

Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod 2024 Resolution on Establishment of a Synodical Care of Creation Ministry

WHEREAS, care for creation is deeply rooted in the biblical witness—humanity created in God’s loving image (Genesis 1:27) and given essential responsibility to serve and preserve the earth and all that dwells therein (Genesis 2:15; 9:8-17);

And WHEREAS, we are called in faith as Jesus’ disciples and as the church to love our neighbors as ourselves (Luke 10:27; John 13:34) as did Christ who gave himself for us (Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 5:1-2; Titus 2:14) and for the sake of the world (John 3:16-17; Romans 8:19-21; Colossians 1:20);

And WHEREAS, the 1993 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (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 recognizes that action to counter earth’s degradation is essential to the future of our children and our children’s children¹;

And WHEREAS, the 1993 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Social Statement Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice declares that each congregation should see itself as a center for exploring scriptural and theological foundations for caring for creation; and that as congregations and other expressions of this church, we will seek to incorporate the principles of sufficiency and sustainability in our life²;

And WHEREAS, the 1999 ELCA Social Statement Economic Life: Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All recognizes that the growth of economic activity during the twentieth century, and the industrialization and consumerism that fueled it, radically changed the relationship between humans and the earth³;

And WHEREAS, the 1999 ELCA Social Statement Economic Life: Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All recognizes 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 depends³;

And WHEREAS Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod memorialized the Churchwide Assembly 2019 to endorse The Earth Charter and encourage members of ELCA synods, seminaries, colleges and congregations to join and promote bringing forth a sustainable global society, the equitable sharing of finite resources and the benefits of development, a shared responsibility for the well-being of the human family, and the larger living world, in a spirit of solidarity⁴;

And WHEREAS, the Churchwide Assembly 2019, reaffirmed the commitment of this church to engage in creation care through principles of sufficiency, sustainability, solidarity, and participation, and endorsed The Earth Charter⁵;

And WHEREAS, the Churchwide Assembly 2022 encouraged congregants, rostered ministers, and bishops to commit themselves to education about the urgency of the climate emergency⁶, the global opportunities of a just transition [away from greenhouse gasses]⁷, and to lift up loving our neighbor in response to the climate emergency in their preaching; and reaffirmed the commitment of this church to advocacy and action in support of 50% reduction from 2005 levels in the United States economy-wide net greenhouse gas pollution by 2030 and achieve net-zero emissions by 2050, including having the churchwide organization meet these goals⁸;

And WHEREAS, the 2023 ELCA Social Message on Earth's Climate Crisis affirms that climate change dramatically increases the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events such as droughts, floods, hurricanes, and wildfires, with huge losses of life and property, reduced agricultural yields, and costly disruptions to society and further calls the church and society to summon the courage to face the climate crisis and the perils it poses to human civilization and encourages synods and congregations to lead by achieving a 50% reduction from 2005 levels of net greenhouse gas pollution by 2030 and net-zero emissions by 2050⁹;

And WHEREAS, as individuals, congregations, and a synod of the ELCA, we have the shared calling and opportunity to model the kind of care for creation we would like to see in the world. Therefore, be it

RESOLVED that the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA encourage all congregations to engage in caring for creation through practices such as:

- Worshiping in ways that celebrate and foster care for creation;
- Educating adults and children about biblical and theological foundations for creation care and about ecological issues;
- Improving energy conservation efforts in church buildings and on their grounds;
- Promoting incorporation of earth-friendly practices by members in their home and work;
- Demonstrating care for creation in their local communities;
- Providing pastoral care to those struggling with concerns relating to care for creation;
- Advocating at the local, state, and national levels for energy policies that foster cleaner, renewable, and more efficient energy use in all sectors of society; and
- Including people of all perspectives in ongoing care for creation conversations.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod commit to providing resources and programs to equip congregations and leaders throughout the synod to engage in the above, and to financially support these initiatives;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the above resourcing and equipping be done through the establishment of a Care of Creation Ministry Team at the synodical level, with written reports to the assembly included in future bulletins of report.

ENDNOTES

We give thanks to Northwestern Minnesota Synod of the ELCA and Lutherans Restoring Creation for their work in preparing resolutions regarding Care for Creation. Their resolution language was utilized throughout this resolution prepared for the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly.

¹Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice, Social Statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), 1993, p. 2,5. <https://tinyurl.com/ms3cw23f>

²Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice, Social Statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), 1993, p. 9,10. <https://tinyurl.com/ms3cw23f>

³Economic Life: Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All, Social Statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1999, p. 15. <https://tinyurl.com/35eh34un>

⁴Endorsement of “The Earth Charter,” Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly 2019 Memorial to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly 2019, p.3. <https://tinyurl.com/44epx5t5>; See Earth Charter Initiative, The Earth Charter. <https://tinyurl.com/2efv7eud>

⁵Endorsement of the Earth Charter, Social Policy Resolution CA19.02.06c, ELCA Churchwide Assembly 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/ywcm4a9x>; See Earth Charter Initiative, The Earth Charter. <https://tinyurl.com/2efv7eud>

⁶IPCC, 2021: Summary for Policymakers. In: Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) [Masson-Delmotte, V., et al. (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, pp. 3-32, doi:10.1017/9781009157896.001. <https://tinyurl.com/3vswahaja>; See also IPCC, 2023: Summary for Policymakers. In: Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Core Writing Team, H. Lee and J. Romero (eds.)]. IPCC, pp. 1-34, doi: 10.59327/IPCC/AR6-9789291691647.001. <https://tinyurl.com/32tjnu2c>

⁷“*Just transition* is the transition to a net-zero carbon sustainable, resilient world without leaving stranded individuals or communities...Knowing that climate change impacts marginalized and vulnerable people the most, we must commit to actions that leave no one behind. In our efforts to protect God’s good creation, we will not exclude voices, because doing so would only mirror and deepen existing racial, gender and economic inequalities.” (from the ELCA Advocacy document, “Just Transition to a Sustainable Future,” originally posted March 2021, pp. 1-7.) <https://tinyurl.com/4y74c4e6>

⁸Additional ELCA Efforts to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Social Policy Resolution CA22.04.27, ELCA Churchwide Assembly 2022, p.1 <https://tinyurl.com/2n7e66pc>

⁹Earth’s Climate Crisis, Social Message of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2023, p.6,13,16. <https://tinyurl.com/ycxjbfm3>