

Becoming a Green Parish: A Guide for Parishes

As people of faith, we are convinced that “the earth is the LORD’s and all it holds” (Ps 24:1)... Our Creator has given us the gift of creation: the air we breathe, the water that sustains life, the fruits of the land that nourish us, and the entire web of life without which human life cannot flourish. All of this God created and found “very good.” We believe our response to global climate change should be a sign of our respect for God’s creation.

- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, **Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good** (Washington DC: USCCB, 2001)

As Catholic people of faith we are charged with being good stewards of creation. We strive to carry out our call to care for God’s creation. We do this in the way we live our daily lives and in the way we provide for worship within our parishes. *A Roadmap to a Green Parish* is designed to assist parishes as they take a long loving look at their immediate environment which includes the church structures and surrounding grounds and parking areas.

There are three parts to this guide:

A Roadmap to a Green Parish <<http://www.richmonddiocese.org/ojp/road-map.pdf>> is a graphic guide which includes some of the resources available for use with a Creation-Care-Awareness Group. We use the A-R-T process which describes the mission of the Justice & Peace/Social Ministry in parishes, schools, and campus ministries, bringing the vision of the just and peaceable Reign of God to life in the daily activities of the faith community and its members. (See the handbook, *Service: Following Christ in Charity and Justice*, Office of Justice & Peace, Catholic Diocese of Richmond, page 13 at: http://www.richmonddiocese.org/ojp/manual_08-02.pdf.)

Act A Creation-Care Group measures the Parish’s current commitment using the “*Ecology Checklist for Parishes*”. Findings should be presented to the Pastor and Parish Council. This is followed by an assessment of the Parish’s use of resources using the “*Environmental Assessment Tool for Churches*.”

Reflect The process must be centered in prayer and reflection. The graphic lists some of the materials available and the Ecological Educator is available for additional resources.

Transform The group then uses the findings to make a plan of action for transforming the parish through structural, worship, and educational actions.



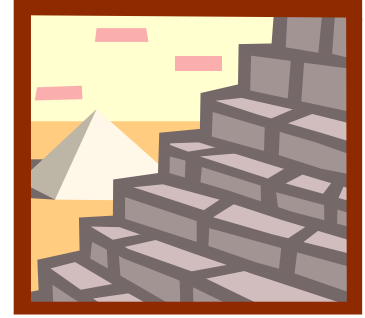
Ecology Checklist for Parishes <<http://www.richmonddiocese.org/ojp/eco-list.pdf>> helps parishes measure their activities under the topics of *liturgy, education, building and grounds, discipleship, and advocacy*.

Environmental Assessment Tool <<http://www.richmonddiocese.org/ojp/eco-assess.pdf>> helps churches to assess its use of resources: electricity, water, natural gas, and behaviors that impact our earth. It provides benchmark data so a church can make a plan of action and measure success. A member of the Ecological Working Group is available to assist with the process.

Measuring footprints has become a popular way of assessing the environmental status of households and businesses. A tool for this is available on-line from Interfaith Power and Light at www.coolcongregations.org. Other sources which may be helpful are: www.webofcreation.org and www.earthministry.org.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has developed a guide: “*Putting Energy Into Stewardship: ENERGY STAR® Guide for Congregations*” and can be found on their website, www.energystar.gov.

Steps to Take:



1. Gather interested people in the parish and with the permission of the Pastor form a Creation-Care Awareness Group. A good way to find interested people in the parish is to hold one of the educational programs such as “Just Matters God’s Creation Cries for Justice”, “Climate Change: Our Faith Response”, or the “Habits of Creation” Retreat. Contact the Office of Justice and Peace for more information.
2. Review the resources available in this guide.
3. Sign-up by submitting the form to the Diocese of Richmond Ecological Working Group.
4. Reflect upon the “Ecology Checklist for Parishes”.
5. Report to the Pastor and Parish Council on findings and ask for permission to proceed. Do a “temperature taking” about the commitment of the parish to go further with the process. *You may want to take on a “soft” project such as switching from the use of Styrofoam when serving coffee or setting up bins throughout the parish and developing a system for recycling.* If the parish is receptive to going further with the Assessment, explain that you will be coming back with a proposed plan once the Assessment is completed.
6. Use the “Environmental Assessment Tool for Churches” in one (or all) of the parish buildings.
7. As a group decide on possible projects and prioritize. We suggest the low or no-cost ones be done first. Lighting is a major use of energy in the parish and changing to Compact Fluorescent (CFL’s) can make a major difference in the cost of electricity. The second most significant is heating and cooling.
8. Establish a budget.
9. Submit your plan to the Pastor and the Parish Council.
10. Announce the plan to the members of the Parish.
11. Carry out the plan. We suggest doing a long-rang plan as well as an annual plan. The annual plan can be evaluated and rewritten each year.
12. Continue to meet as a Creation-Care Awareness Group and reflect on God’s call. Find ways to engage the parish in the mission. Look for special events, possibly on Creation Sunday, which will highlight the goals of the group. Be aware of issues around environmental justice which can be addressed by the group and parish members.
13. Celebrate success and tell your story!

Saving money is a worthy goal or saving the earth. But let us go a step beyond and become examples to the larger community. Your parish can become “the light to the world.....a city set on a mountain.”

You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lamp stand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.

– Matthew 5:14-16

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Catholic Diocese of Richmond
February 2009



Registration to Become a Green Parish

Name of Parish: _____

Address: _____

Town/Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email Address: _____

Website address: _____

Parish Contact: _____

Address: _____

Town/Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email Address: _____

Send registration form to: Susan Hedge
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