the presence of the world in God."<sup>47</sup> Overemphasizing the transcendence of God in relation to nature has supported human dominance and exploitation of nature, Moltmann goes on to say, but in his ecological doctrine of creation, the church must recover and proclaim God's *immanence* in the world, which he believes is a return to the truth of the biblical witness. This means moving beyond the idea of God creating to recapture the reality of God indwelling the creation: "through his cosmic Spirit God the Creator of heaven and earth is present *in* each of his creatures and *in* the fellowship of creation which they share."<sup>48</sup> Affirming God's immanence does not mean embracing pantheism or ignoring the biblical injunctions against worshiping idols. But in a time of ecological crisis, proclaiming divine immanence helps recover both a more active understanding of God in the world and a higher view of nature with the capacity to bear the divine presence. We will return to this idea of God's presence in creation in our discussion of sacramental imagination, below.

As a theological lens, perichoresis strengthens our understanding not only of the church participating in God's mission for the life of the world, but also of creation itself sharing in the divine life. The reciprocal relationality perichoresis assumes expands the missional embrace even beyond all humanity to include all creation. As Moltmann ably affirms, "The perichoretic unity of the divine persons is so wide open that the whole

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 14.

world can find room and rest and eternal life within it. All creatures will ‘enter into God,’ we orthodox theologians say, to find life-space and their home in God.”<sup>49</sup> Perichoresis, therefore, provides theological grounding for this thesis project’s assessment of how creation is viewed and included (or not) in congregational faith practices. If we share with all creation perichoretic relationality, then its salvation is wrapped up in our own and earthkeeping not only pertains to the church’s doing but also the church’s being. We who are in constant relationship with all creation must make room for its concerns in our words and actions.

### Eschatology

Moltmann’s insights on perichoresis are formulated within an understanding of the eschatological movement of creation from *creatio originalis* toward *creatio nova*, original creation toward new creation (2 Cor 5:17). Jesus Christ is the pivotal person between these two realities, as J. Matthew Bonzo describes:

*Creatio originalis* is the creation that comes to be in the forsaken space that is in need of fulfillment by the Son. This is the first pulse of *agape*. Creation here moves historically toward its “eschatological goal.” *Creatio nova* arrives from the future to overcome/complete original creation. Here the incarnate Son enacts the second pulse of *agape* and God becomes “all in all.” The incarnate Jesus Christ is the linchpin, swivel, flip, or turning point between *creatio originalis* and *creatio nova*, as he both bears the burden of godforsakenness and reveals the way of overcoming such forsakenness.<sup>50</sup>

In the present moment, the new creation has not fully arrived, nor has original creation been entirely overcome. But this eschatological framework allows Moltmann to describe the suffering of the whole creation as the larger arena in which the Son’s solidarity and

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<sup>49</sup> Moltmann, “Perichoresis: An Old Magic Word for a New Trinitarian Theology,” 117-18.

<sup>50</sup> J. Matthew Bonzo, *Indwelling the Forsaken Other: The Trinitarian Ethics of Jürgen Moltmann*, Distinguished Dissertations in Christian Theology, vol. 3 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 54.

redemption occur. It also enables Moltmann to express the nature of that goal: more than creation's self-fulfillment, the eschatological *telos* toward which the Spirit yearns is creation's union with God. As Bryan Jeongguk Lee observes, "the eschatological procession of both God and the creation is a procession toward embodiment in which God and the creation arrive at a peaceful, harmonious, and loving union, in fact, a *perichoretic* union, which Moltmann calls God's rest."<sup>51</sup>

This eschatological lens serves two purposes for this thesis. First, it articulates theologically the biblical vision of God's redemption of all creation, described as: the *peaceable kingdom* (Isa 65:17-25), the *new creation* that encompasses the reconciliation of the world (2 Cor 5:17), and the *new heaven* and the *new earth* (Revelation 21:1). Within this biblical vision, God has not abandoned the earth to destruction, but God's salvation is deeply connected to and rooted in the earth, as New Testament scholar Barbara Rossing affirms.<sup>52</sup> We recall that the concern of this thesis is not only with the *care* of that which God has made but also with its *redemption*. As another Lutheran biblical scholar, David Rhoads, reminds us, "Creation is not a stage or a backdrop on which human redemption is carried out. We have screened creation out of much of our reading of the Bible, where the natural order is an integral part of that which God is seeking to redeem and bring to fulfillment."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Bryan Jeongguk Lee, *Celebrating God's Cosmic Perichoresis: The Eschatological Panentheism of Jürgen Moltmann as a Resource for an Ecological Christian Worship* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 60-61.

<sup>52</sup> Barbara Rossing, "River of Life in God's New Jerusalem: An Eschatological Vision for Earth's Future," in *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, ed. Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Cambridge, MA: Distributed by Harvard University Press for the Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions, 2000).

<sup>53</sup> Rhoads, "Reflections on a Lutheran Theology of Creation: Foundations for a New Reformation," 8. See also Frank Moore Cross, "The Redemption of Nature," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin*

The scope of this redemption is both personal and cosmic: “through [Christ] God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross” (Col 1:19). Lutheran pastor and theologian H. Paul Santmire describes the eschatological fulfillment of the whole creation through the redemptive work of Christ, whom he calls a *cosmic good shepherd*. With this image, Santmire sees Christ not only “calling all things into being in relationship to one another and to himself” but also “suffering especially with those creatures who experience pain, at times singling out some creaturely domains or even individuals for special care and attention, as a good shepherd does when leaving the flock behind and seeking out the sheep that is lost.”<sup>54</sup> In the end, this shepherd will lead them into the presence of God who “fills all in all” (Eph 1:23), but his salvific power is revealed in creaturely suffering and solidarity. A car-struck snowshoe hare dying on a roadside, chickens and pigs living in the cramped conditions of industrialized agriculture, even plants and other non-human creatures are not lost to this cosmic redeemer through a differentiated relationship appropriate to each member of creation. “In a word, my personal savior who dwells with me and all other humans in our affliction, embraces us in our godforsakenness, and bears our pain with us ... is likewise in a variety of ways the cosmic savior of all other creatures, which also groan in travail in their own manner.”<sup>55</sup>

As the eschatological linchpin between creation and new creation, Jesus Christ embodies the redemption he effects for all creation not only through his resurrection from

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10, no. 2 (1989): 101. Cross calls for reaffirming humanity’s oneness with nature and observes, “The view that our health is bound up with nature’s health, that the redemption of the human community is inseparable from the redemption of nature, is of critical importance for the contemporary theologian.”

<sup>54</sup> Santmire, *Before Nature: A Christian Spirituality*, 164-65.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

the dead but also through his incarnate life as fully human—a *mammal* who depended on air, water, soil, climate, sunshine—and through his solidarity with the most vulnerable in his ministry, crucifixion, and death.<sup>56</sup> The theology of the cross inherent in Christ's redemptive action calls for a church of the cross, whose capacity for *compassion* (suffering-with) expands beyond anthropocentric concerns to include the most vulnerable in nature. As Lutheran ethicist Larry Rasmussen explains,

The moral assumption here is that the farther one is removed from that suffering present in creation, the farther one is from its central moral reality (such distance belongs to theologies of glory). And the closer one is to the suffering of creation, *the more difficult it is to refuse participation in that afflicted life, humankind's or otherkind's* (such intimacy is cross theology).<sup>57</sup>

The theology of the cross prevents us from adopting a romantic view of nature and forces us to face the realities of our human-centered, earth-diminishing ways of life, what Douglas John Hall calls “the crisis of planetary justice.”<sup>58</sup> Hall understands the cross to be the culmination of the movement of the Creator toward all creation and Christianity to mean participation in the solidarity of the God who “suffers in the suffering of God's creatures.”<sup>59</sup>

In addition to framing God's vision of the redemption of all creation, a second purpose of the lens of eschatology in this thesis is that it articulates the life-giving impact of God's future cosmic perichoresis breaking into and arriving in the present. This corresponds well with the strategic practice of “backcasting” in The Natural Step

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<sup>56</sup> Rhoads, “Reflections on a Lutheran Theology of Creation: Foundations for a New Reformation,” 27, 29.

<sup>57</sup> Rasmussen, “Waiting for the Lutherans,” 94-95. Emphasis added.

<sup>58</sup> Douglas John Hall, *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 48.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 39, 174-75.



framework, mentioned in chapter 2, whereby a compelling vision fulfilling the *Four System Conditions* for sustainability helps an organization decide on practical steps that move toward it.<sup>60</sup> Rather than starting from a present state and projecting forward, the future vision of the healing of all creation helps inform the proleptic practices of Christians in the present. “The new creation that is our eschatological promise includes everything God has made,” Van Gelder and Zscheile rightly observe. “Amid the environmental crisis of today, that is a critical promise to keep in mind in considering the church’s missional vocation.”<sup>61</sup>

The concept of *reformation* is central to this calling. Just as Martin Luther was moved by the promise of salvation by grace alone through faith alone to effect significant reforms in and through the 16<sup>th</sup> century church, so also leaders moved by the promise of redemption for all creation are called to work toward significant ecological reform in and through the church today. As Larry Rasmussen insightfully observes, the same liberating gospel that challenged “ecclesial systems of bondage” in Luther’s day and offered “creative reform that resisted the corruption of the church” is at work today with a different purpose: “to rally the powers of faith for the long, hard transition from the unsustainable way of life of industrial-technological civilization to a durable future in ecological-technological civilization.”<sup>62</sup>

Pursuing technological innovations will be necessary for this reforming movement but not sufficient. As important as some of the technical tweaks explored in

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<sup>60</sup> Robèrt, *The Natural Step Story: Seeding a Quiet Revolution*, 102. See also The Natural Step, “What Is Backcasting.”

<sup>61</sup> Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*, 113.

<sup>62</sup> Rasmussen, “Lutheran Sacramental Imagination,” par. 17.

this thesis project are, such as recycling or changing incandescent light bulbs to compact fluorescent ones, this reformation requires *adaptive change*.<sup>63</sup> It calls for the development of new habits and perceptions and the creation of “systems of human responsibility that, contrasted with current morality and standard legal systems, match human influence on the planet’s core processes.”<sup>64</sup> To say that science will develop a solution to global warming that will enable us to continue our current way of life—a perception tested with participants—would be to minimize the destructive severity our current actions have on the biosphere, fail to recognize this in terms of human sin, and ignore the kinds of repentant, revolutionary changes that are needed.

David Rhoads provides a helpful outline of what such a reformation must involve in his 2012 article, “Reflections on a Lutheran Theology of Creation: Foundations for a New Reformation.” The widespread and systemic problems of the ecological crisis today call for comprehensive transformations not only in society but also in the church, especially if it is to provide leadership in addressing them. Rhoads describes worshipping in relationship *with* creation, preaching God’s word for all creation, broadening our social justice concerns to include endangered species and vulnerable ecosystems, and creating communities that are alternatives to consumption and exploitation. Yet he recognizes that the necessary global changes are inextricably linked to personal transformation: “In this new reformation, we need to reform *ourselves*.”<sup>65</sup> We cannot minimize the challenge ahead, he concludes, noting that the paradigm shift is nothing short of a “Copernican

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<sup>63</sup> Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1994), 22.

<sup>64</sup> Rasmussen, “Lutheran Sacramental Imagination,” par. 17.

<sup>65</sup> Rhoads, “Reflections on a Lutheran Theology of Creation: Foundations for a New Reformation,” 7.

Revolution”—away from anthropocentrism toward a new relationship with nature and with God.<sup>66</sup>

Larry Rasmussen’s monumental *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key* is also written in the spirit of reformation. Just as old wineskins cannot hold new wine (Luke 5:33-39), so also we cannot solve the ecological problems of today with the same anthropocentric ways of life that created them.<sup>67</sup> Beginning with the state of the earth in which we live, Rasmussen likens our reformation calling to learning to sing the LORD’s song in a strange land (Ps 137:4) and draws on a similar singing metaphor from Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “The earth remains our mother just as God remains our father, and only those who remain true to the mother are placed by her into the father’s arms. Earth and its distress—that is the Christian’s Song of Songs.”<sup>68</sup>

Such distress is evident on every front as the planet’s water, air, land, and inhabitants suffer from the effects of ecological degradation and neoliberal policies that continue to dominate our way of life. Hence, Rasmussen warns, “Deep reform will not happen apart from risk that is both needed and dangerous. We will not attain sustainability smoothly and without error. Nor will it come without great cost and wrenching change.”<sup>69</sup> Reformation involves a posture of sober self-examination and recognizing the urgency of the crisis, in faithful dialectic with compassionate energy, eschatological vision, and resurrection hope. “The faith we seek, then, is one in which fidelity to God is lived as fidelity to the Earth. Intimacy with Earth is intimacy with

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

<sup>67</sup> Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key*, 5.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 82. Bonhoeffer’s citation is “Basic Questions of a Christian Ethic” in *DBWE* 10:377-78.

<sup>69</sup> Rasmussen, “Waiting for the Lutherans,” 96.

God.”<sup>70</sup> Faith communities who know the rhythms of death and renewal in their liturgical life have an important role in the new reformation.

Thinking eschatologically helps us pay attention to the long view congregations project for the earth community and what impact their future vision has on their present perceptions and practices. To what extent is the biblical promise of redemption for all creation lifted up in Living Water Synod congregations? How do congregational leaders picture a sustainable world, a redeemed creation? What steps are they taking toward that vision? What reforms within both church and society do they see are needed?

In chapters that follow, we will look particularly for congregations seeking to embody what Rasmussen calls “anticipatory communities” that demonstrate ahead of time practices that are needed to live into the future of creation God intends:

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.<sup>71</sup>

By their witness and incarnation, such communities challenge our consumeristic culture and economic policies, and by their conversion “to Earth and God in the same moment and together” they broaden the scope of our concepts of salvation and God’s presence.<sup>72</sup>

While perhaps no single congregation can demonstrate all aspects of the anticipatory way of life Rasmussen envisions, anticipatory practices of different congregations helped me form a collective and more hopeful picture of the synod.

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<sup>70</sup> Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key*, 110.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 226-27.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 261.

## Sacramental Imagination

The eschatological redemption for which all creation yearns is not located in an unreachable future but is brought into the present by the power of the Holy Spirit. In worship, the gathered community of faith anticipates the coming Reign of God through the transforming presence of Christ in word and sacrament. While the Reformed theologian Moltmann focuses on the presence of Christ among the assembly of believers, Lutheran sacramental theology traditionally emphasizes Christ's presence *in, with, and under* the elements. For Luther, *finitum capax infinitum*—the finite elements of bread and wine are capable of bearing the body and blood of Christ.

Even further, Luther says Christ's presence in the Eucharist testifies to God's presence in the *whole creation*. It is worth reading Luther at length on this point:

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. He is at the same time outside and above all creatures. These are all exceedingly incomprehensible matters; yet they are articles of our faith and are attested clearly and mightily in Holy Scripture. ... For how can reason tolerate it that the Divine Majesty is so small that it can be substantially present in a grain, on a grain, through a grain, within and without, and that, although it is a single Majesty, it nevertheless is entirely in each grain separately, no matter how immeasurably numerous these grains may be? ... And that the same Majesty is so large that neither this world nor a thousand worlds can encompass it and say: "Behold, there it is!" ... His 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 not one thing encompasses it and dwells in it.<sup>73</sup>

Returning to the needed emphasis on divine immanence we expressed earlier, here is a tremendous theological asset for our reflections on faith and earthkeeping: the conviction

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<sup>73</sup> Luther, *Daß diese Wort Christi "Das ist mein Leib" noch fest stehen, wider die Schwermgeister* (1527), in WA 23:134.34—23:136.36. Quoted in H. Paul Santmire, *Before Nature: A Christian Spirituality*, 140. Also quoted in David Rhoads, "Reflections on a Lutheran Theology of Creation: Foundations for a New Reformation," 14-15.

that *God is dwelling in, with, and under all creation*. Luther understands the whole of creation to be God's "mask," concealing yet revealing God's creativity in the present moment, and he sees Christ as being "present in all creatures," even in ordinary things.<sup>74</sup>

As if waiting in the wings while other Lutheran insights have taken center stage, this sacramental view of nature has emerged in recent years as a valuable theological perspective for an ecological age—a perspective all Lutherans should rediscover. "God's potent indwelling belongs to all created things," Larry Rasmussen affirmed at a Lutheran seminary in 2010 almost as if he was revealing a secret, "including 'water, air, the earth and all its products' (I am quoting Luther). 'God,' Luther says, 'exists at the same time in every little seed, whole and entire, and yet also in all and above all and outside all created things.'"<sup>75</sup> While Rasmussen refers to Luther's "joyous panentheism" there, the perspective that all is *in* God, Santmire says in a more recent work that he is not content with that term to describe Luther. Since Luther employed many prepositions (in addition to *in*) and the term was not current to his time, Santmire prefers to describe Luther's view of the created world as *omnimiraculous*: "For Luther, once you have eyes to see, you can encounter miracles everywhere: in a seed, in the birth of a child, in a bolt of lightning, no less than in the healings of Jesus or in the Eucharist. Thus, in one exuberant statement,

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<sup>74</sup> Martin Luther, *In epistolam S. Pauli ad Galatas Commentarius* (1531) in WA 40/1:174.13-14: "*Universa autem creatura est facies et larva Dei.*" Martin Luther, *Sermon von dem Sakrament des Leibes und Blutes Christi wider die Schwermgeister* (1526), in WA 19:492.19-21: "Christ ... is present in all creatures, and I might find him in stone, in fire, in water, or even in a rope, for he is there ... ." Quoted in Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, *Healing a Broken World: Globalization and God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 84.

<sup>75</sup> Rasmussen, "Waiting for the Lutherans," 95. The Luther references are "Sermon on Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity" and "Confession concerning Christ's Supper," in Moe-Lobeda, *Healing a Broken World: Globalization and God*, 84.

Luther could say that all creatures are sacraments.”<sup>76</sup> Regardless of the label, recovering and teaching these Lutheran insights are tremendously significant for the church’s leadership in an ecological reformation age: “Put it this way: the awesome secret of creation is God’s dwelling in, with, and under it all.”<sup>77</sup>

This sacramental view of all creation—of God’s very presence in, with, and under, as well as beyond and around it—helps recapture a relationship with the natural world that is in stark contrast to the modern one. Our current attitudes and behaviors toward the environment, which are placing unprecedented stress on Earth’s systems through accelerating rates of consumption and resource depletion, Rasmussen characterizes as a relationship of *master to slave*.<sup>78</sup> Again, rather than fellow *subject*, the rest of nature is mere *object*. Especially since Descartes and the industrial revolution, this commodification of nature has desensitized us to the profound gift, relationality, and even sacredness inherent in creation.<sup>79</sup> Shaped further by modern capitalist assumptions of perpetual growth, we tend to see the rest of nature as a limitless resource for the purposes and progress of human beings, who are *above* the rest of nature rather than part of it and dependent on it.

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<sup>76</sup> Santmire, *Before Nature: A Christian Spirituality*, 141.

<sup>77</sup> Rasmussen, “Waiting for the Lutherans,” 95.

<sup>78</sup> Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key*, 100. See also Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, 46. For a critical examination of the concept of mastery over nature and its attribution to the idea of “dominion,” see Cameron Wybrow, *The Bible, Baconianism, and Mastery over Nature: The Old Testament and Its Modern Misreading*, American University Studies Series VII, Theology and Religion 112 (New York: Peter Lang, 1991).

<sup>79</sup> Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key*, 298. Rasmussen observes, “Already in the *Discourse on Method* (1637), comes the triumphalist proclamation of humankind as the ‘master and possessor of nature’ ... Descartes had put in place the profound alienation—that is, nonbelonging—that is born of the ontological separation of the human self from body and world. That separation became the trademark of modernity’s master-slave ethic of control.”

Rasmussen attributes these developments in part to the persistent cosmology of *Great-Chain sacramentalism*, which goes back even further than Descartes.<sup>80</sup> While the notion of sacramentalism in general conceives of the universe's life, interdependence, and purpose as proceeding from God, this particular Christian cosmology has, at least since Augustine, perpetuated an implied hierarchy of all created things in a Great Chain of Being: "Humans rank a bit lower than angels, with God above and all else beneath."<sup>81</sup> That reference to Psalm 8 is only the beginning. Within humanity, this hierarchical chain placed men above women and the faculties of reason and spirit over emotion and body. Together with the Great Commission, Great-Chain sacramentalism effectively sanctioned imperial colonization and commerce, Rasmussen observes, and "served [as] a 'civilizing mission' in which 'inferior' peoples and cultures were the unconsulted beneficiaries of a salvific gospel and way of life."<sup>82</sup> In addition to legitimizing racism, androcentrism, and the domination of indigenous peoples, this sacramentalism also devalued the rest of nature:

Not least the Great Chain conceived the life of the spirit as largely *Earth-escaping*. While all creatures are alive with the presence of the divine, the chain's hierarchical order placed God as pure Spirit and Mind at the apex and inorganic matter at the base, with union with the divine as the goal of the moral-spiritual life. Because the means of that was ascetic ascent, *the closer the human was to God, the farther the human was from the rest of creation "below"*; the closer to God, the farther from Earth, that temporary place of pilgrimage.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Santmire mentions Augustine's connection to Great Chain of Being cosmology in Santmire, *Before Nature: A Christian Spirituality*, 139.

<sup>81</sup> Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key*, 259.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 260 (emphasis added).



Santmire also discusses Great Chain cosmology and believes that “if one’s spirituality is shaped by the theology of *ascent*, then a viable and vital spirituality of *nature* becomes very difficult, if not impossible.”<sup>84</sup>

By contrast, Rasmussen embraces a *Web-of-life sacramentalism*, which views the sacredness of creation in non-hierarchical relationships and shifts the idea of ensuring the common good beyond human society to planetary well-being.<sup>85</sup> Santmire argues for a *theology of descent*, in which God’s presence is seen indwelling the whole creation:

“This, I believe, is where God wants to be found, not vertically, above. For me, therefore, *there is no up*, spiritually. *There is only down*—and around, and in, with, and under.”<sup>86</sup>

Rhoads also highlights this multi-directional language in describing our need to change how we perceive God’s location.<sup>87</sup> Each of these Lutheran theologians affirms God’s transcendence beyond the created world, yet insists on God’s immanence within it. Just as it is important to distinguish this Christian view from pantheism, so also Santmire stresses its difference from natural theology: it begins with faith in God and leads to an engagement of nature in which traces of the divine can be discerned. “It is not the other way around, as if we were somehow able to survey nature in itself, see what we might think of traces of the divine, and then make affirmations about God.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Santmire, *Before Nature: A Christian Spirituality*, 135.

<sup>85</sup> Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key*, 260-266.

<sup>86</sup> Santmire, *Before Nature: A Christian Spirituality*, 135.

<sup>87</sup> Rhoads, “Reflections on a Lutheran Theology of Creation: Foundations for a New Reformation,” 17-19.

<sup>88</sup> Santmire, *Before Nature: A Christian Spirituality*, 144.

In short, this sacramental lens helps us see nature in a different way—both as fellow subject in a web of life and also as potential bearer of God’s presence. The insights from Luther’s theology, re-envisioning God’s location and ours in relation to the rest of the creation with multiple prepositions, stretch us and reinforce Rasmussen’s encouragement for the church to rediscover its *sacramental imagination*: “Luther’s imagination is sacramental. The entire universe is alive with the presence and power of God in Jesus and the Spirit. All material reality is sacred ... As God’s abode and handiwork, creation is inherently worthy of reverence.”<sup>89</sup>

I close with two examples of such imagination. The first is from David Rhoads, who offers a vivid image of all members of the web of life as co-participants in worship and co-recipients of sacramental grace. Recalling a vision from a dream, he describes worshipping at a cathedral in which a snake, a raccoon, and a bird received the Eucharist in addition to human beings, and the walls of the cathedral fell away to reveal a forest in which other animals gathered. “In this moment,” Rhoads writes, “it seemed as if the walls of separation had been removed and there was a seamless web of all creation praising God and exalting in the grace of Christ.” There he concludes,

From the time I awoke from that dream until this day, I have never experienced worship in the same way again. I now see Earth as the real sanctuary in which we worship, and I see myself invoking and confessing and giving thanks and praising God and making petitions and offering myself in solidarity with all of life.<sup>90</sup>

Such imagination supports the theme of nature as subject and broadens our perceptions of the environmental context beyond the church’s sanctuary walls. Verbally connecting the

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<sup>89</sup> Rasmussen, “Lutheran Sacramental Imagination,” par. 63.

<sup>90</sup> Rhoads, “Reflections on a Lutheran Theology of Creation: Foundations for a New Reformation,” 22.

water used in baptism with a local river or lake, holding an outdoor service, or offering a blessing of animals are among many ways congregations might cultivate an awareness of the whole web of life as co-participants in worship and co-recipients of grace.

As a second example of sacramental imagination, Rasmussen describes a painting of the Tree of Life based on Revelation 22 by Lutheran artist Kristen Gilje (figure 5).



**Figure 5. Tree of Life by Kristen Gilje<sup>91</sup>**

This triptych, notes Rasmussen, rightly portrays the human being is fully part of the Tree of Life, participating in God's earth-renewing purposes through its fruits and leaves "for the healing of the nations" (Revelation 22:2). "At the same time," Rasmussen observes,

life is vibrant in and around the Tree, with waters flowing from the Throne of God. Human presence for Gilje is a presence in which our power fits in, rather than masters or attempts to control. Human presence and power is part of the sacred itself. The waters that flow from the throne of God aren't dammed.<sup>92</sup>

These insights, and the artwork itself, contrast sacramental imagination to the master-slave relationship and favor a cooperative participation between God, humanity, and the rest of creation. Gilje says of her work, "My artistic mission is to communicate the sacred

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<sup>91</sup> In Rasmussen, "Lutheran Sacramental Imagination."

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., par. 66.

presence of God in all creation, by connecting the rhythms, stories and images nature has to offer with liturgical rites and rituals through art”—to which Rasmussen responds, “That’s a precise statement of Lutheran sacramental imagination.”<sup>93</sup>

As a theological lens, sacramental imagination complements this project’s biblical lens of *nature as an active subject*, mentioned above as another corrective to its objectification. Yet, it also goes beyond it by pointing to the capacity of all creation to communicate God’s sacred presence. Though God is not equated with creation in this view, to witness to God’s presence *in, with, and under* creation in daily life beyond the sanctuary walls would seem an important component of discernment for the missional church. This lens helped me pay attention to how congregations cultivate a sacramental imagination through the arts and worship, how close they draw to the suffering of God in creation, and how they envision God’s creative and redeeming presence in the world.

### Summary

The biblical and theological perspectives in this chapter characterize human relationships with God and the rest of creation as utterly reciprocal. The *active role of nature* throughout the biblical witness, in liturgy, and in song provides a faithful picture of all creation as co-participant in worship and discerning God’s work and presence in the world. The scientific description of our ecological interdependence with the rest of nature is mirrored in the theological concept of *perichoresis*, which eschews hierarchy and describes the circulation of divine life among members of equal integrity. By expressing nature’s value not in terms of its usefulness to humanity but in relationship to God, these lenses help counter both the commodification of nature in modern industrial systems and

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., par. 64.

the anthropocentrism prevalent in our functioning theologies. The *sacramental* lens also broadens our conception of what is capable of bearing the divine presence, and points the missional congregation again out beyond its walls to discern and celebrate the holy in, with, and under its ecological neighborhood. Throughout this investigation, we have seen earth-honoring insights well within Christian and oftentimes Lutheran understandings.

Worship is central to cultivating these reciprocal relationships. But as the witness of Francis of Assisi and John Muir attest, there is great potential for perichoretic and sacramental imagination to shape not only the church's perceptions of creation but also its earth stewarding work. As Rasmussen suggests: "If we considered Earth truly home, and if the environment had sacramental status for us—no drilling in the cathedral, please—would it matter for policy and action? ... If Earth were a sacrament, how would we treat it?"<sup>94</sup> Rediscovering other-than-human members of creation as fellow pilgrims and recipients of God's grace is part of the *eschatological* vision of their redemption as well as our own.

The capacity of God's cosmic eschatological vision to inform the present also issues an urgent calling for the church to embrace a new reformation—to lean into adaptive changes in its faith practices, teaching, and how it cultivates perceptions of nature, God, and humanity. This includes rediscovering the biblical symbol of the *steward*, which first describes Jesus, whose own stewardship defines and fulfills that role and who frees us by grace to participate in his stewarding work of everything that belongs to the Father. Steward then also describes humanity and especially the church in a time of environmental distress. Accordingly, this thesis holds that stewardship, which

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<sup>94</sup> Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key*, 257.

has often been a shortsighted concept in the church, can no longer be understood as one aspect of ministry but rather characterizes the whole of Christian discipleship and participation in the *missio Dei*. Through Christ and by the power of the Spirit, we become participants with God in the care and redemption of all God has made.

The theoretical, biblical, and theological lenses we have examined in this thesis project shaped how it engaged the topic of creation care with synod leaders and congregations in ministry. We now turn to a more detailed discussion of the research methodology and its practical implementation.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODOLOGY

I designed this research project to study the extent to which congregations in the Living Water Synod ELCA express earth stewardship as a component of the *missio Dei*.

The research question is:

In light of the recent resolution passed by the Living Water Synod ELCA, how missional are current creation care perceptions and practices among church leaders in the synod?

This question called for a methodology that would elicit perceptions and practices of creation care among congregation leaders and members. The end goal was primarily descriptive: to test the level of awareness regarding the recent resolution on creation care and to explain how central this component of the *missio Dei* was in respondents' theology and discipleship. To maximize the descriptive quality of the study, I included as many congregations in the synod as possible and followed up with some congregations in greater depth. Therefore, I chose an *Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods* design.

#### **Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods**

The elements of this methodology are straightforward, involving first collecting quantitative data and then explaining the quantitative results further through qualitative data.<sup>1</sup> This approach has the advantage of combining both quantitative and qualitative instruments, i.e. mixed methods, to describe phenomena. As John Creswell explains,

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<sup>1</sup> Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 224.

“This ‘mixing’ or blending of data, it can be argued, provides a stronger understanding of the problem or question than either by itself. This idea is at the core of a reasonably new method called ‘mixed methods research.’”<sup>2</sup> In this view, both qualitative and quantitative methods are valued and can complement the findings of one another.

*Quantitative methods* assume that “social phenomena can be systematically measured and scientifically assessed,” observes Peter Nardi.<sup>3</sup> A self-administered questionnaire is a common quantitative format, which my research design employed. Researchers frame questions with an aim to quantify or count responses so that they can be mathematically analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Nardi recognizes, however, that there are limits to quantitative instruments: “choosing to conduct a quantitative approach to understanding the social world can answer only some questions.”<sup>4</sup> To gain a broad picture of the synod’s creation care practices and perceptions, for example, quantitative research can count the number of respondents who have conducted an energy audit in the last five years, or use a Likert scale to measure how concerned respondents are, on average, about climate change. But quantitative instruments are not as well suited to understand the basis of an individual’s passion for the earth or the narrative contours of a congregation’s journey toward sustainability.

*Qualitative methods* are a helpful supplemental approach to use in such a case. As Herbert and Irene Rubin put it, “Qualitative researchers focus on depth rather than breadth; they care less about finding averages and more about understanding specific

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>3</sup> Peter M. Nardi, *Doing Survey Research: A Guide to Quantitative Methods*, 3rd ed. (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2014), 19.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 16.



situations, individuals, groups, or moments in time that are important or revealing.”<sup>5</sup> Researchers gather stories, illustrations, and interpretations from interviewees and “put them together in a reasoned way that re-creates a culture or describes a process or set of events in a way that participants would recognize as real.”<sup>6</sup> The focus group component of my research project followed the specific variety of qualitative research in Rubin and Rubin known as *responsive interviewing*, which allows the interviewer to adapt questions in response to what he or she is learning and “treats the interviewees more as partners than as subjects of research.”<sup>7</sup> As a fellow member of the synod, not to mention a fellow citizen of the earth, I find this concept of seeing others as partners (regardless of whether I share their opinions) to be essential if the church hopes to work toward earth stewardship and understand how to address its obstacles.

A mixed methods approach thus seeks to use the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research. Creswell identifies different strategies for relating them.<sup>8</sup> In *explanatory sequential* mixed methods—the approach of this study—the research design proceeds by administering the quantitative and then qualitative instruments sequentially, so that qualitative findings can enhance the explanatory power of previously collected quantitative data. Subsequent to the use of the quantitative instrument, qualitative questions also can be tailored to help clarify or deepen insights the researcher seeks to address further.

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<sup>5</sup> Herbert J. Rubin and Irene Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2012), 2.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>8</sup> Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 220-21.

This methodology was a natural choice because it enabled me to obtain a broad assessment of creation care perceptions and practices throughout the synod. From these data, I was able to select congregations that differed in context, perspective, and practice for more in-depth understanding through interviews. Sequential explanatory mixed methods research also supported my main question by allowing me: (1) to ascertain how widespread creation care practices were across the synod, (2) to assess the missional character of those practices and how important leaders perceived creation care to be in the ministry of the church, and (3) to identify congregations that represented a variety of viewpoints and activities for deeper investigation.

### Biblical and Theological Grounding of this Methodology

As congregational leaders seek to discern the Spirit's leading in missional ministry, they need to ask, "What is God doing?" and "What does God want to do?"<sup>9</sup> In such discernment, the scriptural metaphor of *listening* is central. The prophet Samuel learns to open himself up to God, saying, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening" (1 Sam 3:9-10). The epistles speak of "testing the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 John 4:1) and "bearing with one another" with reconciling love, even in times of disagreement (Col 3:13). The risen Jesus asks disciples to articulate in their own words what is happening in their context:

He said to them, "What are you discussing with one another as you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?" (Luke 24:17-19a)

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<sup>9</sup> Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*, 59-61.

Missional theologians highlight listening as essential to discerning God's activity within and beyond the congregation. For Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, a central task of missional leaders today is to develop spaces in which the Spirit can be heard: "Leaders cultivate the missional imagination ... by listening to and engaging their congregation's collective stories, fears, concerns, and dreams about who they are and where God is leading them."<sup>10</sup> God's vision for mission emerges from among God's people in a co-learning environment as they engage scripture, dialogue with one another, and become aware of what is happening in their changing contexts. Whether in congregational life or in everyday life, these relationships "come to be seen as the places where God's Spirit is present and calling us to enter with listening love."<sup>11</sup>

The Director of ELCA Congregational and Synodical Mission, Stephen Bouman, also believes congregations are vital to God's mission in the world. In *The Mission Table*, he uses images of various tables—e.g. altar tables, kitchen tables, decision-making tables—to illustrate centers of communication and relationship.<sup>12</sup> He challenges church leaders to become "rerooted" in their contexts and to participate in the *missio Dei* by practicing what he calls the *three great listenings*: "listening to God, listening to one another in the church, and listening to our neighbors in the community."<sup>13</sup>

Our listening *to God* is also embedded in religious *practice*. Worship, prayer, service, and hospitality, as well as the process of "dwelling in the Word," shape our

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<sup>10</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*, Leadership Network Series (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 149-50.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen P. Bouman, *The Mission Table: Renewing Congregation & Community* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

receptivity to God.<sup>14</sup> As Van Gelder and Zscheile observe, this practice of dwelling in the Word assumes that God can speak through the Word to each person present, not just experts; it cultivates imagination for recognizing God's activity in the world as well as in the biblical narrative; and it develops a congregation's capacity to listen attentively both to the Word and to those around them.<sup>15</sup> This aspect of listening has implications for attending to the researcher's own faith practices in addition to the self-reported faith practices of participants.

Our listening *to one another* involves mutual discernment. In addition to prayer and Word-dwelling, such communal discernment in the church can benefit from what Jürgen Habermas has called "communicative action," a process by which participants negotiate their shared commitments in the midst of different, sometimes conflicting, interpretations of life.<sup>16</sup> As Daubert explains, "Habermas saw communicative action as involving more than the mere exchange of ideas; it is grounded in a broader sense of trust and relationships. Therefore, it is not just the content of the speech that engages but also the credibility and reliability of the speaker."<sup>17</sup> This approach to discernment is especially important when discussing potentially polarizing topics, such as climate change. But

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<sup>14</sup> Pat Taylor Ellison, "Word-Dwelling, Deep Listening, and Faith-Based Moral Conversations in Congregations: A Nested Vision for Learning New Habits," in *Testing the Spirits: How Theology Informs the Study of Congregations*, ed. Patrick R. Keifert (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 91-95.

<sup>15</sup> Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*, 151.

<sup>16</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 2 vols. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984). See also discussion by Craig Van Gelder, "Method in Light of Scriptures and in Relation to Hermeneutics," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 3, no. 1 & 2 (2004): 61.

<sup>17</sup> Dave Daubert, "Vision-Discerning vs. Vision-Casting: How Shared Vision Can Raise up Communities of Leaders Rather Than Mere Leaders of Communities," in *The Missional Church and Leadership Formation: Helping Congregations Develop Leadership Capacity*, ed. Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 158.

through deeper listening and deliberate conversation, trust is cultivated through which a shared social vision may emerge and group participants may become more aware of their own social location. “What is important is to be aware of one’s biases as one approaches the interpretive process, and to be open to having one’s biases reframed.”<sup>18</sup> This is true of participants in conversations intended for discernment, as well as of researchers that use social science methods.

Our listening *to the community* is enhanced by both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Developments in philosophy and social science remind us that the social context is to be included among the *texts* for our interpretation. This insight from Paul Ricoeur forms the basis for his dialectical process of interpreting and explaining events through which ongoing guesswork and validation can lead to greater insight and meaning.<sup>19</sup> Just as the two disciples discovered as Jesus joined them on the road to Emmaus, Christian discernment of God’s action in the world can involve imperfect interpretations of current events that become clarified as we “open up the scriptures” especially in conversation with “strangers” in our contexts (Luke 24:18, 27, 32). These neighbors cannot be reduced to texts, of course, but are rather people through whom God may also be at work.

That Easter account, beginning with a contextual question of what people are talking about, involves genuine listening, moves toward scriptural and sacramental participation, and ends with communal discernment of the divine presence at work in the

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<sup>18</sup> Van Gelder, “Method in Light of Scriptures and in Relation to Hermeneutics,” 59.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, Essays in Hermeneutics 2 (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1991). See also discussion by Van Gelder, “Method in Light of Scriptures and in Relation to Hermeneutics,” 60.

world. “What do you see that makes God rejoice? Where do you see God already at work?”<sup>20</sup> These are among the questions Daubert encourages congregations to ask when engaging their communities, confident that God is actively present there. He further observes that while demographic information can be a helpful component of understanding the context, it is *relational* engagement—by which he means “a genuine desire to know the people within a church’s context”—that is crucial for the integrity of the church’s work, which is shown in its demonstrated actions and which verifies statistical data.<sup>21</sup> These insights support this project’s rationale for conducting qualitative interviews with specific congregations following a broad quantitative survey.

In sum, my methodology essentially took a snapshot of the synod through a wide-angle lens followed by a few close-ups. Its attention was on a particular window of time. In order to provide an accurate representation of the creation care perceptions and practices of Living Water Synod, I focused on these aspects of listening—to God, to others, and to the context—through the lenses of scripture and theology, the tools of social science research, and an openness to the other in my interpersonal communication with the questionnaire respondents and focus group interviewees.

## **Research Design**

### Census Survey

In the first phase of research, I conducted a quantitative *census survey* of congregations in the Living Water Synod by administering a questionnaire to all pastors

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<sup>20</sup> Daubert, “Vision-Discerning vs. Vision-Casting: How Shared Vision Can Raise up Communities of Leaders Rather Than Mere Leaders of Communities,” 164.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

and other rostered leaders in the synod (see appendix B). This included pastors who were retired or in special ministry settings, since in this synod they may vote at the assembly and, therefore, participated in the passage of the resolution. Or, if not present at the assembly, the retired pastors at least received news about it. The synod bishop gave me permission to work with the synod office for their contact information and to conduct the survey. The preferred method for completing the questionnaire was online through SurveyMonkey; paper questionnaires that I numbered and tracked were also available upon request. The questionnaire was administered over a period of one month—November 15 to December 15, 2014. This turned out to be the first wave of survey. Before this period began, I field-tested the online questionnaire with pastors and lay leaders of three congregations from other denominations. A second wave took place seven months later, when I contacted pastors and other rostered leaders whose congregations were not represented in the first wave and gave them an opportunity to complete the survey over a three-week time period, July 4-24, 2015. I obtained e-mail addresses from the synod office and contacted the pastors directly. The purpose of this second wave was to increase participation, particularly among leaders and congregations for which creation care was not a major emphasis (see appendix D).

The primary mode of contact was via e-mail. Out of 195 e-mails sent by the synod office to all rostered leaders with the initial invitation, 117 were opened (as reported by the synod communications person) and seventy-seven rostered leaders completed the questionnaire online in the first wave. For three pastors who did not have e-mail access, I mailed a paper copy of the questionnaire with a cover letter and implied consent form (see appendices D and E). Two were returned. An additional seven clergy completed the

survey online in the second wave, out of a total of forty-six e-mails sent. Hence, the total number of participating pastors and other rostered leaders was eighty-six. They represented 43.4% of all rostered leaders in the synod.

The pastors currently serving congregations were asked to choose three lay members to complete the questionnaire, if possible: (1) a congregational president or other elected leader, (2) someone from the congregation's creation care team if it had one, and (3) someone between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine inclusive. Pastors serving more than one congregation could choose three from each congregation. This was a *nonprobability purposive snowball-type* invitation process through which pastors forwarded the online survey link via e-mail to the lay members they selected. For the three pastors receiving a questionnaire by regular mail, the link was included in the cover letter. There were forty-four laypersons in the first wave and six in the second wave, for a total of fifty laypersons that completed the questionnaire online. No paper questionnaires were requested.

Together with pastors and other rostered leaders, the total number of participants was 136. They represented a strong majority (61.3%) of the congregations, eighty-four out of 137 congregations, in the synod. There were also three respondents who were rostered in the Living Water Synod but were members of congregations in another synod.

The invitation to participate was reinforced in three ways. The first was a direct e-mail to all rostered leaders thanking those who had participated and inviting those who had not yet responded. The same 195 e-mail addresses in the first wave and the forty-six e-mail addresses in the second wave that received the initial invitation received three additional weekly updates (see appendix D). Second, I made a follow-up telephone call to



the three pastors who did not have e-mail access. The third reinforcement, in the first wave only, was a general announcement in the weekly synod e-mail about the care survey, saying that pastors received the invitation and online link and were seeking lay participation (see appendix D). This general list included about 608 e-mail addresses, plus or minus two each week, and in addition to the 195 e-mail addresses of rostered leaders also included lay leaders and others who signed up to receive weekly synod news. On average, 294 of those e-mails were opened, according to the synod communications person. This general announcement did not include the link to the online survey, since I was focusing on rostered leaders and looking especially for three categories of lay involvement. Including the link there likely would have yielded more participants and may have been beneficial to an overall view of the synod. However, I was interested in the responses of specific lay members, as outlined above. In the end, I was pleased with the response rate of forty-three percent of rostered leaders and sixty-one percent of synod congregations represented.

I analyzed the quantitative data with descriptive and inferential statistics using SPSS software. The descriptive statistics included Ns, frequencies, and percentages of the respondents according to age, gender, clergy or lay status, role in the congregation, and political preference. These statistics also helped to describe individual creation care practices and faith practices, as well as congregational creation care practices in areas of worship, education, congregational life, building and grounds, and community action. Further descriptive statistics included calculating means of Likert-scale questions about creation care perceptions. The inferential tests which were run included correlations of individual creation care perceptions and practices by personal discipleship, political

preference, and leisure activities; and correlations of congregational creation care practices by context, importance of creation care to pastors, and belief that creation care participates in God's mission. I also conducted analysis of variance (ANOVA) and independent t-tests comparing groups according to age, gender, clergy or lay status, and political preference to determine inferential significance when comparing means.

### Focus Group Protocol

In the second phase of research, I conducted qualitative interviews using a focus group protocol (see appendix C). Careful attention to framing the interview questions and probes, selecting interviewees that were knowledgeable about the topic within their particular context, and cultivating an openness to learn without predetermining outcomes were key aspects of this qualitative phase. I followed Rubin's and Rubin's *responsive interviewing* approach, mentioned above, in which researchers can respond to and ask follow-up questions about what they are hearing in the moment, rather than rely exclusively on predetermined questions and probes: "In exploratory studies, you listen for unanticipated material and then plan to follow up on any new ideas or perspectives you hear to examine their relevance for your study."<sup>22</sup> After assessing the survey results with particular attention to congregations' contexts and the missional character of their creation care perceptions and practices, I selected two congregations to interview that had active creation care teams and two congregations that did not. In one of the latter cases, I telephoned and wrote to one active pastor whose perceptions of creation care (less enthusiastic) I wanted to explore further, inviting him and one or two members of his congregation to attend a cluster interview with another congregation close by, but that

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<sup>22</sup> Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, 122.

pastor declined. A total of thirteen people participated in the focus group interviews, eight of which had participated in the survey.

There were several concepts embedded in my main research question about how missional the creation care practices and perceptions of congregations could be seen in light of the synod resolution. These concepts included: what congregations were doing currently to care for the earth, how interviewees understood environmental stewardship in relation to their faith and God's action in the world, how important it was to them that the church care about the environment, where they saw environmental stewardship taking place in the wider community, and how aware they were about the synod's recent resolution about creation care being integral to faith practices. These queries formed the basis of my focus group protocol (see appendix C).

I field-tested this focus group protocol with the same pastors and lay leaders who had field-tested the questionnaire. Since some questions had to do with the synod resolution, I also field-tested this protocol with another Lutheran congregation in the synod, whose qualitative data I did not include in my results. The qualitative interviews took place at the location of each congregation selected, or, in the case of the cluster interview, at one hosting congregation. To participate in a focus group required signing an informed consent form, which I read through with the interviewees (see appendix F). I recorded the interviews with an audio digital recording device and took brief notes during the meeting. A lay colleague acted as recorder for each of the focus groups, not commenting but writing on a newsprint pad words and phrases that were being offered by group members about each question and hanging the sheets of paper in the room. The

colleague signed a statement of confidentiality (see appendix G). I transcribed the audio recordings myself, aided by my notes and the newsprint account.

From the transcripts of each interview session, I followed Charmaz's process of coding qualitative data. This involved an *initial coding* process of word-by-word, line-by-line, and incident-by-incident coding to produce *in vivo* codes. A subsequent process of *focused coding* involved clustering the *in vivo* codes into similar concepts, paying attention to both the frequency and value of these initial codes. A second level of abstraction followed with *axial coding*, clustering the focused codes into similar categories and beginning to relate them to the theoretical and theological lenses of this thesis. A final step was *theoretical coding*, specifying the interrelationships and possible directions of influence between the axial codes.<sup>23</sup> The advantage of Charmaz's coding process is that the research data are grounded in the words of the people being interviewed, not initially placed in categories imposed by the researcher. After completing this coding process for each focus group separately, I then began to look for patterns of similarity and contrast across the whole set of groups interviewed.

### Summary

This thesis project employed an explanatory sequential mixed methods research methodology, combining both the explanatory capability of quantifiable measures and the open-ended structure of qualitative interviews. Both components of the mixed methods approach enhance the ability of the researcher to listen to the community. An explanatory sequential mixed methods research design fit my research question well since the main objective was to describe a picture of the synod's creation care practices and perceptions,

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<sup>23</sup> Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 42-70.

both through a broad lens and deeper follow-up opportunities with congregations. About forty-three percent of rostered leaders and sixty-one percent of the congregations of the Living Water Synod were represented in this study, with a total of 136 completed questionnaires with data from eighty-four congregations, and thirteen participants from four congregations in the follow-up interviews. We now turn to the results of this project's social science research, first to the questionnaire responses and then to an analysis of the focus group interviews.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS

The purpose of my research was to understand how church leaders of the Living Water Synod view creation care and live it out as part of their faith. How many are involved in specific sustainable practices? How important is caring for creation in their understanding of Christian identity and mission today? To rephrase my main research question: *Given the synod's expressed emphasis on creation care as an integral part of faith, 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?*

#### **Quantitative Results**

Quantitative research is one appropriate strategy for addressing my research question as it seeks to gather information from a large number of people about their beliefs and practices relative to creation care. The ability of these data to make generalizations about the population has limits, however, since it was not a truly random sample. As Peter Nardi observes, “With nonprobability methods ... you are limited to making conclusions about only those who have completed the survey.”<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the high level of participation in this study reflects its descriptive capacity, with over forty percent of rostered leaders in the synod (43.4%) and a strong majority of congregations (61.3%) represented.

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<sup>1</sup> Nardi, *Doing Survey Research: A Guide to Quantitative Methods*, 124.

### Profile of Quantitative Survey Participants

Descriptive statistics help us begin to understand this study's quantitative sample.

**Table 2. Gender and Rostered Status of Survey Participants**

		Frequency	Valid Percent
<i>Gender</i>			
Valid	Female	56	43.1
	Male	74	56.9
	Total	130	100.0
<i>Rostered Status</i>			
Valid	Clergy		63.2
	Called to congregation	58	67.4
	Specialized ministry	9	10.5
	Retired	19	22.1
	Total Clergy	86	100.0
	Lay		36.8
	Elected Council	23	46.0
	Creation Care Team	16	32.0
	Other	11	22.0
	Total Lay	50	100.0
	Total Clergy and Lay	136	100.0

Table 2 shows an initial profile of the survey participants. A total of 136 questionnaires were completed. Over half of the respondents (56.9%) were male, 43.1% were female; and about seven clergy participated for every four lay leaders. Among clergy who completed the survey, 67.4% were actively called to a congregation, 22.1% were retired, and 10.5% were in specialized ministry (chaplaincy, synod staff, campus ministry). Among lay participants, almost half (46.0%) were elected leaders, 32.0% were members of a creation care team, and 22.0% were involved in other self-reported congregational activities including music, Christian education, and youth ministry.

**Table 3. Cross-tabulation of Clergy and Lay Survey Participants by Gender**

<i>n</i> =130	Clergy		Lay		Total Gender	
Valid	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Female	23		33		56	
% of females		41.1		58.9		100.0
% of clergy/lay		27.4		71.7		
Male	61		13		74	
% of males		82.4		17.6		100.0
% of clergy/lay		72.6		28.3		
Total Clergy and Lay	84	100.0	46	100.0	130	100.0

A cross-tabulation of clergy and lay participants by gender in table 3 indicates that while lay and clergy females were evenly represented, far more males who were clergy (82.4%) participated than did males who were lay (17.6%). It also shows that there were more than twice as many male clergy (72.6%) than female clergy respondents (27.4%), and that among the laity there were more than twice as many females (71.7%) as males who participated (28.3%).

**Table 4. Age Distribution of Survey Participants**

Age	Frequency	Valid Percent	Mean
Valid 18-29	11	8.4	
30-39	11	8.4	
40-49	14	10.7	
50-59	34	26.0	
60-69	38	29.0	
70-79	18	13.7	
80 or older	5	3.8	
Total	131	100.0	56.0
Missing	5		
Total	136		



Table 4 shows the age distribution of participants, roughly according to decade. The youngest survey participant was 18 and the oldest was 84. Although there was some representation from all age categories, a majority of respondents were in their fifties or sixties. Further calculations revealed the average age of survey participants was 56.0 years, the median age was 58.0 years, and the mean had a standard deviation of 15.561. Only 27.5% of respondents were younger than 50, including 8.4% who were under 30.

**Table 5. Political Preference of Survey Participants**

Political Preference		Frequency	Valid Percent	Independent Total
Valid	Democrat	83	64.3	
	<i>Independent Leaning Democrat</i>	23	17.8	
	<i>Independent</i>	4	3.1	
	<i>Independent Leaning Republican</i>	8	6.2	27.1
	Republican	11	8.5	
	Total	129	100.0	
Missing		7		
Total		136		

When survey participants were asked, “In politics, as of today, do you consider yourself a Republican, a Democrat, or an independent?” nearly two-thirds (64.3%) said they were Democrat, 8.5% Republican, and 27.1% Independent (see table 5). A further, open-ended question asked: “*If independent*: As of today, do you lean more to the Democratic Party or the Republican Party?” Most Independents did select a leaning preference, indicated in table 5. In sum, the participants overwhelmingly associated themselves with the Democratic Party, with 82.1% identifying as Democrat or Democratic-leaning, and 14.7% as Republican or Republican-leaning. The congressional district which resembles the geographic boundary of the Living Water Synod does lean Democratic, according to the Cook Partisan Voting Index of the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress, tending

to vote one percentage point higher Democratic than the national average.<sup>2</sup> But the national average for this index, computed by each party's average vote in the previous two presidential elections, 2008 and 2012, was roughly 52.8% Democratic and 47.2% Republican.<sup>3</sup> This is much lower than the percentage of self-identified Democrat or Democratic-leaning participants in the study, even with the additional percentage point. Determining the reasons for this participation bias go beyond the scope of this thesis, but it suggests a higher Democratic preference either in the population sampled, which is a subset of the congressional district (the Living Water Synod), or among those who self-select when invited to participate in a survey about creation care issues.

**Table 6. Faith Practices of Survey Participants**

<i>How often do you participate in worship?</i>		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Once a week	116	90.6
	2-3 times a month	10	7.8
	Once a month	1	0.8
	Once every few months	1	0.8
	Total <i>n</i>	128	100.0
Missing		8	
Total		136	
<i>About how often do you engage in the following faith practices?</i>			
<u>Praying</u>			
Valid	Daily	117	91.4
	Weekly	9	7.0
	Monthly	1	0.8
	Never	1	0.8
	Total <i>n</i>	128	100.0
Missing		8	
Total		136	

<sup>2</sup> See David Wasserman, "Introducing the 2014 Cook Political Report Partisan Voter Index," 2013, <http://cookpolitical.com/house/pvi> (accessed November 12, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

**Table 6. Faith Practices of Survey Participants (continued)***About how often do you engage in the following faith practices? (cont.)*

		Frequency	Valid Percent
<u>Reading from the Bible or a devotional</u>			
Valid	Daily	83	65.9
	Weekly	34	27.0
	Monthly	6	4.8
	1-2 times/year	2	1.6
	Never	1	0.8
	Total <i>n</i>	128	100.0
Missing		8	
Total		136	
<u>Inviting someone to church</u>			
Valid	Daily	8	6.7
	Weekly	40	33.3
	Monthly	30	25.0
	1-2 times/year	38	31.7
	Never	4	3.3
	Total <i>n</i>	120	100.0
Missing		16	
Total		136	
<u>Sharing my faith with someone</u>			
Valid	Daily	39	30.7
	Weekly	58	45.7
	Monthly	18	14.2
	1-2 times/year	12	9.4
	Total <i>n</i>	127	100.0
Missing		9	
Total		136	
<u>Giving money for God's purposes</u>			
Valid	Daily	21	16.5
	Weekly	80	63.0
	Monthly	21	16.5
	1-2 times/year	4	3.1
	Never	1	0.8
	Total <i>n</i>	127	100.0
Missing		9	
Total		136	

**Table 6. Faith Practices of Survey Participants (continued)**

*About how often do you engage in the following faith practices? (cont.)*

	Frequency	Valid Percent
<u>Serving my neighbor in need</u>		
Valid    Daily	56	44.8
Weekly	42	33.6
Monthly	27	21.6
Total <i>n</i>	125	100.0
Missing	11	
Total	136	

The survey respondents were quite active in faith life, as table 6 shows. The faith practices probed by the survey corresponded to the discipleship practices lifted up by the synod and the ELCA: worship, pray, study, invite, encourage, give, and serve.<sup>4</sup> More than nine out of ten reported that they worshiped once a week (90.6%) and prayed daily (91.4%), and almost two-thirds read from the Bible daily (65.9%). Many also reported inviting people to church at least once a month (65.0%) and sharing their faith with others at least once a week (76.4%). Nearly all said they supported God’s work financially and were involved in regular service to those in need.

Table 7 shows survey participants’ preferences for leisure activities involving interaction with nature. Nearly a third of respondents (32.0%) said they preferred to interact with nature through exercise, and about one in ten (9.7%) prioritized hunting and fishing. More tended toward wilderness exploration (16.2%), plant cultivation (15.0%) and quiet reflection (13.4%). In sum, respondents overwhelmingly preferred leisure activities with nature that are non-motorized.

<sup>4</sup> See Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, “Education Program Planners.”

**Table 7. Leisure Activities Involving Interaction with Nature**

*When you think of leisure activities involving interaction with nature, which top TWO do you prefer most?*

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid Responses*		
Exercise	79	32.0
Wilderness exploration	40	16.2
Plant cultivation	37	15.0
Quiet reflection	33	13.4
Wild game	24	9.7
Other recreation	19	7.7
Animal care	10	4.0
Motorized recreation	4	1.6
None of these	1	0.4
Total <i>n</i>	247	100.0

\*Ranked by frequency. Exercise: walk, run, bicycle, field sports, cross-country ski, swim. Motorized recreation: four-wheel, snowmobile, motorcycle, motorboat, jet ski. Other recreation: golf, beach activity, city park, picnic, sail, ice skate, downhill ski. Wild game: hunt, fish. Animal care: pets, farm, zoo, birding. Plant cultivation: garden, farm, houseplants, yard work. Wilderness exploration: hike, tent camp, canoe, kayak. Quiet reflection: meditate, watch sunrise/sunset, photograph, sit, pray.

### Creation Care Perceptions of Survey Participants

We now turn to the descriptive data of respondents' creation care perceptions.

**Table 8. Concern About Challenges Facing the Earth**

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

	<i>n</i>	Mean	% Concerned	% Very Concerned	% Total
Valid Responses*					
Climate change/global warming	136	3.60	18.4	72.1	90.5
Water issues	134	3.57	30.6	63.4	94.0
Energy issues	136	3.56	28.7	64.0	92.7
Loss of biodiversity/habitat	134	3.43	32.8	56.7	89.5
Food/Agriculture issues	136	3.40	38.2	51.5	89.7
Mineral/Mining issues	134	3.12	40.3	37.3	77.6
Forestry issues	136	3.11	43.4	35.3	78.7
Global population growth	132	3.00	47.7	28.0	75.7

\*Ranked in descending order of mean. Scale:

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

Survey respondents tended to be concerned about different challenges facing the earth, with over half being “Very Concerned” about most of the issues listed (see table 8). The highest levels of concern had to do with climate change, water, and energy issues, with more than 90% of respondents being concerned or very concerned about these challenges. Although other issues ranked lower in level of concern, more than 75% of survey respondents were concerned or very concerned about all issues listed.

**Table 9. Top Two Earth-related Concerns**

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*Of these challenges facing the earth, which TWO concern you most?*

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid Responses*		
Climate change/global warming	87	32.6
Water issues	57	21.3
Energy issues	37	13.9
Food/Agriculture issues	26	9.7
Loss of biodiversity/habitat	23	8.6
Global population growth	19	7.1
Mineral/Mining issues	11	4.1
Forestry issues	5	1.9
None of these	2	0.7
Total <i>n</i>	267	100.0
Missing	5	
Total	272	

\*Ranked in descending order of frequency.

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Respondents’ levels of concern tended to mirror the same ranking when asked which challenges facing the earth concerned them most. Again, climate change, water, and energy issues were top concerns (see table 9). A summary of responses to an open-ended question provides a window into why they chose these particular challenges:

*Climate change/global warming:* Those who mentioned climate change in their remarks viewed it as “a huge threat” on a “global level” that “really encompasses every

issue.” They saw climate change as “already affecting weather and causing catastrophic events,” not only impacting “populations living in coastal lands (and in poverty)” but also “affecting our ability to sustain life.” This category of open-ended responses included the direst warnings: “The future of our planet is tied to climate change. We only have a short time to make critical changes before it is too late,” one respondent wrote. Another stated, “Climate change has proven to be a major issue in the past century, and if we do not react it may be the end of the human race. The planet will survive, but will we?”

*Water:* Responses in this category mentioned water’s “essential” quality as “a basic human need” without which “we cannot live.” At the same time, respondents stated that “people take water for granted way too often,” and “we are frivolous with our use.” One noted that “aquifers are being depleted and forestry/ paper production/ mining/ agricultural practices directly affect the long-term quality of that water.” Others said water is “tough to clean up,” and “It needs to be managed better especially in the West and in oil fracking areas.” They believed “rising populations” will accelerate the decline of fresh water, affecting other interrelated systems including “food and habitat.” In short, those who prioritized water declared, “We have to take better care of this resource.”

*Energy* was the third-most mentioned concern. That human production and use of energy “impact global climate change” and “affect most of the other challenges,” led survey respondents to conclude, “Humanity's failure to steward its energy resources wisely has imperiled life on the planet.” Their statements linked economic, political, and ecological dimensions. “I feel the government is onerous regarding energy and that current practices will not allow for enough energy,” said one. “Affordable and renewable energy is a must to sustain life as we have become accustomed to it,” observed another.

Together with water issues, respondents saw energy concerns as “geopolitical” that “can play major roles in international conflicts.” Though they made no explicit mention of the need for conservation, they admitted deep concern about “the uneven distribution of these resources and the temptation of those who ‘have’ to hoard resources and/or be unwilling recognize the needs of all our planet.”

*Remaining issues:* Those who commented on *food/agriculture* recognized the need for “stable food sources,” and that “dealing with hunger issues” is a focal point for “our ministry and mission.” There were no specific statements about genetically modified food or organic versus agribusiness corporations, but respondents believed “local communities can have a huge impact.” Regarding *loss of biodiversity/habitat*, respondents said this “impact of human activity affects the whole capacity of the planet to sustain life” and noted that even “minor changes ... can have long reaching repercussions that we may not see for decades—too late.” Those who chose *global population growth*, observed that its “increasing rate each year puts more demands on the earth’s resources,” and with climate change it is an “overriding concern,” driving “all other challenges.” Some mentioned *mining* as “essential to the economy,” others that it is a “hot topic” and that its implications “challenge quality of life for all beings, and not just human beings.” In general, respondents saw the urgency and interconnectedness of these challenges facing the earth, the need for human beings to “alter their fundamental views about the earth, natural resources, and energy consumption,” and the potential for “individuals and businesses” to make changes.

Table 10 shows participants’ agreement or disagreement with statements about possible struggles related to thinking or acting for the well-being of the earth. The vast



**Table 10. Perceptions of Possible Struggles in Acting for Earth's Well-being**

Valid Responses*	% Disagree or Strongly Disagree	Mean
The added expenses in dealing with this problem are not worth it.	96.9	1.48
I am too set in my ways to change.	95.4	1.64
This issue is too divisive to bring up	92.2	1.71
This problem is too big for me to make a meaningful difference.	86.3	1.92
Other problems in the world are more pressing.	84.4	1.94
Environmentalists are not being realistic enough when considering human and business needs.	68.5	2.23
	% Agree or Strongly Agree	Mean
Not enough collective will has been generated around this issue to make a difference.	64.5	2.75
Elected leaders are not moving fast enough to make and enforce stricter environmental policies.	86.3	3.23

\*Ranked in ascending order of mean. Number of valid responses ranged 124-131 out of 136. Scale: 1="Strongly Disagree"; 2="Disagree"; 3="Agree"; 4="Strongly Agree"

majority of respondents (96.9%) were not deterred by the prospect of incurring added expenses to address ecological concerns. They overwhelmingly did not believe they were too entrenched in their ways to change (95.4%), nor that they were unable to bring up this potentially divisive topic (92.2%). Most would not label environmentalists as being unrealistic (68.5%), and an even stronger majority did not think other problems in the world were more pressing (84.4%). Despite the enormity of the issue, they nevertheless believed they could make a meaningful difference (86.3%). There were two statements with which most respondents agreed or strongly agreed: 1) not enough collective will has been generated to make a meaningful difference (64.5%), and 2) elected leaders are not moving fast enough to make and enforce stricter environmental policies (86.3%).

On one element of this survey question, not reported in table 10, respondents were more evenly divided: “Primary employers in my area would not be open to creation care ideas.” Nearly half disagreed or strongly disagreed (46.2%), an additional 36.3% agreed or strongly agreed, and one in six respondents (17.4%) selected “Don’t Know.” Although not usually considered valid, the higher-than-usual response in that last category could be useful for the synod creation care team’s follow-up, encouraging congregations to seek others in their community who may value sustainability, including employers, and to begin from common ground to envision possible collaboration. This is all the more apparent when exploring additional survey questions, which asked about possible groups for potential collaboration with the church: utility companies, sportsmen and women, non-profits, and Native American tribal organizations (see table 11).

**Table 11. Perceptions About Potential Allies for Creation Care**

Valid Responses*	<i>n</i>	% Agree or Strongly Agree	% Don’t Know
I see Native American tribal organizations as allies for collaborating on creation care.	128	86.0	7.0
I see sportsmen and women (involved in hunting and fishing) as allies for collaborating on creation care.	129	83.7	8.5
I see utility companies as allies for collaborating on creation care.	129	66.7	14.7
I can name a non-profit or non-government organization in our community that would be open to collaborating with the church on caring for creation.	127	50.4	32.3
The primary employers in our community would be open to collaborating with the church on caring for creation.	128	29.7	50.0

\*In this table, valid *ns* include “Don’t Know.” Ranked in order of percentage agreement. Scale: 1=“Strongly Disagree”; 2=“Disagree”; 3=“Agree”; 4=“Strongly Agree”

Respondents saw potential in their communities for collaborating on creation care with Native Americans, hunters and fishermen, and utility companies, and a slight majority (50.4%) could name a local non-profit organization that would be open to working with the church on creation care issues (see table 11). But seen from another angle, half of respondents (49.6%) either did not know such a non-profit organization (32.3%) or could not name one (17.3%), and a solid half of respondents (50.0%) were unaware of the degree of openness primary employers may have to collaborate with the church. In another section of the survey, a strong majority (80.5%) believed they could promote environmental stewardship in their own occupation, but nearly one in ten did not know (9.4%). Again, the data suggest potential for exploring, forging, and strengthening ties between congregations and community organizations on issues of creation care.

**Table 12. Perceptions About Society and Caring for the Earth**

Valid Responses*	<i>n</i>	% Agree or Strongly Agree	Mean
Humanity's well-being is dependent on the earth's well-being.	129	99.2	3.73
Human activity is a significant factor in global temperature increase.	124	96.0	3.56
There is overwhelming scientific evidence that the current use of earth's resources is unsustainable.	125	93.6	3.53
For the sake of the global community, the U.S. should reduce its carbon emissions even if some other countries don't do the same right away.	122	93.4	3.52
The average surface temperature of the earth has been increasing.	124	95.1	3.47
I have become more concerned about the environment in recent years.	129	92.3	3.36

**Table 12. Perceptions About Society and Caring for the Earth (continued)**

	<i>n</i>	% Disagree or Strongly Disagree	Mean
The media have overemphasized the urgency of caring for the environment.	126	87.3	1.82
*Ranked in descending order of mean. Scale: 1="Strongly Disagree"; 2="Disagree"; 3="Agree"; 4="Strongly Agree"			

Table 12 shows very strong agreement among respondents regarding several current perspectives relating human society and the earth. Almost all believe humanity's well-being is dependent on the earth's well-being (99.2%). More than nine out of ten have become more concerned about the environment in recent years (92.3%) and agreed that there is overwhelming scientific evidence that the current use of earth's resources is unsustainable (93.6%). As for global warming, a vast majority of respondents agreed it is real (95.1%) and that it is accelerating through human activity (96.0%). Fewer, but still a substantial majority of respondents, did not think the media have overemphasized the urgency of caring for the earth in recent years (87.3%), but would encourage the U.S. to cut carbon emissions unilaterally for the sake of the global community (93.4%).

**Table 13. Perceptions About Jesus and Science**

Valid Responses*	<i>n</i>	% Yes	% No	% Don't Know
I believe when Jesus returns the earth will be destroyed anyway, so what's the point in doing something to care for it now?	128	0.8	94.5	4.7
I think science will develop a solution to global warming that will enable us to continue our current way of life.	128	10.2	66.4	23.4
*In this table, valid <i>ns</i> include "Don't Know." Ranked in ascending order of percentage agreement.				

One section of the questionnaire asked respondents about their views of similar perspectives in society and the church through yes/no questions. Table 13 shows an overwhelming rejection of an earth-destroying interpretation of Jesus' return (94.5%). It also reveals that two-thirds of respondents did not think science will develop a solution to global warming that will enable us to continue our current way of life (66.4%). This is much lower than the percentages reported in table 12, e.g., those who agree or strongly agree that the current use of earth's resources is unsustainable. It is a solid majority, but from another angle these data suggest that a third of respondents (those who do think science will develop a solution and those who don't know) are holding out for the possibility that our current way of life (including its level of resource consumption) may not need to change, or that if it does such change would be technical rather than adaptive.

**Table 14. Perceptions About the Church and Caring for the Earth**

Valid Responses*	<i>n</i>	% Agree or Strongly Agree	Mean
The Bible teaches that humanity is part of God's creation and is responsible to care for creation.	128	99.2	3.78
The Lutheran Church in its confessional documents and social statements teaches that humanity is part of God's creation and is responsible to care for creation.	124	98.4	3.64
Jesus' teaching about loving the "neighbor" should be interpreted to include non-human members of the earth community.	121	90.9	3.31
A congregation is an ideal setting for modeling the kind of creation care needed for a more sustainable world.	117	93.2	3.29
Our congregation's global connections through ELCA World Hunger, Malaria, or Disaster Relief increase creation care's importance for me.	122	86.8	3.11

**Table 14. Perceptions About the Church and Caring for the Earth (continued)**

	<i>n</i>	% Agree or Strongly Agree	Mean
Our congregation's global connections through ELCA or companion synods increase creation care's importance.	115	73.0	2.87
	<i>n</i>	% Disagree or Strongly Disagree	Mean
The church should not be involved in helping to shape environmental policy.	124	92.7	1.54

\*Ranked in descending order of mean.  
Scale: 1="Strongly Disagree"; 2="Disagree"; 3="Agree"; 4="Strongly Agree"

There was strong agreement among respondents' perceptions relating the church and care of the earth (see table 14). Nearly all agreed that the understanding of humanity's creatureliness and responsibility to care for creation are communicated by both the Bible (99.2%) and the teachings of the Lutheran church (98.4%). More than nine out of ten would not be against the church helping to shape environmental policy (92.7%) and would be open to interpreting Jesus' teaching about loving one's "neighbor" to include non-human members of the earth community (90.9%). Slightly fewer but still a strong majority of respondents agreed that the importance of creation care has been magnified by their congregations' involvement with global relief efforts such as ELCA's World Hunger Appeal, Malaria Campaign, and Disaster Relief (86.8%) and their connections to churches worldwide through global mission and companion synod relationships (73.0%). Of special note, this table shows respondents' robust agreement with a key assumption of this thesis (93.2%), that a congregation is an ideal setting for modeling the kind of creation care needed for a more sustainable world.

**Table 15. Christian Understanding of How Humans Should Relate to Earth**

*Which statement best represents your Christian understanding of how humans should relate to the earth?*

	Valid Percent (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

\*Ranked in descending order of percentage agreement.

When asked to choose one of three statements that best describes their Christian understanding of how humans should relate to the earth, it was heartening to see the majority of respondents (60.3%) selected the statement about earth stewardship that was intentionally phrased in terms of reciprocal relationships and participatory action with God and the earth (see table 15). Following the above discussion of theological perspectives, I would characterize this statement as more missional than the second statement in this table, which sees human stewardship as acting not “with God” but “on God’s behalf.” While not as classically species-centric as the “dominion” wording in the third statement, that a substantial number (34.9%) chose the second statement may still point to an area for missional hermeneutic development.

Survey participants were not as confident about the impact of creation care when shifting from a general view of the church to a particular congregation (see table 16). Only about half would say that what their congregation does to care for creation has

**Table 16. Perceptions About Respondents' Congregations and Creation Care**

Valid Responses*	<i>n</i>	% Agree or Strongly Agree	% Don't Know
<i>Our congregation's care for creation has...</i>			
...inspired me to care for creation in daily life.	129	50.8	10.9
...made a positive impact on the community.	128	47.7	23.4
...helped me grow in relationship with God.	128	47.6	8.6
Caring for creation is a very low priority for our congregation.	127	34.6	13.4
	<i>n</i>	% Disagree or Strongly Disagree	% Don't Know
Our congregation would lose members if it emphasized care of creation more.	128	69.5	14.1
*In this table, valid <i>ns</i> include "Don't Know." Ranked in order of percentage agreement. Scale: 1="Strongly Disagree"; 2="Disagree"; 3="Agree"; 4="Strongly Agree"			

inspired them in their own earthkeeping practices (50.8%), helped them grow in relationship to God (47.6%), or made a positive impact on the community (47.7%). Nearly one-fourth of respondents (23.4%) did not know what impact, if any, their congregations' creation care might have in their context. More than a third admitted that caring for creation is a very low priority in their congregation (34.6%). However, more than two-thirds of respondents thought that if their congregation emphasized creation care more it would not lose members (69.5%). This final note is encouraging as we now shift our focus from creation care perceptions to creation care practices.

#### Creation Care Practices of Survey Participants

Questions related to creation care practices were constructed with the four sustainability principles of The Natural Step framework in mind: reducing fossil fuel use,



reducing/recycling persistent chemicals and synthetic substances, limiting human encroachment upon nature, and seeking to meet human needs fairly and efficiently. We turn first to self-reported creation care practices of individuals, then to congregations, and finally to responses suggesting possible areas for synod creation care team support.

**Table 17. Respondents' Personal Creation Care Practices**

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*Which of the following creation care practices describe your personal involvement?*

Valid Responses	<i>n</i>	% Yes	% No
Recycling paper, glass, plastic	132	100.0	0.0
Food waste composting	127	58.3	41.7
Intentionally using alternatives to driving (carpool, bus, bike, walk)	129	46.5	53.5
Intentionally obtaining food from local or organic sources	125	73.6	26.4
I have conducted a home energy audit.	127	47.2	52.8
I have replaced a home furnace with one that is more energy efficient (in last 5 years).	122	42.6	57.4
I have replaced a vehicle with one that is more energy efficient (in last 5 years).	130	60.8	39.2
I have encouraged my workplace to consider ways to save energy or resources.	117	74.4	25.6
I have written or spoken to community leaders about caring for the earth.	130	34.6	65.4
I know I need to reduce my ecological footprint, but I struggle with how to do that.	126	72.2	27.8
I am actively reducing or seeking to reduce my ecological footprint.	126	91.3	8.7

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Survey respondents reported that they are very engaged in creation care practices (see table 17): every respondent recycles paper, glass, and plastic (100.0%); nearly three-fourths intentionally obtain food from local or organic sources (73.6%); and over half compost their food waste (58.3%). A strong majority said they recently replaced a vehicle with one that is more energy efficient (60.8%), and almost half of respondents

intentionally use alternatives to driving (46.5%). About the same number conducted an energy audit (47.2%) or replaced a home furnace with one that is more energy efficient (42.6%). Slightly fewer have written or spoken to community leaders about caring for the earth (34.6%), but nearly three-fourths have encouraged energy conservation in their workplaces (74.4%)—nearly mirroring a result mentioned above that 80.5% believed they could promote environmental stewardship in their current occupations. All of these practices are commendable, but the level of participation in each of these specific practices, except for recycling, falls short of respondents’ overall self-assessment: “I am actively reducing or seeking to reduce my ecological footprint” (91.3%). I anticipated the more accurate self-assessment to be, “I know I need to reduce my ecological footprint but I struggle with how to do that,” but fewer respondents held that view (72.2%). If we take this to mean the other 27.8% don’t struggle with *how* to reduce their ecological footprint,

**Table 18. Practices for Christian Identity and Mission**

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<i>How essential are these practices for Christian identity and/or participation in God’s mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?</i>			
Valid Responses*	<i>n</i>	% Important or Very Important	Mean
Caring for the poor	128	100.0	3.88
Praying regularly	127	99.2	3.80
Worshiping God regularly	128	97.7	3.78
Caring for God’s creation	127	98.4	3.72
Giving generously	128	99.2	3.69
Reading scripture regularly	127	94.5	3.65
Sharing our faith with others	127	98.5	3.64
Inviting someone to church	124	91.1	3.45

\*Ranked in descending order of mean. Scale:  
1=“Not at all important”; 2=“A little important”; 3=“Important”; 4=“Very Important”

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perhaps these data about creation care practices reveal that a significant part of the struggle involves actually *implementing* them.

Respondents had a very high view of the importance of creation care practices for Christian identity and participation in God’s mission today. Their view of all traditional faith practices was also very high in general, but when set alongside these other practices, creation care was not considered to be least essential in this survey (see table 18). Note that this question comes at the topic from a different angle: the resolution adopted by the Living Water Synod did not see creation care as an *additional* faith practice but rather as “integral to each faith practice” (see appendix A). What this table shows is more basic, yet also significant: overwhelming support for seeing caring for God’s creation as essential to Christian identity and participating in God’s mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### Creation Care Practices of Congregations

The process to select representatives of the eighty-four congregations from the 136 respondents was as follows: in congregations with more than one respondent, I gave preference to participants with fewer or zero “Don’t Know” answers. This almost always resulted in selecting clergy who were called to the congregation. In the case of two clergy called to the same congregation, who gave the same number of valid responses, I selected the participant that completed the questionnaire on the earliest date. This process resulted in seventy-one clergy and thirteen laypersons representing the eighty-four congregations.

Table 19 describes the community contexts of these congregations in terms of labels and population ranges. More than three-fourths of congregations (76.2%) were situated in rural or small town settings. No congregations were in or near large metropolitan cities, and only eleven congregations were located in or near a city with a

population of 50,000 or more. Though self-reporting may differ slightly from the synod's actual data, this sample was quite reflective of the synod's contextual representations.

**Table 19. Congregation Community Context**

Valid Responses ( <i>n</i> =84)	Survey Frequency	Survey Percent	Synod Frequency	Synod Percent <sup>5</sup>
Rural	30	35.7	63	45.9
Small Town < 10,000	34	40.5	47	34.3
Small City 10,001 to 49,999	9	10.7	12	8.8
Medium City 50,000 to 249,999	7	8.3	13	9.5
Suburb of Medium City	4	4.8	2	1.5
Large City 250,000 or more	0	0.0	0	0.0
Suburb of Large City	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	84	100.0	137	100.0

Questions related to congregational creation care practices were organized into five categories: Worship, Education, Congregational Life, Building and Grounds, and Community Action.<sup>6</sup> We now examine the responses of congregation representatives within each category.

Worship is at the center of congregational faith formation and practice. It was thus encouraging to see that a high percentage of congregations lift up God's concern for all creation in prayers (96.3%), hymns (91.1%), and sermons (80.0%) (see table 20). One possible influence behind the first two of these instances may be the Lutheran worship planning resource *Sundays and Seasons*, which is used by many ELCA churches.<sup>7</sup> Each

<sup>5</sup> Synod data from the ELCA, Office of the Secretary, obtained November 13, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> These categories are adapted from Rhoads, "Lutherans Restoring Creation: Training Manual for Congregations." I substitute "Congregational Life" for "Discipleship at Home and Work."

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Augsburg Fortress (Publisher), *Sundays & Seasons: Worship Planning Guide, Cycle C* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1997). This resource is published annually.

Sunday's entry contains suggestions for hymns, and its prayers always include a petition for the well-being of creation. With or without this resource, this table shows that many

**Table 20. Creation Care Practices in Congregational Worship**

*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*	<i>n</i>	% 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 sanctuary plants or altar flowers that are locally grown	76	43.4	56.6
In communion elements (bread, wine) that are locally made	81	38.3	61.7
In altar cloths, banners, or other artwork locally made	80	32.5	67.5

\*Ranked in descending order of percentage agreement.

people are recognizing the prevalence of creation-centered prayers and hymns in regular worship. But only around half of congregational representatives see an emphasis on God's creation through liturgy (58.0%), specific Sundays or seasons during the church year (48.8%), or outdoor services (46.9%). Still fewer said their congregational worship incorporates locally grown sanctuary plants or altar flowers (43.4%), locally made communion elements (38.3%), or locally made artwork or altar paraments (32.5%). In such components of worship life, congregations could make their value of God's creation more visible.

**Table 21. Creation Care Practices in Congregational Education**

*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*	<i>n</i>	% Yes	% No
In involvement with Lutheran outdoor ministry (church 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.

The survey showed that among congregations represented creation care is generally less emphasized in education than in worship, and that when congregations lifted up God's creation they tended to do so more with youth and children than with adults (see table 21). Respondents reported that many, if not most, of their congregations do lift up creation care in Sunday School (53.3%) and Confirmation programming (46.7%) but that creation care is more likely to be a component of Christian education at special times, as with Vacation Bible School (60.8%), or at special places, as with church camp (62.0%). Only about a third of congregations lift up creation care in adult forum or Bible study (35.0%), and even fewer do so through church outings (26.7%), book study groups (24.3%), or guest speakers (15.9%).

**Table 22. Creation Care Practices in Congregational Life**

*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*	<i>n</i>	% 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: e.g. turning lights off	82	58.5	41.5
In encouraging the use of local food sources	79	48.1	51.9
In offering fair trade coffee, tea, chocolate or other items for sale	80	46.3	53.8
In using fair trade coffee at church functions	81	29.6	70.4
In encouraging carpooling, biking, taking the bus to church	81	23.5	76.5
In composting food waste	80	11.3	88.8

\*Ranked in descending order of percentage agreement.

As the story of the third grader and food waste composting in the introduction of this thesis illustrated, earthkeeping habits cultivated in congregational life can have an impact on parishioners' values and practices. Table 22 shows the vast majority of congregations represented in the survey practice recycling in their facilities, targeting paper (94.0%) along with glass, plastic, and/or aluminum (90.2%). Many display signage encouraging energy conservation (58.5%), and almost half encourage the use of local food sources in congregational meals (48.1%). About the same number offer fair trade coffee or other items for sale at church (46.3%), but far fewer regularly serve fair trade coffee (29.6%) at church functions. Finally, less than a fourth of congregations actively encourage alternative modes of transportation (23.5%) or practice food waste composting (11.3%).

**Table 23. Creation Care Practices in Congregation Buildings and Grounds**

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

\*Ranked in descending order of percentage agreement.

Many congregations have taken steps to reflect the care of creation in their buildings and grounds (see table 23). Nearly three-fourths of congregations have changed light bulbs to be more energy efficient (74.7%), and a solid majority of them have policies discouraging the use of Styrofoam (56.6%). About half of the congregations have conducted energy audits (47.8%) and upgraded a furnace (50.0%), though, in addition to these valid responses, survey participants representing 16 congregations did not know whether or not an energy audit in the church had been conducted. Nearly a third of congregations keep a garden with native plants (32.9%), and about one in five utilize



church property for wildlife habitat (20.5%) or vegetable gardens (18.5%). Finally, just one congregation has installed a renewable energy source in its facility.

**Table 24. Creation Care Practices in Congregational Community Action**

*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*	<i>n</i>	% 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.

Earthkeeping actions by congregations engaging their communities were in general less widespread than their creation care practices in other categories (see table 24). Still, over a third of congregations have adopted a portion of highway or beach to clean up (38.3%), and about a fifth are collaborating with civil society organizations (19.7%) or hosting conversations in their communities about environmental sustainability (19.0%), all of which can be highly visible ways of community interaction. Political advocacy was the least prevalent form of community action in this category, with only 10 congregations engaged in writing elected leaders about earth stewardship (14.3%). This was even fewer than the number of survey participants who didn't know whether or not such advocacy was taking place in their congregations (13), if we expanded the number

of valid responses to include them. Recognizing that the systemic nature of the ecological crisis is beyond what congregations can address within their ministries, these data reveal the need for more congregations to grow in their political engagement and their collaboration within civil society on this issue.

### Creation Care Emphasis and Support in the Synod

Participants shed light on the prominence of creation care in the synod's ministry.

**Table 25. Respondents' Awareness of Synod Emphases on Creation Care**

Valid Responses*	<i>n</i>	% Yes	% No	% Don't Know
Our congregation has participated in the synod's "Discipleship Challenge" for faith practices: worship, pray, invite, give, encourage, study, serve	129	55.8	24.8	19.4
Our congregation has a functioning green team or creation care team.	129	25.6	62.8	11.6
Our synod encourages all congregations to form creation care teams.	128	71.9	2.3	25.8
Our synod encourages all congregations to conduct energy audits.	129	59.7	3.9	36.4
Our synod recognizes creation care as integral to all faith practices.	129	73.6	3.1	23.3
Our synod offers creation care retreats and congregational trainings.	127	72.4	1.6	26.0
I have read the ELCA's social statement on <i>Caring for Creation</i> .	128	53.9	43.0	3.1

\*In this table, valid *ns* include "Don't Know."

Since it was established in 2008, the Living Water Synod creation care team has emphasized creation care in the synod through assembly resolutions, retreats, and guest speakers. A strong majority of survey participants knew several components of the synod's emphasis, but there were significant gaps in both awareness and follow-through (see table 25). Of special note, 71.9% of respondents knew that the synod encourages

congregations to form creation care teams, but only 25.6% said their congregation has one (from 19.0% of congregations, sixteen out of eighty-four congregations represented). Many also knew that the synod encourages congregations to conduct energy audits (59.7%), offers creation care trainings (72.4%), and recognizes creation care as integral to all faith practices (73.6%)—addressing a significant aspect of my research question. But around a quarter or more of respondents did not know about these developments. Cross-tabulations showed that there were similar numbers of both clergy and lay who marked “Don’t Know” for the statements in table 25; there was not a notable difference in awareness between these groups of respondents. A majority of respondents said their congregation has participated in the synod’s “Discipleship Challenge” (55.8%), but this program did not explicitly include creation care. Finally, about the same number have also read the ELCA’s Social Statement, *Caring for Creation* (53.9%).

**Table 26. Cross-tabulation of ELCA Statement by Clergy and Lay Respondents**

<i>n</i> =124 Valid	Clergy		Lay		Total Yes/No	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
I have read (Yes)	52		17		69	55.6
% of Yes		75.4		24.6		100.0
% of clergy/lay		65.0		38.6		
I have not read (No)	28		27		55	44.4
% of No		50.9		49.1		100.0
% of clergy/lay		35.0		61.4		
Total Clergy and Lay	80	100.0	44	100.0	124	100.0

Those who have read this ELCA social statement were much more likely to be clergy (75.4%) than lay (24.6%), which was not surprising (see table 26). Yet the data also show that over one-third of clergy respondents (35.0%) had not read it, revealing an area of growth that could be easily promoted by the synod.

**Table 27. Potential Areas of Support from Synod Team**

*How helpful would the following areas of support from the Synod Creation Care Team be for your congregation?*

Valid Responses*	<i>n</i>	% Helpful or Very Helpful	Mean
Biblical and/or theological resources to help articulate the relationship between creation care and faith today	118	85.6	3.15
Opportunities to learn from other church leaders and congregations about their creation care	119	85.7	3.13
Opportunities to hear guest theologians and/or biblical scholars on the topic of creation care and faith today	119	85.7	3.13
Opportunities for advocacy on environmental issues facing our region	115	85.2	3.10
Grants or loans for congregational projects related to creation care	111	82.0	3.07
Worship resources, music and/or liturgy that lift up creation	118	78.8	3.00

\*Ranked in descending order of mean.

Scale: 1="Not at all helpful"; 2="A little helpful"; 3="Helpful"; 4="Very Helpful"

Survey respondents generally thought that the support of the synod creation care team would be helpful to their congregations in a variety of ways (see table 27). The respective means indicate that participants tended to describe these areas of support as more "Helpful" than "Very Helpful." Nevertheless, respondents overwhelmingly thought the team would be helpful by providing biblical and theological resources (85.6%), opportunities to learn from theologians and other congregations about their engagement with creation care (85.7%), and opportunities for environmental advocacy in the region (85.2%). A strong majority also believed their congregations could benefit from grants or loans for creation care projects (82.0%) and from worship resources that lift up creation

(78.8%). All of these data validate the current efforts by the synod creation care team to accompany congregations in their journey of deepening earth stewardship.

### Effect of Intervening Variables

The foregoing sections presented descriptive quantitative data across all demographic categories. How might these data compare among respondents according to their gender, age, or political preference? Were responses different depending on whether participants were clergy or lay? This final section of quantitative results investigates the effect of such intervening variables. I compared the means of responses to Likert-scale questions of two demographic groups through t-tests, and of multiple groups through

**Table 28. Concern and Political Preference**

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

Valid Responses for:					
<i>Democrat or leaning Democrat</i>	<i>n</i>	Mean	t	df	p
<i>Republican or leaning Republican</i>					
Climate change/global warming	106	3.79	4.483	20	<b>.000</b>
	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	<b>.003</b>
	19	2.74			
Food/Agriculture issues	106	3.45	1.399	123	.164
	19	3.21			
Mineral/Mining issues	104	3.29	4.487	121	<b>.000</b>
	19	2.47			
Forestry issues	106	3.19	2.309	123	<b>.023</b>
	19	2.74			
Global population growth	104	3.11	2.500	120	<b>.014</b>
	18	2.61			

Scale:  
1=“Not at all concerned”; 2=“A little concerned”; 3=“Concerned”; 4=“Very Concerned”

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analysis of variance (ANOVA), and I compared responses to nominal variable questions through cross-tabulations and chi-square computations. In these tests, a difference is statistically significant if the p-value is less than or equal to .050 (bold type in the tables). Discovering a significant difference does not allow us to conclude a *causal* relationship from one intervening variable to a specific question, but it does enable us to *reject the null hypothesis*, which states there is no relationship between the variables.

Table 28 shows that those identifying as Democrat or Democratic-leaning had significantly higher mean levels of concern about climate change, loss of biodiversity, mining issues, forestry issues, and global population growth, than did those identifying as Republican or Republican-leaning. Even for those issues where there was no statistically significant difference, the pattern was that those who identified as Democrat or leaned Democratic had higher mean levels of concern. There were no statistically significant differences between male and female respondents on this array of issues. However, those who were age 40 or older had a significantly higher mean level of concern about mining issues (mean = 3.20) than did those who were under 40 (mean = 2.77);  $t_{(127)} = -2.241$ ,  $p = .027$ . This same pattern was also reflected when comparing the mean level of concern about mining issues of those who were age 50 or older (mean = 3.24) with those who were under 50 (mean = 2.833);  $t_{(127)} = -2.560$ ,  $p = .012$ . Older participants were more concerned about mining issues than were younger participants. I tended to split respondents into two such age groups to run t-tests, though these statistically significant differences are similar to what ANOVA tests revealed with three age categories.<sup>8</sup> Mining

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<sup>8</sup> Respondents under age 40 (mean = 2.77) had lowest mean, followed by respondents age 40-59 (mean = 3.10) and respondents age 60-84 (mean = 3.27). The mean for the youngest group and the middle group were statistically the same, and the middle and the oldest group were statistically the same. But the mean for the youngest group and the oldest group were statistically different;  $F_{(2,126)} = 3.082$ ,  $p = .049$ .

was the only issue in this array with a statistically significant difference between age groups. Mining was also the only issue in this array with a significant difference between clergy and lay participants. Those who were clergy had a significantly higher mean level of concern about mining issues (mean = 3.235) than did those who were lay (mean = 2.918);  $t_{(132)} = 2.177$ ,  $p = .031$ . In sum, respondents who were older, Democratic-leaning, and clergy were more concerned about mining issues than were their counterparts.

**Table 29. Possible Challenges and Political Preference**

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

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

Table 29 shows significant differences between those who identified as Democrat or Democratic-leaning and those who identified as Republican or Republican-leaning regarding their levels of agreement or disagreement about possible challenges facing the earth. Democratic-leaning participants disagreed more strongly than did Republican-leaning participants that "Other problems in the world are more pressing," and, "The added expenses in dealing with this problem are not worth it." Democratic-leaning participants also agreed more strongly than did their counterparts that "Elected leaders are not moving fast enough to make and enforce stricter environmental policies."

**Table 30. 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	<b>.030</b>
This issue is too divisive to bring up.	35 93	1.94 1.61	2.815	61	<b>.007</b>
Primary employers in my area would not be open to creation care ideas.	32 76	2.72 2.30	2.919	106	<b>.004</b>

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

**Table 31. 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	<b>.015</b>
Other problems in the world are more pressing.	73 53	2.12 1.72	3.331	124	<b>.001</b>
Not enough collective will has been generated to make a difference.	72 53	2.97 2.43	3.861	123	<b>.000</b>

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

Participants differed significantly in their responses to other possible challenges when categorized by age (see table 30) and gender (see table 31). Younger respondents tended to agree that employers in their area would not be open to creation care ideas, and were not as confident as were their older counterparts that the issue of creation care wasn't too divisive to bring up. Participants who were over 50 and those who were male tended to agree that not enough collective will has been generated to make a difference, while those who were under 50 as well as those who were female leaned toward



disagreeing with that statement (for respondents under 40, the mean was 2.41). Women disagreed more strongly than did men that “Other problems in the world are more pressing,” and that “This problem is too big for me to make a meaningful difference.”

In sum, women seemed more confident than did men that they could make a personal contribution to this urgent problem and, along with younger respondents, that there was enough collective will to make a difference. It is worth noting that, in the questionnaire’s set of possible challenges related to thinking or acting for the well-being of the earth, the statement, “I am too set in my ways to change” yielded no significant differences in groupings by political preference, age, gender, or clergy/lay status. All were statistically similar in their mean level of disagreement with that statement.

**Table 32. Society, Caring for the Earth, and Political Preference**

Valid Responses for:					
<i>Democrat or leaning Democrat</i>	<i>n</i>	Mean	t	df	p
<i>Republican or leaning Republican</i>					
I have become more concerned about the environment in recent years.	105 19	3.41 3.05	2.615	29	<b>.014</b>
The average surface temperature of the earth has been increasing.	102 17	3.60 2.76	6.123	117	<b>.000</b>
Human activity is a significant factor in global temperature increase.	103 17	3.67 2.94	5.369	118	<b>.000</b>
Humanity’s well-being is dependent on the earth’s well-being.	105 19	3.82 3.26	4.902	122	<b>.000</b>
There is overwhelming scientific evidence that current resource use is unsustainable.	104 16	3.63 2.94	4.435	118	<b>.000</b>
The media have overemphasized the urgency of caring for the environment.	104 17	1.71 2.41	-3.609	119	<b>.000</b>
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	3.58 3.06	2.961	117	<b>.004</b>

Scale: 1=“Strongly Disagree”; 2=“Disagree”; 3=“Agree”; 4=“Strongly Agree”

Several of the respondents' perceptions regarding society and caring for the earth differed significantly according to their political preference (see table 32). Compared to Republican or Republican-leaning participants, Democrat or Democratic-leaning participants became significantly more concerned about the environment in recent years. They believed much more strongly that global warming is real and that it is impacted substantially by human activity, that human well-being depends on the earth's well-being, that overwhelming scientific evidence reveals our current resource use is unsustainable, and that the U.S. should unilaterally reduce carbon emissions for the sake of the planet. Democrat and Democratic-leaning participants disagreed more strongly than did their Republican-leaning counterparts that the media have overemphasized the urgency of caring for the environment.

**Table 33. Congregations, Caring for the Earth, and Age**

Valid Responses for: <i>Ages 18-39</i> <i>Ages 40+</i>	<i>n</i>	Mean	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Our congregation would lose members if it emphasized creation care more.	17 93	2.29 1.92	1.980	108	<b>.050</b>
Our congregation's care for creation has inspired me to do so in my daily life.	18 96	2.17 2.78	-3.143	112	<b>.002</b>
Caring for creation is a very low priority for our congregation.	20 90	2.70 2.22	2.598	108	<b>.011</b>

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

Table 33 shows significant differences between respondents under 40 and those age 40 and older regarding their levels of agreement or disagreement about some aspects of congregations and creation care. Younger respondents tended to agree that caring for creation was a low priority in their congregations, while older respondents leaned toward disagreeing with that assessment. Older respondents tended to agree that the

congregation's earthkeeping practices inspired similar practices in daily life. Both groups generally disagreed that the congregation would lose members if it emphasized creation care more, but the mean disagreement of younger respondents was significantly less pronounced. Comparing those under 50 and those 50 and over yielded similar, significant results for these three statements. On the one hand, it is reassuring that older members strongly disagreed that the congregation would lose members with more creation care emphasis—an encouragement to increase emphasis. On the other hand, the significant difference between them and their younger counterparts indicates that younger members might not be aware of the openness of older members to such emphasis.

**Table 34. Essential Christian Practices for Clergy and Lay**

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

Valid Responses for: <i>Clergy</i> <i>Laity</i>	<i>n</i>	Mean	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Worshiping God regularly	82 46	3.90 3.56	3.470	57	<b>.001</b>
Praying regularly	82 45	3.88 3.67	2.460	64	<b>.017</b>
Reading scripture regularly	82 45	3.83 3.31	4.429	57	<b>.000</b>
Inviting someone to church	81 43	3.59 3.19	3.433	122	<b>.001</b>
Sharing our faith with others	82 45	3.74 3.44	3.109	79	<b>.003</b>
Caring for God's creation	81 46	3.74 3.70	0.504	125	.615
Giving generously	82 46	3.84 3.41	4.790	69	<b>.000</b>
Caring for the poor	82 46	3.94 3.78	2.335	62	<b>.023</b>

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

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It was not surprising that clergy respondents assigned higher mean levels of importance than did lay respondents to every practice listed in the questionnaire pertaining to Christian identity and mission today (see table 34). While both clergy and lay participants believed all of these practices to be important, those who were clergy on average saw the regular faith practices of worship, praying, reading scripture, inviting, evangelism, giving, and caring for the poor with significantly more importance than did those who were lay. The only faith practice listed without a significant difference in importance between clergy and lay respondents was caring for God's creation. There were no significant differences for responses to this question when comparing different genders. The only significant difference with respect to political preference and this question had to do with "Sharing our faith with others," with Republican and Republican-leaning respondents assigning more importance (mean = 3.84) than Democrat and Democratic-leaning participants (mean = 3.60);  $t_{(33)} = -2.448$ ,  $p = .020$ . There were also a few significant differences with respect to age (see table 35). Respondents age 40 and

**Table 35. Essential Christian Practices and Age**

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

Valid Responses for: <i>Ages 18-39</i> <i>Ages 40+</i>	<i>n</i>	Mean	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Worshiping God regularly	22 106	3.45 3.85	-2.446	23	<b>.022</b>
Reading scripture regularly	22 105	3.27 3.72	-2.469	24	<b>.021</b>
Inviting someone to church	22 102	3.09 3.53	-2.937	122	<b>.004</b>

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

---

older assigned more importance to worshipping regularly, reading scripture regularly, and inviting someone to church than did those under age 40. All respondents thought these were important, to be sure, but the importance for older participants was significantly greater. Again, the importance of caring for God's creation was statistically similar when comparing respondents' age, gender, political preference, or clergy or lay status.

We conclude this section on the effect of intervening variables by looking at reciprocal relationship and co-participation with God, additional themes I sought to assess in the questionnaire. We recall that when participants were asked, "Which statement best represents your Christian understanding of how humans should relate to the earth?" a strong majority of respondents (60.3%) chose the language of "humanity's interdependent relationships with God and the rest of creation" and saw human beings as "participants with God in God's creative and redeeming work" (see table 15). Almost all the remaining participants (34.9%) chose the language of "acting on God's behalf," and very small numbers chose language about human "dominion" for the sake of "the progress of humanity" (3.2%) or "None of these" (1.6%).

If we set aside the choices for both "None of these" and "dominion," and compare the other two answers in relation to intervening variables, we find this question is independent in relation to gender and age, but contingent in relation to political preference and contingent in relation to clergy or lay status. Table 36 shows those who identified as Democrat or Democratic-leaning were significantly more likely to choose the statement about humanity's interdependence and co-participation with God than those who identified as Republican or Republican-leaning, who were more likely to choose the statement about acting on God's behalf;  $X^2_{(1)} = 6.624$ ,  $p = .019$ . In table 37, clergy

**Table 36. Cross-tabulation of Humanity's Relation to Earth by Political Preference**

<i>n</i> =117	Democrat or leaning Dem		Republican or leaning Rep		Total Relation	
Valid	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Interdependent co-participants	69		5		74	63.2
<i>Expected count</i>	64.5		9.5			
% of Interdependence		93.2		6.8		100.0
% of Political Pref.		67.6		33.3		
Act on God's behalf	33		10		43	36.8
<i>Expected count</i>	37.5		5.5			
% of Act Behalf		76.7		23.3		100.0
% of Political Pref.		32.4		66.7		
Total Political Preference	102	100.0	15	100.0	117	100.0

**Table 37. Cross-tabulation of Humanity's Relation to Earth by Clergy/Lay Status**

<i>n</i> =120	Clergy		Lay		Total Relation	
Valid	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Interdependent co-participants	57		19		76	63.3
<i>Expected count</i>	49.4		26.6			
% of Interdependence		75.0		25.0		100.0
% of Clergy/Lay		73.1		45.2		
Act on God's behalf	21		23		44	36.8
<i>Expected count</i>	28.6		15.4			
% of Act Behalf		47.7		52.3		100.0
% of Clergy/Lay		26.9		66.7		
Total Clergy or Lay	78	100.0	42	100.0	120	100.0

respondents were also more likely to chose language about humanity's interdependence and co-participation with God than those who were lay, who were significantly more

likely to choose language about acting on God's behalf;  $X^2_{(1)} = 9.111$ ,  $p = .003$ . So the effect of political preference and the effect of clergy or lay status were not independent of this question. These data suggest growth in missional language about reciprocal relationships and cooperation with God is needed especially among laity, though 26.9% of clergy also saw humanity acting on God's behalf.

The data also suggest that Republican and Republican-leaning participants were generally less open to language of reciprocal relationships and co-participation with God. This suggestion is supported when looking at another item in the questionnaire, which asked how strongly respondents agreed or disagreed with the statement, "Jesus' teaching about loving the 'neighbor' should be interpreted to include non-human members of the earth community." Democrat or Democrat-leaning participants agreed significantly more strongly (mean = 3.42) with this statement than did Republican or Republican-leaning participants (mean = 2.81);  $t_{(17)} = 2.385$ ,  $p = .029$ . There was no significant difference when comparing responses to this statement according to age or clergy or lay status, but there was for gender. Female participants agreed significantly more strongly (mean = 3.49) than did male participants (mean = 3.17) that love for the neighbor should extend beyond the human community;  $t_{(118)} = -2.389$ ,  $p = .018$ . An overview of the effects of intervening variables will conclude the quantitative summary, to which we now turn.

### Quantitative Summary

The aim of my quantitative research was to capture a wide snapshot of the creation care perceptions and practices of clergy and lay leaders in the Living Water Synod and to begin assessing the missional character of those perceptions and practices. After analyzing the survey responses of 136 active participants representing eighty-four

congregations of the synod, I am even more convinced of the need for the church to emphasize creation care as a component of God's mission for the life of the world.

In general, respondents are personally engaged in various creation care practices and 98.4% see creation care as an essential part of Christian identity and expression of participating in God's mission today. The vast majority of participants believed they are actively reducing their ecological footprint, but 72.2% struggle with how to do that. Many of their personal practices are reflected in congregational life, but to a lesser degree. For example, 100% of respondents recycle but 94% of congregations do; 73.6% obtain food from local or organic sources but only 48.1% of congregations encourage that practice; 46.5% of respondents use alternative modes of transportation but only 23.5% of congregations actively encourage it; and 58.3% of individuals compost food waste but only 11.3% of congregations practice it. Congregations are also more likely to sell fair trade coffee for personal use than to serve it.

While such discrepancies may be indicative of limited services in rural areas or small towns where most of the congregations are situated, these data reflect the admission of a third of the respondents: that creation care is a very low priority in their congregations. Nevertheless, the higher percentage of personal involvement in these practices should embolden congregations to make them part of their corporate life. They should take courage from the 69.5% percent who thought they would not lose members if their congregation emphasized creation care more, and especially from the 93.2% who agree with a key assumption of this thesis, that a congregation is an ideal setting for modeling the kind of creation care needed for a more sustainable world. Similar data should also encourage congregations to follow through with synod calls to action by



conducting energy audits and establishing creation care teams in order to take steps to reduce their buildings' carbon footprints and cultivate the synod's recognition, known by 73.6% of respondents, that creation care is integral to all faith practices.

Respondents were generally very concerned about many challenges facing the earth, especially climate change, energy, and water issues. They overwhelmingly believe global warming is real, that it is accelerating through human activity, that scientific evidence convincingly shows the current use of earth's resources is unsustainable, that science will not find a solution to global warming enabling us to continue our current way of life, and that the U.S. should cut carbon emissions unilaterally for the sake of the global community. But while 86.3% say elected leaders are not moving fast enough to make and enforce stricter environmental policies, and 92.7% do not oppose the church being involved in helping shape environmental policy, only 34.6% of respondents or 14.3% of congregations represented have written or spoken to elected leaders about caring for the earth.

About 20% of congregations are collaborating with civil society organizations already to work for environmental sustainability, and a strong majority of respondents see in Native American tribal groups, hunting and fishing organizations, and utility companies potential partners for the church in caring for creation. But while only about half could name a non-profit or non-government organization that would be open to such collaboration, and while about 30% thought primary employers in their area would be open to it, 50% did not know. Again, congregations can be encouraged by the 92.2% of survey respondents who said the issue is not too divisive to bring up, the 74.4% who have already approached their workplaces about adapting ecologically, and the 85.2% who

believed providing opportunities for advocacy on regional environmental issues would be a helpful way the synod creation care team could support their congregations. These are important ways the church may cultivate an understanding of its participation with God in global civil society.

Nearly all respondents believe that the Bible teaches that humanity is part of God's creation and is responsible to care for it. Over 98% also believe the Lutheran church teaches the same about earth stewardship, but only about half have read the ELCA's Social Statement, *Caring for Creation*, and a third of clergy respondents have not read it. Although 98.4% of respondents view creation care as essential to Christian identity and mission today, only 19.0% of congregations represented in the survey have established creation care teams, and less than two-thirds of congregations lift up God's creation intentionally in their church education. When taught, creation care is more likely to be lifted up with children and youth than with adults, and more likely at a special time (VBS) or a special place (church camp) than as part of regular programming.

Still, the perspective of most survey respondents—all of whom were adults—was definitely hospitable to the unique role humanity is called to play in earth stewardship. When set alongside other possible ways to understand how humans should relate to the earth, the majority of respondents (60.3%) chose missional language of reciprocal relationships and participation with God:

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.

Nearly all others chose the language of “acting on God's behalf to protect the earth.”

While this distinction may point to an area to grow in the missional hermeneutic, i.e., participating “with God and the rest of creation” in the *missio Dei*, I am encouraged that

most respondents seem very receptive to it. Findings from other survey components support this conclusion. For example, participants overwhelmingly rejected an earth-destroying interpretation of Jesus' return, and more than 90% believe Jesus' teaching about loving the "neighbor" should be interpreted to include non-human members of the earth community, relaying an openness to perichoretic, reciprocal relationality.

Respondents affirmed the current activities of the synod team, identifying as helpful the resources for worship and education, opportunities to learn from other congregations, grants and guest speakers the team provides. But the data also show that congregations' awareness of creation care as integral to all faith practices could be enhanced by making conscious some connections that already exist. For example, a strong majority agree creation care's importance is heightened by their congregations' connections with ELCA World Hunger appeal, malaria campaign, disaster response, global mission, and companion synod relationships—all of which could be avenues for linking creation care to education. Respondents' personal leisure activities—which center around exercise, wilderness exploration, plant cultivation, and non-motorized recreation in addition to a smaller percentage engaged in hunting and fishing—might also be arenas that could enrich congregations' engagement and understanding of creation care. Finally, taking respondents' high view of creation care as essential to Christian identity and mission today, together with their strong participation in faith practices like worship, prayer, Bible study, and service, should encourage all to actively consider these practices as inseparable from creation and our role as stewards. That over 80% of congregations are hearing creation care mentioned in the pulpit and even more in congregational hymns and prayers indicates they are already beginning to make these connections.

Testing the data according to respondents' gender, age, political preference, and clergy or lay status added another layer of interpretation. Of all the intervening variables in my survey, political preference yielded the most frequent statistically significant differences. Independent t-tests showed that Democrat or Democratic-leaning participants have become significantly more concerned about the environment in recent years than Republican or Republican-leaning participants. Democratic leaners believed much more strongly than their counterparts in the reality of global warming, that human activity is a major cause of climate change, that human well-being depends on the earth's well-being, that scientific evidence demonstrates the unsustainability of our current resource use, and that the U.S. should unilaterally reduce carbon emissions for the sake of the whole earth community. Those who identified as Democrat or Democratic-leaning also had significantly higher mean levels of concern about climate change, loss of biodiversity, mining issues, forestry issues, and global population growth, than did their Republican or Republican-leaning counterparts, and higher mean levels of concern for all issues in the survey even when there was no statistical significance. For Democratic-leaning participants, significantly more than Republican-leaning ones, the urgency of caring for the environment is not being overemphasized, there is no world problem more pressing, it is worth additional expenses to solve, and elected leaders are not moving fast enough to make and enforce stricter policies. Women seemed more confident than did men that they could make a difference personally and, along with younger respondents, collectively.

Mining was not among the top concerns of respondents (it ranked seventh out of eight in mean level of concern—see tables 8 and 9), yet it was the only issue among others in that array that resulted in significant differences when conducting independent t-

tests on additional intervening variables. Respondents who were older and who were clergy, in addition to those who were Democratic-leaning, were on average more concerned about mining issues than were their counterparts. Perhaps related to the mining industry, younger respondents were closer to believing that employers in their area would not be open to creation care ideas, and they were not as confident as were their older counterparts that the issue of creation care wasn't too divisive to bring up.

While all participants believed every traditional faith practice to be important, those who were clergy saw the regular practices of worship, praying, reading scripture, inviting, evangelism, giving, and caring for the poor with significantly more importance than did those who were lay. The importance of worshipping regularly, reading scripture regularly, and inviting someone to church was also significantly greater for those who were age 40 and older than for those under 40. I was not surprised that respondents who were older and who were clergy assigned more importance to these faith practices. I was encouraged that the importance of caring for God's creation was statistically similar across the board; its high mean level of importance was generally affirmed by all respondents regardless of age, gender, political preference, and clergy or lay status.

Cross-tabulations and chi-square computations revealed further significant differences regarding themes of reciprocal relationship and co-participation. When presented with statements about humanity's relationship to the earth, Democrat and Democratic-leaning participants were significantly more likely to choose language emphasizing interdependence with other creatures and co-participation with God, and Republican or Republican-leaning participants were significantly more likely to choose language about acting on God's behalf. Clergy respondents were also significantly more

likely to chose language about humanity's interdependence and co-participation with God than those who were lay, who tended to prefer the language of acting on God's behalf. The openness to the missional language of reciprocal relationality and cooperation with God was thus largely coming from clergy and from Democratic-leaning participants. Both Democrat-leaning participants and women agreed significantly more strongly than did their counterparts that Jesus' teaching about loving the *neighbor* should extend beyond humanity.

When considering these statistical differences, we should not lose sight of the overall trajectory of the data—for example, over 90% of respondents agreed that Jesus' concept of neighbor could be applied to non-human members of the earth community. We should also recall that the data only reveal the perceptions and practices of this sample. How would the data look if respondents were more balanced politically, or included more laity or participants under 40? Some tests could not be run—for example, comparing perspectives of those who prioritized hunting and fishing, or motorized recreation, with perspectives of those who preferred other leisure activities—because of the number of representatives in some categories were too low. Nevertheless, the impact of such leisure activities, along with how focus group interviews confirmed some of the data's overall trends, can be seen in the next section, as we consider qualitative results.

### **Qualitative Results**

The second phase of my research involved interviewing focus groups from four congregations in the Living Water Synod to explore in further depth some of the issues raised by the questionnaire. I conducted these separate interviews during the summer of 2015, using the focus group protocol in appendix C. I recorded the interviews digitally

and transcribed them myself with the help of my own notes and the notes of a lay assistant, a member of the synod creation care team who accompanied me and wrote what was being said on large newsprint pages that he put up on the walls during each interview. This project followed an *explanatory sequential* mixed methods research design, whereby qualitative research is intended to inform quantitative findings. In this section, we therefore not only examine the different insights lifted up by each focus group regarding creation care in its congregational context, but also examine the results of the interviews in light of themes that emerged from the survey results. We begin with a brief look at the four congregations and their focus group participants.

#### Profile of Qualitative Focus Group Congregations and Participants

**Table 38. Profile of Focus Group Participants**

Respondent	Gender	Age	Role(s)
Mariposa Lutheran Church			
M1P1	male	50-59	senior pastor
M1P2	female	60-69	creation care team, organist
M1P3	female	70-79	creation care team, global mission team
Columbine Lutheran Church			
C2P1	female	60-69	senior pastor
C2P2	female	60-69	associate pastor
C2P3	female	50-59	creation care team, council member
Trillium Lutheran Church			
T3P1	female	30-39	pastor
T3P2	male	60-69	property committee, council member
T3P3	female	60-69	Sunday School, VBS leader
T3P4	male	18-29	VBS leader
Lupine Lutheran Church			
L4P1	male	50-59	pastor
L4P2	male	70-79	retired pastor
L4P3	female	70-79	worship & music committee member

There were several criteria for selecting the congregations and participants with which to conduct focus group interviews. I deliberately chose two congregations that had creation care teams and two that did not, and, while working with pastors to set up the interviews, I encouraged gender balance and an inclusion of various ages. While I preferred interviewees that participated in the survey, I allowed pastors to invite anyone from their congregations whose perspectives they thought would be beneficial. I wanted focus groups that would reflect a variety of geographical, demographical, and congregational perspectives, and I believe the focus group participants were reflective of the synod. Tables 38 and 39 give a profile of the focus group interviewees.

**Table 39. Demographic Summary of Focus Group Participants**

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Clergy and Lay Representation of Focus Group Participants by Gender

	Male	Female	Total
Clergy	3	3	6
Lay	2	5	7
Total	5	8	13

Age and Gender of Focus Group Participants

	Male	Female	Total
18-29	1	0	1
30-39	0	1	1
40-49	0	0	0
50-59	2	1	3
60-69	1	4	5
70-79	1	2	3
Total	5	8	13

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Thirteen people participated in these focus group interviews with clergy and laity evenly represented (see tables 38 and 39). While the five male and eight female participants were predominantly over 50, there were two interviewees under 40,



including one under 30. This sample roughly reflects the age distribution of the survey, with the majority of respondents in their fifties and sixties (see table 4).

### Analysis of Focus Group Interviews

We now turn to a detailed examination of the qualitative interviews. From the transcriptions, I analyzed each interview through a process of word-by-word, line-by-line, and incident-by-incident coding to produce *in vivo* codes. These data sought to preserve the terminology of the interviewees and became the basis for *focused* codes, which gathered the *in vivo* codes into salient categories. A further level of grouping by association related focused codes into *axial* codes, and a final stage of analysis, *theoretical* coding, involved diagraming how the axial codes could be related. As Kathy Charmaz observes, “Coding is the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data. Through coding, you *define* what is happening in the data and begin to grapple with what it means.”<sup>9</sup> We proceed with an overview of each congregation in turn, describing the insights behind its coding, and conclude with observations about overlapping and distinctive themes and how they may deepen our understanding of the findings that emerged from the survey results.

### Mariposa Lutheran Church

Mariposa is a large congregation situated in the vicinity of a small city,<sup>10</sup> with around 400 in weekly worship. It has had an active creation care team since 2008, with the following mission statement: “To renew our community and congregation with a

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<sup>9</sup> Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 46.

<sup>10</sup> Context labels reflect the population descriptions in the survey; see table 19 or appendix B.

fresh commitment to care for creation and one another in new ways” (M1P3). This dual emphasis of engaging both community and congregation on the topic of creation care was evident throughout the interview. From 143 *in vivo* codes gleaned from the transcript, I elucidated twenty-two focused codes (see table 40) and developed six axial codes from them (see table 41).

**Table 40. Focus Group 1: Focused Codes**

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1. Creation care as mandate to responsibility
2. Earth belongs to God
3. Earth stewardship is Christ-centered healing
4. We perpetuate separateness from nature, above it
5. Misuse of the Bible
6. Fear, isolation from nature
7. Technology disconnects us from outdoors
8. Economic motivations trump creation’s needs
9. Personal dimension with creation and God
10. We are connected to nature, part of it
11. Creation care is not abstraction
12. Building awareness into everyday thinking
13. Learning and teaching earth stewardship
14. Getting political
15. Uniting role of worship
16. Missional relationships with community
17. Connections with community organizations
18. Connections with churches
19. Visibility of the church, progressive, attracting
20. Staying positive
21. Younger generations’ enthusiasm
22. Openness and permission giving

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**Table 41. Focus Group 1: Axial Codes with Supporting Focused Codes**

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1-A Guiding inspiration for earth stewardship
1. Creation care as mandate to responsibility
2. Earth belongs to God
3. Earth stewardship is Christ-centered healing

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**Table 41. Focus Group 1: Axial Codes with Supporting Focused Codes (continued)**

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- 1-B Experiencing separation from nature
    - 1. We perpetuate separateness from nature, above it
    - 2. Misuse of the Bible
    - 3. Fear, isolation from nature
    - 4. Technology disconnects us from outdoors
    - 5. Economic motivations trump creation's needs
  
  - 1-C Connecting personally with both creation and God
    - 1. Personal dimension with creation and God
    - 2. We are connected to nature, part of it
    - 3. Creation care is not abstraction
  
  - 1-D Incorporating creation care into everyday life of congregation
    - 1. Building awareness into everyday thinking
    - 2. Learning and teaching earth stewardship
    - 3. Getting political
    - 4. Uniting role of worship
  
  - 1-E Relating missionally with the community & wider church
    - 1. Missional relationships with community
    - 2. Connections with community organizations
    - 3. Connections with churches
    - 4. Visibility of the church, progressive, attracting
  
  - 1-F Cultivating space for hopeful action
    - 1. Staying positive
    - 2. Younger generations' enthusiasm
    - 3. Openness and permission giving
- 

Mariposa Lutheran Church is quite active and articulate in earth stewardship matters. Interviewees described its *guiding inspiration for creation care* as a mandate to responsibility, referring to Psalm 8 and 24, and Genesis 2:15, “where [God] placed humans on earth and gave us the honor and responsibility to be caretakers of the rest of his creation. ... Stewardship is a good word to mean that we are not owners, we’re only caretakers” (M1P3). They mentioned the Tree of Life in Revelation 22, referring to the “healing of the nations” not as an abstract concept but a concrete promise of abundance

and healing for both people and the planet. Quoting Glenn Taibl, former director of the Stewardship Center at Luther Seminary, who said, “Stewardship is the ordering of all of life with Christ at the center” (M1P1), Mariposa leaders saw Jesus Christ and their relationship with him at the center of their creation care work: “God created this earth. God renewed this earth at the cradle and the cross. And made in his image we are called to care for this earth” (M1P3). This focus on Christ “puts stewardship into the, you know, the driving role in your life of what it means to be a person of faith” (M1P1). Such centrality of stewardship for Christian identity echoes what we saw above in Douglas John Hall’s treatment of stewardship as “a biblical symbol come of age.”<sup>11</sup>

In tension with this solid biblical understanding of creation care, interviewees also recognized how human beings experience and perpetuate *separation from nature*, seeing themselves as above it or outside of it, rather than as a part of it. They identified the roots of this separation in the increased power of human beings; society’s economic pressure for increased production, consumption, and “endless growth on a finite planet” (M1P2); and the illusion of being in charge and able to do what we want with “what I own” (M1P2). They saw popular theological notions like “dominion” and being “raptured away” as “antithetical to the biblical witness and the earth groaning in travail” (M1P1), and they labeled human actions and attitudes against both God and creation as “sinful” (M1P3). People look increasingly to technological fixes for contemporary problems, they said, but they also saw a “dark side” of technology in the ubiquity of handheld devices that they believed can have an isolating effect and tend, more than time outdoors, to dominate our current culture especially as it pertains to youth (M1P2).

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<sup>11</sup> See above, chapter 3. Hall, *The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age*.

What has strengthened Mariposa leaders in their earth stewardship identity and actions is *connecting personally with both creation and God*. “Stewardship implies a responsibility and a personal connection. There you don't get away from it. YOU have something to do and say about creation” (M1P2). They recalled moments from childhood growing up on a farm or fishing or playing outside. For one, there was “a visceral sense of the love of nature and feeling God alive in that” (M1P2), and another said, “it's all connected for me with my faith, and with, you know, a sense that this is God's place, too” (M1P1). This personal connection necessarily entails the humility of seeing ourselves as part of nature and seeing all members of creation as co-recipients of God’s promises.

I'm thinking of a quote from Martin Luther: “Our heavenly Father has written the promise of the resurrection not in books alone but in every leaf in springtime.” And I think that that gives credence to the whole biblical notion that it's not just the abstraction of a future existence in heaven or an abstraction of theological ideas. It's right here, right in the nitty gritty of dirt, and water, and air. And I think Martin Luther got that. (M1P2)

Through concrete actions and practices of discipleship, Mariposa has been *incorporating creation care into the everyday life of the congregation*. This has meant intentionally providing space to learn and teach earth stewardship in adult forums and VBS, inviting speakers with scientific expertise from the community or nearby university to keynote a fall dinner, and publishing “earth bytes” in the weekly bulletin that are researched and written by a church member. “When people come, that's the first thing they look for when they go to the bulletin on Sundays” (M1P1). The church has put recycling bins in the building, and adults convey to the next generation the idea that “you leave a place better than you found it” on youth trips (M1P1). In raising awareness, Mariposa has been encouraging people to recognize the systemic nature of ecological problems, our dependence on a fossil fuel economy, and how social justice and

environmental care must go together. Leaders have called attention to legislation related to regional environmental issues and cultivated the importance of engaging the political system “in a good way, and that is you contact your representative and let them know what you want to see happen. That’s part of stewardship” (M1P2). They have proceeded with sensitivity in this area, not wanting to “arouse too much political ire,” yet the urgency of the problems and the desire to maintain focused attention on the earth’s well-being have taken precedence: “I’m the subversive,” said the author of the earth bytes. “I try to be as gentle as possible but nevertheless unstinting in what I want to get out there” (M1P2). There has been little backlash about the congregation’s strong emphasis on creation care, and leaders saw a uniting force in worship, especially mentioning an annual service of rogation, which includes a litany of blessing soil, water, and seeds. Leaders have contextualized the service, connecting it to the practice of the church for centuries, and have given worshipers seedlings to plant as they are sent from the sanctuary.

Creation care has been an important means by which Mariposa *relates missionally with the community and wider church*. In addition to invited speakers, the congregation cultivates reciprocal relationships in the community through environmentally-related field trips, partnerships with non-profit organizations working for better water quality and renewable energy, and a community garden they started in part with funding from a state health improvement board. The garden has become a hub of hospitality for people beyond the church, “a space for congregation and community to grow fresh produce organically ... thinking about creation” (M1P3). At a sharing market during summer, members also bring excess food from their own gardens for donations, which have raised hundreds of dollars for the local food shelf. Mariposa has connected creation care to

global mission and the shared ministry of synods by raising awareness and funds to support a project of the Women of the ELCA designed to put solar panels on a hospital in Liberia. The church also has a comprehensive plan to install solar panels on their own property, “mainly to set a good example. This church is so visible, you know” (M1P2). Such visibility is characterized not just by their location but again by the relationships they have cultivated in the community, which have given the church a “progressive” reputation (M1P1) and have attracted newcomers to the church. One member said,

They just see there's a vision. ... We have some retired PhD educators who joined the church and now they're on the creation care team. Water shed management, science, writing grants. So you start getting some people with some real background. (M1P2).

The pastor agreed: “There are a lot of people that have jumped on board here because we're doing things like this. Yeah, it resonates with them” (M1P1).

In thinking and talking about creation care in various ways, Mariposa has been *cultivating space for hopeful action*. Leaders have engaged children in hands-on projects with butterflies and a wildflower garden, recognized in the millennial generation an awakening concern for earth stewardship, and given people permission and support to follow through with their ideas—one of which involved planting hundreds of seedlings in a local park area. Such openness and experimentation in ecological faith practices echoes Van Gelder’s image of the missional church as “God’s demonstration plot.”<sup>12</sup> For them, the church embracing an ecological paradigm is essential: “If the church isn’t, you know, the one organization in our world leading the way on this, then we’re in big trouble ... We’ve got to be as strong of a voice as anybody on this.” (M1P1). They pointed to the

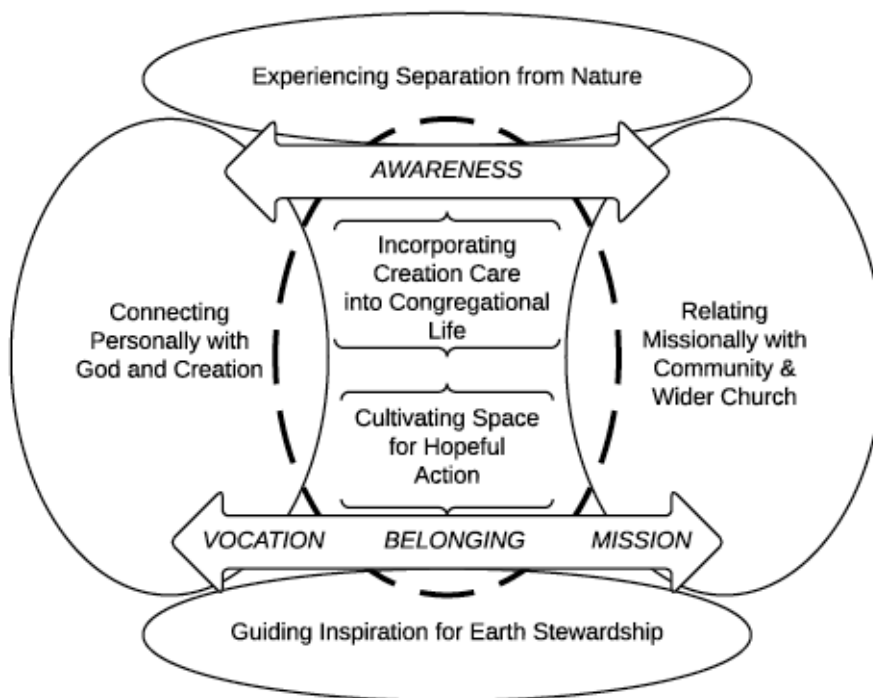
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<sup>12</sup> Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 99-100.

support of the synod team for raising awareness but also to the necessity of having one or two people in the congregation who can help articulate issues, shape action, and at the same time bring balance to the urgency: “I think sometimes we’ve made a lot of earth stewardship and creation care stuff not fun, because it’s an alarm. It’s always an alarm. But there’s this incredible place out there, too, that is meant to be a place of joy” (M1P1). Another member agreed:

I always try to keep some element of positive in, so people can see, yeah, this is a problem, but here’s what’s being done. ... We are not helpless; we are not powerless. God has ... you know, if we profess to believe God created everything then doesn't it follow naturally that you would want to care for it, and shepherd it, and steward it? (M1P2).

Figure 6 presents *theoretical codes* for the first focus group, which I describe generally in terms of AWARENESS, VOCATION, BELONGING, and MISSION. Rather than a further funneling of the six axial codes, the purpose of the theoretical codes is to suggest how the axial codes are related in the creation care ministry of Mariposa.



**Figure 6. Focus Group 1: Theoretical Codes Relating Axial Codes**



I begin with a few general observations, since this illustration will be similar to those of subsequent focus groups. The center of the diagram is a large oval representing the congregation, with a dashed outline to indicate a permeable boundary overlapping both personal and community dimensions, represented by large ovals on the left and right respectively. In all three ovals or circles of concern—*personal, congregational, and communal*—one can find a sense of *alienation from nature* and from our role as earth stewards, indicated by the flat oval at the top of the diagram. And all three circles of concern can be contexts in which one may find profound *connection* with all creation and *inspiration* for earthkeeping, indicated by the flat oval at the bottom of the diagram. The arrows indicate how the cultivation of AWARENESS, VOCATION, BELONGING, and MISSION can occur across the three circles of concern.

For Mariposa, two axial codes share the congregational oval, which forms several relationships of BELONGING. When space in the congregation is cultivated for hopeful action, the community and wider church find BELONGING in Mariposa's ministry through hospitality, and individuals connect personally with God and creation by contributing their ideas that are being supported; these individuals also recognize their simultaneous separation from nature and BELONGING within God's creation through humility. Incorporating creation care into the everyday life of the congregation involves creating space for hopeful action and inspiration, which together strengthen the *personal* VOCATION of individuals through faith practices and the *collective* VOCATION of the church as responsibility lived out in MISSIONAL relationships seeking the well-being of all creation. These relationships in the community generate AWARENESS within the church about our separation from the rest of nature through ecological education and

AWARENESS in the community about the church's concern for the earth through its visibility and advocacy. The permeable boundary and overlapping arrow connecting personal VOCATION and the congregation's participation in MISSION suggest that both the guiding inspiration for earth stewardship and the space for hopeful action can be discovered both inside and outside the church's walls and membership, as a congregation like Mariposa begins embracing creation care as integral to all faith practices.

### **Columbine Lutheran Church**

Columbine is a medium-sized congregation located in a small town, with about 100 in weekly worship. Like Mariposa, it also established a care team in 2008 that it sees as a vital part of its ministry and a vehicle for connecting the church and its community. From 166 *in vivo* codes in this focus group interview, I elucidated twenty-five focused codes (see table 42) and eight axial codes (see table 43).

**Table 42. Focus Group 2: Focused Codes**

- 
1. God will renew all creation
  2. Holy Spirit connects us to earth
  3. Created for mutuality, not domination
  4. Co-creators with God
  5. Role of stewards involves repentance
  6. Separation from creation
  7. Systemic fabric of unsustainability
  8. Power and risk in community
  9. Threat to congregational unity
  10. Challenge of isolation
  11. Making explicit mission of God with earth
  12. Serving neighbors and the earth
  13. Importance of faith community support
  14. Earth stewardship connects church & community
  15. Local abundance, capacity
  16. Inspired by community efforts
  17. Need for substantive conversations
  18. Graceful engagement
  19. Need to get beyond stereotypes, enmity

**Table 42. Focus Group 2: Focused Codes (continued)**


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20. Worshiping with creation
21. Outdoors as sanctuary
22. Being present to the earth, present to God
23. Ecstasy, wonder, joy with creation
24. Teaching, demonstrating earth stewardship in real life
25. Earth stewardship not a program but long-term emphasis

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**Table 43. Focus Group 2: Axial Codes with Supporting Focused Codes**


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2-A Drawing strength from God who renews us and all creation
1. God will renew all creation
2. Holy Spirit connects us to earth
2-B Identifying as created, repentant co-creators
1. Created for mutuality, not domination
2. Co-creators with God
3. Role of stewards involves repentance
2-C Being honest about systemic challenges of context, congregation, self
1. Separation from creation
2. Systemic fabric of unsustainability
3. Power and risk in community
4. Threat to congregational unity
5. Challenge of isolation
2-D Clarifying earth stewardship as missional collaboration
1. Making explicit mission of God with earth
2. Serving neighbors and the earth
3. Importance of faith community support
2-E Connecting community, recognizing abundance and capacity
1. Earth stewardship connects church & community
2. Local abundance, capacity
3. Inspired by community efforts
2-F Engaging topic gracefully, substantively
1. Need for substantive conversations
2. Graceful engagement
3. Need to get beyond stereotypes, enmity
2-G Delighting in creation as part of worship
1. Worshiping with creation

**Table 43. Focus Group 2: Axial Codes with Supporting Focused Codes (continued)**

- 
- 2. Outdoors as sanctuary
  - 3. Being present to the earth, present to God
  - 4. Ecstasy, wonder, joy with creation
- 2-H Modeling real life, long-term earth stewardship in congregation
- 1. Teaching, demonstrating earth stewardship in real life
  - 2. Earth stewardship not a program but long-term emphasis
- 

Columbine draws strength for its creation care emphasis from the *God who renews us and all creation*. Leaders resonated with the biblical images from Isaiah, in which the wilderness and dry land rejoice, as well as the images from Revelation of the new heaven and earth, the river and tree of life, and the leaves for the healing of nations. Diametrically opposed to a “*Left Behind* model” which sees humans “escaping” earth’s “suffering that we have brought upon ourselves,” Columbine’s interpretation instead saw in these earth-honoring images God’s promises of *newness for the whole creation*: “God will not forsake who and what God loves, even in the midst of, you know, some nightmare situations that I don’t want to think about. So that’s redemption, new creation” (C2P1). Columbine leaders’ view of salvation has therefore expanded beyond the idea that “it’s all about the human soul, saving individual souls ... God is not that one that only cares about, you know, the Platonic soul, the soul inside us. God cares about all” (C2P1). God’s faithfulness in this endeavor they linked to the promise of resurrection through the Spirit’s ongoing work: “The Holy Spirit calls us into this and calls us outside of our old frameworks, and it’s Holy Spirit that moves through creation, that moves through the church, that raised Jesus from the dead” (C2P1). It is the Spirit, they believed, that unites us with each other and with the earth.

This call of the Holy Spirit has led to Columbine members *identifying as created, repentant co-creators*. Referring to Genesis 1, one leader emphasized the creaturely nature of human beings, saying, “There should be some kind of mutuality ... between people and the creation. You know, they are co-creatures with us” (C2P2). For her, creation care involves “care *for* and also care *with*” (C2P2), stressing cooperation rather than domination and respecting the agency of other creatures. Another leader saw the very term *creation care* as problematic, observing, “you know creation cares for us more than we care for creation. ... We are so dependent, and our role as stewards, caretakers, is a function of our interdependence with all other creatures” (C2P1). She went on to describe how the term *care* does not get at the deeper transformation that is needed and that the role of stewards necessarily involves *repentance*:

It's more than taking care of, because it's so damaged. You know, we have so damaged and so dominated, and we're so all of us inextricably involved in that ongoing damage, that just taking care of it, it's like ... Taking care implies that it's okay and we just have to keep, you know, keep the dust off and keep the furniture polished and, you know, keep the tree pruned kind of thing, like an ongoing maintenance thing. And we're not at the maintenance point. We are way beyond earth maintenance. It's more like a healing that can only happen through *metanoia*, through deep repentance. (C2P1)

Leaders resonated with the term *earth stewardship* better, and also expressed humanity's role as “co-creators” with God, insisting that “we are not like on par with God, but ... we participate in God's creative activity” (C2P1).

This repentance is one aspect of Columbine's *honesty about systemic challenges*. Leaders recognized humanity's tendency to view itself as “separate from or superior to the creation, that we are not part of the ecology” (C2P1), which can have the effect of devaluing nature's long-term well-being when decisions are being made on multiple levels. From a global perspective, they described the current unsustainable trajectory of

consuming more than the earth can provide. Yet they also saw how deeply embedded society is at a personal level, not excusing themselves: “You want to give up your Prius? You want to give up your cell phone?” (C2P1). At the regional level, a proposal that emerged in the area for non-ferrous metal mining: “And that's tough because, you know, people are willing to trade twenty years’ worth of jobs for clean water permanently” (C2P2). Columbine leaders were conversant about the competing dynamics at work in their context, including the power that both large corporations and the press wield in communities like theirs, and how such dynamics are reflected within the congregation: “Even people that would fully agree with us, you know the many people that fully agree, still don't want to threaten the unity of the congregation” (C2P1). Though they have experienced some losses, they risk engaging ecological issues, partly because of their awareness of environmental standards being violated and the belief of some they know that “the work that's being done on sustainability is compromised by the need to play nice” (C2P2). External and internal pressures of indifference or prejudice that might be mitigated by “a critical mass of progressive Christians” (C2P1) become acute when like-minded colleagues have left the area, resulting in a sense of isolation.

Yet at Columbine this has been offset by discovering the support from the faith community that is there, through its process of *clarifying earth stewardship as missional collaboration*. This has involved intentionally reaching outward to build ecumenical and interfaith partnerships around earthkeeping in the community, sending a number of members to synod creation care retreats, and communicating the ecological priorities of national and international Lutheran bodies. For example, when an issue of *The Lutheran* magazine featured earth stewardship, a couple that had left Columbine told a member,

“Wow, you're not so different from the rest of the ELCA” (C2P1).<sup>13</sup> And the idea for an annual harvest meal the congregation hosts, in which all dishes are to have ingredients from within 100-mile radius, leaders traced to a Lenten activity from Lutheran World Relief. Such connections have helped leaders know they are part of a larger mission, which they have articulated more formally in this way, following a year of discernment:

to collaborate and connect with the community—other organizations and churches—to serve our neighbors and the earth. ... So neighbors ... serve neighbors, serve earth—it's right there together. And I don't think that we would have thought of that ten years ago. ... But it needs to be spelled out. You can't just say, “neighbor,” because then people think strictly human. And that is, yeah, I think ... part of the reason for the church to make the mission ... to make explicit the mission of God with, you know, the earth” (C2P1).

By *connecting with its community*, Columbine has begun *recognizing abundance and capacity* for raising ecological consciousness and shaping change. They beamed about the abundance they discovered within 100 miles for their annual harvest meal, revealing new relationships with a local mill, fishing and hunting families, and canning traditions. They have lifted up local capacity, telling of seasonal garden sharing on Sunday mornings with donations supporting the ELCA World Hunger Appeal and a greenhouse project with a neighbor. A year after forming its creation care team, Columbine began organizing a community-wide environmental fair that has brought together educators, community leaders, farmers, artisans, renewable energy providers, faith communities, and non-profits. “It’s the most wonderful event” in their area, one member said (C2P3). “We just got so excited about the what-ifs and started to imagine having some kind of a gathering day involving speakers and vendors and the sharing of ideas,” said another (C2P2). Although the church initiated it at the beginning, planners

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<sup>13</sup> Mary Birdsong, “Restoring Creation with Faith,” *The Lutheran*, April, 2015.

formed a non-profit with the momentum, gathered partners along the way including a school, and secured sponsors and grants. The fair has become an important point of civil society connection and mutual inspiration between the church and its community.

Yet with the potentially polarizing dynamics also in their community, Columbine leaders have seen the need for *engaging the topic gracefully yet substantively*. “We want to stimulate substantive conversation, but the risk is what you said, of being neutralized” (C2P1). They mentioned forums as a possible platform for speaking about public issues, but more than a venue it is the process that concerned them most. Part of that process means being informed as a leader, a pastor said: “Part of the reason I don't preach about it is, you know ... I haven't ... enough time to be able to know what I'm talking about ... You know, I'd have to put a lot more time into careful study” (C2P1). But another part of the process they mentioned was how to talk about hot-button issues without opposing sides demonizing one other, how to create

a place where people can try to get beyond their knee-jerk reactions and stereotypes of one another ... you know the person that loves their ATV ... can sit down and talk with the person that loves their cross country skis. You know, to be able to get past this automatic, “You're the enemy” kind of thing. (C2P1)

While they have begun cultivating such spaces in their relationships within the congregation and with others in the community, Columbine leaders mentioned two potentially helpful resources for their own follow up and for possible consideration by the synod team. Both resources they encountered during a previous process involving another contentious topic, in becoming a congregation that is open and affirming to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons. One was the term *graceful engagement*, as described by the Reconciling Ministries Network of the United Methodist Church:

Graceful Engagement IS:

- Living together in relationship and compassion



- Fully valuing other people and their beliefs, even when they differ from our own
  - Listening more than speaking
  - Meeting people where they are, not where we want them to be
- Graceful Engagement IS NOT:
- Debate
  - Forcing our opinions on others through argument
  - Exclusion or outright condemning those with whom we do not agree
  - Leaving the church to find a place “where everyone agrees”<sup>14</sup>

The other resource was the *Implications Wheel*, a framing instrument for moving beyond a two-sided conceptualization of a situation to considerations of many stakeholders and potential outcomes. According to the Lutheran organization ReconcilingWorks, with which Columbine collaborated in its inclusivity training, “The Implications Wheel (or “I-Wheel” for short) is a decision-enhancing tool developed by Joel Barker that allows leaders and other interested folks to research the potential implications of a policy change, emerging trend, innovation, strategic goal, or an event.”<sup>15</sup> Exploring these two strategies in addressing ecological issues may prove fruitful for deeper understanding, including all voices in a conversation, and moving forward as a community together.

Both inside and outside the church walls, Columbine *delights in creation as part of worship*. Leaders mentioned prayers that include all creation each Sunday, an annual blessing of animals in the sanctuary, and a five-week alternate lectionary developed by the Lutheran Church in Australia called the *Season of Creation* which they observe sometime after Pentecost.<sup>16</sup> All of these practices have helped convey the idea that people

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<sup>14</sup> Rebecca Voelkel et al., “Building an Inclusive Church: A Welcoming Toolkit 2.0,” (2013): 12-13, <http://www.welcomingresources.org> (accessed October 4, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> Tim Fisher, “First Advanced I-Wheel Training Event Equips Activists,” *Concord* 29, no. 1 (2008). See also Joel Barker, “Why the Implications Wheel?,” 2011, <http://www.implicationswheel.com> (accessed October 4, 2015).

<sup>16</sup> Norman Habel, “The Season of Creation Story,” <http://seasonofcreation.com/about/the-season-of-creation-story/> (accessed October 4, 2015).

“worship with creation” (C2P1), an idea visibly depicted at Columbine during the Season of Creation by an inflatable ball representing the earth and sitting in a pew. At the same time, leaders viewed the outdoors also as a sanctuary, attending to the beauty of sights, sounds, and textures in God’s ongoing creative activity, referring to the ecstasy of grandchildren in natural settings, the behavior of pets, and the process of gardening. “When you're out digging in the dirt, it's like looking over God's shoulder” (C2P2). It was not a particular practice but simply being present to what was happening around them that was important, cultivating an awareness of the Creator’s presence, as they are present to the earth. “Even composting to me is thrilling,” one member said, “I think every community should have a compost program” (C2P3). Another paraphrased Psalm 8, saying, “It just puts you in your place. Or being small, being tiny. ‘What are mortals that you are mindful of them?’ You know, ‘humans, that you give a care for them?’” (C2P1).

A final axial code I gleaned from my interview with Columbine was *modeling real life, long-term earth stewardship in the congregation*. Opportunities for interacting with nature outside are not limited to parishioners’ personal lives but available on the church grounds through a Monarch butterfly garden, fruit trees, and several vegetable garden beds, which are beginning to be designated for people who live in apartments. They saw their potential to be a “demonstration building” (C2P1), wanting solar panels eventually and seeing the importance of teaching by example: “how to grow your own vegetables, how to recycle, how to share with what we already know. . . . People need to learn. They need to know what's happening, they need to know how to be sustainable for themselves and for their future” (C2P3). Columbine leaders believed hands-on practices to be the eventual goal of synod resolutions, which they said serve a good purpose in

lifting up principles such as earth stewardship and calling it to the attention of church “leaders so that they can wrestle with that and then translate, begin translating that, not so much as a resolution but as real lived experience” (C2P1). Yet they also stressed that adaptive changes like embracing comprehensive creation care integration take time and cannot simply be top-down directed. “Program from the top wants to be driven by short-term goals and projects, but the reality of it is that it only has an effect by long-term emphasis” (C2P2). Finally, they pointed out the difference between a packaged program and a new way of life: “Having a Season of Creation ... it’s not a program ... a garden is not a program ... prayer is not a program ... anything that’s going to be deeply embedded in people’s lives does not happen in a year” (C2P1).

Figure 7 presents my *theoretical codes* for the second focus group. I again use four main terms AWARENESS, VOCATION, BELONGING, and MISSION to describe relational dynamics among the eight axial codes in Columbine’s creation care ministry.



**Figure 7. Focus Group 2: Theoretical Codes Relating Axial Codes**

Although I elucidated more axial codes for Columbine, I was not surprised to find them to be similar to Mariposa's in both description and function, since both congregations have had creation care teams for several years and are actively integrating creation care into their faith practices. Again, the diagram shows personal, congregational, and communal circles of concern, in which I have placed the axial codes, overlapped by solid arrows indicating the congregation's wrestling with a sense of separation from nature and at the same time finding inspiration for earthkeeping both personally and corporately.

In Columbine's case, individuals experience BELONGING by participating in the congregation's process of engaging ecological issues gracefully and substantively, BELONGING in the web of creation while worshipping alongside it indoors and out, and BELONGING through repentance as they acknowledge their captivity to ecologically unsustainable systems. Community members also experience BELONGING through graceful engagement and missional collaboration as both congregation and community discover their capacities. AWARENESS of humanity's sense of separation from the rest of creation, the unsustainable trajectory of ecological damage, and systemic challenges within the congregation and the community, helps encourage a graceful yet substantive engagement of these issues, as earth stewardship is clarified in terms of MISSIONAL collaboration with God and neighbor. People discern their VOCATION to become earth stewards by participating in worship and in the congregation's modeling of real life, long-term earth stewardship, drawing strength from the God who renews them and all creation.

### **Trillium Lutheran Church**

Trillium is a small- to medium-sized congregation in a rural context, with about seventy-five in weekly worship. From 123 *in vivo* codes I gleaned from this focus group

interview, tables 44 and 45 present the twenty-one focused codes and the five axial codes I developed from them.

**Table 44. Focus Group 3: Focused Codes**

- 
1. Wise use of creation
  2. Present and future concern for earth
  3. Seeking harmony
  4. Practicing creation care at home
  5. Beginning earth practices in congregation
  6. Nature's gifts evoke thanks
  7. God's close presence in creation
  8. Creation belongs to God
  9. Church hosting community efforts
  10. Church stewarding through community organizations
  11. Members on different boards
  12. Concern for water quality
  13. Problems with erosion, nutrient runoff
  14. Local economic needs
  15. Economic reality makes local ecological choices difficult
  16. Listening, not taking a stand, in a charged political climate
  17. Creation care in lifestyle, not verbalized
  18. Importance of mentoring youth in outdoors
  19. Need for education and dialogue
  20. Open to congregational plan, vision
  21. Potential divisions within church divisions within church
- 

**Table 45. Focus Group 3: Axial Codes with Supporting Focused Codes**

- 
- 3-A Being inspired to use creation wisely
1. Wise use of creation
  2. Present and future concern for earth
  3. Seeking harmony
  4. Practicing creation care at home
  5. Beginning earth practices in congregation
- 3-B Connecting personally with God in nature
1. Nature's gifts evoke thanks
  2. God's close presence in creation
  3. Creation belongs to God

**Table 45. Focus Group 3: Axial Codes with Supporting Focused Codes (continued)**

- 
- 3-C Connecting church with community stewardship efforts
    - 1. Church hosting community efforts
    - 2. Church stewarding through community organizations
    - 3. Members on different boards
  - 3-D Understanding local ecological and economic concerns, tension
    - 1. Concern for water quality
    - 2. Problems with erosion, nutrient runoff
    - 3. Local economic needs
    - 4. Economic reality makes local ecological choices difficult
    - 5. Listening, not taking a stand, in a charged political climate
  - 3-E Recognizing need, challenge of raising creation care consciousness
    - 1. Creation care in lifestyle, not verbalized
    - 2. Importance of mentoring youth in outdoors
    - 3. Need for education and dialogue
    - 4. Open to congregational plan, vision
    - 5. Potential divisions within church
- 

Unlike Columbine and Mariposa, Trillium does not have an established creation care team. There were a few long pauses before responding to questions when the interview began, as focus group participants were not used to talking about the connection of faith and the earth's well-being. "This isn't a subject that I necessarily think a lot about" (T3P2), one member said. Nevertheless, they were able to articulate much about their creation care perceptions and practices when prompted by the focus group protocol. The interview was an exercise in helping make conscious the church's role in earth stewardship as part of God's mission.

Trillium leaders expressed *being inspired to use creation wisely*, though they did not make an explicit connection to scripture passages. "God put on creation for us to use, but use wisely" (T3P2), said one member, noting the importance of not overtaking when hunting or fishing. They also stressed a long-term motivation for creation care: "For me,

it's what we do now to care for our environment and world. I'm thinking of us now but also in the future, for future people coming after us" (T3P1). Another said, "I just want to take care of the earth. I want it to be if not as good maybe even better than how I left it, or how it was when I came. I just want to take care of it. So, for my family generations later, it will still be a beautiful place" (T3P3). Leaders mentioned how the growth and well-being of wild rice is part of Native American spirituality and described God's ultimate vision for all creation in terms of "living in harmony with nature, with people," though they admitted, "I do not know how that would ever happen, but in theory" (T3P3).

Interviewees described several creation care practices they do personally such as recycling and organic gardening, participating in a sustainable forest program that had financial incentives, and generally enjoying being outdoors. They noted congregational practices of recycling, changing light bulbs, garden produce sharing, and transitioning away from Styrofoam use. They also recalled an outdoor service with pet blessings, which yielded mixed responses, yet they expressed openness to planning "a service maybe in the fall or spring or something, lifting up what we do with scripture readings and maybe hymns that go with that" (T3P1).

*Connecting personally with God in nature* was evident in each leader's responses. Living in a rural area, they recalled "thanking God for a fresh snow ... or the sun coming up" (T3P3) and that they see wildlife "so often but still don't take it for granted" (T3P4). One member said, "I remember as a young man hunting and my dad would shoot a deer and he'd say a little prayer, 'Thanks God,' that he got meat for the winter, because we needed the meat for the winter. And so that's just kind of how I grew up and I guess I'm imparting that to my grandchildren as well" (T3P2). They spoke of creation as belonging

to God, referring to animals as “God’s creatures” (T3P4) that do not deserve ill treatment and to moments of crisp stillness under the trees and stars realizing “this is all part of God’s nature” (T3P2). Yet they also described God’s close presence *in* creation, in favorite natural settings, or in colors in the sky “like God’s cloak coming down surrounding me” (T3P3). They wanted “people to experience what we experience in our environment around here, whether it's the same type of environment or in a desert or in a city, but just realize that God is in all that” (T3P1).

Trillium leaders have begun *connecting the church with community earth stewardship efforts*. When a flood occurred in their region, the church became the center of municipal meetings and relief. Leaders were conversant in replanting strategies to restore marshland, create buffer zones, and provide habitat for butterflies, bees, and native plants. In their view, “the church really doesn't get involved with it too much other than ... it affects our people” (T3P2, P1). Yet when the interview protocol explored how the church might be collaborating with community organizations, leaders began to recognize earth stewardship happening in their area through state parks and animal sanctuaries, lake and watershed associations, and the municipality creating mulch through leaf compost sites. Awareness of Trillium members’ participation on various boards, sportsmen’s clubs, associations, and institutes could prove a significant relational resource for making conscious the church’s participation with God in civil society through earth stewardship.

Yet Trillium leaders’ *understanding of local ecological and economic concerns* revealed a tension between those forces in their community. They mentioned problems with erosion and nutrient runoff, how locals are “rather upset with the city people that



come up here and they want to have their city lawns ... and the fertilizer runs into the lake” (T3P2). They “mow their lawns right down to the lake as close as they can and pick out all the natural wild rice and weeds in there. And then with the waves and everything it creates erosion and all the nutrients into the lake” (T3P4). Leaders’ concern for water quality also extended to major regional environmental issues, including a proposed copper mine, from which “any runoff would directly affect us here,” and a proposed oil pipeline that would run through their township, saying, “We all know that the environment can be affected by pipeline spills” (T3P2). They knew Native Americans shared their concern about the mine, and they were well aware that transporting oil by railroad also carries risks. However, they stressed how local economic needs can make ecological choices difficult, noting that theirs is one of the poorest counties in the state, that people make a living through tourism there or by commuting long distances, and that in an economically depressed area having strict environmental regulations can deter new businesses and make some neighbors’ decisions understandable.

Some peripheral members of our church had sold their property to the mine, basically. And the little town west of us ... all the way up that road there's an awful lot of people that sold that off to the mines. And they've got big dollars for it. And it's kind of hard to say to some family here that is dirt poor, that you shouldn't do that. It's kind of hard to say to some poor family here that is struggling. They're loggers, and logging is almost a dying industry. They're small time farmers. And the pipeline's going to go across their property and they're getting money for that. That's why I say it's politically charged. (T3P2)

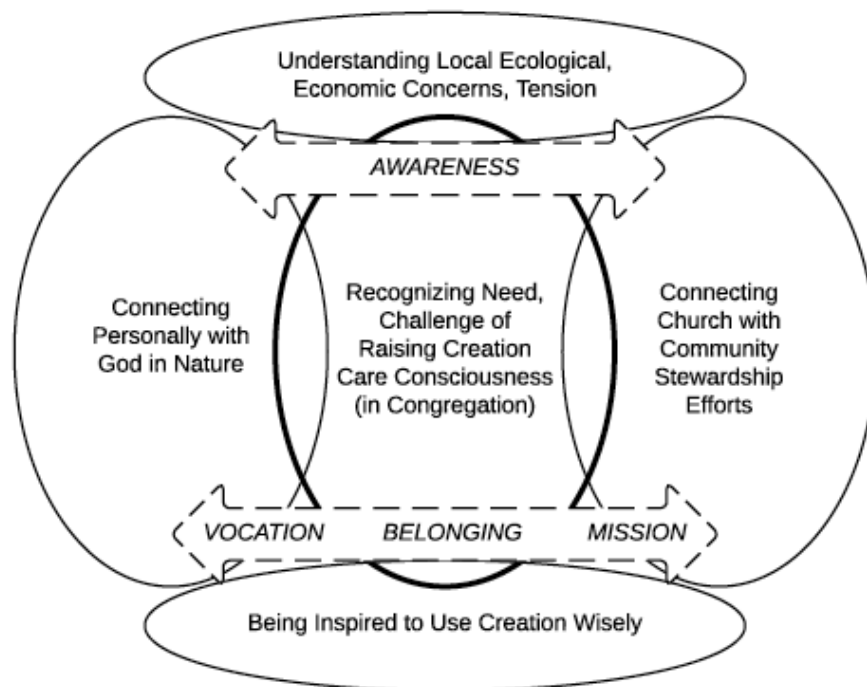
For the church or even the town board to take a stand on these issues would be very difficult, Trillium leaders said, “because we have people both ways. We can listen to it. If it's going to be a problem for us, then we'll deal with it. But otherwise it's just part of the greater political climate out there” (T2P2).

Understanding the tensions that exist in their context and listening with compassion are significant steps toward earth stewardship. But without an intentional concerted effort to make an explicit connection between God's mission and the earth's well-being within and beyond the church, Trillium leaders were beginning to *recognize the need and the challenge of raising creation care consciousness*. They saw creation care as being part of the "lifestyle here" (T3P2), practiced by the hunters and fishermen, passed down to younger generations by parents and grandparents, and experienced by public school classes annually visiting a designated wildlife area. They were beginning to see it in members' participation on boards and associations, efforts of the women's group supporting solar panel installation at a hospital in Liberia, and the planting of milkweed for butterflies during a day camp. They stressed the importance of mentoring youth in the outdoors as the most important thing the church can do to encourage earthkeeping practices. But they also admitted that creation care has not been made an explicit value of the congregation. As the pastor said, "It's happening. It's just that it doesn't have the title, the word, or maybe the emphasis of ... this is what you're actually doing" (T3P1). One way the synod team could support them, they said, is through education. The congregation had "no idea" of the synod resolution, and they would value "having an open dialogue to inform what other congregations are doing" and growing in "the knowledge of how to educate" (T3P1).

However, raising creation care consciousness has risks, Trillium's leaders also recognized. The political tension in the community between ecological and economic issues leaders saw as a potential in the congregation for another "divide" (T3P3). "If the church gets too far involved with it, you lose members" (T3P2), said one participant.

Another agreed, “Whatever issue comes up, there's always one side or the other side, and one will leave for a while and hopefully come back and sometimes not so much. ... And it doesn't even have to be political ... the color of the carpet was a big one” (T3P1). Nevertheless, they saw potential openness for engaging the congregation in visioning, seeing themselves as “the starters of the conversation” (T3P1).

Figure 8 presents my *theoretical codes* for the third focus group. I again employ the terms AWARENESS, VOCATION, BELONGING, and MISSION to describe with solid lines and dashed lines both *evident and potential* relational dynamics, among the five axial codes I found in Trillium’s ministry.



**Figure 8. Focus Group 3: Theoretical Codes Relating Axial Codes**

Trillium leaders have an AWARENESS of local ecological and economic concerns, which informs their perceived need for raising creation care consciousness in the congregation. Such AWARENESS is related to how they are *beginning* to see the

church connecting with community stewardship efforts through boards, associations, and hosting flood relief efforts. But a component that seemed missing in their inspiration to use creation wisely was a deeper AWARENESS of humanity's estrangement from and damage to the earth that the previous two congregations exhibited, a self-critical posture of humility and repentance that results from raising creation care consciousness. Leaders saw the challenge of raising such consciousness in the congregation as BELONGING in or reflecting the wider political tensions of the community. They saw both their personal inspiration to use creation wisely and their cooperation with community stewardship efforts as BELONGING in the church's efforts of raising creation care consciousness. But their ministry could benefit by exploring how their deep connection to God in nature BELONGS in a more explicit Christian inspiration for earth stewardship, which goes beyond humanity's *wise use* and cultivates reciprocal relationships with God and the rest of creation through the congregation's worship, scriptural and theological study, and corporate life. In contrast to the two previous focus groups, this congregational oval is shown with a *solid line*, indicating that the personal and communal dimensions of creation care have not been integrated into the life of the congregation. The diagram's arrows connecting personal VOCATION and collective MISSION are *dashed*, indicating places where explicitly connecting God's MISSION and earth stewardship as part of Christian VOCATION today could potentially strengthen individuals' relationship with God in nature and shape the congregation's relationship to stewardship in the community. I would attribute Trillium's challenge of raising creation care consciousness partly to its lack of a creation care team. Establishing and supporting one at the congregational level could enhance Trillium's capacity to articulate creation care as integral to faith practices

and vital to the church's VOCATION today, and to grow in its identity as a host in the community, providing a space where dialogue about ecological issues could occur.

### **Lupine Lutheran Church**

Lupine is a medium-large congregation located in the midst of a medium-sized city, with about 125 in weekly worship. Out of 151 *in vivo* codes I elucidated from this focus group interview, tables 46 and 47 present the twenty-six focused codes and six axial codes I developed from them.

**Table 46. Focus Group 4: Focused Codes**

- 
1. Be wise stewards
  2. Goodness of creation
  3. All part of a world family
  4. Global problem and inspiration
  5. Creation care includes concern for poor
  6. Accent on future generations
  7. Creation conveys God's closeness
  8. Creation evokes wonder
  9. Connecting with creation in worship
  10. Lack of regard for creation
  11. Need to accept responsibility
  12. Need awareness
  13. Need more study, resource people
  14. Potential to learn from others
  15. Obstacles to making adaptive changes in congregation
  16. Missional action arises from study, prayer
  17. Acting through wider church
  18. Tree planting, highway pickup
  19. Recycling, lighting with economic incentive
  20. Personal practices matter
  21. Church can be prophetic voice
  22. Be gently persuasive
  23. Need an atmosphere of cooperation
  24. Acting through community organizations
  25. Open to partnering with community organizations
  26. Seeing potential to do more
-

**Table 47. Focus Group 4: Axial Codes with Supporting Focused Codes**


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4-A Being inspired as wise stewards of good creation in a global family
1. Be wise stewards
2. Goodness of creation
3. All part of a world family
4. Global problem and inspiration
4-B Emphasizing the poor and future generations in creation care
1. Creation care includes concern for poor
2. Accent on future generations
4-C Connecting with God through creation
1. Creation conveys God's closeness
2. Creation evokes wonder
3. Connecting with creation in worship
4-D Recognizing low priority on creation care in society, church
1. Lack of regard for creation
2. Need to accept responsibility
3. Need awareness
4. Need more study, resource people
5. Potential to learn from others
6. Obstacles to making adaptive changes in congregation
4-E Cultivating earthkeeping practices congregationally, personally
1. Missional action arises from study, prayer
2. Acting through wider church
3. Tree planting, highway pickup
4. Recycling, lighting with economic incentive
5. Personal practices matter
4-F Seeing church as community creation care prophet, partner despite challenges
1. Church can be prophetic voice
2. Be gently persuasive
3. Need an atmosphere of cooperation
4. Acting through community organizations
5. Open to partnering with community organizations
6. Seeing potential to do more

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Like Trillium, Lupine did not have an established creation care team in the congregation. Nevertheless, interviewees were articulate about the importance of *being inspired as wise stewards of good creation in a global family*. They drew from the

creation stories, describing “dominion” as tending and nourishing God’s gift of creation (L4P1) and saying, “[God] told Adam to be a good steward in the garden of creation. And I think that’s God’s message to us, too, today—to be wise stewards” (L4P2). Wise use of resources characterized their definitions of the concepts stewardship and sustainability, which they viewed as theological and scientific complements of each other. The goodness of creation God pronounces in Genesis they said also motivates them:

We have to realize this creation is good and part of our stewardship, our care for the earth, is to make sure it becomes an even better good. And so the ultimate vision I think God has is this goodness. It permeates everything—relationships, people, animals—that we are truly one and we are good. (L4P1).

Such relational unity they saw in terms of an expansive “world family,” noting the value of animals depicted in the story of Noah while lamenting current extinction trends, referring to the “Earth our Mother, as Native Americans relate to it,” and encouraging the cultivation of a world family consciousness, “because there are many people who say, ‘You are not part of my family’” (L4P2). A global environmental problem calls for a global effort, they said, in which all are collectively inspired and mutually accountable.

Lupine leaders were explicit in *emphasizing the poor and future generations in creation care*. Echoing the notion of a world family, they insisted, “We have to take care of each other, not only the wealthy but the poor as well. And many times when we have such a division, we’re not really using the resources in the right way” (L4P2). The story of Ruth grounded a similar observation about those being neglected, that “the stranger, the foreigner, the poor are to have access” (L4P1), as did a reference to Matthew 25: “Do we truly care for the least of these?” (L4P2). Annual mission trips to Louisiana, begun eight years ago to help people rebuild after hurricane damage, have been a significant way Lupine has connected these ecological and social values in ministry, not only by

rebuilding places but also strengthening relationships year after year and showing others they are not alone. “And that's creation care ... to help lives rebuild when that destructive force of nature comes through” (L4P1). Leaders emphasized the importance of creation care for the sake of the future, recognizing society’s failure to live up to the Native American concept of acting for the well-being of the *seventh generation*, and saying, “we are not only concerned here about our lives but the lives of our children and grandchildren, and their children and grandchildren ... until the Lord comes, I suppose” (L4P2). In sum, wise stewardship for Lupine means to “take care of the earth in order to enhance people's lives” (L4P2), with special reference to the poor and future generations.

*Connecting with God through creation* is another inspiration for Lupine’s leaders. “You know, the harmony of humans, animals, plants, whenever that comes together, for me that's a glimpse of God's creation—and heaven” (L4P1). They mentioned trips to special wilderness places, camping with children, marveling at crop fields and farmers’ dependence on the quality of soil and weather, and paying attention to the process of growth in a garden as all opportunities to sense the Creator’s presence. “Plant a seed, and all of a sudden you have a plant. And from that plant comes fruit. And that's such a close relationship to I think how God is a part of our life” (L4P2). Leaders have lifted up the well-being of creation in worship through an occasional Sunday service and an outdoor service they used to have, but earthkeeping has not had a regular emphasis in worship.

In fact, Lupine leaders acknowledged *a low priority on creation care* at both societal and congregational levels. They lamented the amount of consumption and waste in society, the garbage on roads, the cutting of trees, and seeing dead animals that were hit by cars, as well as the prospect of the “extinction of so many species in the world



today, because of our practices” (L4P2). They believed that “Human nature is, we don't accept responsibility for our own actions,” and said that rather than faulting others people should recognize, “It's our responsibility” (L4P1). Lupine's participants remembered the synod resolution and the ELCA social statement on creation care, and they brought a copy of *The Green Bible* to the interview (L4P3).<sup>17</sup> But they saw the need for greater awareness and emphasis in the congregation regarding ecological problems in general and synodical avenues in particular for addressing them, the need for more study materials and resource people, and the potential to learn from other congregations—all ways the synod team may be of assistance. “I think we need to have this in the forefront as far as creation care. And I think that it's important for us to visualize what all of us can do, you know, and how we can communicate that to others” (L4P2). Yet adaptive changes in the congregation are hard, they recognized, saying there was a goal of using washable instead of disposable cups, for example, but “we have fallen down very badly on that” (L4P3), and “Sometimes it's just too easy to use the Styrofoam” (L4P1).

Despite relatively little emphasis on creation care in worship or education, Lupine leaders saw ways in which they were *cultivating earthkeeping practices congregationally and personally*. They highlighted a shiny paper recycling effort that raises money for youth trips, changing incandescent light bulbs in the sanctuary to LED, and increasing the efficiency of fluorescent lighting throughout the building. They mentioned a stretch of highway the congregation cleans up twice a year, tree-planting members did in a city park, and stands of trees in the area that resulted from a seedling distribution their Vacation Bible School conducted over thirty years ago. Through the congregation's

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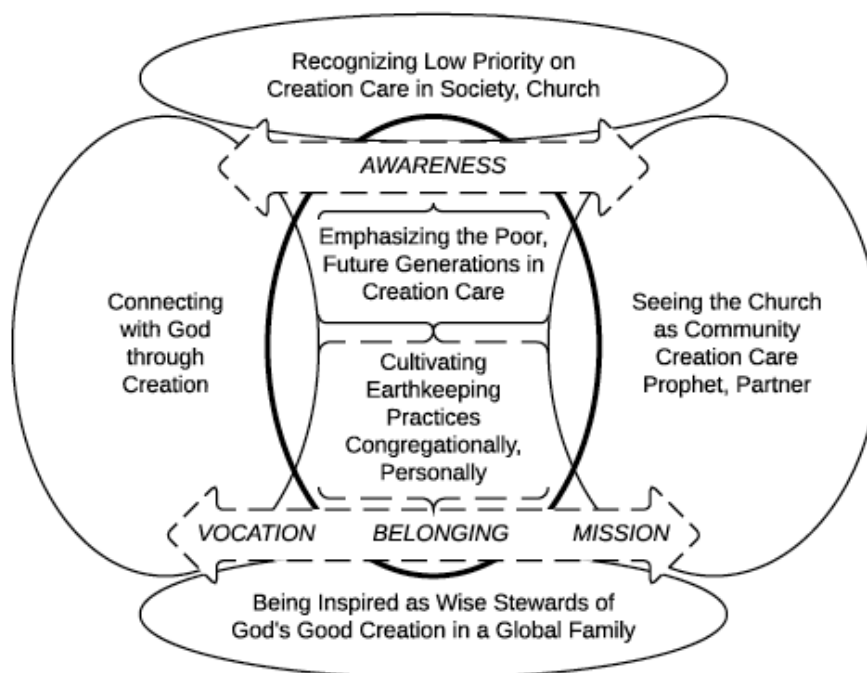
<sup>17</sup> *The Green Bible: New Revised Standard Version*, (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2008).

participation at Lutheran camps and synod youth trips, members have also participated in a forestry plan and projects to get rid of invasive species along roadways. Interviewees shared lots of ideas about the value of personal earthkeeping practices, from reducing energy use and water use to recycling, composting, and pesticide-free yard maintenance (L4P3). But such sharing was not intentionally connected to congregational life, forums, or Christian education. For Lupine participants, the Bible study and prayer group that gave rise to their annual mission trips years earlier could be a helpful model for the formation of a creation care team. “I think we have to study and pray first, but then have a group of people come forward and say, ‘This is a priority for us at this congregation, that we will do the following things’” (L4P1). They thus believed that missional action arises from study and prayer. “Prayer is most important, one of the important issues, I think. But we have to do something beyond praying. We have to act on it, too” (L4P2).

Finally, Lupine church leaders saw the *church as a community prophet and partner* in earth stewardship, in spite of challenges. “It is important for the church to care about the environment,” the pastor said. “Oftentimes the church becomes a prophetic voice in a world that doesn't always want to hear that voice. ... The church could have a much stronger voice, should have a much stronger voice” (L4P1). But this stance would not be easy, they admitted, because “That’s not my comfort zone” (L4P1) and people balk when told what to do. “You know, we have to put it in a certain way that it's beneficial to them and it's beneficial to everyone. ... Be gently persuasive” (L4P2). They recognized division among politicians, congregants, and family members about the cause of climate change and asked, “How can we create an atmosphere in which we are able to cooperate with one another, even though we have differences?” (L4P2). Although Lupine

has not hosted or initiated local earthkeeping efforts, leaders identified how members were acting through community organizations, helping plant trees, teaching middle school students how to garden, and taking students on a field trip to an organic farm. They were open to the church partnering with community organizations, naming the Department of Natural Resources, 4-H, and businesses moving to the area, and they were beginning to see their potential as a congregation to do more through their relationships and assets, including green space on church property.

Figure 9 presents the *theoretical codes* for this final focus group. As with the previous diagram, I use the terms AWARENESS, VOCATION, BELONGING, and MISSION to describe with solid lines and dashed lines both *evident and potential* relational dynamics, among the six axial codes I elucidated in Lupine's ministry.



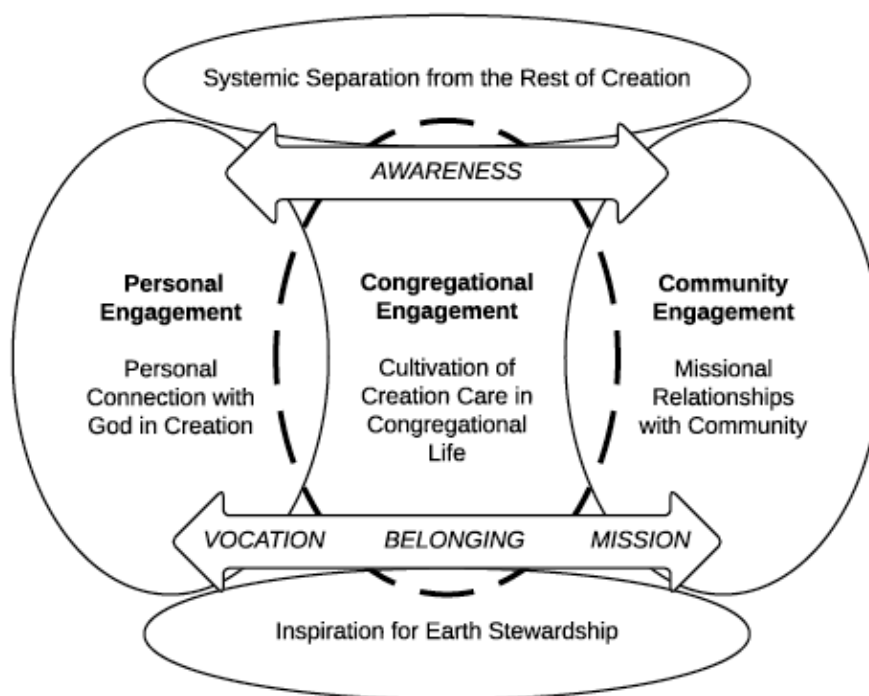
**Figure 9. Focus Group 4: Theoretical Codes Relating Axial Codes**

For Lupine, there was definite AWARENESS of a low societal priority on creation care that has informed *personal* earthkeeping practices, and an AWARENESS of

how members are caring for the earth through community partners. But relatively little intentional emphasis on earth stewardship in the congregation, especially in Christian education, worship, and sharing personal practices in *congregational* life, has not consciously shaped the AWARENESS among parishioners of the biblical connection between faith and creation care or the emphasis on the poor as related to creation care. This lack of integrating creation care into congregational life is indicated by the solid line around the congregational oval and the dashed brackets within it. Like Trillium, not having a formal creation care team has hindered the concerted cultivation of earthkeeping practices at Lupine. Nevertheless, the stewarding VOCATION of individual members could be seen both in their personal earthkeeping practices and in their participation in community creation care efforts, largely through organizations beyond the congregation. Individual VOCATION has been nurtured also through a deep personal closeness with God through creation, but the congregation's collective VOCATION as a creation care prophet and organizational partner in the community, while identified, has yet to be developed. The potential for connecting personal VOCATION to such corporate MISSION is shown by the dashed arrows. The personal BELONGING these interviewees have felt with God through nature is part of what inspires them to be wise stewards of God's good creation in a global family that includes the poor and future generations. These values could BELONG in an intentional cultivation of earthkeeping practices in congregational life, worship, and study, as could the conscious sharing of members' actions in the community. Such congregational practices could BELONG in the wider MISSIONAL context as part of the church's prophetic witness and as a collective *alternative* to the earth-neglecting attitudes and behaviors Lupine leaders see in society.

### Qualitative Summary

Conducting focus group interviews with four congregations yielded rich insights into the complex yet rewarding process of incorporating creation care into local ministry. Figure 10 presents six overall themes to help summarize these insights, using the familiar diagram to show their interrelatedness, as in the theoretical coding of the interviews: *inspiration for earth stewardship*, *systemic separation from the rest of creation*, *personal connection with God in creation*, *cultivation of creation care in congregational life*, *missional relationships with community*, and *graceful engagement*—shown in bold in the engagement of personal, congregational, and community circles of concern. These themes were present across congregations, though shaped by each unique context, as indicated by references to particular axial codes and focused codes in previous tables.



**Figure 10. Overall Qualitative Themes Across Congregations**

All focus groups expressed *inspiration for earth stewardship*. They mentioned the earth belonging to God, a human mandate to responsibility as the correct interpretation of “dominion” (M1P1, L4P1), and the importance of seeking harmony with other creatures. Interviewees from Trillium and Lupine, which did not have creation care teams, tended to phrase earth stewardship in terms of “wise use” of creation and its resources (3-A, 4-A), maintaining a sense of human agency as primary. Participants from Mariposa and Columbine, with long-established creation care teams, tended to employ more reciprocal terminology such as “mutuality” with other creatures (C2P1). They referred to God’s agency in renewing all creation and connecting humanity with the earth (2-A) and used participatory language in phrases like “earth stewardship as Christ centered healing” (1-A) and humanity’s role of being “co-creators with God” (2-B). Some mentioned inspiration for earth stewardship in Native American spirituality and the concept of the seventh generation (T3P2, L4P1). Lupine leaders made an explicit connection between caring for the poor and caring for the earth (4-B), and Columbine leaders stressed the need for spelling out concern for the earth as part of God’s mission (2-D).

Participants across congregations lamented humanity’s *systemic separation from the rest of creation*. They described a disconnect from the outdoors as the “dark side” of technology (M1P2), and how human practices threaten water quality and show a lack of regard for creation. Most focus groups discerned how society gives a higher priority to economic motivations than to ecological needs (1-B, 3-D) and understood society’s assumed goal of economic growth as part of the systemic fabric of unsustainability (2-C). While all participants noted the importance of raising awareness and accepting responsibility, those from Mariposa and Columbine, which have creation care teams,

used theological categories to describe this human rift from the rest of creation as “sinful” (M1P3) and requiring “deep repentance” (C2P1). Such liturgical terminology powerfully recognizes the deep spiritual rupture that accurately reflects of our society’s captivity to systems denigrating the earth and invites openness to a new direction.

Representatives from all focus groups conveyed a *personal connection with God in creation*. They described God’s “close presence” in wilderness settings and gardening (2-G, 3-B, 4-C), and they spoke of encounters with nature evoking thanks, wonder, ecstasy, and joy. Those with the support of creation care teams in their congregations also emphasized humanity’s connection to the rest of nature as part of it, not above it (1-C), and they expressed such mutuality regularly by worshiping *with* creation and perceiving the outdoors as an extension of sanctuary (2-G). This personal connection with God in creation was evident in the annual service of rogation at Mariposa and using the *Season of Creation* at Columbine.

In each congregation, participants recognized the importance of *cultivating creation care in congregational life*. Mariposa and Columbine have benefited from their creation care teams, which over time have been incorporating creation care into the everyday thinking of their members through earth bytes in bulletins, opportunities for learning and teaching, guest speakers, liturgical resources, giving members permission to follow through with ideas, and modeling real-life, long-term stewardship in many areas of congregational life (1-D, 2-H). Trillium and Lupine leaders recognized their need to raise creation care consciousness through education and awareness in the congregation to address a current low priority on earthkeeping (3-E, 4-D). The protocol helped these participants identify some earth-honoring congregational activities such as mentoring

youth in the outdoors, recycling, and adopting a stretch of highway. In addition, the personal practices of members in these congregations would provide helpful assets for encouraging the implementation of corporate practices (3-A, 4-E).

Representatives from each congregation saw ways in which creation care could be a beneficial avenue for *missional relationships with the community*. Those from Trillium and Lupine recognized ways members were currently involved in earthkeeping activities beyond church walls through lake associations, sportsmen's clubs, and other civil society organizations, and Trillium hosted community relief efforts during the aftermath of an area flood (3-C, 4-F). All linked some of their actions to emphases in the wider church, through the ELCA, Lutheran World Relief, and ecumenical partnerships. While there was openness in each group to seek out new local partnerships for earth stewarding projects, the two congregations with creation care teams had already formed several overt ties to others in their local contexts through community gardens, harvest meals, speakers, and an environmental fair (1-E, 2-E). In such hospitality and outreach, Mariposa and Columbine were engaging non-members, calling attention to local abundance and capacity, and increasing the visibility of the church as an instrument and demonstration of God's stewardship in the world. A few participants also used language related to God's mission and agency in earth stewardship. Lupine linked missional action to prayer and study and drew upon a social component (4-E), Mariposa defined stewardship as Christ-centered healing (1-A), and Columbine made an explicit connection between the mission of God and the earth (2-D).

Focus groups across congregations expressed in the topic of creation care the need for *graceful engagement* through the church's internal dynamics and public witness. They



recognized potential divisions within the church, reflecting divisions in the society (2-C, 3-E), which have presented obstacles to making adaptive changes (4-D), and they called for dialogue and substantive conversations to get beyond stereotypes and polarization (2-F, 3-E). Lupine participants saw the potential of the church to be a creation care prophet that would promote an atmosphere of cooperation by being gently persuasive (4-F), though they were not actively following through with this insight, acknowledging that prophetic was outside their “comfort zone” (L4P1). Trillium also saw its role as listening, though not taking a stand, in a charged political climate (3-D). But Mariposa participants saw being political and even “subversive” as part of stewardship, advocating a gentle yet “unstinting” approach (M1P2). Those from Columbine also, despite power dynamics and risk, have boldly hosted a public annual environmental fair that has brought various groups in the community together, and they pointed to the *Implications Wheel* as a possible tool for communal discernment among multiple stakeholders (2-F). The support of a creation care team in these congregations has kept the challenge of isolation at bay.

In sum, each congregation interviewed expressed ways in which creation care was a value for the church to embrace more deeply. Focus groups from congregations that had creation care teams for the past seven years tended to see themselves as participating in God’s mission for the well-being of earth and its people, to view humanity in reciprocal relationships with the rest of nature, and to describe the depth of humanity’s systemic separation from creation in terms of sin that leads to repentance. Those with the support of creation care teams were able to incorporate creation care into many aspects of congregational life, to bring tools for engaging this topic even in contexts with tension, and to build intentional earth stewarding partnerships with community organizations.

### Triangulation of Data

The explanatory sequential mixed methods research design of this project necessarily involves the *triangulation of data*, a strategy of bringing results from different data sources of information into conversation with one another. The aim is to build coherence and validity, as John Creswell explains: “If themes are established based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants, then this process can be claimed as adding to the validity of the study.”<sup>18</sup> We now briefly present some ways in which the qualitative data shed light on the quantitative results.

The qualitative phase of the research has shown there are discernable differences between congregations that have an established creation care team and those that do not. Since only 19.0% of congregations have formal creation care teams, this study was fortunate to include two such congregations with long-established teams. Each of the four focus groups brought a positive contribution, and each saw its congregation’s potential to grow more deeply and intentionally in its creation care activity. But the data from what we might call the two *integrating congregations* revealed that a creation care team significantly increases a congregation’s capacity to integrate creation care practices into worship, education, congregational life, building and grounds, and community action.

Integrating congregations lifted up God’s concern for all creation regularly in worship, recognizing human systemic separation from the rest of nature in terms of sin, calling for actions of *metanoia*, and using liturgical resources like a service of rogation or the *Season of Creation* to emphasize human belonging as part of the earth community (not above it) and as an instrument of God’s love for the whole creation. They saw

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<sup>18</sup> Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 201.

prayers, hymns, and preaching as vehicles for making explicit God's mission with the earth. The reciprocal relationships with other creatures they were cultivating both inside their sanctuaries and in the sanctuary of the outdoors resonated with the more than 90% of survey respondents who believed Jesus' teaching about loving the *neighbor* should be expanded to include non-human members of the earth community. While other focus groups tended to stress human agency, those from integrating congregations used phrases more similar to the 60.3% of survey respondents who chose missional language to describe how humans should relate to the earth:

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.

According to the survey, less than two-thirds of congregations lift up God's creation intentionally in their Christian education, and when they do so creation care is more likely to be engaged with children than adults and not part of regular programming. But the education of integrating congregations was geared for all ages, and especially adults. It went beyond the handing down of personal ecological stewardship (as in gardening or hunting traditions, e.g.) and engaged speakers from the community with expertise on scientific or current ecological issues being faced in the region. Emphasizing the need to learn more from science and theology, and even putting "earth bytes" of information in the weekly bulletin, these congregations were cultivating a greater sense of ecological AWARENESS, VOCATION, BELONGING, and MISSION among their members and the community, to use the four theoretical codes from the qualitative phase.

A third of survey respondents acknowledged that creation care is a very low priority in congregations. But even in congregations without a creation care team, interviewees described a high level of *personal* involvement in earthkeeping activities,

which was also reflected in the survey. Again, the prevalence of these personal practices should embolden congregations to make them a part of corporate life. For integrating congregations, deepening the expression of creation care in their corporate life, building and grounds, and community action meant going beyond recycling and changing out light bulbs to modeling real-life long-term earth stewardship through community gardens, conducting harvest meals with local organic food, and hosting an environmental fair. They were among the roughly 20% of congregations already collaborating with civil society organizations on ecological issues, though both the survey and the interviews indicated a much higher interest in the potential for more such collaboration.

Interviewees were concerned about many challenges facing the earth, and were conversant especially about local ecological issues. But only about a third of respondents said they have engaged in political advocacy as part of caring for the earth. More than gender, age, or clergy or lay status, the intervening variable that yielded the most frequent statistically significant differences among respondents of the creation care survey was political preference. Participants' political views were related to their level of concern about global warming as well as specific ecological issues, their sense of urgency in caring for the environment, and their desire for stronger environmental action by elected leaders. Political affiliation was even correlated with the tendency of respondents to prefer either the language of interdependence with the rest of creation and participation with God, or the language of human beings acting on God's behalf. In the *politically charged* conversation that earthkeeping has become, congregations without creation care teams saw their role as listening but not taking a stand, citing possible internal disruption in the church and confessing that being publicly prophetic was not in their comfort zone.

Their concerns were not unique; all focus groups discerned tensions and the risk of divisions in their contexts. But in the overall survey, 92.2% said the issue is not too divisive to bring up, 92.7% did not oppose church involvement in shaping environmental policies, and 85.2% believed providing opportunities for advocacy on regional environmental issues would be a helpful way the synod team could support them. Integrating congregations were acting with such confidence. Supported by church networks, insights of civil society organizations, and their creation care team, they were bringing up creation care in the community regularly and visibly. They were engaging the political process as part of stewardship, seeking graceful engagement, and building relationships with other churches and organizations in the community. Although some of these actions have resulted in the loss of members, they have also created more interest and missional activity in these congregations, especially with non-members who are becoming involved with some earth stewarding projects.

In the survey, 73.6% of respondents knew about the synod resolution that creation care is integral to all faith practices, but in each interview, leaders said knowledge of it was minimal in their parishes. Interviewees noted that such resolutions are helpful insofar as they draw attention to an issue but need follow-through by clergy and steady emphasis in the synod. They said that creation care should be approached not as a program but as a worthwhile process, which takes time to emerge and grow in a specific context. This research suggests that such a process would be best encouraged and facilitated by the formation of congregational creation care teams. Establishing these teams has the support not only of the insights from the congregations with these integrative teams but also of 98.4% of survey respondents who agreed that creation care is an essential part of

Christian identity and mission today and 93.2% who believe that a congregation is an ideal setting for modeling creation care for a more sustainable future.

### **Summary**

This chapter reported descriptive and inferential statistics on the creation care practices and perceptions of survey respondents in this study, interpreted deeper insights about creation care in congregational ministry through codes elucidated from focus group participants, and explored how data from these two methods of inquiry complement each other. The next chapter brings the findings from the quantitative survey and the qualitative interviews into dialogue with the theoretical, biblical, and theological lenses from earlier chapters. The concluding discussion places this thesis within the larger conversation of social and scientific concerns about the environment and within the broader scope of the earth-redeeming promises inherent in the *missio Dei*.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS

A picture of the missional character of the creation care perceptions and practices of leaders in the Living Water Synod is beginning to emerge through the wide-angle snapshot of the synod-wide survey and the four congregational close-up interviews. This concluding chapter briefly recapitulates these quantitative and qualitative findings and then examines them in conversation with the theoretical, biblical, and theological themes from previous chapters. These lenses guided the development of the questionnaire and the focus group protocol, and now aid us in a missional evaluation of the results. They also help situate this study within wider environmental and ecclesial discussions, and point to opportunities for further work.

#### **Review of Results**

The quantitative and qualitative components of this thesis project have convinced me even more of the church's calling today to emphasize creation care as a vital facet of God's mission for the life of the world. In general, survey respondents shared a deep concern about many challenges facing the earth, especially climate change and issues related to energy and water. They overwhelmingly agreed that global warming is real, that it is accelerating through human activity, that scientific evidence demonstrates our current resource use is unsustainable, that science will not find a solution to global warming that would enable us to continue our current way of life, and that the U.S.

should cut carbon emissions for the sake of the global community. At the same time, nearly all respondents agreed that both the Bible and the Lutheran church teach that humanity is part of God's creation and is responsible to care for it. Almost all (98.4%) saw creation care as an essential part of Christian identity and participation in God's mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and 93.2% agreed with a key assumption of this thesis, that a congregation is an ideal setting for modeling the kind of creation care needed to move toward a more ecologically sustainable future.

These general perspectives of participants in favor of creation care were reflected in many personal practices, but less so in their congregations. According to the survey, 100% of respondents reported that they recycle, but 94% of congregations do; 73.6% of individuals obtain food from local or organic sources, but only 48.1% of congregations suggest it in corporate life; 46.5% of respondents use alternative modes of transportation, but only 23.5% of congregations actively encourage it; and 58.3% of participants compost food waste, but only 11.3% of congregations practice it. Congregations were also more likely to sell fair trade coffee for home use than to serve it at church functions. It may be true that some services (such as alternative modes of transportation) are limited in rural areas or small towns, where the vast majority of the congregations responding to the survey were located. Yet, the discrepancy in these data reflects what 34.6% of the respondents admitted: creation care is a very low priority in their congregations. Despite their predominant view that a congregation is an ideal setting for modeling creation care, just 25.6% of respondents (19.0% of congregations) reported having a creation care team.

This incongruity was corroborated in the focus group interviews: the level of *congregational engagement* did not match the same level of *personal engagement*.



Participants across congregations lamented humanity's systemic separation from the rest of creation, and every focus group expressed inspiration for earth stewardship, especially drawing strength from a personal connection with God in creation. Yet, there were discernable differences between congregations that lacked a formal creation care team and those that had established one. These *integrating congregations* were intentionally cultivating creation care in congregational life and benefited from designated creation care teams. Such teams did not function as siloes. Rather, like leaven, they influenced many areas of corporate church practice: worship, education, congregational life, building and grounds, and community action. They used special liturgical services and seasons to worship with creation. They highlighted creation concerns in their Christian education for all ages, especially adults with invited speakers and information in weekly bulletins. They highlighted local food providers with congregational meals. They targeted their buildings' energy use and designated space for community gardens and butterfly habitat. They also engaged partners in their contexts to help broaden awareness of regional ecological issues and facilitate avenues for political advocacy.

This *community engagement* was more concerted in integrating congregations. Yet, the other two congregations, without creation care teams, began to recognize their potential for engaging their communities through environmentally-related concerns. One offered its facility to host the community's flood relief and the other connected social justice as part of creation care and remembered its members' tree planting emphases both currently through other organizations and years earlier as part of the church's VBS. Essential to the ecological consciousness-raising of a congregation's creation care team, then, is identifying what the congregation already has been doing to lift up creation care

in the five areas this survey explored (worship, education, congregational life, building and grounds, and community action) and then considering long and short-term goals for each area. In the words of one focus group, a team helps the congregation recognize abundance and capacity in its members and in the community for missional collaboration.

The theoretical codes of the qualitative phase of the research indeed showed that integrating congregations were more adept at raising AWARENESS about systemic separation from the rest of creation, as it pertained to personal, congregational, and community life (see figures 6, 7, and 10 in chapter 5). They were emboldened to make personal practices a part of corporate life, and they supported ecologically related projects of members in collaboration with non-members. By cultivating creation care in congregational life, they were drawing inspiration for earth stewardship in worship and education, affirming their profound BELONGING in a larger web of being, and strengthening personal VOCATION on the one hand and corporate participation in God's renewing MISSION for all creation on the other.

All focus groups recognized risks in bringing up creation care in congregations. Leaders saw political tensions in their communities between ecological and economic values as threatening division or the loss of members if creation care was emphasized more in their congregations. Their concern that the church would be entering a politically charged debate was not unfounded. Political preference was the intervening variable that yielded the most frequent statistically significant differences among survey respondents, more than gender, age, or clergy or lay status. Participants' levels of concern about global warming as well as specific ecological issues, their sense of urgency in caring for the earth, and their desire for stronger environmental action by elected leaders were

statistically related to their political affiliation. I was not surprised by these political differences, which have been reflected in national studies.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, I was encouraged by the actions of integrating congregations despite political tension. They reflected the confidence of 92.2% of survey respondents who said the issue was not too divisive to bring up, 92.7% who did not oppose church involvement in helping shape environmental policies, and 85.2% who thought it would be helpful for the synod team to provide opportunities for advocacy on regional environmental issues. With support from ecumenical networks, insights of non-profit organizations, and their creation care teams, integrating congregations were lifting up creation care regularly in their congregations and visibly in their communities. They saw political advocacy as part of stewardship and explored strategies for gracefully engaging stakeholders who may have different views. For these congregations, the inspiration for stewarding God's creation, together with the urgency of acting for its well-being, outweighed the political risks. It is the presence of creation care teams within congregations, these data suggest, that enables the church to act more intentionally, comprehensively, and missionally for the sake of God's creation.

Integrating congregations were close to reflecting what Larry Rasmussen describes as *anticipatory communities*:

What suffice are not good ideas, critical though they may be, but good communities; in our case anticipatory communities meeting adaptive challenges. Anticipatory communities are home places where it is possible to reimagine world and reorder possibilities, places where new or renewed practices give focus to an ecological and postindustrial way of life.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Leiserowitz, "Politics & Global Warming, Spring 2014."

<sup>2</sup> Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key*, 226-227.

Perhaps no single congregation can demonstrate all aspects of the anticipatory way of life Rasmussen envisions, but I found anticipatory practices and perceptions evident in each congregation represented by the focus groups, and in the collective survey results, which helped me form a hopeful view of the synod's capacity for earth stewardship.

### **Results in Light of Theoretical, Biblical, and Theological Lenses**

This hopeful view is manifest more deeply when we analyze the quantitative and qualitative results in more detail by bringing them into conversation with the theoretical, biblical, and theological perspectives from chapters 2 and 3. We recall the lenses that informed the development of this project: sustainability, globalization, and global civil society as *theoretical* lenses; the view of nature as an active subject and the scriptural concept of stewardship as *biblical* lenses; and perichoresis, eschatology, and sacramental imagination as *theological* lenses. We proceed with each lens in turn, discussing how it deepens our interpretation of the research findings.

#### **Theoretical Lens: Sustainability**

This thesis relied on the scientific understanding of environmental sustainability articulated by The Natural Step (see chapter 2). This framework views the earth as an interdependent system of geological and biological processes on which human society depends, and it outlines the necessary and sufficient conditions for humanity to achieve sustainability, that is, for human society to exist indefinitely within these processes:

- To become a sustainable society we must eliminate our contributions to ...
- 1. the *systematic increase* of concentrations of substances extracted from the Earth's crust (for example, heavy metals and fossil fuels)
- 2. the *systematic increase* of concentrations of substances produced by society (for example, plastics, dioxins, PCBs and DDT)
- 3. the *systematic* physical degradation of nature and natural processes (for example, over harvesting forests, destroying habitat and overfishing); and ...

4. conditions that *systematically* undermine people's capacity to meet their basic human needs (for example, unsafe working conditions and not enough pay to live on).<sup>3</sup>

These *Four System Conditions* act as a plumb line for businesses, municipalities, and organizations wishing to evaluate their ecological violations and assets, and served as a scientific standard in this thesis project for assessing the sustainability of survey respondents' personal and congregational practices. The need to reduce fossil fuel extraction (#1) was reflected in questions having to do with energy use. A strong majority of respondents (60.8%) said they replaced a personal vehicle with one that is more efficient in the last five years, and almost half of respondents use alternatives to driving (46.5%). About the same number conducted a home energy audit (47.2%), and about the same percentage of congregations had conducted an energy audit of their church buildings (47.8%) and even replaced an old church furnace (50.0%). More congregations (58.5%) reported using signage for energy conservation (e.g. turning lights off) and replacing regular light bulbs with more efficient ones (74.7%). Most respondents also knew the synod encourages all congregations to conduct an energy audits (59.7%), a helpful way to take a baseline measure for future action. Finally, about one-fourth of congregations encourage carpooling, biking, or taking the bus to church (23.5%). Every contribution toward cutting fossil fuel dependence is helpful, but there is room for improvement.

The need to reduce the accumulation of synthetic substances in the biosphere (#2) was reflected in questions about recycling and Styrofoam use, and the need to reduce direct physical degradation of the earth (#3) was reflected in questions about church

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<sup>3</sup> The Natural Step, "The Four System Conditions of a Sustainable Society."

grounds. As mentioned above, all respondents reported recycling paper, glass, and plastic personally, but the figure was somewhat lower in congregational practice, especially for glass, plastic, and aluminum (90.2%). Over half of congregations also reported policies that discouraged Styrofoam use (56.6%). Eliminating Styrofoam cups and plates, and plastic utensils, often so prevalent at church functions, is a significant way congregations can directly lessen their ecological impact. So is exchanging harsh cleaning agents for more ecologically friendly ones. Rather than keep large church lawns, which typically require mowing, fuel, and fertilizer, leaders could also consider what some congregations reported: designating space on church property for gardens with native plants (32.9%) or wildlife habitat (20.5%) or growing vegetables (18.5%). Integrating congregations that are hosting community gardens are building missional relationships in the community.

The need for reducing conditions that systematically undermine the capacity for people to meet their basic human needs (#4) was reflected in questions concerning social aspects of sustainability. Serving fair trade coffee at church functions, not just offering it for sale, is another significant way congregations can model a sustainable choice, and there are built-in connections to make this transition easy for Lutherans to consider.<sup>4</sup> It is a window for congregations to understand social justice as a complement of ecological justice, social well-being as a component of ecological well-being. Meeting economic needs sometimes dovetails well with ecological thinking: one focus group emphasized caring for the poor and for victims of natural disasters as part of creation care; another

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<sup>4</sup> Lutheran World Relief initiated a fair trade coffee project in 1996. See Lutheran World Relief, “The L W R Coffee Project,” Lutheran World Relief, 2016, [http://lwr.org/getinvolved/fairtrade/coffee\\_tea](http://lwr.org/getinvolved/fairtrade/coffee_tea) (accessed April 11, 2016).

congregation hosted its community's flood relief efforts. But sometimes the economic concerns of an area make ecological choices difficult there, they recognized.

This is where it is helpful to remember the *systematic* aspect of unsustainable trajectories. The Natural Step does not see sustainability as the *sweet spot* intersection of economics, society, and the environment, but views these spheres of influences as nested: economics as a subset of society and society within the environment (see figures 3 and 4 in chapter 2). Nearly all (99.2%) respondents agreed that humanity's well-being is dependent on the earth's well-being. So if the effects of an economic proposal are shown to jeopardize the long-term viability of the environment on which human society depends, then it has overreached its bounds. This systematic framework provides a scientific basis not only for questioning such proposals but also for scrutinizing society's levels of dependence, consumption, waste, and recycling related to them.

Here, too, The Natural Step's strategic process for sustainable decision-making could be useful. After cultivating awareness of the big picture, taking a baseline of the organization's or municipality's current practices that violate or support the four system conditions for sustainability, and casting a compelling vision for a sustainable future that fulfills these conditions, leaders then decide on priorities for action. These decisions are not confined to the way things have always been done in the past but are rather opened up to a compelling alternative through a process of *backcasting*, projecting from a future vision of sustainability back to the present and considering steps that would move the organization or municipality forward sustainably. Knowing that the end goal is not reached overnight, this process encourages flexible thinking, in which a creative idea may become an intermediary step toward sustainability. Communities that may now be

dependent on particular forms of industry or suffering from economic depression may benefit from the transformative accounts of municipalities, such as Övertorneå in Sweden, and businesses such as Interface and Patagonia, that have become both ecologically beneficial and economically viable through a process of engaging many residents and stakeholders with a new vision for sustainability.<sup>5</sup>

Hosting such conversations for the future sustainability of their communities is an important missional opportunity for the church. The concept of *graceful engagement* and the *Implications Wheel*, suggested in the interviews, may be fruitful for the synod team to investigate for equipping congregations.<sup>6</sup> Using a scientific framework, such as that articulated by The Natural Step, helps cultivate a shared language for sustainability in potential collaboration with others in the community. The systematic aspects of this understanding of sustainability mean that congregations alone cannot solve the ecological crisis with their own practices but must be involved with sustainability on a larger scale, through community action and advocacy.

#### Theoretical Lens: Globalization

Globalization is an emerging reality of social, economic, political, and cultural interrelatedness worldwide. The theories of globalization by Rebecca Todd Peters showed how the meaning and impact of globalization represent different realities to

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<sup>5</sup> James and Lahti, *The Natural Step for Communities: How Cities and Towns Can Change to Sustainable Practices*, xxi-xxiv. The stories of carpet manufacturer Interface, and outdoor gear and clothing manufacturer Patagonia, among other businesses, are told in the documentary *So Right So Smart*, directed by Justin Maine et al. DVD. (San Francisco, CA: Video Project, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> See Voelkel et al., “Building an Inclusive Church: A Welcoming Toolkit 2.0.” See also Barker, “Why the Implications Wheel?”



different people, depending on their social location.<sup>7</sup> Writing from a Christian feminist perspective, she shows how the political, economic, and technological dimensions of globalization give rise to injustice, poverty and environmental degradation. Her sharp critique of the dominant models of globalization, neoliberalism, and social development, and her support for a combination of post-colonialist and earthist models, underscore the ethical importance of how the church understands its global relationships.

Key to this concept is sharing a global consciousness and recognizing the interdependence of local and global concerns. Survey respondents demonstrated such global awareness through their high level of concern about climate change, energy issues, and global population, among other challenges facing the earth. Significant differences between Democratic-leaning and Republican-leaning respondents in the survey reflected national differences between how Democrats and Republicans viewed climate change and whether or not the U.S. should participate in a climate treaty.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, survey respondents strongly agreed overall that the U.S. should reduce carbon emissions for the sake of the global community (93.4%), an indication of general support for the historic climate agreement in Paris on December 12, 2015. A robust majority of respondents believed their congregations' involvement with global relief efforts such as the ELCA World Hunger Appeal, Malaria Campaign, and Disaster Relief, has heightened their concern for earth stewardship. So have their connections to churches worldwide through

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<sup>7</sup> Peters, *In Search of the Good Life: The Ethics of Globalization*, 9.

<sup>8</sup> Giovanni Russonello, "Party and Region Influence Congress on Climate Concerns," *New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/cp/climate/2015-paris-climate-talks/democrats-republicans-congress-on-climate-concerns> (accessed December 3, 2015). See also Thomas Kaplan, "Republicans on Campaign Trail Largely Ignore the Climate Deal," *New York Times*, [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/14/us/politics/republicans-on-campaign-trail-largely-ignore-the-climate-deal.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/14/us/politics/republicans-on-campaign-trail-largely-ignore-the-climate-deal.html?_r=0) (accessed December 13, 2015).

global mission and companion synod relationships. The post-colonialist perspective in Peters' work highlights the importance of *accompaniment* in such relationships.<sup>9</sup>

Focus group participants also mentioned global relationships, including helping put solar panels on a hospital in Liberia through an initiative of the Women of the ELCA, and national relationships resulting in projects related to creation care through the ELCA National Youth Gathering and humanitarian trips to hurricane-affected areas.

Interviewees were conversant in regional environmental issues and how they related to wider economic dependence on fossil fuels, minerals, and water. They highlighted the *dark side* of technology in a globalized world, as competing with human connection to the rest of creation, and they recognized how enmeshed society is technologically through the economics of communication, transportation, and commerce. Yet, different focus groups also reflected Peters' concern for bioregionalism in their emphasis on community gardens, members' organic produce sometimes raising funds for hunger relief programs at home and abroad, and hosting an annual congregational meal lifting up food raised and produced within 100 miles.

Thinking globally and acting locally can be cultivated both within personal and congregational circles of concern. Peters' critique of neoliberalism's values of deregulation and unlimited economic growth invite the church to consider the further possibilities of socially responsible investing and divestment from fossil fuel industries.

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<sup>9</sup> This concept is well developed by the Division for Global Mission of the ELCA. See Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, "Global Mission," Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2016, [http://www.elca.org/en/Resources/Global-Mission?\\_ga=1.50400042.2085530141.1389235572](http://www.elca.org/en/Resources/Global-Mission?_ga=1.50400042.2085530141.1389235572) (accessed April 11, 2016).

### Theoretical Lens: Global Civil Society

Global civil society is the public participation of people through non-profit and non-governmental organizations toward the development of better conditions throughout the world. A strong majority of survey respondents saw potential allies for collaboration on creation care in Native American tribal organizations (86.0%), sportsmen and women who hunt and fish (83.7%), and even utility companies (66.7%). Focus groups mentioned Native American values such as acting with the seventh generation in mind, participating in and learning from lake associations and sportsmen's clubs, and collaborating in wider faith partnerships like congregations caring for the earth and Interfaith Power & Light. But nearly half of respondents (49.6%) either did not know a non-profit organization in their area that could be an ally for creation care (32.3%) or could not name one (17.3%), and only a fifth of congregations reported actually collaborating with non-profit or non-governmental organizations on environmental issues (19.7%) or hosting environmental conversations for the community (19.0%). Most believed they could promote environmental stewardship in their own occupation (80.5%), but nearly one in ten did not know whether they could (9.4%), and a solid half of respondents (50.0%) were unaware of how open primary employers in their area may be to collaborate with the church on earth stewardship. These data suggest the importance of seeing everyone as a potential ally, since we have a shared future, and also the need for exploring and strengthening ties between congregations and community organizations on issues related to creation care.

The Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project (CNP) of the Center for Civil Society Studies at Johns Hopkins University sees congregations and associations of congregations, such as a synod, functioning as civil society organizations (see chapter 2).

Theologically, the church cannot be reduced to a civil society organization. But Lutheran theologians Mary Sue Dreier and Gary Simpson have found the CNP's identification of five ways nonprofits contribute to society helpful for reflecting on where churches can envision anew their participation with God in the world: providing direct services, leading innovation, advocating, expressing values, and building community.<sup>10</sup>

The results of this thesis show how Dreier's and Simpson's emphasis on the church participating with God in civil society to help address social needs can be extended also to addressing ecological needs—either through collaboration with other organizations or through their own ministry. For example, congregations provide *direct ecological services* when they adopt a highway or beach to clean up (38.3% of congregations in the survey), dedicate property for wildlife habitat or a Monarch way station (20.5%), host area relief efforts in the wake of a natural disaster like a flood, or participate in tree-planting projects. They act as *innovators* in their communities by being on the early end of adopting ecologically sustainable practices like food waste composting (11.3%), installing solar panels to generate renewable energy (1.2%), or exploring a new liturgy or lectionary that lifts up creation.

All groups were aware of risks in highlighting creation care issues in their various contexts, but integrating congregations saw the importance of *advocacy*, participating in the political process, as part of stewardship, making an effort to educate members about state legislation that could potentially affect their area. They also *expressed values* concerning God's creation in special worship services, conducting a service for rogation,

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<sup>10</sup> Dreier, "Five Congregations and Civil Society: An Imagination for God's World." See also Simpson, "God in Civil Society: Vocational Imagination, Spiritual Presence, and Ecclesial Discernment."

e.g., or in adopting a temporary alternative lectionary such as the *Season of Creation*.<sup>11</sup> Finally, ecological engagement was an avenue for *building community* through hosting an environmental fair, establishing community gardens, and inviting guests with environmental expertise to speak at adult forums or other church events. Integrating congregations especially were discovering the abundance and capacity of their communities for missional collaboration.

The synod team, as another collaborative layer for congregations, could learn from these five areas of community engagement as they accompany congregations in earthkeeping. The survey indicated that respondents overwhelmingly thought the team would be helpful by providing biblical and theological resources (85.6%), opportunities to learn from theologians and other congregations about their engagement with creation care (85.7%), and opportunities for environmental advocacy in the region (85.2%). A strong majority also believed their congregations could benefit from grants or loans for creation care projects (82.0%) and from worship resources that lift up creation (78.8%). All of these data validate the current efforts by the synod creation care team to facilitate opportunities for congregations to deepen their earth stewardship, and to project the image of the church as an entity in partnership with God in civil society to effect change.

### Biblical Lens: Nature as Active Subject

The active role of nature throughout the biblical witness, in liturgy, and in hymns provides a faithful picture not only of humanity, but of all creation as co-worshiping and discerning God's work and presence in the world. Such a scriptural view challenges the anthropocentric distortion of faith and invites us to resonate with the groaning of the

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<sup>11</sup> See Habel, "The Season of Creation Story."

whole creation that yearns for redemption, to ask what animals can teach us, to praise the LORD along with the clapping hands of rivers and with everything that has the breath of life. Francis of Assisi and John Muir provide both classic and more modern examples of relating to nature reciprocally, viewing nature as a *thou* rather than an *it*, seeing other creatures and parts of creation as fellow subjects rather than objects.<sup>12</sup>

Focus group interviews conveyed such a sense, especially as participants shared about growing up with farm animals, encountering a dead animal on the side of the road, or caring for pets. One participant shared: “There should be some kind of mutuality ... between people and the creation. You know, they are co-creatures with us. If you ever look deeply into a cat's eyes, you know that there's an intelligence there that's remarkable” (C2P2). The same interviewee described creation care involving both “care *for* and also care *with*,” respecting the agency of other creatures and stressing cooperation rather than domination. Other participants described the threat of extinction facing some species today, the importance of landowners providing habitat for birds and other animals, and cooperation to protect shorelines from erosion and nutrient runoff for the health of aquatic life. Integrating congregations modeled the language of interdependence and reciprocity in regular worship, inviting animals into the sanctuary, lifting up soil and water and seeds with a litany at spring planting time, even using a “gigantic blow up ball of the earth, inflatable earth. And we bring it out during the Season of Creation and ... you got the idea of having the earth worshiping with us, so the earth is in a pew” (C2P1). They were among around half of congregational representatives in the survey who saw an

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<sup>12</sup> See Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature: Tradition and Innovation in Western Christian Attitudes toward the Environment*, 123. See also Muir, *Nature Writings: The Story of My Boyhood and Youth, My First Summer in the Sierra, the Mountains of California, Stickeen, Selected Essays*, 191, 233.

emphasis on God's creation through liturgy (58.0%), specific Sundays or seasons during the church year (48.8%), or outdoor services (46.9%).

Nearly all respondents believed that humanity's well-being is dependent on the earth's well-being (99.2%), and, when presented with different statements about how humans should relate to the earth, a strong majority (60.3%) selected wording that was intentionally phrased in terms of *interdependence* (see table 15). Such reciprocal relationality provides an important contrast to our anthropocentric society, which tends to reduce nature and its systems to commodities or resources for human consumption. Rather than an exploitative relationship, which Larry Rasmussen describes as that of master to slave, the survey revealed that nine out of ten survey respondents would be open to interpreting Jesus' teaching about loving the "neighbor" to include non-human members of the earth community (90.9%).<sup>13</sup>

Such a finding broadens the scope of congregational ministry: who is our neighbor? What is our neighborhood? Activist Ched Myers offers a compelling proposal for communities to rethink affiliations according to arbitrary lines separating states, counties, or districts and instead become familiar with their watersheds, suggesting that people of faith engage their contexts in "watershed discipleship."<sup>14</sup> The watersheds of ancient Israel, including the Jordan River Valley, with the rhythms of seasons, the presence of unique flora and fauna, and the periodic hydration of the ecosystem in the desert, provided inspiration for biblical images of God's salvation (e.g. Isaiah 35:1-7). The survey respondents' high level of concern for water issues could move congregations

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<sup>13</sup> Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key*, 100.

<sup>14</sup> Ched Myers, "From 'Creation Care' to 'Watershed Discipleship': Re-Placing Ecological Theory and Practice," *Conrad Grebel Review* 32, no. 3 (2014).

to, in Muir's words, "make the acquaintance" of other watershed inhabitants, remember the presence of these neighbors as part of their worshiping community, and guide local action and regional advocacy for and with them.<sup>15</sup>

### Biblical Lens: Stewardship

This thesis holds with Douglas John Hall that stewardship, which has often been a truncated concept in the church, can no longer be understood as one aspect of ministry but rather characterizes the whole of Christian discipleship and participation in the *missio Dei*.<sup>16</sup> Embracing his ideas of the *stewardship of all believers*, the *church as steward*, and *stewardship as the church's mission* makes sense only if we allow our concept of steward to be expanded. Beyond financial stewardship, it recognizes everything as belonging to God and our responsibility for all that has been entrusted to humanity. Stewardship is not just a command in Hall's view. He shows how *Jesus Christ is the preeminent steward*, who defines that role and fulfills human accountability to God and responsibility for all creation, not desiring anything for himself but giving his life for the sake of others, and enabling those who are in Christ to be "taken up into his stewardship. It is not that we achieve the stewardly status through our works, our imitation of him. We are graciously brought into a stewarding of God's grace that has already been enacted by God's chief steward."<sup>17</sup> In this thesis, then, Christian stewardship is essentially *participatory*. Christ overcomes the sin within us that would prevent us from becoming stewards—our illusion

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<sup>15</sup> Muir, *Nature Writings: The Story of My Boyhood and Youth, My First Summer in the Sierra, the Mountains of California, Stickeen, Selected Essays*, 190.

<sup>16</sup> Hall, *The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age*, 232, 244.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.



of ownership as well as our lack of responsibility—and enables us by grace to share in God’s self-giving love for the life of the world.

Focus group conversations reflected several of these insights. Interviewees mentioned the theme of God’s ownership, quoting Psalm 24:1, “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it,” and linking the concept of stewardship to taking care of what belongs to God: “Stewardship is a good word to mean that we are not owners, we’re only caretakers” (M1P3). Although many saw it as a mandate for human responsibility, some defined stewardship as centered in Christ, with their relationship with him at the heart of their creation care work. The focus on Christ “puts stewardship into the, you know, the driving role in your life of what it means to be a person of faith” (M1P1). Some preferred the term *earth stewardship* to *creation care*, which they thought did not get at the deeper repentance needed as part of restoring human relationships with all creation. As one interviewee explained, “We are so dependent, and our role as stewards, caretakers, is a function of our interdependence with other creatures” (C2P1). She further expressed the role of human beings as “co-creators” with God, insisting that “we are not like on par with God, but ... we participate in God’s creative activity” (C2P1).

This participatory quality of stewardship was also reflected in the survey, with a strong majority (60.3%) favoring the preferred wording of how humans should relate to the earth:

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.

Almost all remaining respondents chose language of “acting on God’s behalf” (34.9%), and very small numbers chose language about human “dominion” for the “progress of humanity” (3.2%) or “None of these” (1.6%). Cross-tabulations comparing just the two

choices with the most representation, and chi-square tests, revealed that those who identified as clergy, and those who identified as Democrat or Democratic-leaning, were significantly more likely to choose the statement about humanity's interdependence and co-participation with God than did their counterparts. Those who were lay or who identified as Republican or Republican-leaning were more likely to choose the statement about acting on God's behalf.

Human action is important, but the framework of missional theology emphasizes the primacy of God's agency, in which we are enabled to participate. As Dwight Zscheile explains, "By 'missional church' I mean a church whose identity lies in its *participation in the triune God's mission* in all of creation. ... Local churches are central to God's mission as they discern God's movement in their particular times and places and join up with it."<sup>18</sup> Zscheile's wording articulates the wide scope of the *missio Dei* encompassing all creation, and its emphasis on participation echoes Craig Van Gelder's advice to let the church be what it is, "a Spirit-led missional church that seeks to participate fully in God's mission in its particular context."<sup>19</sup> This entails, according to Alan Roxburgh, wanting "to know what God is up to in our neighborhoods and communities and what it means for the gospel to be lived out and proclaimed in this time and place."<sup>20</sup> That question cannot be answered fully from within the walls of the church, he insists, but challenges readers

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<sup>18</sup> Dwight J. Zscheile, *Cultivating Sent Communities: Missional Spiritual Formation*, Missional Church Series (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2012), 6. Emphasis in original.

<sup>19</sup> Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*, 182.

<sup>20</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*, Allelon Missional Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 26.

instead, like the disciples whom Jesus sent out in Luke 10:1-12, to “Sit at the table of the other, and there you may begin to hear what God is doing.”<sup>21</sup>

Integrating congregations were missional in this sense, engaging *the other* in their communities on ecological issues through field trips, learning from scientists and educators, collaborating on projects like tree planting, and providing community garden space for apartment-dwellers. Listening to the community is key to these relationships, they demonstrated, and, in cultivating an atmosphere of hospitality and permission-giving, they were partnering with and empowering people even outside their church walls to participate in this fundamentally human calling of participating with God in the care and redemption of all God has made.

#### Theological Lens: Perichoresis

This thesis has reinforced the interdependence, inter-subjectivity, and reciprocal relationality among all creatures, and between God and all creation, with the theological concept of Trinitarian perichoresis. The mutual indwelling of the divine persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—emphasizes the dynamic community of equal persons finding unity within the Godhead, preserving the distinctiveness of each yet describing their co-existence *in* one another through the circulation of the divine life (see chapter 3). This mutual indwelling is also mutual self-emptying: each exists in the other and empties itself for the other in self-giving love. With Miroslav Volf, we understood the church as having the capacity to mirror this concept, to become an image of the Trinity, through the Spirit enabling people to share in the divine life of the Son who dwells in them (John 14:20;

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 134.

17:23).<sup>22</sup> With Jürgen Moltmann’s ecological doctrine of creation, we saw how the perichoretic unity of the divine persons can also be seen to include the whole creation, through emphasizing God’s immanence, the Creator’s presence in each creature, and creation’s capacity to bear the divine presence and find its true home in God.<sup>23</sup> The perichoresis that characterizes Trinitarian divine life therefore points to the kind of reciprocal relationships we have been created for—not only in relation to other human beings but also to other creatures who share with us the breath of life (Gen 2:7).

The concepts of reciprocal relationality and inter-subjectivity were evident in survey results that reflected strong agreement with the language of interdependence to describe how humans should relate to the earth (60.3%), and with the idea of expanding neighborly love to include non-human members of the earth community (90.9%), which we have already reviewed. Where interviewees especially pointed toward a perichoretic understanding can be elucidated further with the theoretical code BELONGING. One focus group described it in terms of a *world family*, sharing relational unity through the goodness of God’s creation: “It permeates everything—relationships, people, animals—that we are truly one and we are good” (L4P1). Other focus groups emphasized that human beings belong within nature and lamented “the idea that we are, kind of separate from or superior to the creation and we are not part of the ecology” (C2P1). As another interviewee put it,

I think it would be safe to say that in pre-industrial times *humans were much more aware of their dependence and reliance on natural systems* and lived accordingly, and had probably a genuine relationship and didn't see themselves as distinct and apart from it. And I think as the Industrial Revolution gathered steam and does to

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<sup>22</sup> Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, 213.

<sup>23</sup> Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, 13-17.

this day, *increasingly humans see themselves as outside and distinct from and special from everything else* and look increasingly to technological fixes to repair any damage, even though the dark side of that technology very quickly becomes evident and then creates a new or an additional problem. (M1P2)

Representatives of these integrating congregations rightly identified the rift between humanity and the rest of creation as “sinful” (M1P3) and calling for “deep repentance” (C2P1). These theological terms accurately express this separation at the level of the spirit, and thereby also suggest where reconciliation of this vital relationship can begin.

The theoretical codes BELONGING and AWARENESS also overlap with further understanding of this cosmic family. “All that is, is kin and born to belonging,” Larry Rasmussen observes. “All is relational. Humankind and otherkind live into one another’s lives and die into one another’s deaths in relationships that either sustain or subvert creatures and the land. Nothing is, without the other.”<sup>24</sup> Unpacking how human beings are related via biological evolution not only to all other earth creatures—some of which symbiotically inhabit our guts—but also at the molecular level to stars through the presence of heavy elements, he identifies our profound physical interrelatedness to the whole creation. He expresses it with perichoretic language: “So the Tree of Life lives within us, as well as we within it ... We’re at home in the cosmos; the cosmos is at home in us. We’re creatures of a planet on which the planet’s creatures inhabit and sustain us, inside and out.”<sup>25</sup> Complementing this comprehensive scientific picture of humanity’s place in the cosmos is Rasmussen’s theological diagnosis of anthropocentrism,

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<sup>24</sup> Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key*, 17.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

humanity's sin, which he deepens with Luther's articulation of the human condition as *cor curvatum in se*, the heart turned in upon itself.<sup>26</sup>

While the theological term perichoresis may seem difficult for congregations to assimilate, its deeply relational spirit, as exemplified in the words of St. Francis and John Muir, may resonate both within congregations and with their neighbors. Indeed, we have seen promising capacity in integrating congregations to cultivate AWARENESS and BELONGING both scientifically and theologically through their education of adults and their incorporation of creation's concerns and presence in worship.

#### Theological Lens: Eschatology

This theological lens served two purposes for this thesis, articulating both the biblical vision of God's redemption of all creation and the impact of God's future cosmic perichoresis breaking into the present. As made clear in an offertory prayer of the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, the concern of this thesis has been not only with the *care* but also the *redemption* of all God has made:

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, maker of all things. Through your goodness you have blessed us with these gifts. With them we offer ourselves to your service and dedicate our lives to the care and redemption of all that you have made, for the sake of him who gave himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.<sup>27</sup>

The broadening of the concept of salvation was evident in the focus group interviews, especially through one participant from an integrating congregation who insisted that the church explicitly connect the mission of God to the earth and thereby move beyond the idea that "it's all about the human soul, saving individual souls ... God

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 92-93.

<sup>27</sup> Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship, *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Pub. House, 1978), 88. Santmire, *Before Nature: A Christian Spirituality*, 164-166.

is not that one that only cares about, you know, the Platonic soul, the soul inside us. God cares about all” (C2P1). She went on to describe in that mission God’s ultimate promises of newness for the whole creation:

The terrible and wonderful thing about Revelation is that it allows us to look at the possibility that things could get terrible, and that there is still hope, and that God will not forsake who and what God loves, even in the midst of, you know, some nightmare situations that I don't want to think about. So that's redemption, new creation. (C2P1)

These insights encourage the church to affirm with H. Paul Santmire that the salvific scope of the good shepherd is cosmic and present to all creatures, and with David Rhoads that creation is not merely a stage on which human redemption is carried out but is a co-recipient with humanity of God’s redeeming grace.<sup>28</sup> That these are voices firmly rooted in the Lutheran tradition further enhances the conviction that the Christian perception of God’s salvation must be broadened, especially among Lutheran congregations.

These voices also underscored the theme of *reformation* as an ecclesial touchstone for living into the ecological way of life the planet community requires. The “New Reformation” Rhoads calls for involves rethinking articles of faith and religious practice from the perspective of the whole creation, and the “religious ethics in a new key” proposed by Rasmussen describes how none of the traditions he draws upon for *Earth-Honoring Faith* are adequate in their present form to address the ecological crisis.<sup>29</sup> In addition to acknowledging the depth of the adaptive changes necessary for humanity and the church to embrace new ecological behaviors, religious perspectives, and public policies, Rasmussen highlights the importance of *anticipatory communities*,

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<sup>28</sup> Santmire, *Before Nature: A Christian Spirituality*, 164-166. Rhoads, “Reflections on a Lutheran Theology of Creation: Foundations for a New Reformation,” 8.

<sup>29</sup> Rhoads, “Reflections on a Lutheran Theology of Creation: Foundations for a New Reformation.” Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key*.

which practice ahead of time the kind of earth stewardship needed for a sustainable world. These proleptic eco-practitioners are reminiscent of early adopters of The Natural Step, who engage in *backcasting* from a future vision of sustainability to the present and experimenting with flexibility possible intermediary steps with the end vision in mind.

Although only 25.6% of respondents reported that their congregation had a creation care team, this is a hopeful beginning. As Rasmussen affirms, “Systemic changes usually don’t materialize if they are not already present in anticipatory communities, even if those communities are modest in size and number. ... In words attributed to Gandhi, we must *become* the change we seek if we expect change to happen.”<sup>30</sup> Integrating congregations, we have seen, are acting with such reforming boldness, as they assess their carbon footprints, analyze their use of ecological services, cultivate environmental AWARENESS and VOCATION in their education with adults as well as children, and experiment with new liturgies and lectionaries that incorporate creation into regular religious language and practices. “The Way is made by treading it,” Rasmussen says. “It is forged, from time to time, on new ground. ... Improvisation is of necessity the shape of discipleship for Earth-honoring faith. Hard transitions are not negotiated without it.”<sup>31</sup>

Focus groups recognized risks and challenges of lifting up creation care issues in their congregations and their communities, one participant especially linking ecological witness to the prophetic role of the church. (L4P1). Though this role may be outside the comfort zone of some, integrating congregations are becoming inspiring models of it, and

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<sup>30</sup> Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key*, 121.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.



the longer congregations wait to emphasize creation care, the more they will be seen as coming late to a globally significant issue that they actually have a wealth of insight to help shape. But as they perceive the congregation as a possible *demonstration plot* for the *missio Dei* as ecologically understood, and create an atmosphere of permission giving and collaboration with others, congregations can become innovators in civil society, reformers in their ecclesial circles, and participants with God in their ecological neighborhoods. By the Spirit they would be enabled, in Leslie Newbigin's words, to be a "sign, foretaste, and instrument" of God's mission for the whole earth community.<sup>32</sup>

### Theological Lens: Sacramental Imagination

Lutheran sacramental theology traditionally emphasizes Christ's real presence in, the elements of the Eucharist. Our exploration of Luther's writings, through Santmire, Rasmussen, and Rhoads, revealed a tremendous asset for our reflections on earthkeeping and faith: the conviction that *God is dwelling in, with, and under all creation*. "God is substantially present everywhere, in and through all creatures," writes Luther, "so that the world is full of God and He fills all ... He is at the same time outside and above all creatures."<sup>33</sup> A renewed emphasis on divine immanence has emerged as a valuable theological perspective for an ecological age—a perspective all Lutherans should learn and celebrate. In contrast to a modern industrial tendency to view nature as a limitless resource for human consumption, this lens can help us re-envision nature as a potential bearer of God's presence. Every place is an opportunity for being open to the sacred.

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<sup>32</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995). See also Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*, 19.

<sup>33</sup> In Rhoads, "Reflections on a Lutheran Theology of Creation: Foundations for a New Reformation," 14-15.

Focus group participants reflected such sacramental imagination. They spoke of viewing the outdoors as sanctuary and worshipping with creation (C2P1), of “a visceral sense of the love of nature and feeling God alive in that” (M1P2), of wanting people who experience in their own environment to “realize God is in all that” (T3P1), and of sensing God’s closeness in the process of growth in a garden (L4P2) or even digging in the dirt or a compost heap (C2P2, C2P3). No one used the word *panentheism*, but in all focus groups a theological understanding of God’s immanence was clear, and could be strengthened through exposure to this broader reading of Lutheran sacramental theology, and reinforced through Lutheran outdoor ministry (relating to 62.0% of congregations) and congregational outings (offered by 26.7% of congregations).

Worship, however, has perhaps the most potential for cultivating sacramental imagination in congregations. Rhoads’ account of his dream in which animals received the Eucharist and the walls of the sanctuary fell away to reveal the wider earth as God’s sanctuary, and Rasmussen’s discussion of the potential for liturgical artwork to convey God’s presence in creation, raise the question for worship leaders: how does your congregation cultivate an awareness of its ecological neighborhood in worship?<sup>34</sup> It was heartening to learn that a strong majority of congregations were lifting up God’s love for all creation in prayers (96.3%), hymns (91.1%), and sermons (80.0%). But less than half of congregations in the survey were involved in other practices that could potentially strengthen sacramental imagination. Some congregations reported using locally made altar cloths or other art (32.5%), locally made bread or wine for the Eucharist (38.3%), and locally grown flowers for worship (43.4%). More congregations were conducting

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 22. Rasmussen, “Lutheran Sacramental Imagination,” par. 64, 66.

outdoor services (46.9%) and lifting up God's love for all creation in specific Sundays or seasons (48.8%). The focus group interviews revealed that the presence of a creation care team has enabled integrating congregations over time to introduce such practices into regular worship life.

### Summary

This brief overview of results and bringing the research findings into conversation with the theoretical, biblical, and theological lenses offers a response to the main research question this thesis proposed: *In light of the recent synod resolution emphasizing creation care as an integral part of faith, how missional are the current creation care perceptions and practices among church leaders in the synod?* In some instances, I would conclude very missional. Most participants in this study were very concerned about the challenges facing the earth, many were connecting their concerns with God's intentions for the well-being of all creation, and some were expressing these concerns and intentions explicitly within the ministry of the church.

Respondents exhibited a fairly high level of *personal engagement*, with earth-sensitive practices at home, agreement with the need for collective action and stricter environmental policies, sensing the presence of God in natural settings, and even extending Jesus' command to love the neighbor to include other-than-human members of God's creation. But *congregational engagement* and (rarer) *conscious community engagement*—both of which are essential to a missional church understanding—were best exemplified by integrating congregations, those with an established creation care team. Such teams function best like leaven in a congregation, so that concern for creation is not sequestered into one ministry area but becomes part of all aspects of the

congregation's ministry: worship, education, congregational life, building and grounds, and community action. Nearly three-fourths of respondents knew the synod recognizes creation care as integral to all faith practices, though interviews revealed this knowledge of the gist of the resolution was not widespread. Congregational creation care teams are vital for following through with it, which brings up a major purpose of the synod creation care team: to accompany congregations in the formation and support of such teams. The current efforts of the synod team were strongly validated by survey respondents, but the efficacy of congregational teams, emerging from this study, calls for a synod team focus in helping churches to establish and support them.

It has been my assumption and remains my conviction that a congregation is an ideal setting in which to model the kind of earth stewardship needed for a more sustainable world. More than nine out of ten participants in the survey agreed with this statement, and integrating congregations were demonstrating it, despite risks. Yet even for congregations that are new to earth stewardship, this thesis has explored multiple entry points.

A congregation can develop a shared language of *sustainability* among its members and with others in its community through frameworks like The Natural Step, and reduce the environmental impact of its facility and among its members. Its international partnerships in the body of Christ are a starting place to wrestle with the reality of *globalization* and to see how its local actions can promote economic, cultural, and ecological justice. *Global civil society* is an arena in which congregations can grow in their relationships with other organizations, understand some aspects of their own role in the public, and discern how they may participate with God in the world.

Congregations can deepen their understanding of *nature as an active subject* in scripture and in the lives of St. Francis, John Muir, or others in their own regions. It is in congregations that a broader concept of *stewardship* can emerge, elevating the church's identity-come-of-age as the stewarding community that is empowered to participate in Christ's stewardship of all that belongs to God. As a creation of the Holy Spirit, a congregation can become an image of the *perichoresis* of the Trinity, as it seeks to reflect non-hierarchical relationships of self-giving love, not only with one another in *koinonia* but also with other members of its ecological neighborhood. The hope of God's promises fulfilled for all creation in *eschatology* encourages congregations to broaden their scope of redemption to include all creation and to embrace their roles as reformers in an ecological age. Finally, the rich imagery of Luther's *sacramental imagination* inspires congregations to envision their whole ministry as deeply interdependent in the web of life and to discern God's presence in, with, and under all their interactions with creation.

Each of these entry points—theoretical, biblical, and theological—is also an opportunity for further maturing in the *missio Dei*. Understanding the world God so loves, celebrating the unique perspectives the church brings to this time of ecological reformation, and being open to God's presence in their midst and ecological context, it is my hope that congregations will live into their vocation for this time as stewards, prophets, and anticipatory communities of faith, participating with Christ through the power of the Spirit in the care and redemption of all God has made.

### **Project Limits and Generalizability**

This study involved 136 survey respondents, including 43.4% of rostered leaders in the synod, and representing a strong majority (61.3%) of the congregations, eighty-

four out of 137 congregations, in the synod. It also involved thirteen participants from four congregations in the focus group interviews. Although I was generally pleased with this level of participation, there are limits to generalizing from these samples.

The sampling method was a non-probability purposive snowball-type invitation process, intended to select particular people to participate: pastors and other rostered leaders, elected officers or other council members, a member of a congregation's creation care team if applicable, and someone between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine inclusive. Since this sample was not random, the findings of the study cannot generally be applied to the whole synod, as noted above: "With non-probability methods ... you are limited to making conclusions about only those who have completed the survey."<sup>35</sup>

The limits relate to the demographics of the survey sample, with higher representation of male clergy and female lay participants than their counterparts, an average respondent age of 56.0 years with only 27.5% younger than 50, including just 8.4% who were under 30, and an overwhelming 82.1% identifying as Democrat or Democratic-leaning. We suggested above that this political bias may mean a higher Democratic preference either in the Living Water Synod, which is a subset of a congressional district that does lean Democratic but is more balanced, or among those who self-select when invited to participate in a survey about creation care issues. How would the data look with more Republican respondents or participants under 30?

Despite these limits, data from this sample, representing more than four out of ten rostered leaders and a strong majority of congregations in the synod, suggest some general statements that can be made: (1) Leaders in the Living Water Synod are

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<sup>35</sup> Nardi, *Doing Survey Research: A Guide to Quantitative Methods*, 124.

concerned about several challenges facing the earth. The high level of survey respondents' concern especially about climate change, water issues, and energy issues would impact broader results in the same direction, even if more leaders were to participate in the study. I would expect this general concern to become more intense as awareness of local environmental issues and global ecological distress in the media increases.

(2) The Living Water Synod exhibits awareness of and openness to biblical and theological connections to earth stewardship. The resolution is an example of this, an overwhelming majority of leaders meeting in assembly and identifying creation care as integral to each faith practice and as a vital component of the church's identity and vocation today. While leaders did not think knowledge of this particular resolution was widespread in their congregations, and creation care education for adults was not prioritized, their association of creation care with the teachings of the Bible and the Lutheran church was very strong. So was their recognition of creation care themes in prayers and hymns, and their openness to additional resources from the synod team.

(3) Political preference is a major factor relative to creation care perceptions. The statistically significant differences this study found between perceptions about creation care of those who identified as Democrat or Democratic-leaning and those who identified as Republican or Republican-leaning reflected larger national studies. I would expect political preference to be an important factor if a similar project were conducted in a different synod in another part of the U.S. While survey respondents tended not to agree that bringing up creation care would be too divisive, interviewees mentioned how politically charged it can be and the challenge that presents to leaders in congregations.

(4) Congregational creation care practices are less pronounced than personal practices. The survey showed that individuals were more likely than congregations to engage in intentional behaviors that reduced their ecological footprints, and interviews revealed that even in congregations without a creation care team, individuals could be quite active environmentally. If another study were conducted elsewhere, I would expect there to be a gap between *personal engagement* and *congregational engagement* similar to that found in this study. The higher level of personal involvement is both an encouragement to introduce or expand creation care practices in congregational life, and a resource for creative innovation.

(5) Integrating congregations demonstrate greater capacity to exhibit the missional character of creation care than do those without creation care teams. More than nine out of ten survey respondents agreed that congregations are ideal settings in which to practice creation care. Yet, the interviews showed that congregations with creation care teams (two out of ten in the survey sample) were able to deepen and broaden personal participation with creation care through congregational engagement and community engagement, even when there were risks. Through cultivating awareness, belonging, and vocation, integrating congregations built new relationships and grew in understanding their local earth stewardship as a component of participating in God's mission. I would expect subsequent research to yield similar results.

### **Areas for Further Research**

Employing alternative methods for sampling, to open up the study to more of the population, is one possible area for further research. Rather than contacting pastors and rostered leaders and asking them to invite others, a wider invitation to all who receive the



synod online announcements could have included the link to the survey. Setting a particular goal or quota for representation in each demographic category, or devising a random sampling of congregations and participants within each, could also have been pursued with more time and resources. In the qualitative phase, more focus groups with an intentional representation—such as all young adults, or a men’s group—could have added helpful perspectives. This study involved two congregations without creation care teams and two with long-established creation care teams—what insights could be gained from interviewing congregations at earlier stages of developing a team? This study used an explanatory sequential mixed methods design, though it would be possible to conceive a Participatory Action Research design to assess with baseline and end line instruments the possible impact of introducing practices or studies in creation care. Finally, this synod’s congregations were situated predominantly in rural and small town settings. How would these results compare with those of a more urban synod, or with synods from different parts of the country?

The timing of this research project, near both the International Climate Agreement in Paris of December 2015 and the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation in 2017, also points to possible areas of further study. For example, Eco-Reformation is one area of emphasis the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in 2016 plans to consider.<sup>36</sup> This project invites congregations to go deeper into Lutheran theology in this time of renewing interest in the church as locus and instrument of reform. In addition to rediscovering Luther’s deeply sacramental view of nature, and resources that could deepen

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<sup>36</sup> The Living Water Synod Assembly in 2015 passed a memorial to the Churchwide Assembly entitled, “Memorial on Eco-Reformation in the Context of Climate Change” (see appendix A). Other synods passed memorials with similar wording.

congregations' expression of God's love for all creation in scripture study, liturgy, music, and art, this is a time for more widespread exposure in congregations to Lutheran theologians who have been emphasizing ecological issues for decades.<sup>37</sup>

It is also vital to become familiar with voices lifting up eco-justice from other parts of the globe, particularly the global South, through the Lutheran World Federation.<sup>38</sup> Both Rasmussen and Rhoads have even mentioned the church's moral responsibility in responding to climate change as becoming a matter of *status confessionis*, a term associated with reformation that elevates an issue calling for the church's stance to the center of what it means to confess and practice the faith with integrity.<sup>39</sup> As with the Confessing Church in opposition to the Third Reich in Nazi Germany and the response of churches to the injustices of Apartheid in South Africa, the threat of economic injustice and cultural displacement brought about by globalization and climate change is becoming integral to the public witness of the church for the well-being of humanity and creation.<sup>40</sup> How will these strong ecological emphases within both church and society impact future study of earth stewardship? As the effects of climate change continue and magnify humanitarian crises as well as ecological ones, will the

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<sup>37</sup> See, e.g., Joseph Sittler, *The Care of the Earth, and Other University Sermons*, The Preacher's Paperback Library (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1964). See also H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985). Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996).

<sup>38</sup> See, e.g., Karen L. Bloomquist, ed. *God, Creation and Climate Change: Spiritual and Ethical Perspectives* (Minneapolis, MN: Lutheran University Press and the Lutheran World Federation, 2009). See also Karla G. Bohmbach and Shauna K. Hannan, eds., *Eco-Lutheranism: Lutheran Perspectives on Ecology* (Minneapolis, MN: Lutheran University Press, 2013).

<sup>39</sup> Rasmussen, "Lutheran Sacramental Imagination." Rhoads referred to *status confessionis* in personal conversation with the creation care team of the Living Water Synod, September 27, 2014.

<sup>40</sup> Guillermo Hansen, "Neoliberal Globalization: A Casus Confectionis?," *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, <http://www.elca.org/JLE/Articles/698> (accessed December 28, 2015).

level of a congregation's emphasis on creation care relate to how the faithfulness and relevance of its ministry is perceived: by seminary graduates or professors, by global partners, by people in its immediate vicinity?

This thesis project also took place during the May 2015 release of Pope Francis' powerfully articulated encyclical letter, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*.<sup>41</sup> Several of the themes we have explored in previous chapters he also expresses with urgency and eloquence: agreeing with the scientific consensus of global warming resulting from human activity (par. 23), lifting up creation as a common good and water as a "basic and universal human right" deserving justice over against the privatization of resources by corporations (par. 30-31), and highlighting reciprocal relationality between human beings and the rest of nature through scriptural and theological analysis.

For example, Francis describes human life as "grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor and with the earth itself," and he identifies the brokenness of any of these as "sin" (par. 66), echoing with approval his parallel in Eastern Orthodoxy, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew (par. 8). Francis also criticizes anthropocentrism (par. 68), deplores the reduction of creatures to mere objects for human purposes (par. 11, 69, 82), and draws from his namesake St. Francis of Assisi to stress how all created beings are "linked by unseen bonds" as a "universal family" (par. 89), an interconnection brought about by the Spirit and by love:

Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth. (par. 92)

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<sup>41</sup> Pope Francis, "Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home," <http://www.papalencyclicals.net> (accessed December 31, 2015). Citations refer to paragraph numbers in the encyclical.

These reflections form the basis for Pope Francis' appeal for an *integral ecology*—a view that joins the concerns of the earth and the concerns of the poor; that integrates economic, social, and environmental concerns; and that lifts up indigenous cultures and assigns every creature's value in God. "Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity" (par. 240). Although he does not mention the word *perichoresis*, Francis' reflections add another prominent voice calling for the rethinking of humanity's relationships with the rest of creation and with God in terms of the reciprocity inherent in the web of creation and reflecting the perichoretic union of the Trinity.

I mention Francis' work not only to note its parallel concerns and insights to this thesis but also to stress the importance of congregations to reach beyond Lutheran circles for additional inspiration and companionship on the journey of earth stewardship. By this I mean other Christians such as John Cobb and Bill McKibben, as well as voices from other faith traditions, such as Hindu Vandana Shiva.<sup>42</sup> How would creation care practices or perceptions compare in a study of congregations from more than one denomination or faith community? The arena of global civil society also opens up the possibilities of learning from environmentalists, organizations like Interfaith Power & Light, and documents like the Earth Charter.<sup>43</sup> What would interviews with environmental

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<sup>42</sup> See John B. Cobb, *A Christian Natural Theology: Based on the Thought of Alfred North Whitehead*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007). Bill McKibben, *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Times Books, 2007). Vandana Shiva, *Making Peace with the Earth* (Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publ, 2013). See also John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Ecology and Religion*, Foundations of Contemporary Environmental Studies (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2014).

<sup>43</sup> Earth Charter Initiative, "The Earth Charter," Earth Charter Initiative, 2015, <http://earthcharter.org/discover/the-earth-charter/> (accessed April 11, 2016).

organizations like the Sierra Club reveal today about how the church is perceived in different contexts relative to creation care?<sup>44</sup>

Finally, the themes and results of this thesis encourage more research in missional theology as it relates to earth stewardship. The theological understanding of the Triune God creating, redeeming, inspiring, and sending the church to participate in what God is doing for the sake of the whole world must include all creation in its scope. This thesis has consistently sought to connect concepts of earth stewardship and mission through several areas already being explored in missional theology: Trinitarian perichoresis, participating with God in civil society, understanding one's ministry context deeply, discerning God's presence through reciprocal relationships with the dignified other in the community, being formed by the incarnation of Christ's kenotic love on the cross to accompany a suffering world, becoming a demonstration point for God's mission in the world, and drawing strength from the Spirit that equips all for ministry. In what ways will these and other areas of missional theology develop through an intentional connection with the stewardship of all creation? How will further research in missional theology inform creation care ministry in reflection and action for the well-being of the whole earth community? What theological assets of hope will future ministers draw from to address the needs of a world adapting to a new way of life?

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. Loudon, "Toward Congregational Ecological Activism."

## EPILOGUE

This thesis project has been part of an inspiring journey for me over several years, a journey I look forward to continuing with people in and beyond the Living Water Synod. “Where does your deep passion meet the world’s deep need?” I once heard then ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson ask. While attending a leadership conference at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago in the winter of 2007, I picked up two manuals from David Rhoads, one about forming a green team in your congregation and the other about congregations making their buildings and grounds more sustainable. When I returned home, I found a handful of others in the congregation I serve who also wanted to take faithful earth stewardship seriously, and at the following annual meeting the congregation passed two resolutions, one to establish a congregational creation care team and the other to establish a synod-wide creation care team at the next assembly.

In the congregation, we began taking an inventory of current congregational activities in worship, education, parish life, building and grounds, and community action related to creation care, and also set goals for incremental improvements. This process was augmented a year later when we began participating with twelve other community organizations in a training program of The Natural Step. Over several months, we collaborated with teams from businesses, city administration, and non-profits to envision a more sustainable community, to assess our own organizations’ assets and liabilities

according to sustainability principles we were learning, and to develop projects that would move our organizations closer to the vision. The combination of a practical manual for congregational ministry and a scientific framework for understanding sustainability used across municipalities and organizations rooted creation care in the ministry of the church and connected it to the broader ecological concerns and that were being continually revealed in regional and global contexts. The congregation benefited from the shared insights, relationships, and reputation of collaborating with other organizations on environmental sustainability.

In the synod, we encouraged congregations to form their own creation care teams and conduct energy audits, and began to consider ways of support and accompaniment. This involved hosting workshops based on the manuals, planning retreats that introduced the Season of Creation and an earthkeeping liturgy, and establishing a growing network of individuals, congregations, and ministry partners for collaboration. With the help of funding, we began offering grants for earth ministry projects and organized an annual earth stewardship event for the synod at which we had the privilege of welcoming guest speakers that included Larry Rasmussen, David Rhoads, and Barbara Rossing.

Joining the D.Min. Program in Congregational Ministry and Leadership deepened my theological reflections on the nature of the church and its participation with God in the *missio Dei*. Readings, projects, and seminars helped me analyze my own ministry context and leadership patterns, and made me more sensitive to missional opportunities in the church and community I serve. The program, and especially this thesis project, also enhanced my capacity to begin to reframe my understanding of earth stewardship in light

of the *missio Dei*, as earthkeeping activities continued to develop in both congregation and synod.

It has been a privilege to work closely with the Living Water Synod on this project, and I look forward to conveying the results and recommendations of this study to the synod team to better accompany congregations in their earth stewardship. The bishop has also invited me to give a presentation on earth stewardship at a synod workshop event on the continuing reformation of the church. In addition to the results, the theoretical, biblical, and theological insights from chapters 2 and 3 may be helpful to congregations, and to other synods, perhaps presented or published in condensed form.



## APPENDIX A

### **Resolution Passed by Living Water Synod ELCA, May 2014**

WHEREAS we read in Scripture that “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it” (Psalm 24:1), that God put humanity in the Garden of Eden “to till it and keep it” (Genesis 2:15), and that the Risen Jesus said to his disciples, “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15), and

WHEREAS for over 20 years the ELCA has expressed concern for the environment and has urged the church’s advocacy and action for the well-being of all God’s creatures (e.g., *Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope and Justice*, 1993), and

WHEREAS the Living Water Synod, meeting in assembly in 2008, pledged to grow faithfully and intentionally in this responsibility as individuals and congregations within the synod by:

- Worshiping in ways that celebrate and foster care for creation,
- Educating adults and children about ecological issues and energy conservation,
- Improve energy conservation efforts in church buildings and on their grounds,
- Promoting earth-friendly practices of members at home and work,
- Demonstrating the care of creation in their communities, and
- Advocating for energy policies at the state and national levels that will foster cleaner, renewable, and more efficient energy use in all sectors of society, and

WHEREAS different congregations of the Living Water Synod are living out these commitments to Creation Care in a variety of inspiring ways through forming congregational creation care teams, hosting community events, promoting energy conservation, and increasing awareness of earthkeeping practices, and

WHEREAS the synod’s “Practice Discipleship Challenge” continues to emphasize that members and congregations in our synod seek to grow in faith practices, to “Give, Invite, Serve, Study, Worship, Pray, and Encourage,” and

WHEREAS reports in 2014 from the United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the American Association for the Advancement of Science confirm the consensus of 97% of climate scientists that global emissions of greenhouse gases have risen to unprecedented levels due to human activities, and that the current low-level

societal response to reducing these emissions risks “abrupt, unpredictable, and potentially irreversible climate changes with highly damaging impacts,” therefore be it

RESOLVED that Living Water Synod, meeting in assembly, reaffirm our calling and responsibility to be stewards of the earth, and be it further

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, and be it further

RESOLVED that the Living Water Synod, meeting in assembly, renew its commitment to earth stewardship by encouraging congregations to engage this calling to Creation Care boldly and creatively in their local communities, trusting and participating in God’s creative, redemptive, and sustaining love for the world.

### **Memorial Passed by Living Water Synod ELCA, May 2015**

#### **Memorial on Eco-Reformation in the Context of Climate Change**

WHEREAS, 2017 will mark observances of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, which addressed fundamental threats to human well-being and all of God’s creation in theological, social, and political ways; and

WHEREAS, the 1993 ELCA Social Statement *Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice* affirms that, “we are called to care for the earth as God cares for the earth;” and

WHEREAS, in 1993 with *Caring for Creation* we realized the urgency was already “widespread and serious, according to the preponderance of evidence from scientists worldwide [of] dangerous global warming, caused by the buildup of greenhouse gases, especially carbon dioxide” from the burning of fossil fuels, and that “action to counter degradation, especially within this decade, is essential to the future of our children and our children’s children. Time is very short;” and

WHEREAS, in the 1999 ELCA Social Statement *Economic Life: Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*, this church declares that “Too often the earth has been treated as a waste receptacle and a limitless storehouse of raw materials to be used up for the sake of economic growth, rather than as a finite, fragile ecological system upon which human and all other life depends;” and

WHEREAS, the ELCA’s *Vision and Expectations for Ordained Ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* stipulates that “the people of God are called to the care and redemption of all that God has made. This includes the need to speak on behalf of this earth, its environment and natural resources and its inhabitants. This church expects that its ordained ministers will be exemplary stewards of the earth’s resources, and that they will lead this church in the stewardship of God’s creation;” and

WHEREAS, Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton wrote in a pastoral letter on September 19, 2014: “Daily we see and hear the evidence of a rapidly changing climate. Glaciers are disappearing, the polar ice cap is melting, and sea levels are rising. Incidents of pollution-created dead zones in seas and the ocean and toxic algae growth in water supplies are occurring with greater frequency. Most disturbingly, the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is rising at an unprecedented rate. At the same time we also witness in too many instances how the earth’s natural beauty, a sign of God’s wonderful creativity, has been defiled by pollutants and waste... The present moment is a critical one, filled with both challenge and opportunity to act as faithful individuals and churches in solidarity with God’s good creation”; and

WHEREAS, the Lutheran World Federation has already, with its three-fold theme “Salvation: Not for sale. Human beings: Not for sale. Creation: Not for sale.”, signaled its intention to include creation at the center of global 2017 anniversary commemorations; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the Living Water Synod, meeting in assembly and recognizing the need for ongoing reformation of the ELCA in the context of climate change, memorialize the 2016 Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA to make stewardship of the earth and ecological justice major themes in ELCA planning and activities leading up to and following the observance of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

## APPENDIX B

**Synod Creation Care Questionnaire**

Your responses to this questionnaire will be treated confidentially. Please be candid. This questionnaire is designed to help our synod's Creation Care Team better understand and support caring for the earth as a part of how we live out our faith. Thank you for participating!

Please fill in circles completely: ●

**Part 1.**

First, we'd like to ask about your church context, background, and current involvement in caring for the earth.

1. What role do you have in your congregation? *(mark one)*
  - clergy/rostered leader called to this congregation (includes interim and campus ministry)
  - clergy/rostered leader, member of this congregation, called to specialized ministry (synod office, chaplaincy, etc.)
  - clergy/rostered leader, member of this congregation, retired.
  - elected officer (president or other council member)
  - congregation creation care team member
  - Other: please specify.
2. What is the name and location of your church? *(Please mark one, listed alphabetically by city. Pastors serving more than one congregation will be able to answer for each. This information will be treated confidentially and used only to group answers within your congregation)*
3. How would you describe your church's community context?
  - Rural
  - Small Town < 10,000
  - Small City 10,001 to 49,999
  - Medium City 50,000 to 249,999
  - Suburb of Medium City
  - Large City 250,000 or more
  - Suburb of Large City
4. How concerned are you about the following challenges facing the earth? *(mark one per line)*

Not at all Concerned	A little Concerned	Concerned	Very Concerned	Don't Know
a. Global population growth				
○	○	○	○	○
b. Climate change/global warming				
○	○	○	○	○

- |                                 |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| c. Loss of biodiversity/habitat | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| d. Energy issues                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| e. Water issues                 | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| f. Mineral/mining issues        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| g. Food/Agriculture issues      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| h. Forestry issues              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

5. Of these challenges facing the earth, which **TWO** concern you most? (*mark up to two*)

- ☐ Global population growth
- ☐ Climate change/global warming
- ☐ Loss of biodiversity/habitat
- ☐ Energy issues
- ☐ Water issues
- ☐ Mineral/mining issues
- ☐ Food/Agriculture issues
- ☐ Forestry issues
- ☐ None of these
- ☐ Don't know

a. Please indicate why you chose these two:

6. Please check how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about **possible struggles** related to thinking and acting for the well being of the earth.  
(*mark one per line*)

- |  | Strongly<br>Disagree  | Disagree              | Agree                 | Strongly<br>Agree     | Don't<br>Know         |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| a. I am too set in my ways to change.  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| b. This problem is too big for me to make a meaningful difference.                       | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| c. Other problems in the world are more pressing.  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| d. Not enough collective will has been generated around this issue to make a difference. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| e. This issue is too divisive to bring up.   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| f. The added expenses in dealing with this problem are not worth it.                     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

- g. Primary employers in my area would not be open to creation care ideas.  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- h. Elected leaders are not moving fast enough to make and enforce stricter environmental policies.  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- i. Environmentalists are not being realistic enough when considering human and business needs.  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

7. Which of the following creation care practices describe your **personal involvement**?

- |  | Yes                   | No                    | Don't Know            |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| a. Recycling paper, glass, plastic   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| b. Food waste composting   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| c. Intentionally using alternatives to driving (carpool, bus, bike, walk)                  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| d. Intentionally obtaining food from local or organic sources                              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| e. I have conducted a home energy audit.   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| f. I have replaced a home furnace with one that is more energy efficient (in last 5 years) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| g. I have replaced a vehicle with one that is more energy efficient (in last 5 years)      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| h. I have encouraged my workplace to consider ways to save energy or resources.            | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| i. I have written or spoken to community leaders about caring for the earth.               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

8. 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**?

- |  | Yes                   | No                    | Don't Know            |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| a. In prayers  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| b. In sermons  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| c. In hymns  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| d. In liturgy  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| e. In specific services, Sundays, or seasons                   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| f. In outdoor services   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| g. In altar cloths, banners, or other artwork locally made     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| h. In sanctuary plants or altar flowers that are locally grown | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

- i. In communion elements (bread, wine) that are locally made

☐                      ☐                      ☐

9. 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?**

Yes                      No                      Don't Know

- a. In adult forum or Bible study

☐                      ☐                      ☐

- b. Through guest speakers: scientists, theologians, etc.

☐                      ☐                      ☐

- c. In Sunday school

☐                      ☐                      ☐

- d. In Vacation Bible School

☐                      ☐                      ☐

- e. In Confirmation programming

☐                      ☐                      ☐

- f. In book study groups

☐                      ☐                      ☐

- g. In involvement with Lutheran outdoor ministry (church camp)

☐                      ☐                      ☐

- h. In congregation outings: hiking, camping, skiing, stargazing, etc.

☐                      ☐                      ☐

10. 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?**

Yes                      No                      Don't Know

- a. In recycling paper

☐                      ☐                      ☐

- b. In recycling glass, plastic, and/or aluminum

☐                      ☐                      ☐

- c. In composting food waste

☐                      ☐                      ☐

- d. In signage for energy conservation: e.g. turning lights off

☐                      ☐                      ☐

- e. In using fair trade coffee at church functions

☐                      ☐                      ☐

- f. In offering fair trade coffee, tea, chocolate or other items for sale

☐                      ☐                      ☐

- g. In encouraging carpooling, biking, taking the bus to church

☐                      ☐                      ☐

- h. In encouraging the use of local food sources

☐                      ☐                      ☐

11. 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?**

	Yes	No	Don't Know
a. In building use policies that discourage Styrofoam use	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. In replacing regular light bulbs with compact fluorescent ones	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. In conducting an energy audit of the church building	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. In replacing a church furnace to be more energy efficient	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. In maintaining a church garden with native plants	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. In growing vegetables at church or hosting a community garden	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g. In providing habitat for wildlife or Monarch way station	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
h. In installing renewable energy generators (solar or wind)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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

	Yes	No	Don't Know
a. In adopting a portion of highway or beach to clean up	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. In writing to elected leaders about caring for the earth	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. In hosting conversations about environmental issues in our area	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. In collaborating with non-profit, non-governmental organizations to work for environmental sustainability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*[Pastors and other rostered leaders were asked at this point whether or not they served a **second** congregation and, if so, could answer Questions 8-12 for that congregation. They were then asked whether or not they served a **third** congregation and, if so, could answer those questions for that congregation.]*

13. In which year were you born? Complete the year: 19\_\_

14. What is your gender?

- ☐ Female  
☐ Male



15. In politics, as of today, do you consider yourself a Republican, a Democrat, or an independent?
- ☐ Republican
  - ☐ Democrat
  - ☐ Independent
- a. *If independent:* As of today, do you lean more to the Democratic Party or the Republican Party? \_\_\_\_\_
16. When you think of leisure activities involving interaction with nature, which top TWO do you prefer most? (*mark up to two categories showing possible examples*)
- ☐ Exercise: walk, run, bicycle, field sports, cross-country ski, swim
  - ☐ Motorized recreation: four-wheel, snowmobile, motorcycle, motorboat, jet ski
  - ☐ Other recreation: golf, beach activity, city park, picnic, sail, ice skate, downhill ski
  - ☐ Wild game: hunt, fish
  - ☐ Animal care: pets, farm, zoo, birding
  - ☐ Plant cultivation: garden, farm, houseplants, yard work
  - ☐ Wilderness exploration: hike, tent camp, canoe, kayak
  - ☐ Quiet reflection: meditate, watch sunrise/sunset, photograph, sit, pray
  - ☐ None of these
  - ☐ Don't know

## Part 2

Now, we'd like to learn more about your perspectives on humanity's relation to the earth, and what role your faith plays in shaping that perspective.

17. Please check how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about **society** and caring for the earth. (*mark one per line*)
- | Strongly<br>Disagree  | Disagree  | Agree                 | Strongly<br>Agree     | Don't<br>Know         |
|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| a.                    | I have become more concerned about the environment in recent years.                                   |                       |                       |                       |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| b.                    | The average surface temperature of the earth has been increasing.                                     |                       |                       |                       |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| c.                    | Human activity is a significant factor in global temperature increase.                                |                       |                       |                       |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| d.                    | Humanity's well-being is dependent on the earth's well-being.   |                       |                       |                       |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| e.                    | There is overwhelming scientific evidence that the current use of earth's resources is unsustainable. |                       |                       |                       |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| f.                    | I see utility companies as allies for collaborating on creation care.                                 |                       |                       |                       |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

- |    |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| g. | I see sportsmen and women (involved in hunting and fishing) as allies for collaborating on creation care.                                    | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| h. | I see Native American tribal organizations as allies for collaborating on creation care.   | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| i. | The media have overemphasized the urgency of caring for the environment in recent years.   | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| j. | For the sake of the global community, the U.S. should reduce its carbon emissions even if some other countries don't do the same right away. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

18. Please check how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about **the church** and caring for the earth. (*mark one per line*)

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
-------------------	----------	-------	----------------	------------

- |    |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. | The Bible teaches that humanity is part of God's creation and is responsible to care for creation.   | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| b. | The Lutheran Church in its confessional documents and social statements teaches that humanity is part of God's creation and is responsible to care for creation. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| c. | The church should not be involved in helping to shape environmental policy.  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| d. | Our congregation would lose members if it emphasized care of creation more than it currently does.   | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| e. | Jesus' teaching about loving the "neighbor" should be interpreted to include non-human members of the earth community  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| f. | Our congregation's care for creation has inspired me to care for creation in my daily life.  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| g. | Our congregation's care for creation has made a positive impact on the community.  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| h. | Caring for creation is a very low priority for our congregation.   | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| i. | The primary employers in our community would be open to collaborating with the church on caring for creation.  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

- j. I can name a non-profit or non-government organization in our community that would be open to collaborating with the church in caring for creation.  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- k. Our congregation's care for creation has helped me grow in relationship with God.  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- l. Our congregation's global connections through ELCA or companion synod churches increase creation care's importance for me.  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- m. Our congregation's global connections through ELCA World Hunger, Malaria, or Disaster Relief increase creation care's importance for me.  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
- n. A congregation is an ideal setting for modeling the kind of creation care needed for a more sustainable world.  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

19. Which statement or statements represent your current thinking and/or behavior in relation to the earth? (*mark one per line*)

- |  | Yes                   | No                    | Don't Know            |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| a. I believe when Jesus returns the earth will be destroyed anyway, so what's the point in doing something to care for it now? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| b. I know I need to reduce my ecological footprint but I struggle with how to do that.   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| c. I have read the ELCA's social statement on <i>Caring for Creation</i> .   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| d. I am actively reducing or seeking to reduce my ecological footprint.  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| e. I can promote environmental stewardship in my current occupation.   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| f. I think science will develop a solution to global warming that will enable us to continue our current way of life.          | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

20. Which statement best represents your Christian understanding of how humans **should** relate to the earth? (*mark one*)

- ☐ God has given humanity dominion over the earth in order to utilize its resources for the progress of humanity.
- ☐ 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.
- ☐ As people created in God's image, we act on God's behalf to protect the earth and its creatures for future generations.
- ☐ None of these
- ☐ Don't know

21. Which statement or statements represent your understanding of and possible response to recent **actions by the synod** through synod assemblies or other means? (*mark one per line*)

- |  | Yes                   | No                    | Don't Know            |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| a. Our congregation has participated in the synod's "Discipleship Challenge" for faith practices: worship, pray, invite, serve, give, encourage, study, serve. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| b. Our congregation has a functioning green team or creation care team.  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| c. Our synod encourages all congregations to form creation care teams.   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| d. Our synod encourages all congregations to conduct energy audits.  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| e. Our synod recognizes creation care as integral to all faith practices.  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| f. Our synod offers creation care retreats and congregational trainings.   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

22. How helpful would the following areas of support from the Synod Creation Care Team be for your congregation? (*mark one per line*)

- |  | Not at all<br>Helpful | A little<br>Helpful   | Helpful               | Very<br>Helpful       | Don't<br>Know         |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| a. Worship resources, music, and/or liturgy that lift up creation  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| b. Biblical and/or theological resources to help articulate the relationship between creation care and faith today | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| c. Opportunities to learn from other church leaders and congregations about their creation care                    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| d. Opportunities to hear guest theologians and/or biblical scholars on the topic of creation care and faith today  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| e. Opportunities for advocacy on environmental issues facing our region  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| f. Grants or loans for congregational projects related to creation care  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| g. Other: please specify. _____  |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |

23. How often do you participate in worship? (*mark one*)

- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ 2-3 times a month
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ Once every few months
- ☐ Once or twice a year

24. About how often do you engage in the following faith practices?

(mark one per line)

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	1-2 times/year	Never	Don't Know
a. Praying	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Reading from the Bible or a devotional	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. Inviting someone to church	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Sharing my faith with someone	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. Giving money for God's purposes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. Serving my neighbor in need	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

25. How essential are these practices for Christian identity and/or participation in God's mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? (mark one per line)

	Not at all Important	A little Important	Important	Very Important	Don't Know
a. Worshiping God regularly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Praying regularly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. Reading scripture regularly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Inviting someone to church	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. Sharing our faith with others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. Caring for God's creation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g. Giving generously	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
h. Caring for the poor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

26. Please share any other comments. \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

### Focus Group Protocol

1. What does the idea of “creation care” mean to you?
  - How is this understanding related to your faith?
  - Describe a particular Bible story or passage that comes to mind when you think of caring for creation.
  - How would you describe the relationship between humanity and the rest of creation?
  - What difference, if any, is there for you in using the terms nature/creation sustainability/stewardship?
2. What does your congregation currently do to care for the earth?
  - In what ways have any of these activities involved working with others outside your organization or with other organizations in the area?
  - What further creation care activities do you have planned?
3. How important is it that the church care about the environment?
  - How is creation care related to your organization’s mission or vision?
  - What is the most important thing the church can do to care for the earth?
  - What role should the church have in a public issue like this?
4. Recently our synod overwhelmingly passed a resolution recognizing creation care as an integral component of all faith practices (invite, pray, study, worship, give, encourage, and serve). To what extent is your congregation aware of this resolution?
  - What change, if any, does this central recognition of creation care have for your ministry planning?
  - How might these faith practices look with creation care as an essential part?
  - What is the best way the synod creation care team can help congregations and their leaders follow through?
5. What evidence have you seen of environmental stewardship taking place in your community?
  - Where would you like to see that stewardship developing further?
6. Think about a time that you felt close to the earth. How might God have been part of that experience?
  - How would you describe God’s ultimate vision for creation?
7. Anything else we have not talked about that you want me to know about this topic?

## APPENDIX D

**Invitation Letter**

*This invitation was sent via e-mail by the Living Water Synod office to all pastors and other rostered leaders of the synod. A paper copy was sent to three pastors without e-mail access, along with a questionnaire and implied consent letter (appendices B and E).*

November 14, 2014

Dear Colleagues in Christ,

All pastors and other rostered leaders, including retired leaders and those called to specialized ministry, of the Living Water Synod are invited to participate in an important survey in our synod about creation care practices and perceptions. Your assistance in inviting lay participation is also requested (see below).

This survey takes about 15 minutes. It part of my doctoral research and is designed to help our synod's Creation Care Team better understand and support congregations in their care for the earth as part of how we live out our faith. Bishop Thomas Aitken has given me permission to conduct this survey in our synod. Please use this link to take the survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/VPGQTNK>  
An implied consent form appears at the online survey website.

**IMPORTANT** - If you are a pastor or rostered leader currently called to a congregation, please forward this e-mail to **THREE OTHERS** in your congregation to participate:

- 1) an elected congregational leader (president or other council member)
- 2) a member of your congregation's creation care team, if it has one, and
- 3) a congregation member who is between the ages of 18 and 29 inclusive.

If you serve more than one congregation, please select people from these three categories for **EACH CONGREGATION** you serve. If there is more than one pastor serving the same congregation, you may decide together which three lay representatives you wish to participate. After completing the survey yourself, please invite them by forwarding this e-mail with the above link and follow up with them verbally to see if they have any questions about participating. If they do not have e-mail access, please let me know their mailing address and I will send them a paper copy of the survey to complete.

The window of participation is now through December 15, 2014. After that, the online link will close. Representation from as many congregations in our synod as possible is needed to help provide an accurate picture of our synod's creation care. Thank you for participating!

Sincerely yours,  
Pastor David Carlson  
Synod Creation Care Team co-chair  
[e-mail address]  
[telephone number]

## Synod Announcement

*The following weekly announcement was sent by the Living Water Synod office to all its online e-mail synod news recipients, including not only all pastors and other rostered leaders but many lay members.*

All pastors, rostered leaders, and SAM's of congregations in the Living Water Synod received an invitation to participate in an important survey about creation care practices and perceptions. Pastors will also be seeking the participation of council presidents and others in your congregation.

The survey is being conducted by one of our synod pastors as part of a doctoral research project and is designed to help our synod's Creation Care Team better understand and support congregations in their care for the earth as part of how we live out our faith.

The window of participation is from November 15 to December 15, 2014. Representation from as many congregations in our synod as possible is needed to help provide an accurate picture of our synod's creation care.

Rostered leaders: the e-mail with the link to the online survey was sent Friday, November 14. Thank you for ensuring your congregation's participation!

## Synod Update Example

*This update was sent via e-mail by the Living Water Synod office to all pastors and other rostered leaders of the synod, who received the original invitation (see above). Similar updates were sent each week to this list.*

December 12, 2014

Dear Colleagues in Christ,

If you've already completed the survey - THANK YOU. This is an update. No need to click on the link more than once. But if you haven't completed it yet - or can invite lay members - please do to include your perspective and that of your congregation. This is the final weekend; the last day to complete the survey is Monday, December 15.

Update: Many thanks to all who have completed the Synod Creation Care Survey and have invited lay leaders in their congregations to participate. There have been 108 respondents to date, including 73 pastors/ rostered leaders, with 64 congregations represented in the survey.

A good response so far, with about ½ of synod congregations represented. I really value your input - and that of the lay leaders you choose - to get an accurate picture of our synod. If you have not already done so, please take a moment to include your perspective and your congregation today!

Original Invitation (see above)



## Second Wave Invitation

*This invitation was sent in July 2015 via e-mail directly to all pastors and other rostered leaders of the Living Water Synod who did not complete a survey in the original sample.*

Dear Colleagues in Christ,

I am writing to invite you to participate in an important survey in our synod about creation care practices and perceptions. Pastors and lay leaders from 67 congregations of the Living Water Synod completed the survey last November-December, but my records indicate that you and/or your congregation are not represented yet. This is another chance to be included in the synod report.

Please consider participating. Even if - or especially if - creation care is not a high priority in your congregation, I would like to hear from you! All responses are welcome. Others in your congregation are also invited to take the survey (see below). The time window for participating is just over two weeks, July 4-20.

This survey takes about 15 minutes. It part of my doctoral research and is designed to help our synod's Creation Care Team better understand and support congregations in their care for the earth as part of how we live out our faith. Bishop Thomas Aitken has given me permission to conduct this survey in our synod. Please use this link to take the survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/YZ7F9WD>

An implied consent form appears at the online survey website.

**IMPORTANT** - If you are a pastor or rostered leader currently called to a congregation, please forward this e-mail to **THREE OTHERS** in your congregation to participate:

- 1) an elected congregational leader (president or other council member)
- 2) a member of your congregation's creation care team, if it has one, and
- 3) a congregation member who is between the ages of 18 and 29 inclusive

If you serve more than one congregation, please select people from these three categories for **EACH CONGREGATION** you serve. If there is more than one pastor serving the same congregation, you may decide together which three lay representatives you wish to participate. After completing the survey yourself, please invite them by forwarding this e-mail with the above link and follow up with them verbally to see if they have any questions about participating. If they do not have e-mail access, please let me know their mailing address and I will send them a paper copy of the survey to complete.

**INTERIMS** - If you already completed the survey yourself last December, and are serving a different congregation now, please don't complete it again. But please do forward it to lay leaders in the new congregation and encourage them to complete it.

The window of participation is now through July 20, 2015. After that, the online link will close. Representation from as many congregations in our synod as possible is needed to help provide an accurate picture of our synod's creation care. Thank you for participating!

Sincerely yours,  
Pastor David Carlson

Synod Creation Care Team co-chair  
[e-mail address]  
[telephone number]

### **Second Wave Invitation - Update**

*This update was sent via e-mail directly to the same pastors and other rostered leaders of the Living Water Synod who received the original Second Wave invitation (see above). Similar updates were sent each week to this list.*

Dear Colleagues in Christ,

Many thanks to those who responded to another chance to be included in the synod creation care survey. I really value your perspective and would like every possible congregation in our synod represented.

If you've already completed the survey - THANK YOU. This is an update. No need to click on the link more than once. But if you haven't completed it yet - or can invite lay members – please do to include your perspective and that of your congregation. Here is the link to take the survey:

Because of the Synod Journey and ELCA Youth Gathering schedule, the deadline for completing the survey is now extended from July 20 to Friday, July 24 to give as many congregations as possible time to participate.

In God's grace,  
Pastor David Carlson

## APPENDIX E

**Implied Consent Letter**

November 15 - December 15, 2014

Dear church leader,

You are invited to participate in a study of creation care in our synod. I am conducting this study as part of my Doctor of Ministry thesis project in Congregational Mission and Leadership at Luther Seminary. My advisors are Dr. Craig Van Gelder and Dr. Alvin Luedke. I hope to learn about creation care perceptions and practices among church leaders and congregations in our synod.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are one of the following:

- A pastor or other rostered leader in the Living Water Synod, ELCA
- A congregational president or other elected congregational leader
- A member of your congregation's creation care team
- A congregation member who is between the ages of 18 and 29 inclusive.

If you decide to participate, please complete the enclosed survey. Your return of this survey is implied consent. Your responses will be treated confidentially. Please be candid.

Bishop Thomas Aitken has given me permission to conduct this survey in our synod. The survey is designed to assess perceptions about earth stewardship and synod congregations' current creation care practices. It will take about 15 minutes. No benefits accrue to you for answering the survey, but your responses will be used to help the Synod Creation Care Team better understand and support the creation care of congregations in our synod. Any discomfort or inconvenience to you derives only from the amount of time taken to complete the survey.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will not be disclosed. Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relationships with Luther Seminary or the Living Water Synod ELCA. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

If you have any questions, please ask. If you have additional questions later, contact me at [e-mail address]. Phone: [telephone number].

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,  
Pastor David Carlson

## APPENDIX F

### Informed Consent Form

Earth Stewardship and the *Missio Dei*:  
Participating with God in the Care and Redemption of All God Has Made

You are invited to be in a research study of creation care in our synod. You were selected as a possible participant because you participated in a synod-wide survey about creation care and the researcher wishes to follow up with your congregation's respondents with a more in-depth interview. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by me as part of my Doctor of Ministry thesis project in Congregational Mission and Leadership at Luther Seminary. My advisors are Dr. Craig Van Gelder and Dr. Alvin Luedke.

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to learn about creation care perceptions and practices among church leaders and congregations in our synod and to assist the Synod Creation Care Team in supporting the synod in our care for creation as part of how we live out our faith and participate in God's mission in the world.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things. Meet with me as a group for 45 minutes to an hour. I will ask you some questions about creation care in general, how you see creation care in relation to faith and to your community, and what your congregation currently does to care for the earth. This is not a test. I am looking for your honest responses.

#### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

There are no risks involved in this study. Any discomfort or inconvenience to you derives only from the amount of time taken to participate. No benefits accrue to you for participating, but your responses will be used to help support the creation care of congregations in our synod.

#### **Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept confidential. If I publish any type of report, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. All data will be kept in a locked file at Ponderosa Lutheran Church in City, State; only my advisor, Dr. Craig Van Gelder, and I will have access to the data and any audio recording. If the research is terminated for any reason, all data and recordings will be destroyed. All raw data including audio recordings, transcriptions, and notes will be destroyed by May 19, 2019. While I will make every effort to ensure confidentiality, anonymity cannot be guaranteed due to the small number of participants in this group.

#### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Luther Seminary or with other cooperating institutions, the Living Water Synod, or the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

#### **Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is David M. Carlson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me/us at [dcemail@emailaddress.edu](mailto:dcemail@emailaddress.edu). Phone: 123-456-7890. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Craig Van Gelder at [cvgemail@emailaddress.edu](mailto:cvgemail@emailaddress.edu). Phone: 234-567-8901.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information or have had it read to me. I have received answers to questions asked. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of investigator \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I consent to be audio recorded:

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I consent to allow use of my direct quotations in the published thesis document.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX G

### Confidentiality Agreement

Earth Stewardship and the *Missio Dei*:  
Participating with God in the Care and Redemption of All God Has Made

You are invited to be in a research study of creation care in our synod. You were selected as a possible recorder to help provide a written account for the researcher during interviews. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by me as part of my Doctor of Ministry thesis project in Congregational Mission and Leadership at Luther Seminary. My advisors are Dr. Craig Van Gelder and Dr. Alvin Luedke.

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to learn about creation care perceptions and practices among church leaders and congregations in our synod and to assist the Synod Creation Care Team in supporting the synod in our care for creation as part of how we live out our faith and participate in God's mission in the world. I will be conducting three or four focus group interviews with representatives from different congregations in the synod. The interviews will be conducted at the location of these congregations and the participants will be people who have already participated in a synod-wide survey about creation care. Each focus group interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes. I will arrange for transportation to the interview sites.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things during the interviews. Using a pad of newsprint and markers that I provide, write down words and phrases that are said by the interviewees and hang them on newsprint sheets around the room. I will be recording the interviews with a digital recorder, and taking notes, but your task is to provide another written record of what is being said in real time so that participants can see what words or themes they have mentioned. You are not to contribute to the interview, unless asking for a clarification. Exact words and phrases from the interviewees are the most helpful for this qualitative research.

#### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

There are no risks involved in this study. Any discomfort or inconvenience to you derives only from the amount of time taken to participate. No benefits accrue to you for participating, but your assistance will be used to help support the creation care of congregations in our synod.

#### **Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept confidential. I will keep the newsprint records of each interview. But your participation requires your consent not to divulge what was said or any identifying information about congregations, their locations, or individuals who are part of the interviews. If I publish any type of report, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. All data will be kept in a locked file at Ponderosa Lutheran Church in City, State; only my advisor, Dr. Craig Van Gelder, and I will have access to the data and any audio recording. If the research is terminated for any reason, all data and recordings will be destroyed. All raw data including audio recordings, transcriptions, and notes will be destroyed by May 19, 2019. While I will make every effort to ensure confidentiality, anonymity cannot be guaranteed due to the small number of participants in this group.

#### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Luther Seminary or with other cooperating institutions, the Living Water Synod, or the Evangelical Lutheran

Church in America. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is David M. Carlson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me/us at [dcemail@emailaddress.edu](mailto:dcemail@emailaddress.edu). Phone: 123-456-7890. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Craig Van Gelder at [cvgemail@emailaddress.edu](mailto:cvgemail@emailaddress.edu). Phone: 234-567-8901.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information or have had it read to me. I have received answers to questions asked. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of investigator \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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