

Care for God's Creation

Session Focus

This session on Catholic Social Teaching explores care for God's creation. Pope Francis, writing in his encyclical *Laudato Si' (On Care for Our Common Home)*, shares: "Beginning in the middle of the last century and overcoming many difficulties, there has been a growing conviction that our planet is a homeland and that humanity is one people living in a common home." The Catholic Bishops of the United States explain, "The world that God created has been entrusted to us. Our use of it must be directed by God's plan for creation, not simply for our own benefit. Our stewardship of the Earth is a form of participation in God's act of creating and sustaining the world. In our use of creation, we must be guided by a concern for generations to come. We show our respect for the Creator by our care for creation." (*Faithful Citizenship*, USCCB).

Learning Objectives

The session on Care for God's Creation guides learners of all ages to . . .

- comprehend the impact that we make as individuals and families, and as a nation, on God's creation
- value and appreciate the significance of Catholic teaching on care for God's creation, and the responsibilities of Catholics to be good stewards of the Earth
- to live in harmony with God's creation by adopting an environment-friendly lifestyle and by engaging in actions, locally and globally, to care for God's creation

Session Overview

Part 1. (5-10 minutes) Gathering & Opening Prayer Service

Part 2. (20-25 minutes) All Ages Learning Experience: Respect for God's Creation

Part 3. (75-90 minutes) In Depth Learning Experience: The Poor and Vulnerable

- Option 1. Whole Group Format: All participants remain in the same room.
- Option 2. Age Groups Format : Participants go to separate rooms for parallel learning: families with children, adolescents, adults.

Part 4. (20 minutes) Sharing Learning Experiences

Part 5. (5-10 minutes) Closing Prayer Service

Design Options for In-Depth Learning

Option 1. Whole Group Format

This format guides the entire assembly through each of the learning experiences. You might choose this format if you have:

- a large physical space with good acoustics/sound system and furniture to comfortably accommodate the learners
- a competent large group facilitator/master of ceremonies able to provide clear directions and to manage the dynamics and energy of a large group
- a group of leaders who feel comfortable moving through the assembly offering assistance, or a large enough team of table leaders to have one leader work with each table group
- a learning topic that lends itself to everyone learning the same thing at the same time, but in different ways, in the same space

Facilitation Tips for this Format:

Guide small groups through each of the activities at the same time.

- Organize people into table groups based on age groupings: families with children (grades 1-5), middle school adolescents, high school adolescents, young adults, and adults.
- The lead facilitator guides the entire group through each of the learning experiences. All presentations and activity instructions are given to the whole group.
- The age-appropriate learning activities within each learning experience are conducted in table groups.
- Where needed, small group leaders facilitate the work of the table groups.

Option 2. Age Group Format

This format provides for three separate parallel learning programs. Though age groups are separated, each one is focusing on the same topic. You might choose this format if you have:

- an adequate number of meeting spaces for the various groups to gather
- an adequate number of competent facilitators to work with each group
- a topic that is best explored through age-specific learning

Facilitation Tips for This Format

- Organize participants into three or more parallel learning groups: families with children (grades 1-5), adolescents (grades 6-12), and adults.
- If there are a large number of adolescents, divide them into two groups: middle school and high school.

Organize separate groups for young adults, adults, and older adults. Or you can give the adults their own choice for forming small groups.

- Direct the adolescents and adults into small groups. Give them all the handouts and learning materials needed for the learning experiences
- Guide the families with children into table groups of two or more families. Give each table all the handouts and learning materials necessary for the learning experiences.

- A facilitator must guide all the of the families through each learning experience, while small group leaders move from table to table assisting.

Materials Needed

Gathering

- Name tags
- Community building activities
- Opening Prayer Service
- Bible

All Ages Opening Learning Experience

- Equipment for visual presentation: multimedia projector and screen
- Bible

In-Depth Learning Experience

- Handouts
- Paper: 8.5 x 11 and 11 x 22
- Magazines: news magazines, outdoor magazines, travel magazines, *National Geographic*
- Creative art materials: paper, crayons, washable markers, pens, and pencils
- Newsprint, markers, and masking tape
- Bible

Closing

- Closing Prayer Service
- Bible

Session Plan

Part 1. Gathering and Opening Prayer (5-10 minutes)

Registration and Hospitality

- Welcome people and ask them to sign in for the program.
- Provide name tags or invite people to make their own.
- Distribute the handouts participants will need for the session. (You can also distribute handouts for the In Depth Learning program at the beginning of each Learning Experience.)
- Invite people to share a meal. (Depending on time of day, the program may end with a meal.)

Welcome the participants to the program and introduce the theme of the session, using the words below or your own words.

In this program we are going to examine how we use and share the goods of the earth. We are going to look at what our Catholic faith teaches us about caring for God's creation. And we are going to find ways to live in harmony with God's creation and preserve it for future generations. As Pope Francis wrote, "I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all." (*Laudato Si'*, 14)

1. Group Formation

Organize people into small groups. For the All Ages Experience participants need to be organized into intergenerational groups of eight people (children and parents, teens, adults, older adults). Ask all members of the same family to sit together in these intergenerational groups. If a participating family has all three generations present (children, parents, and grandparents), they become one intergenerational group. Each group needs to have at least three generations present: children, teens, and adults.

For the In Depth Learning Experience organize participants into table groups of families, adolescents, and adults.

2. Opening Prayer Service

The opening prayer for this session is incorporated into the All Ages Learning Experience.

Part 2. All Ages Learning Experience: Respect for Creation (25-30 minutes)

Involvement Phase of the Pastoral Circle Process

The All Ages Learning Experience is designed to help the participants feel and understand how a particular social issue affects the lives of people and their own lives. The first step in the Pastoral Circle process—and the basis for any action—is Involvement. Through learning activities, we connect the participants with the social issue to be explored, helping them "feel" the issue being analyzed and

exposing them to what is happening in their local community or world. This helps the participants “hear” and “think” from a broader perspective. Once people are connected with an issue or situation, they are ready to move to analysis, to ask the “why” questions from a first-hand perspective.

In this session the All Ages Learning Experience is the opening prayer service.

Preparation

Prepare a photo-slide show using PowerPoint or other presentation program to present images of creation, illustrating Psalm 104. The easiest way to get photos of creation is to go online to download free pictures of people and places.

The prayer service calls for seven readers and others to carry the creation symbols to the prayer table. Select these readers and others in advance and give them a copy of Handout #1.

Have a large prayer table set up in the front of the room.

Materials Needed

- Handout #1
- Six large pillar candles
- Two clear pitchers or bowls of water
- A variety of living plants, bowls of fresh vegetables and fruit
- A large picture or drawing of the sun
- A large picture or drawing of the moon
- At least six large stuffed animals
- Instrumental music

The Story of Creation: Genesis 1:1-31

Darken the room.

Play instrumental music throughout the story of Creation.

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Six people of different ages (a family and/or mixed group) process to the front of the room, each with a lighted candle. (Each person should have a pillar candle.) They place their candles on the prayer table.

And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

Two people process to the front with two clear bowls or pitchers of water and place them on the prayer table.

And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it. And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

Six people process to the front with a variety of plants, trees, and bowls of fresh vegetables and fruit, and place them on the prayer table.

And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth." And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

Two people, one holding a large picture or drawing of the sun and the other of the moon, process forward and place the two pictures on the prayer table.

And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

At least six children process to the front, each holding one large stuffed animal to represent the living creations of the earth. They place them on or around the prayer table.

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

At least six people of different ages, from children through older adults, process to the front of the room and stand around the prayer table.

God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Intergenerational Storytelling & Faith-Sharing

1. What is one of your favorite natural objects/places (e.g., mountains, ocean/lake, forest, sunrise/sunset) or living creature (animal, fish)?
2. Share a story of a time when you enjoyed or were amazed by creation (e.g., visiting a national park, at the ocean).
3. When have you experienced God in nature? Do you experience God in the vastness of the ocean, the peace of a forest, the intricacy of a spider's web, etc.? How has the natural world made you more aware or appreciative of God? How does nature help you to understand the character of God?

Images of Creation: Psalm 104

Show the PowerPoint or other presentation program presenting images of creation, illustrating Psalm 104. Play instrumental music in the background and have the participants read the verses from Psalm 104.

Women and Girls:

Bless the Lord, O my soul.
O Lord my God, you are very great.
You are clothed with honor and majesty,
wrapped in light as with a garment.
You stretch out the heavens like a tent,
you set the beams of your chambers on the waters,
you make the clouds your chariot,
you ride on the wings of the wind,
you make the winds your messengers,
fire and flame your ministers.

Men and Boys:

You set the earth on its foundations,
so that it shall never be shaken.
You cover it with the deep as with a garment;
the waters stood above the mountains.
At your rebuke they flee;
at the sound of your thunder they take to flight.
They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys
to the place that you appointed for them.
You set a boundary that they may not pass,
so that they might not again cover the earth.

Women and Girls:

You make springs gush forth in the valleys;
they flow between the hills,
giving drink to every wild animal;
the wild asses quench their thirst.
By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation;
they sing among the branches.
From your lofty abode you water the mountains;
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.

Men and Boys:

You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
and plants for people to use,
to bring forth food from the earth,
and wine to gladden the human heart,
oil to make the face shine,
and bread to strengthen the human heart.
The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly,
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.
In them the birds build their nests;
the stork has its home in the fir trees.
The high mountains are for the wild goats;
the rocks are a refuge for the coney.
You have made the moon to mark the seasons;
the sun knows its time for setting.
You make darkness, and it is night,
when all the animals of the forest come creeping out.
The young lions roar for their prey,
seeking their food from God.
When the sun rises, they withdraw
and lie down in their dens.
People go out to their work
and to their labor until the evening.

Women and Girls:

O Lord, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.
Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
creeping things innumerable are there,
living things both small and great.
There go the ships,
and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.

Men and Boys:

These all look to you
to give them their food in due season;
when you give to them, they gather it up;

when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.
When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.
When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
and you renew the face of the ground.

All:

May the glory of the Lord endure forever;
may the Lord rejoice in his works—
who looks on the earth and it trembles,
who touches the mountains and they smoke.
I will sing to the Lord as long as I live;
I will sing praise to my God while I have being.
May my meditation be pleasing to him,
for I rejoice in the Lord.
Let sinners be consumed from the earth,
and let the wicked be no more.
Bless the Lord, O my soul. Praise the Lord!

Intergenerational Storytelling & Faith-Sharing

How would the world be different if everyone believed that every person, every animal, every plant, every rock, everything was specially hand-crafted by a loving God? Does such a belief challenge you?

Closing Prayer

We join with God's creation and with each other
To bring new life to the land,
To restore the waters,
To refresh the air.

We join with God's creation and with each other
To renew the forests,
To care for the plants,
To protect the creatures.

We join with God's creation and with each other
To celebrate the seas,
To rejoice in the sunlight.
To sing the song of the stars.

We join with God's creation and with each other
To recreate the human community,
To promote justice and peace,
To remember our children.
We celebrate God's creation. Amen.

Part 3. In Depth Learning Experience (90 minutes)

Families with Children Learning Experiences

Activity 1. How Environmentally Friendly Are We?

Pastoral Circle Process: Involvement

Materials Needed

- Handout #2
- Pens or pencils

In this activity the participants will reflect on how environmentally friendly they are as families or as individuals. Using Handout #2: How Environmentally Friendly Are You?, ask the participants to determine their impact on the environment. They should place a check-mark next to each item that is true about their family or individual practices or about their home.

After families and individuals have completed the handout, ask them to review their rating and then discuss the two reflection questions with their table group.

If time allows, invite participants to share with the whole group what they see as “easy” practices to implement and “difficult” practices to implement.

Activity 2. What Is Our Impact on God’s Creation?

Pastoral Circle Process: Exploration-Analysis

Exploration or analysis, the second phase of the Pastoral Circle Process helps, the participants ask *why* in the face of human suffering and injustice. Why do these conditions exist? What role do politics or economics or cultural values play in perpetuating the problem? Exploration broadens participants’ thinking by helping them look for the causes of the injustice; examine the relationships among politics, economics, and cultural values in our world that perpetuate the injustice; and analyze the social or structural realities that keep the situation from changing. Exploration helps the participants understand the social issue more thoroughly so they can envision ways to be involved in working for justice.

Materials Needed

- Handout #3

Distribute Handout #3: Speaking for the Earth and ask each child to choose an animal, plant or other part of God’s creation that they especially love and want to protect. Give them several examples.

Ask the children to draw a picture of their special part of the earth family on one side of the handout and write out their answers to the questions on the other side. Parents may need to write the responses for younger children. Give them examples of how to answer the questions.

Invite the children to share their drawings with the other members of their table group.

When the sharing is completed, have the children discuss the following question:

- How do you feel about being a spokesperson for some part of God’s creation?
- What did you learn from this activity?

After the children have shared their response, direct the table groups—parents and children—to discuss the following questions:

- How do human beings abuse God’s creation? Share examples that show human abuse of God’s creation.
- What is your biggest fear or sadness concerning the abuse of God’s creation?

Activity 3. What do the Scriptures and Church Teachings Say about Care for God’s Creation?

Pastoral Circle Process: Reflection

Reflection, the third phase of the Pastoral Circle process, engages the participants in exploring the social issue from the perspective of faith—the Bible, Catholic Social Teaching, and the living response of the Catholic Church to the issue—locally, nationally, and globally. This step involves the participants in examining what the Catholic faith says about a particular social issue. They explore what the Catholic community is doing about social issues and what motivates its response. Reflection calls forth not just an intellectual assent to faith, but a commitment to incorporate a faith response within one’s own life. The Word of God brought to bear upon the situation challenges old ways of thinking and responding by raising new questions, suggesting new insights, and opening people up to new action possibilities.

Activity Options

1. A Letter from God
2. Creation Posters
3. Care for God’s Creation through the Psalms

Option 1. A Letter from God

Preparation

Prepare a newsprint sheet or PowerPoint with the format for the letter to God.

Materials Needed

- Handout #6

Ask families to recall the opening Scripture reading on creation from the Book of Genesis. Have them read Psalm 104 or Psalm 148 from Handout #6: The Bible Teaches. Parents read one of the Psalms aloud.

Direct them to write a letter from God to humankind about why people should care for creation. Older children can write their own letter. Young children will need the assistance of their parents. Share the format for the letter on a sheet of newsprint or PowerPoint slide.

“To my people. . .”

“I am concerned about. . .” (Identify some of ways that human beings abuse God’s creation.)

“I want you to care for my creation by. . .” (Identify why God thinks it is important to care for creation and what people need to do.)

Invite children to share their letters with the other families at their table.

Option 2. Creation Posters

Materials Needed

- Handout #6
- An 11x17 sheet of paper for each child
- Washable markers and crayons
- Magazines with lots of pictures such as news magazines, outdoor magazines, travel magazines, and National Geographic

Ask families to recall the opening Scripture reading on creation from the Book of Genesis. Have them read Psalm 104 or Psalm 148 from Handout #6: The Bible Teaches. Parents read one of the Psalms aloud.

Direct each child to create a poster with a message from God to the people of the Earth about the importance of caring for creation. The children can write a short paragraph or they can create a series of short sentences. They may want to use the popular format of the billboards with messages from God. For example:

“That ‘Love Thy Neighbor’ Thing, I Meant It.”—God.

“What Part of ‘Thou Shalt Not...’ Didn’t You Understand?”—God.

Have children illustrate their message with drawings and/or magazine pictures.

Invite them to share their poster with the other families at their table.

Option 3. Care for God’s Creation through the Psalms

Materials Needed

- Handout #6
- White paper or paper with a colored border
- Marking pens, crayons
- Creative art materials and stickers

Direct families to choose Psalm 104 or 148 as the Psalm they wish to illustrate. Invite them to read the Psalm from the handout and listen to the words as if they had never read or heard them before. Ask them to read the words as if they were the words of their own prayer.

Invite family members to discuss questions such as:

- What part of the Psalm do you like best?
- What part of the Psalm do you think is most important?
- What is this Psalm telling you about God’s creation?
- What is this Psalm telling you about caring for God’s creation?

Direct families write their own “Psalm of Creation.” Explain that they should select a phrase or one or two verses to be the words they will use to begin their “Psalm of Creation.” They should write those words down, and then phrase by phrase, write their psalm together, allowing family members to offer suggestions of what to include. They should create sentences that continue the thoughts and feelings begun by the words of the Psalmist.

Ask families to illustrate their psalm. When they get home, they can frame it or hang it on their wall or refrigerator.

Invite each family to read their psalm to the rest of the families in their group.

Reflection for All Groups

Invite all groups—families with children, adolescents, and adults—to share their reflections on their learning experience:

- What did you learn about the wisdom of God and the Church on creation from your creative activity? What new insights do you have now?
- How can you and your family deepen your respect for God’s creation?
- What are the implications of your learning for life? How will you live differently?

Activity 4. How Can We Care for God’s Creation?

Pastoral Circle Process: Action

Preparation

Prepare a handout on “Care for God’s Creation Action Projects” with ideas for action projects which families and individuals can take to care for God’s creation. Make sure to include some local, national, or international program that would make great projects the entire parish community can adopt, providing a focus for action and giving everyone an opportunity to work together to make a difference. Begin by researching local organizations involved in caring for the environment. Check with your diocesan Catholic Charities and social justice office for recommended organizations. Be sure to include projects that your parish community already supports.

Materials Needed

- Your handout of “Care for God’s Creation Action Projects”
- Handouts #8 and #9

1. Caring for God's Creation: Individual and Family Actions

Organize the participants into groups of families (teens should go with their parents for this activity), adolescents without parents present, and adults.

Ask everyone to review the results of their original assessment, "How Environmentally Friendly Are You?," and determine several things they can do immediately to respect God's creation.

Review Handout #8: Taking Action to Care for God's Creation with the group. The handout contains ideas for becoming more environmentally friendly by reducing consumption and protecting the environment.

Ask families and individuals to commit to specific strategies by completing Handout #9: Action Plan to Respect God's Creation.

2. Caring for God's Creation: Community-wide, National, and International Actions

Present the ideas in your *Caring for God's Creation Action Projects* handout that move the participants to action at the community, national, and international levels. Summarize the ideas in the handout you prepared, including the featured projects. If your parish has chosen one or more featured projects to adopt, provide a more detailed explanation of how people can be involved in these projects.

Ask families and individuals to commit to specific projects that they will join with others to carry out. They should add these projects to their commitments on Handout #9.

Conclude by inviting participants to share their commitments with the others at their table.

Adolescent & Adult Learning Experiences

Activity 1. How Environmentally Friendly Are We?

See this activity under Families with Children.

Activity 2. What Is Our Impact on God's Creation?

1. Assessing Our Impact on God's Creation

Materials Needed

- Handout #4
- Newsprint and markers

Give each table group a sheet of newsprint. Ask them to draw a line down the middle of the sheet. Participants begin by completing question #1 individually. After several minutes the group shares their responses to question #1. In the left column the recorder writes responses to question #1, item-by-item from "a" through "d."

- How do human beings abuse God's creation? Identify examples in the following categories:
 - a. As individuals. . .
 - b. As families. . .
 - c. As businesses, companies, factories. . .
 - d. As a nation. . .

Participants then complete question #2 individually. After several minutes the group lists the factors that contribute to environmental degradation and discuss the impact of these factors on God's creation. The recorder lists these factors in the right column.

- Why do we see the degradation of God's creation? What are the factors that contribute to the abuse of God's creation?

The group concludes by discussing question #3 without writing the responses on newsprint.

- What are is biggest fear or sadness concerning the abuse of God's creation?

Collect and post the newsprint sheets on the walls for all to see.

If time allows, invite all groups to share examples of how human beings abuse God's creation and their biggest fears or sadness about the abuse of God's creation.

2. Did You Know?

Preparation

Decide which of the material on Handout #5 you will present since there is more information on the handout than you will be able to use. Be selective. Choose information that you believe is most pertinent for your participants.

You might want to involve several people in the presentation with one person sharing the general information, and the others focusing on energy, water, forests, and biodiversity. If possible, add statistics or information from your own community to your presentation.

Create charts or a PowerPoint presentation that presents the key information from the handout. Be sure to connect the work of the small groups in the prior activity with your presentation.

Materials Needed

- Handout #5

Present the key facts about the impact of the U.S. and its citizens on God's creation using Handout #5: Analyzing Our Impact on God's Creation

Conclude by having participants quickly review the quotes of Pope Francis from *Laudato Si'* on their handout. Invite them to share a sentence which strikes them at their tables.

3. Reflection

Invite participants in their table groups to discuss their thoughts and feelings about what they have learned about the human impact on God's creation. Use the following questions:

- What surprised you about the condition of God's creation? What did you learn that you didn't know before?
- How do you feel about the situation of the environment today?
- What do you think our country and world will be like if we continue on our present course? What needs to change?

Activity 3. What Do the Scriptures and Church Teachings Say about Care for God's Creation?

Pastoral Circle Process: Reflection

Reflection, the third phase of the Pastoral Circle process, engages the participants in exploring the social issue from the perspective of faith—the Bible, Catholic Social Teaching, and the living response of the Catholic Church to the issue—locally, nationally, and globally. This step involves the participants in examining what the Catholic faith says about a particular social issue. They explore what the Catholic community is doing about social issues and what motivates its response. Reflection calls forth not just an intellectual assent to faith, but a commitment to incorporate a faith response within one's own life. The Word of God brought to bear upon the situation challenges old ways of thinking and responding by raising new questions, suggesting new insights, and opening people up to new action possibilities.

Prepare newsprint sheets or a PowerPoint presentation with the instructions for the activities you have selected.

Option 1. A Creation Creed

Materials Needed

- Newsprint and markers
- Handout #7

Instruct group members to review Handout #7: The Church Teaches. . . Care for Creation. Assign three to five quotes to each person in the group to read. Each person reports back to the group with one or more key belief statements. These statements will be included in their “Creation Creed.”

Ask the group to discuss each proposed statement and then write their “Creation Creed” on newsprint. Each statement should use this format:

We believe. . .

Therefore, we must. . .

Post the newsprint sheets and invite each group to read their “Creation Creed.”

Option 2. The Wisdom of the Catholic Tradition

Materials Needed

- Newsprint and markers
- Handout #7

Ask each group to select a recorder. Direct the recorder to draw a line down the middle of the newsprint page and write at the top of the left column, “Values of American Society,” and at the top of the right column, “Wisdom of the Catholic Tradition.”

Instruct each group to develop a list of five to ten values of American society that work against caring for God’s creation. Give them one or two examples, such as our emphasis on consumption rather than conservation, purchasing cars and SUVs with poor mileage ratings, failing to recycle materials, and so on. The recorder should write these in the left column and number each value.

Have participants work in pairs to review the wisdom of the Catholic tradition using Handout #7. Assign five quotes to each pair to read. The pairs should select quotes which provide a positive value that counters one or more of the values of American society they have listed on newsprint.

Direct pairs to report their findings to their group. Together the group selects quotes from Church teachings for each value and develops a summary statement from Church teaching that provides a positive response to each of the values they have listed on newsprint.

Post the newsprint sheets and invite groups to share how the wisdom of the Catholic tradition confronts values that work against God’s creation.

Option 3. A Public Service Announcement from God

Materials Needed

- Newsprint and markers
- Handout #7

Begin by asking the group to recall the ways human beings abuse God’s creation.

Have participants work in pairs to review the wisdom of the Catholic tradition using Handout #7: The Church Teaches. . . Care for Creation. Assign five quotes to each pair to read. Ask the teams to highlight statements they want to include in creating a public service announcement for TV or radio about caring for God’s creation. Groups can target their announcement to particular audiences: families, youth, adults, government officials, business leaders, and so on.

Direct the group to write on newsprint the text for God’s public service announcement to human beings. Groups can write their announcement in a variety of different forms: a letter from God, a rap from God, and so on. They may want to use the popular format of the billboards with messages from God. For example:

“That ‘Love Thy Neighbor’ Thing, I Meant It.”—God.

“What Part of ‘Thou Shalt Not...’ Didn’t You Understand?”—God.

Post the newsprint sheets and invite each group to read their public service announcement.

Option 4. Top Ten Reasons for Caring for God’s Creation

Materials Needed

- Newsprint and markers
- Handout #7

Ask the group to recall the ways human beings abuse God’s creation.

Involve the groups in using the quotes from Church teachings on Handout #7: The Church Teaches. . . Care for Creation. Assign each person in the group three to five quotes to read. Ask each person to highlight statements they want to include in creating a “Top Ten Reasons for Caring for God’s Creation.” Ask each person to share one or more significant Church teachings with the group. The group then selects ten teachings they want to include in their top ten list. The group then ranks them in importance from #10 to #1 and writes them on newsprint.

Post the newsprint sheets for all to see.

Activity 4. How Can We Care for God’s Creation?

See this activity under Families with Children Learning Experiences.

Part 4. Sharing Learning Reflections (20-25 minutes)

Ask representatives from the family, adolescent, and adult groups to share the projects they created in Activity 3. Invite families and adult participants to share commitments they are making on behalf of God's creation from Activity 4.

Have people rejoin their groups from the All Ages Learning Experience. Present the following information using the words below or your own words:

"Think of everything we have done in this session to learn about the environment, the message of the Scriptures and the Church on caring for God's creation, and the ways we can live in harmony with God's creation.

- What is the most important lesson you have learned tonight?
- Why do you think caring for God's creation and living an environmentally friendly lifestyle are so important for us as Catholics?

Allow several minutes for small group sharing, and if time allows, ask for responses from the group.

Part 5. Closing Prayer Service (5-10 minutes)

Preparation

Use the creation environment table from the Opening Prayer Service as the focus point for the Closing Prayer Service.

Select five people to be readers for the Opening Prayer.

Gather

Light the candles on the table.

Reader 1: How wonderful, O Lord, are the works of your hands! The heavens declare your glory, the sky displays your handiwork.

All: All creation reveals God's glory and greatness.

Reader 2: In Your love, You have given us the power to behold the beauty of Your world, robed in all its splendor.

All: All creation reveals God's glory and greatness.

Reader 3: The sun and the stars, the valleys and the hills, the rivers and lakes all disclose your presence.

All: All creation reveals God's glory and greatness.

Reader 4: The roaring breakers of the seas tell of your awesome might; the beasts of the fields and the birds of the air speak of your wondrous will.

All: All creation reveals God's glory and greatness.

Reader 5: In Your goodness You have made us able to hear the music of the world. The raging of the winds, the whisperings of trees in the wood, and the precious voices of loved ones reveal to us that you are in our midst.

All: All creation reveals God's glory and greatness.

Listen

Select one of the following Scripture readings: Genesis 9:9-16 OR Psalm 8 OR Psalm 148

Share the following reflection from Henri Nouwen with the participants:

“How do we live in creation? Do we relate to it as a place full of “things” we can use for whatever need we want to fulfill and whatever goal we wish to accomplish? Or do we see creation first of all as a sacramental reality, a sacred space where God reveals to us the immense beauty of the Divine?”

“As long as we only *use* creation, we cannot recognize its sacredness because we are approaching it as if we were its owners. But when we relate to all that surrounds us as created by the same God who created us and as the place where God appears to us and calls us to worship and adoration, then we are able to recognize the sacredness of all God’s handiwork.” (*Bread for the Journey*, Henri J. M. Nouwen)

Respond: A Penitential Litany

Lord God, your peace demands justice for all and calls us to transform ourselves, our communities, our nation, and our world.

Lord, have mercy.

We confess, O Lord, as creatures privileged with the care and keeping of your creation, that we have abused your gifts of creation through arrogance, ignorance and greed.

Lord, have mercy.

We confess, O Lord, that we have risked permanent damage to your handiwork; we confess impoverishing creation’s ability to bring you praise.

Lord, have mercy.

We confess, O Lord, that the races and cultures of the earth reflect the richness of your creation and that we have too often mistreated and inflicted injustices upon the poor, minorities, and the marginalized.

Lord, have mercy.

O Lord, how long will it take before we awaken to what we have done? How many waters must we pollute? How many forests must we destroy? How much soil must we erode and poison, O Lord? How long will we deny the cries of the poor?

Lord, have mercy.

How much of the earth’s atmosphere must we contaminate? How many species must we abuse and extinguish? How many people must we degrade and kill with toxic wastes before we learn to love and respect your creation and our sisters and brothers? Before we learn to love and respect our fragile planet home?

For our sins and failings, O God, we ask forgiveness.

Leader: In sorrow for what we have done, we repent. We ask you, O Lord, to forgive our sins and send your Spirit to renew us and the face of the earth. Grant this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Send Forth: A Prayer of Commitment

We commit ourselves to care for all the gifts of Creation. We commit ourselves to explore and understand environmental concerns. We commit to work with others for environmental justice for all. Come Holy Spirit, enkindle in us the fire of your love. Send your breath over the waters and we shall be re-created. And we shall renew the face of the Earth.