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**A WATERSHED MOMENT: CARE FOR THE CHURCH AND EARTH'S  
WATERS**

by

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate the thesis, first, to my parents, Dorothy and Robert Wright, who instilled a love of nature through many trips into the Colorado Rockies. Second, Fr. Thomas Berry always offered a deep sense of the human community, consciously abiding in the natural world, and supported by the depths of religious traditions. Friends and colleagues, especially Drs. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, accompanied me all along the way. My parish, Ascension Lutheran church, South Burlington, VT is faith-filled and open to new expressions of the faith, such as watershed discipleship demands. Finally, I dedicate this work to all the world's waters, truly "living water."

Nancy G. Wright

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# **A WATERSHED MOMENT: CARE FOR THE CHURCH AND EARTH'S WATERS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

We live in a watershed moment for the planet and for the church. A threatening planetary water crisis asks now for a strong church response. Ascension Lutheran Church of South Burlington, Vermont, engaged in water-focused activities, education, and worship to respond faithfully to God's call to care for Earth and its water. In so doing, the church developed a potential model for watershed stewardship that enhances a congregation's discipleship, spreads the vision of creation care through watershed stewardship, and offers practical guidance for churches and judicatories. This project, and other national and international water stewardship projects, offer insight into Christian leadership and education for water care.

Relevant Christian theological resources and transformational educational and leadership studies grounded the project. Among recent Christian calls for action is the

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Resolution Urging Stewardship of the Gift of Water, passed at the 2016 Churchwide Assembly (Appendix IX). Further, Lutheran theologians, among other Christian theologians, have proposed insights into the sacredness of creation that undergird effective congregational watershed action. Their reformulated theology, plus transformational leadership and education theories, helpfully ground planning for congregational learning and action and were applied to Ascension's watershed project.

Caring for water orients a congregation in a new and deep way to its social, cultural, and ecological community, while also positioning it to develop supportive ties to other congregations and groups in the area to foster watershed health. When a congregation cares for its local watershed, it potentially promotes awareness and action to ameliorate worldwide water justice issues, including climate change and the feminization of poverty, both of which reflect and create water justice issues. A watershed discipleship church faithfully responds in our time to Jesus' timeless words, "I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink [Matt.25:35]."

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## Introduction

**Jeremiah 2:13** “They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water.”

**Romans 1:20** “Ever since the creation of the world, [God’s] eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made.”

**John 4:10** “Jesus answered her, ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you “Give me a drink,” you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.’”

**Matthew 25:35** “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink.”

We live in a watershed moment for the planet and for the church, the Lutheran denomination, and individual Lutheran congregations. A threatening planetary water crisis asks now for a strong church response. The United Nations recognizes access to water as a human right. Yet, the water crisis on the planet is so severe that the next wars will likely be fought over water. The world is running out of accessible water. By 2030, demand will “exceed supply by 40 percent,” according to current trends.<sup>1</sup> Further, climate change will cause more droughts and unpredictable weather, threatening water and food supply around the world, while water pollution and overfishing deplete fisheries worldwide. The church should take up this challenge and recognize the urgent need for transformational leadership in ministry.

The church must respond robustly to the water crisis for at least three reasons. First, Jesus’ life, healings, and teaching modeled care for people in need. He taught, for example, that when his followers feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty, they are

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<sup>1</sup> “Half the World to Face Severe Water Stress by 2030 unless Water Use is ‘Decoupled’ from Economic Growth, Says International Resource Panel,” United Nations Environment Program, March 21, 2016, accessed February 12, 2018, <http://internationalresourcepanel.org/reports/options-decoupling-economic-growth-water-use-and-water-pollution>.

giving food and drink to him, and thus will merit a place in eternal life (Matt. 25:31–46). The church practices short-sighted ministry when it offers food and water as short-term solutions, but does not effectively attend to environmental issues that cause people to be thirsty and hungry. Second, in recent decades the multilayered environmental crisis has inspired many Christians to rediscover biblical witness to the interrelationship of God and creation: the Psalms envision creation as praising God (e.g., Ps. 148), Jesus taught about God’s deep care for lilies and ravens (Lk. 12:22–31), and early Christians envisioned Christ as holding all created things together (Col. 1:15–20). Reinvigorated ministries and theologies of creation care have emerged in response, a widening flow of which this project is a small but significant, action-oriented part. Finally, churches may well become more effective in offering witness to the Gospel if surrounding communities see them respond helpfully to some of the largest challenges facing humans, plants, and animals, one of which is the worldwide water crisis.

Christians are called to love God by loving creation through sacramental living as well as environmental awareness and care. This project explores that call in the context of a particular congregation, Ascension Lutheran Church (ALC), South Burlington, VT. ALC engaged in water-focused activities, education, and worship that respond faithfully to God’s call to care for Earth and its water, and in so doing developed a model for watershed stewardship to enhance a congregation’s discipleship, spread the vision of creation care through watershed stewardship, and offer practical guidance for churches and synods. Relevant Christian theological resources and educational and leadership models ground the project. These include the work of Lutheran theologians and writers

on transformational education and transformational leadership. Among recent Christian calls for action is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Resolution Urging Stewardship of the Gift of Water, passed at the 2016 Churchwide Assembly. The resolution offers an exciting and potentially transformative opportunity to strengthen watershed discipleship. Finally, this thesis compares the findings of the action project at ALC with water stewardship projects in this country and internationally, drawing conclusions about best congregational practices related to watershed stewardship.

## **PART 1**

### **EXPLORING THE TERRAIN**

Because water flows both locally and internationally, a congregation that pays attention to its local watershed has the opportunity to be linked through awareness and action to other similar efforts around the world, as well as to other ecosystems. Thus, watershed stewardship projects potentially foster a congregational effort with at least four positive results: the congregation learns about and cares for the local watershed; parishioners have an opportunity to examine how scripture and theology undergird creation care; supporting ties develop with other congregations and groups concerned about water; and the congregation's leadership capacity strengthens.

"A Watershed Moment" is an action-reflection project. The "A Watershed Moment" experience at Ascension Lutheran Church (ALC) included varied congregational activities, as well as opportunities for reflection and learning. The action component included water sampling, boat trips, a worship service by the shore of Lake Champlain, and summer Sunday school lessons focused on water. Related congregational reflection occurred in several ways: during the lakeside worship service, through teaching opportunities as part of the Lake Champlain Action Cruise and Tutorial, through practices engaged by families who covenanted to be especially aware of water over the eight-month action project, and by way of a final congregational evaluation.

As pastor, my role included organizing the entire action project, "A Watershed Moment," participating in the activities, consciously including water in my personal

prayer, spending extended periods of time sitting by or swimming in the lake or sitting by a stream to appreciate creation, and fostering conversation with other groups and individuals involved in watershed efforts. These environmental and spiritual leaders include the Minneapolis synod of the ELCA, which has encouraged all its churches to focus on watershed stewardship; Lutherans Restoring Creation; and theologian and writer Ched Myers, who has organized a national ecumenical movement for watershed discipleship. My reflection further included reading extensively in theology, water stewardship and water history, transformational leadership, and transformational education; developing resource materials and sermons; and engaging in spiritual practices such as journal keeping and prayer.

“A Watershed Moment” is designed to link to other watershed stewardship efforts. We learn from each other. This effort will later flower with a “toolkit” for watershed stewardship, which will highlight ALC’s work and encourage other congregations to undertake watershed stewardship. Lutherans Restoring Creation will promote this toolkit, and ALC will share it with other denominations and watershed groups, as well.

Part 1 of this thesis explores the theological context for watershed stewardship, especially relying on Lutheran theologians, but also referencing theology from a broader spectrum. Relevant approaches from transformational leadership and transformational educational literature, especially applied to water issues and congregational learning, provide incisive strategies for congregational learning and action.

Part 2 of this thesis describes ALC's project. Lessons learned from ALC and other watershed care approaches in this country, and internationally, contribute to an analysis for proposals and conclusions for future work.

## Chapter 1: Creation Care Theology for Watershed Stewardship

Much has been written on Christianity and care for creation in the past several decades. Many denominations have published statements pertaining to the urgent need to address environmental problems, and several denominations have added staff members to help churches grow in the area of creation stewardship. This project adds to this larger Christian effort to address environmental degradation and to develop and foster a theology adequate to the task.

The discussions in this chapter focus on theological themes pertinent to this effort and practical possibilities for congregational watershed work. The theological themes include Christology, nature as commodity or sacrament, sin and salvation, and baptism. These theological themes bear on liturgy and preaching toward creation care and watershed discipleship.

### Theology

Although many theologians—Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox—have written on care for creation, the prominence of Lutheran theologians in care for creation theology is now evident. Joseph Sittler exemplifies an early theologian who has inspired other theologians to develop work in this area.<sup>2</sup> In recent decades, Larry L. Rasmussen, Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, Lisa E. Dahill, H. Paul Santmire, and Benjamin M. Stewart have contributed deep insights. Each has undertaken an examination of scripture,

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<sup>2</sup> Joseph Sittler, *Essays on Nature and Grace* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972).

theology, economics, and worship to inspire a transformation in church and society toward creation care; several focus specifically on water. The following three factors likely contribute to this impressive body of work: Luther's mystical theology, the centrality of baptism in Lutheran tradition, and the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation, ushering in an Eco-Reformation in Lutheranism worldwide, with renewed reflection on the plight of the planet and the need for a viable, authoritative Christian response.

### *Christology*

Christology is central to care-for-creation theology. Theologians focus both on Jesus' life and teachings and on cosmic Christ imagery (Col. 1:15–20). For example, Rasmussen deepens the challenge to rethink our response to the facts of a changing planet (climate change, species extinction, pollution of air and water, exponential growth in human population) by exploring Jesus' parable of new wine in old wine skins (Lk. 5:36–39).<sup>3</sup> The image of new "wine skins" questions the prevalent and normally unquestioned human dominance over nature. We in the industrialized world desperately need new wine skins to hold substantial sociocultural transformations. These desired cultural changes (economic, demographic, policy related, religious, moral) undergird a cultural shift, a re-enchantment that "restores nature to human consciousness and feeling, nature as a community of subjects, the bearer of mystery and spirit, the ethos of the cosmos, and the womb of all the life we will ever know."<sup>4</sup> Nature does not exist only to

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<sup>3</sup> Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key* (New York: Oxford, 2013), 71–79.

<sup>4</sup> Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith*, 77–78.

satisfy human need and supply material goods; rather, nature's identity, given by God, sustains its own value and dignity independent of human appraisal.

Dahill's theology similarly opens new understanding through a reconsideration of the meaning of the incarnation. To fully understand incarnation toward deep ecological awareness and care means "a Christian spirituality of biocentric sacramental reimmersion into reality."<sup>5</sup> Dahill proposes that "*the primary or normative* site of Christian baptism needs to return outdoors."<sup>6</sup> This "proposal thickens and makes explicit what baptismal life means: the closest possible union with the biologically and ecologically incarnate, crucified, risen Christ, the *wild Logos* inhabiting all Earth's watery life, through whom indeed all things were made."<sup>7</sup>

The importance of Dahill's views, summarized in her incarnational theology behind her strong suggestion for outdoor baptism, links affirmation of the biological incarnation of God in the human Jesus of Nazareth to consideration of the ecologically incarnate Christ, developed from cosmic Christ imagery (John 1:1–18, Col. 1:15–20) about the One through whom all things are made. The natural response from such deepened sacramental reflection is one Dahill hopes Christians will make: to dive into Earth's real waters in order to be fully immersed in the incarnate Christ and, I would add, to celebrate the presence of Christ whenever we encounter water.

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<sup>5</sup> Lisa E. Dahill, "Rewilding Christian Spirituality," in *Eco-Reformation: Grace and Hope for a Planet in Peril*, ed. Lisa A. Dahill and James B. Martin-Schramm (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016), 179.

<sup>6</sup> Dahill, "Rewilding," 187, n. 24.

<sup>7</sup> Dahill, "Rewilding," 187.

Background to what may seem a startling move—to immerse oneself and those who want to be baptized into real, living waters (local lakes and streams) in order to care for Christ in creation—may be found in Martin Luther’s incarnational theology: “Heaven and earth are his [Christ’s] sack; as wheat fills the sack, so he fills all things.” Luther extols the way that a seed “bears a stalk, an ear, and many kernels,” just as a cherrystone develops into a tree, and yet, “Much more is Christ able to distribute himself whole and undivided into so many particles.”<sup>8</sup>

The implication for modern baptismal practices for ecological Christians is (1) that Christ is present in any form of water, *including* a sanctuary baptismal font; and (2) that baptism by immersion when done in rhythm with the natural hydrological cycle of a body of water within the local watershed will help recenter Christians into a Christ-filled universe. Practice incarnates truth: engagement in renewing experiences of water that ensures life to all creatures reinforces God’s power expressed through the life-giving and transforming sacrament of baptism.

Does the Body of Christ include the creation? As Dahill inquires, “Does the Body of Christ into whom we are baptized—the *wild Logos*—include the fish, plants, birds, insects, animals, shellfish, and microbes alive in these waters as well? Can a Christian spirituality include I/Thou relations with creatures beyond the human?”<sup>9</sup> Dahill insists on a critical reappraisal of what is considered holy, extending the sacred to all things, because all things were made through the incarnate Word. Thus, all creation is spiritually

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<sup>8</sup> Martin Luther, “The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ—Against the Fanatics,” in *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy Lull (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 322.

<sup>9</sup> Dahill, “Rewilding,” 193.

kin to humans. These critically important proposals circumscribe a new relational awareness that congregational practices, such as those outlined in this project and other congregational watershed programs, may begin to uncover.

### *Nature as Commodity or Sacrament*

The question posed above about I/Thou relations with other-than-human creatures brings us to a set of central questions about the essential identity of other-than-human creation. What is nature? For what purpose does nature exist? What are our human responsibilities for nature? What does our culture suggest or insist upon? What does Christianity teach? Are there essential views that can help us address the water crisis?

Virtually all prominent theologians who consider and write about the Christian underpinnings of care for creation tackle the difference between the values underlying the modern capitalistic system and the values behind a sacramental view of nature and human response to it.<sup>10</sup> Put simply, the Enlightenment ushered in values central to establishing democratic societies, especially individualism and free markets. But there is a shadow side of these values: they reduce nature to natural goods that can be identified, harvested, produced, manufactured, and promoted for human use. Economics in the mainstream, growth-oriented, industrialized paradigm usually measure benefits by Gross

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<sup>10</sup> See Pope Francis, *Encyclical on Climate Change & Inequality: On Care for Our Common Home* (New York: Melville House, 2015); Dieter Hessel and Larry Rasmussen, eds., *Earth Habitat: Eco-Justice and the Church's Response* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001); Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2013); Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2004); Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr., *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989); Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Nancy G. Wright and Donald Kill, *Ecological Healing: A Christian Vision* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 49–57.

Domestic Product, a financial yardstick that quantifies the flow of goods and services. Corporate leaders and shareholders scrutinize the bottom line of quarterly budgets to measure their companies' profit and loss. The capitalist system, focused on economic growth, is generally understood to increase standards of living; decrease poverty; and promote human well-being, entrepreneurial efforts, and even happiness. Global industrialized capitalism *has* increased the standard of living for billions of people. Promotion of this economic system is still the norm as U.S. government policy and that of other industrialized countries, with an emphasis on economic growth as measured by GDP. But such measurement rarely factors in negative so-called externalities, such as compromised public health, pollution of air and water, climate change, declines in soil quality, and other aspects of ecological or social degradation

Perceiving nature only as a commodity impairs ecosystems and fosters injustice. Growing inequality between rich and poor and the devastation of Earth's natural systems, which constitute the basis for this economy, have brought the world to a crossroads, a watershed moment, within the lifetime of people now living. According to philosopher and theologian James K.A. Smith,

Capitalism as it has developed from classical economic theory, through neoclassical theory and on to neoliberalism, aims at and presupposes what Earth can no longer provide or provide for: Unlimited growth in production of goods and services....Unlimited 'services' ...provided by Earth....Unlimited 'resources' ....provided by Earth....An unregulated market in which the most powerful players are economic entities....Freedom of individuals to do as they please with economic assets...<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting*, 42.

This system now undermines the ecological web of life by degrading soil, climate, water systems, and biological diversity. Ultimately, this economic paradigm is destructive of both ecologies and economies. Because economic systems rely on natural resources, if nature does not thrive, or if it suffers damage in the short term, economies will not be sustainable in the long term.

Industrialized capitalism further causes a psychological conditioning, promoting a worldview with several consequences that now negatively affect human-Earth flourishing. This worldview is almost second nature; it is a *habitus*, a “nexus of dispositions by which we constitute our world without rational deliberation or conscious awareness.”<sup>12</sup> Pope Francis, in his groundbreaking encyclical, specifies this *habitus* as “undifferentiated” and “one-dimensional”: a paradigm that “exalts the concept of a subject who, using logical and rational procedures, progressively approaches and gains control over an external object.”<sup>13</sup> The result is reductionism with severe consequences:

Now...we are the ones to lay our hands on things, attempting to extract everything possible from them while frequently ignoring or forgetting the reality in front of us. Human beings and material objects no longer extend a friendly hand to one another; the relationship has become confrontational. This has made it easy to accept the idea of infinite or unlimited growth, which proves so attractive to economists, financiers and experts in technology. It is based on the lie that

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<sup>12</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013). Smith builds on the work of French intellectual Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002), who examined cultural and social power, social capital, and the fact that humans acculturate to their milieu, whether family, class, economic system, or nation, such that behaviors, cultural preferences, and values are instilled that are beyond consciousness and which help the individual to feel at home, relatively comfortable in one’s cultural setting. The fact that many people in the industrialized world feel so comfortable with Enlightenment and capitalist values such that these are not questioned provides the background for Christian theologians to examine these values and ask whether others are more life-affirming and helpful to creation care.

<sup>13</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical*, 66.

there is an infinite supply of the earth's goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit.<sup>14</sup>

The evidence of the planet being “squeezed dry” displays in the “hockey stick” graphs that reveal the “triumph of the industrial-technological paradigm” between 1750 and 2000.<sup>15</sup> The horizontal line marks the time period between 1750 to 2000, while the vertical line reveals the growth of several indicators: GDP, water use, fertilizer consumption, ozone depletion, carbon dioxide concentration, species extinction, damming of rivers, and paper consumption, among others. Growth was slow until 1950, then it experienced an abrupt upsurge in all indicators, driven by, as Rasmussen puts it, “unprecedented human population matched to unprecedented global economic activity.”<sup>16</sup> Each example reveals a hockey stick line with the blade upward, showing parallel rapid increase.

That human economic activity is fruitful and long-lasting only in the context of a fruitful and long-lasting Earth is an obvious and yet easily forgotten fact. The root word *oikos* captures the truth of human-Earth interconnection as foundational to life. The words “household,” “ecumenical,” “ecology,” and “home” derive from the Greek word *oikos*. Concerns about an economy that deprives Earth and nonhuman creatures of life support indicate that we need to find our way home. Then, as Pope Francis envisions,

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<sup>14</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical*, 67.

<sup>15</sup> Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith*, 56–58.

<sup>16</sup> Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith*, 58.

humans will once again act for themselves and believe in a happy future because they will know “their true place in this world.”<sup>17</sup>

Finding our way home requires establishing a theological understanding of nature as more than a commodity for human use. Nature is God’s gift, to be treated with reverence. Nature is a locus of the holy, as Christ holds all things together. Nature, thus, has a sacramental dimension, an inexhaustible meaning to be honored. As theologian and educator Mary Elizabeth Moore writes, “Some of the more recent work on the sacraments affirms that all of creation is sacred, and that the formal sacraments of the church awaken people to the sacredness of God’s whole creation, mediating God’s grace and enabling the community to participate more fully in the grace of God that is everywhere revealed.”<sup>18</sup> Living with and acting on this knowledge that all creation is sacred is sacramental life.

### ***Sin and Salvation***

As we have seen, to embrace an Earth-honoring faith means thinking in new ways about Christology (Dahill’s “rewilding” Christianity and seeing Christ present in nature) as well as thinking in new ways about economics (the flourishing of humans and Earth being mutually dependent). Just so, understandings of sin and salvation also widen and thicken. Here, we consider four aspects of sin that lead to a widened view of salvation. I

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<sup>17</sup> Pope Francis, *Encyclical*, 71–72.

<sup>18</sup> Moore, *Teaching*, 9.

will discuss sin from a human species level, a structural level, an Earth-honoring level, and an age-of-the-universe level.

Because our awareness of “home” has expanded immensely due to scientific discoveries in the past decades, we can no longer consider sin merely from the personal and socio-structural points of view, but we must also consider it from a human species point of view. Even while aware of the 13-billion-year-old universe, plate tectonics, cell division, dark matter, and the relatively infinitesimal lifespan of humans on Earth, we have become further aware of the planetary role humans now play. As a planetary force, humans now hold the fate of the planet in our hands, determining, for example, how many species become endangered or extinct. The name for this age in which we exert such power is the Anthropocene.<sup>19</sup> It has ushered in the Sixth Great Extinction, this one caused by human beings (scientists describe five earlier Great Extinction events in Earth’s history, after which new species emerge over millions of years; Elizabeth Kolbert reports that “by the end of this century as many as half of earth’s species will be gone”).<sup>20</sup> Grappling with such power and loss, ethicists use the terms *ecocide* and *biocide* to describe human activity that unwittingly runs the story of the creation as told in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, backward.

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<sup>19</sup> Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith*, 55.

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Kolbert, “The Sixth Extinction,” *The New Yorker* (May 25, 2009), accessed February 12, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/05/25/the-sixth-extinction>. See also *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2015).

Second, how do Christians confess sins that are not individually caused but are the result of human population expansion combined with the “moral angle”<sup>21</sup> of global economic markets and national governments? Borrowing the phrase *structural sin* helps. One way to speak about structural sin is to say that humans face “wicked problems,” problems that climate analyst and communicator George Marshall describes as multivalent and uncanny.<sup>22</sup> Wicked problems lack a clear actor (we are all responsible in various ways), and they also lack a clear beginning and end. Further, wicked problems are so multifaceted as to affect many aspects of personal, socio-cultural, and ecological life. Humanity’s lack of self-awareness leads to ignorance and even complicity in wicked problems. As Rasmussen puts it, “The Big Economics and Big Politics of modernity and eco-modernity consists of thinking without thanking....Devoid of empathy, sympathy, ...communion, wonder, praise, and any heartfelt love of place, modernity’s thought would only bend the world to an alien end and leave the soul an arid place.”<sup>23</sup> Humans and Earth need to reestablish a living, vital connection with each other in order for humans to flourish and Earth to regenerate.

Another way to speak of structural sin committed by the human burden on the planet is to remind ourselves that even when we are unaware of the fact, someone always lives downstream (whether locally or across the world). Any intervention in the stream

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<sup>21</sup> Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith*, 179.

<sup>22</sup> George Marshall, *Don’t Even Think About It: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Ignore Climate Change* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 95-96. Marshall notes that U.C. Berkeley urban planners Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber first formulated the “wicked problem” concept in 1973, applicable to policy planning.

<sup>23</sup> Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith*, 179.

affects those farther down the flow; water always connects. In an interconnected world, sinful acts (and grace-filled acts) are communal and ecological, committed or compounded through structural (economic, political, religious) power.

Analyzing structural sin awakens people to the social consequences of ecological injustice as well as the consequences to the planet. For example, those who have the power to abuse creation often have the means to buffer themselves from the worst consequences of this abuse. The developed world causes climate change, which disproportionately affects poorer countries.<sup>24</sup> Famous is the United Church of Christ study revealing that the highest percentage of toxic waste sites is situated in neighborhoods with people of color.<sup>25</sup> One can trace aspects of modern technology (e.g., smart phones) to unfair and unsafe labor practices and processes occurring in countries where the parts are manufactured and the materials are mined, largely beyond the consumer's sight and mind.<sup>26</sup> Further, the results of climate change (drought, food insecurity, tropical diseases, and extreme weather events) largely harm people who have

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<sup>24</sup> The United States, with approximately 4.4 percent of the world's population, was responsible for 15 percent of the world's carbon dioxide emissions in 2015. "Developed nations typically have high carbon dioxide emissions per capita, while some developing countries lead in the growth rate of carbon dioxide emissions." Cited from "Each Country's Share of CO2 Emissions," Union of Concerned Scientists, accessed February 12, 2018, <https://www.ucsusa.org/global-warming/science-and-impacts/science/each-countrys-share-of-co2.html#.WoHG6rpFzct>.

<sup>25</sup> Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr. and Charles Lee, *Toxic Wastes and Race* (Commission for Radical Justice, United Church of Christ, 1987), accessed February 12, 2018, <https://csu.edu/cerc/researchreports/documents/ToxicWasteandRace-TOXICWASTESANDRACE.pdf>. See also Robert D. Bullard's articles and books (for example, Robert D. Bullard and Beverly Wright, *The Wrong Complexion for Protection: How the Government Response to Disaster Endangers African American Communities* [New York: New York University Press, 2012]) on environmental justice and Luke W. Cole & Sheila R. Foster, *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

<sup>26</sup> See Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting*.

not created the problems. For example, so-called rain bombs are heavy downpours caused by climate change, which negatively affect subsistence farmers of whom Christians in developed countries are largely unaware.

The biblical question, “Who is my neighbor?” (Lk. 10:29) thickens when we recognize the interrelation between the products we in the United States buy and their costs in resources and lives abroad. Theologian Thomas Berry points out our need to “reinvent the human at the species level,” which in turns speaks to the profound need to transform human sense of connectedness to the web of life and to peoples whom we will never meet on our planetary home.<sup>27</sup> Structural sin calls for recognition and action that may take civic or political form. Christian ethicist Cynthia Moe-Lobeda points out: “Love in our day takes structural form—more specifically ecological and economic form.”<sup>28</sup> A sense that Earth itself is “groaning” (Rom. 8:22) becomes manifest for an ecologically aware Christian in a felt sense of growing sympathy with creation. By confession of sin that includes compassion for Earth and the many species that cohabit with us, we will be better positioned to answer Paul Tillich’s poignant question positively: “Are we able to perceive the hidden voice of nature? Does nature speak to us? Does it speak to you? Or has nature become silent to us, silent to the man of our

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<sup>27</sup> Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999), 160. Berry writes, “We need to reinvent the human *at the species level* because the issues we are concerned with seem to be beyond the competence of our present cultural traditions, either individually or collectively....Radical new cultural forms are needed. These new cultural forms would place the human within the dynamics of the planet rather than place the planet within the dynamics of the human.”

<sup>28</sup> Moe-Lobeda, “A Haunting Contradiction,” in *Eco-Reformation*, 43.

period?...there is no salvation of man if there is no salvation of nature.”<sup>29</sup> Tillich rightly concludes that human salvation includes Earth’s future well-being as part of God’s love.

Third, after consideration of sin on the levels of human species and societal structures, we shift to the question of sin on an Earth-honoring level and ask, Can Earth be saved? According to theologian Christopher Morse, “Affirmation of the resurrection of the body is not simply a reference to the individual who is raised but also to the corporate reality of the one body of many members resurrected as the body of Christ: ‘For as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ’ (1 Cor. 15:22).”<sup>30</sup> But if consideration of sin thickens to consideration of the human species as a whole, a species capable of structural sin that results in ecocide and biocide, how should salvation and resurrection be conceived? How does the Earth itself—photographed in our lifetime from space and revealed as precious, heart-stoppingly beautiful, alone, one interrelated community, with no evidence of a “heaven” above—participate in resurrection and salvation?

Considering sin from a planetary perspective, we glimpse important and resonant symbols and images rooted deeply in the actual world, including the image of the tree of life. Lutheran theologian Wanda Deifelt writes, “That which is redemptive, transformative, and salvific in the cross finds its fulfillment in the tree of life. It announces the resurrection that could only happen because of and through the

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<sup>29</sup> Paul Tillich, “Nature Mourns for a Lost Good,” in *The Shaking of the Foundations* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1948), 78, 84.

<sup>30</sup> Christopher Morse, *Not Every Spirit: A Dogmatics of Christian Belief* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press Intl., 1994), 342.

cross....God's saving action involves wholeness—restoring all of creation back to its dignity and beauty.”<sup>31</sup> Other positive and renewing symbols include freeing Earth from slavery, “the river of the water of life” [Rev. 22:1], and the “new creation.”<sup>32</sup> If sin is expressed as a master-slave relationship in which humans are the master and nature is the slave,<sup>33</sup> then salvation is “a soul-deep, personal *feeling* for the families of creation, a gut connection that is profoundly personal, Earth-honoring, and Earth-healing.”<sup>34</sup> Julian of Norwich's famous vision of Christ lovingly showing her a hazelnut in the palm of her hand, revealing God as creator, protector, and lover, rewards deep meditation. Jesus Christ's tender care of Earth's entirety, which his crucified and risen body eternally supports, as portrayed through such profound imagery, offers Christians iconic possibilities.

Each of these images treats salvation and resurrection as *not* exclusively “heavenly,” or other-worldly possibilities and realities. Christ's incarnation, salvation, and resurrection include Earth, which scripture tells us “groans” toward fulfillment (Rom. 8:22). Theologian Sigurd Bergmann writes, “The faith in the Holy Spirit as Giver of Life...appears naturally in the horizon of perceiving the environment as an animated

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<sup>31</sup> Wanda Deifelt, “Out of Brokenness, a New Creation,” in *Eco-Reformation*, 68.

<sup>32</sup> On the “river of life,” see Barbara R. Rossing, “The World Is about to Turn: Preaching Apocalyptic Texts for a Planet in Peril” in *Eco-Reformation*, 155. For the “new creation,” see Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1998) and M. Douglas Meeks, ed., *Wesleyan Perspectives on the New Creation* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2004).

<sup>33</sup> Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith*, 101.

<sup>34</sup> Rasmussen, “Creation—Not for Sale,” in *Eco-Reformation*, 33.

biography and topography, created, inhabited and perfected by the triune creator.”<sup>35</sup> The triune Creator wraps Earth, not simply humanity, in saving love.

Fourth, when does salvation occur? Has one aspect of human complicity in sin caught us up in a time warp where we focus only on human history rather than cosmic history in which our human story is merely the blink of an eye? Lutherans define sin as *curvitas* (turned inward). Does our species naturally sin when we fail to widen our self-focused perspective and turn outward to Earth and cosmic reality and time? Such widening both helpfully compresses and expands awareness of time’s significance. Compressed time reminds us of the need to care for Earth now to slow down the accelerating rate of species extinction and the worst effects of climate change. This time awareness should elicit alarm and action; this is *kairos* time. Expanded time, elicited by new awareness of a 13-billion-year-old universe, may elicit awe and wonder as well as renewed dedication to care for this precious blue planet, carrying its wondrous diversity of life, floating in a cosmos vast and ancient beyond human imagination.<sup>36</sup> When humanity is conscious of Earth history and we embrace expanded time, aware that we inhabit a small place in a cosmos of 13 billion years, there is a renewed possibility for wonder, ideally resulting in efforts toward practical care.

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<sup>35</sup> Sigurd Bergmann, “Where on Earth Does the Spirit ‘Take Place’ Today? Considerations on Pneumatology in the Light of the Global Environmental Crisis,” in *Christian Faith and the Earth: Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Ecotheology*, ed. Ernst M. Conradie, et al. (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 59.

<sup>36</sup> For an interfaith discussion of wonder within the new scientific story of the universe, see Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Worldly Wonder: Religions Enter Their Ecological Phase* (Chicago: Open Court, 2003).

We have always known that God’s time is not our time (“A thousand ages in your sight are like an evening gone”). But with a renewed sense of “a sacred universe, worthy God-talk is about the mystery of matter and its drama—all of it, past, present, and future,” in the words of environmentalist and historian of religion Mary Evelyn Tucker.<sup>37</sup> The immediate need for ecological care, laced with awareness of cosmic history from which human history derives, can elicit awe, even fear—both markers of being in the presence of the holy. Ed Ayres of Worldwatch Institute compellingly spoke of the historical moment at which we have arrived as “God’s Last Offer.”<sup>38</sup> Commitment to action in this watershed time will hopefully result from such expanded knowledge and spiritual awareness.

Humanity’s awesome power and expanded understanding of salvation paint the backdrop for the drama of this watershed moment. Sin and salvation now describe human activities on a cosmic scale.

### ***Baptism***

For Christians, this watershed moment begs a reconsideration of baptism. In Luther’s view, baptism is central to the Christian life: “We find baptism in itself to be a holy, blessed, glorious, and heavenly thing, to be held in honor with fear and

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<sup>37</sup> Tucker, *Worldly Wonder*, 34.

<sup>38</sup> Ched Myers, “A Critical, Contextual, and Constructive Approach,” in *Watershed Discipleship: Reinhabiting Bioregional Faith and Practice*, ed. Ched Myers (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016), 3.

trembling,..."<sup>39</sup> In his famous "Flood Prayer," Luther spoke of the flood of Noah's time as "a flood of wrath," whereas he spoke of the "flood of baptism" as a "flood of grace." Highly significant is his statement that, by Jesus' baptism in the Jordan, all water is sanctified, part of God's flood of grace over the whole world.<sup>40</sup>

Luther said that Christ's baptism made water holy. Does Luther's statement that Christ's baptism made all water holy contradict his many statements that creation is filled with God from the beginning of creation? Can we tease out whether, for Luther, God's presence in creation existed from the beginning of creation or whether it only existed in creation following the incarnation?

Luther stated that God's triune presence created from the beginning: "First, I believe with my whole heart the sublime article of the majesty of God, that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, [in?] three distinct persons, are by nature one true and genuine God, the Maker of heaven and earth."<sup>41</sup>

Further, according to Luther scholar Bernhard Lohse, "Luther often said that God created the world and the creatures so that each might share in the struggle against the devil and on behalf of life....The entire created world has the task of cooperating with God."<sup>42</sup> I understand Luther's point here to be that humans and other-than-humans have a

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<sup>39</sup> Martin Luther, "Concerning Rebaptism: A Letter of Martin Luther to Two Pastors," ed. Timothy F. Lull, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 371.

<sup>40</sup> Benjamin M. Stewart, *A Watered Garden: Christian Worship and Earth's Ecology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2011), 33–34.

<sup>41</sup> Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: The Historical and Systematic Development* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1999), 210.

<sup>42</sup> Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 242.

shared vocation, which is to cooperate with God on behalf of life, as coworkers. Thus, all creatures share a God-directed, dedicated purpose for being alive. When we suggest a common vocation among all creatures, we enter the realm of the sacred, sacramental existence including all the living in their purpose for being, not simply in their created existence.

In Lutheran theology, humans play a special role. To fulfill their vocations, they must rely on their consciousness of God, given by the Holy Spirit. They rely on this consciousness for right relation to creation: for Luther, “only those who understand themselves as creatures of God and accept their creatureliness use natural things in the right way.”<sup>43</sup>

The question as to whether, for Luther, creation is holy because God created it or whether it is holy because of the incarnation deserves a nuanced answer. I surmise that this question may expose differences in Eastern and Western thought. The West did not develop an emphasis on sacramental creation, while the Eastern Church did. Theologian Ernst M. Conradie notes,

In his famous address to the New Delhi assembly of the World Council of Churches, [Lutheran theologian] Joseph Sittler observed that ever since Augustine, Western Christendom has been unable to relate the realm of grace to the realm of nature, owing to the influence of a Hellenistic dualism between the spiritual and the temporal. This encouraged the conclusion that redemption should be understood as an escape from that which is finite, material and concrete.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 236.

<sup>44</sup> Ernst M. Conradie, “What Is the Place of the Earth in God’s Economy? Doing Justice to Creation, Salvation and Consummation,” in *Christian Faith and the Earth*, 76.

Orthodox theologian John Chryssavgis formulates the Eastern view: “It has always been a source of great comfort to me that Orthodox spirituality retains a sacramental view of the world, proclaiming a world imbued by God and a God involved in the world—a sacrament of communion.”<sup>45</sup> The spiritual and natural realms have existed with some tension in Western thought and with more unity in Eastern Christianity.

Several possibilities exist to explain the seeming contradiction in Luther’s theology around baptism. Perhaps Luther especially noted divine presence in water because of Jesus of Nazareth’s physical, historical, one-time, baptismal immersion in this aspect of creation, which all believers follow. Or perhaps Luther was, in his writings, carrying on the ambivalence in the West between a sacramental view of nature and an other-worldly ascent-atonement-view. Luther was deeply influenced by Augustine and presumably by Augustine’s atonement theology. But creation-honoring medieval mysticism and piety also influenced Luther toward a sacramental sense of creation.

I promote the view that Luther bends toward a sacramental theology and spirituality for several reasons. First, he extolled God’s presence in creation in many statements. Second, Luther scholar Bengt R. Hoffman’s exhaustive study of Luther’s mysticism notes that “Luther...spoke about the inclination toward God that is a part of creation.”<sup>46</sup> Consistent with Hoffman’s view are Luther’s many statements locating God in creation, noted above. Third, for Luther, the triune God created all things, which

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<sup>45</sup> Rasmussen, “Creation—Not for Sale,” in *Eco-Reformation*, 28.

<sup>46</sup> Bengt R. Hoffman, *Theology of the Heart: The Role of Mysticism in the Theology of Martin Luther* (Minneapolis: Kirk House Publishers, 1998), 232.

means that from the beginning the incarnate Christ infused creation, as scripturally expressed in Cosmic Christ imagery (Col. 1:15–20).

Two additional images ground Lutheran discussion of baptism and worship in the present age of environmental abuse. First, Lutheran theologian H. Paul Santmire and others reinforce the difference between the aspiration of ascent toward God, prominent in many images of spiritual growth and especially in light imagery, and the importance of embracing and accepting God's grace as descending, just as water always seeks lower ground. Light imagery often fosters a spiritual movement toward ascension and ethereal spiritual life. This ascent imagery may obscure Jesus' insistence on care for the vulnerable and his teaching that God watches over even a sparrow (Matt. 10:29). The prophet Isaiah, further, announces that God's effective word falls on the earth as rain and snow, to accomplish what God purposes and to give "seed to the sower and bread to the eater [Is. 55:10b]."

Thus, the image of God's grace and goodness as falling to earth, nourishing all life, parallels the water cycle when precipitation falls and gives life, then evaporates in an ever-renewing cycle. Just so, God continues to send grace, again, and again. The baptismal practice not only symbolizes through water the spiritual death and rebirth of the person being baptized, but also the spiritually and physically renewing life of God. Therefore, according to Benjamin Stewart, "...the descending imagery [of God's goodness, wisdom, and fecundity] is expressed by metaphors of flowing water: flowing

through, pouring out, and overflowing. The Lutheran emphasis on the action of God has special affinity with imagery of flowing water.”<sup>47</sup>

Second, such emphasis on flow as central to baptism links Lutherans to the phrase “flowing water,” which the *Didache* offers as the first choice for baptism for early Christians.<sup>48</sup> The *Didache* specifies that flowing water contrasts with other (cold) water, and if none is available (either flowing or cold), warm water is acceptable. If warm water is not available, water should be poured onto the head three times in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Thus, we can picture the early Christians seeking out springs or rivers for baptisms, just as Christians have done for centuries. To baptize outdoors in running streams or lakes, as Dahill advocates, seems to return Christian practice to its origins. Such practices immerse Christians in the natural world, where sensing God’s gift of life and grace through the medium of water manifested tangibly God’s powers of life and also beauty. If the stream or lake is healthy, beauty and the complexity of ever-flowing life enfold the baptismal candidate and community. The wider natural experience may add depth and mystery to reflection on Jesus’ teaching about “living water,” with which he identifies his gift of eternal life (John 4:10).

Faithful practices that honor descending, flowing, living water can involve ritual, architecture, and watershed stewardship. Dahill urges us to follow her: “I want to move back out: to step away from chlorinated tap water in bowls or pools in climate-controlled

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<sup>47</sup> Benjamin M. Stewart, “The Stream, the Flood, the Spring: The Liturgical Role of Flowing Waters in Eco-Reformation,” in *Eco-Reformation*, 163.

<sup>48</sup> Aaron Milavec, *The Didache: Text, Translation, Analysis, and Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 19.

rooms, and to restore the practice of Christian baptism into the uncontrolled, dangerous, transforming waters of a community's watershed."<sup>49</sup> How each congregation would baptize in the colder climates seems a critical question. Perhaps architectural changes in churches could provide an actual and symbolic flowing water option. Whether indoors or outdoors, prayers that include the entire watershed in the baptismal ritual, as well as cosmic imagery, recapture some of the drama of early baptisms and of the significance of baptisteries, which, according to Santmire, were "free-standing structures...designed to image-forth the whole cosmos, with domed ceilings... representing the heavens."<sup>50</sup> Most churches could quite easily feature flowing water, perhaps with a small fountain or miniature, trickling waterfall. Further, as pastors pour the water into the baptismal bowl, they increase the sense of drama by allowing the water to flow abundantly, whether they pour from a lifted arm so that water splashes in the bowl, or whether they give boughs to children to dip in the bowl and sprinkle on the congregation. Wherever Christians baptize, we should creatively find liturgical ways to name, relish in, and celebrate water's joy and beauty.

But more must be said about outdoor baptism since questions arise from the possibility that water available for baptism is polluted. According to Dahill, "The safety and purity of local water for adequate symbolic use in Christian baptism is an urgent pastoral question in many places, regardless whether the rite takes place indoors or

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<sup>49</sup>Dahill, "Rewilding," 183.

<sup>50</sup> H. Paul Santmire, *Ritualizing Nature: Renewing Christian Liturgy in a Time of Crisis* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 133.

out.”<sup>51</sup> Eco-justice concerns pertain to availability of chlorinated tap water in wealthier communities versus polluted, even toxic water for less advantaged ones. And what does a blessing over the water during baptism mean for polluted waters? Is a deeper blessing offered by caring for the watershed enough to lighten water’s burden of pollution? Does baptism have more effectiveness in cleaner waters?

If we do the work of connecting our baptisms physically and emotionally to the local watershed, at the least, we will know the state of the water and can determine to join activists caring for it, all the while learning more about our local water bodies. If local waters are polluted and communities have access to cleaner water (either chlorinated or bottled), a baptism may be celebrated in that cleaner water for the health of the baptized, while including prayers over the bowl of polluted water as part of the baptism. Action steps toward advocacy could follow, if laid out concretely by the congregation’s leaders (e.g., a letter-writing table, a sign-up sheet for a visit to a legislator).

Re-immersion in our watersheds seems spiritually necessary, whether through watershed stewardship or outdoor baptism—or hopefully both. Rasmussen sums up this sentiment well: “Water is the object of awe and not *only* the object of engineering; it is the medium of the mystical and not *only* a resource for a world of our own making; water is a “Thou” and not *only* an ‘it.’ . . . It’s worthy of reverence.”<sup>52</sup> If all water is holy and worthy of reverence, as Luther claims it to be, do we receive the blessing inherent in it by

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<sup>51</sup> Dahill, “Rewilding,” 184.

<sup>52</sup> Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith*, 282.

reverencing it, or at the very least caring for it? And do we receive a blessing when we acknowledge water as a partner in the graces of God, so that all worship services (installations, baptisms, ordinations) include water references that honor its holiness? Such services place the worshipping congregation in the context of its home watershed, for which it is responsible and through which it hopes to experience God. Only then will we truly relate to water as “Thou.”

### **Congregational Efforts toward Watershed Discipleship**

Discussion of theological themes in caring for creation with a water focus comes alive when grounded in worship and other congregational practices that include or embody healing of creation and gratitude for flourishing natural life. We now turn to worship, including liturgy and preaching, with a focus on water. Concluding this section on liturgy is an investigation of several national efforts to foster congregational watershed stewardship. Healthy worship nourishes and inspires effective congregational stewardship practices.

### ***Liturgy and Preaching toward Creation Care***

Worship planners who intend to promote care for creation and watershed stewardship will embody ideas and visions that inspire such care as elements of worship services. Several theologians promote worship planning that helps worshipers envision the promises inherent in God’s flowing grace for a world of abundant life and for living, healthy water. Worship communities can learn to reflect awareness of their watersheds

and commitment to care for them in worship services. We will examine the writings of philosopher James K. A. Smith and educator Courtney Goto as they relate to worship and the importance of imagination in congregational worship. We then consider Lutheran liturgical theologians H. Paul Santmire and Leah D. Schade, drawing out themes for congregational worship with watershed awareness.

### *Worship and Imagination*

James K. A. Smith offers a broad and refreshing understanding of worship. He writes, “The Spirit marshals our embodiment to re-habituate us to the kingdom of God.”<sup>53</sup> The practices of Christian worship contribute to such embodiment because humans “fundamentally [are] formed by worship practice.”<sup>54</sup> What is worship? For Smith, “Worship is the space in which we learn to take the right things for granted precisely so we can bear witness to the world that is to come and, in the power of the Spirit’s transformation, labor to make and remake God’s world in accord with his desires for creation.”<sup>55</sup> Worship recruits our intellects, imaginations, and hearts toward “a *telos* that ‘pulls’ out of us action that is directed toward the kingdom of God.”<sup>56</sup>

Worship promotes loves, longings, and habits, the end of which is action. In turn, our action in the world creates who we are: “We are what we love precisely because we

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<sup>53</sup>James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 15.

<sup>54</sup> Smith, *Imagining*, 3.

<sup>55</sup> Smith, *Imagining*, 3.

<sup>56</sup> Smith, *Imagining*, 6.

do what we love.”<sup>57</sup> Smith asks Christians to deemphasize several traditional ways of defining human beings (as thinkers, as believers) to focus on the human person as lover. Such a movement shifts the focus away from the head toward the heart (referencing Martin Heidegger).<sup>58</sup> When we become aware of what we love, we become able to picture the good life. We “begin to live into this vision of the good life and start to look like citizens who inhabit the world that we picture as the good life.”<sup>59</sup> We develop dispositions and habits through “bodily practices and rituals that train the heart...to desire certain ends.”<sup>60</sup>

The practices and rituals Smith speaks of form us unconsciously as well as consciously into the people we want to be, living out our belief in the world we inhabit and hope to transform. Thus, we move from the head to the heart, then to a vision, then to practices that conform to the vision, and finally to sustained work that creates the world which our heart loves. Smith writes that “liturgies are compressed, performed narratives that recruit the imagination through the body.”<sup>61</sup> Thus, worship embodies our imagined visions about God’s dawning kingdom, narrated liturgically so that the worshiper participates in an anticipated, dawning new creation that we believe God desires.

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<sup>57</sup> Smith, *Imagining*, 12.

<sup>58</sup> James K. A. Smith, “Homo Liturgicus: The Human Person as Lover,” in *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 49–50.

<sup>59</sup> Smith, “Homo Liturgicus,” 54.

<sup>60</sup> Smith, “Homo Liturgicus,” 58.

<sup>61</sup> Smith, *Imagining*, 20.

The movement that Smith describes toward a Christianity “inscribed in our ‘habit-body’”<sup>62</sup> resonates in several ways with that of Goto’s discussion of playing as means of embodying the Kingdom of God. “To play,” she explains, “is to experience losing and finding oneself in engaging reality and one another ‘as if,’ exploring freely a world of possibilities bounded by structure that facilitates relationship.”<sup>63</sup> Goto delineates “habits and ‘dispositions’ that draw on sacred wisdom to liberate, heal, and bind together individuals and communities.”<sup>64</sup> She describes revelatory experience, which “*causes in learners a destabilizing and re-orienting shift in awareness or feeling that allows them to encounter divine mystery, themselves, and others in new life-giving ways.*”<sup>65</sup> Play, she argues, serves as entry into revelatory experience. She writes, “Churches have much to offer if they intentionally provide opportunities for playing, where the faithful might have creative encounters with mystery and one another.”<sup>66</sup>

Goto thus envisions play as engaging imaginatively with many possible ways of being that strengthen relationship. Goto describes the importance of play at/in God’s new creation, when “Christian communities attempt to create the world in which Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection point—a place where all of creation can live in justice, harmony,

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<sup>62</sup> Smith, *Imagining*, 45.

<sup>63</sup> Courtney T. Goto, *The Grace of Playing: Pedagogies for Leaning into God’s New Creation* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2016), 15.

<sup>64</sup> Goto, *Grace*, xvii.

<sup>65</sup> Goto, *Grace*, 3.

<sup>66</sup> Goto, *Grace*, 12.

and authenticity.... performed by body-mind.”<sup>67</sup> Pertinent to both worship planners and educators, and similar to Smith’s understanding, Goto proposes that “the faithful do not know the good news simply because they have read or been told about it. They experience it in relating to others, knowing it in their bodies, with the senses, in heartfelt imaginings, and authentic exchanges that hit home.”<sup>68</sup> Goto helps us to incarnate within our bodies and communities the meaning of Christ’s Kingdom, the good news of the all-encompassing love of God.

Goto describes several instructive examples of play toward God’s new creation. These examples include fourteenth-century nuns in Rhineland, Germany, who “played with dolls as a practice of venerating the infant Jesus”<sup>69</sup>; the lives and practices of holy fools in the Middle Ages; and the Sacramento Japanese United Methodist Church’s creation of a pretend garden, *The Garden Series*—an art installation reflective of the seasons. Thus, play during worship expresses one aspect of the pedagogy of play, which may extend also to other aspects of a congregation’s life (e.g., individual devotional practices, fellowship, advocacy).

To summarize, Smith and Goto promote worship experiences that (1) involve the body and the senses; (2) enable worshipers to enter an imaginary, creative space so that the worshipers (3) proleptically participate in the world envisioned by Jesus. Further, for both Smith and Goto, the Holy Spirit inspires such worship. Goto writes, “Playing creates

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<sup>67</sup> Goto, *Grace*, 33.

<sup>68</sup> Goto, *Grace*, 128.

<sup>69</sup> Goto, *Grace*, 61.

openings for Spirit so that God is tutoring us for more abundant living.”<sup>70</sup> Similarly, Smith writes, “While liturgical formation sanctifies our perception for Christian action, Christian worship is primarily a site of divine action.... Our incarnating God descends to inhabit these practices precisely in order to lift us up into union with Christ.”<sup>71</sup> When the worship planner opens to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he or she creates a worship service with integrity and purpose and yet remains flexible for unusual or unexpected experiences. These possible unexpected experiences may point the way toward deeper understanding or inspirited serendipity.

Following Smith and Goto’s suggestions, the worship planner attentive to watershed stewardship would do well to create a setting and liturgy in which worshipers bodily live into the kingdom and imaginatively anticipate God’s new creation by caring for water and celebrating water’s healing. Story and narrative hold an important place in such a worship setting since liturgies are “compressed, repeated, performed narratives that...conscript us into the story they ‘tell.’”<sup>72</sup> Stories may surface in sermons, liturgy, or prayer. Contemporary stories of water care and advocacy inspire commitment to water stewardship, as do time-honored stories retold with a new emphasis on local waters. For example, stories such as the Pharaoh’s daughter’s discovery of baby Moses in the Nile (Exod. 2:1–10), the Syrian Naaman’s healing in the Jordan (2 Kings 5:1–9), the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1–42), and John the Baptist and Jesus’ baptism all

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<sup>70</sup> Goto, *Grace*, 97.

<sup>71</sup> Smith, *Imagining*, 15.

<sup>72</sup> Smith, *Imagining*, 109.

infuse new meaning into stories of the local watershed.<sup>73</sup> Powerful or surprising narratives create and solidify values and desires responsive to the vision for God's abundant new creation.

The phrase "lift us up," employed in the quotation above by Smith to describe God's divine action, as already noted expresses a traditional theme of ascension in the spiritual life. Ascent toward God holds much meaning in Christianity. Yet, again, several theologians stress that, when it comes to care for creation, the image has been problematic when not balanced with imagery of God's "descent." Goto, Santmire, and Schade<sup>74</sup> thus emphasize the importance of the descending movement of the Spirit when it comes to helping people envision caring for Earth. Goto's discussion of local practical theological aesthetics (LPTA) strikes this note. Goto postulates that if a faith community knows itself, it will utilize LPTA, ensuring that liturgy appeals "to people's particular sensual preferences, their context, and their way of being in the world."<sup>75</sup> Thus, extending Goto's thought, worship that places the congregation in the context of its local watershed could potentially strengthen both liturgy and the community's identity through LPTA.

Also emphasizing the value of descent imagery, Santmire has argued that Gothic architecture, with its emphasis on vertical elements pointing the worshiper to God's

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<sup>73</sup> Ched Myers, "Toward Watershed Ecclesiology," in *Watershed Discipleship*, 206. For Myers, to retell biblical stories in a way that are indigenous to the church's bioregion is to help churches to reinhabit their watersheds and also to revivify the biblical stories.

<sup>74</sup> Leah D. Schade, *Creation-Crisis Preaching: Ecology, Theology, and the Pulpit* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2015).

<sup>75</sup> Schade, *Creation-Crisis Preaching*, 109.

presence in heavenly light soaring high above, expressed the medieval vision of the world as a great Chain of Being in which humans have higher value than Earth and all its creatures, and in which humans alone have spirit.<sup>76</sup> For Santmire, this hierarchical vision prepared the way for Christians to leave the material world behind in worship, resulting in many modern church structures that visually obscure the surrounding natural world.

Santmire argues that ascent imagery, when combined with a contemporary focus on radical individualism, centers worshipers' focus on forgiveness of individual sins leading to heavenly life after death and thus does not foster worship that widens out to include social justice and care for creation.<sup>77</sup> This problematic theological focus on human salvation as individual atonement has played a critical role in removing any impetus for concern among Christians when it comes to the state of Earth and their respective bioregions. Myers states the argument clearly: "We must wean ourselves, once and for all, off theologies of salvation that posit 'exit strategies' from the earth." The incarnation means that God "takes flesh....And because flesh requires geography, we must seek and encounter God *en-tented in* the watershed. Only *here* will 'we see God's glory' (John 1:14c)."<sup>78</sup>

Watershed stewardship can promote expressive and inspiring worship experiences that emphasize the all-encompassing sweep of God's grace into human history and creation's life. Additionally, worship that celebrates God's immanent and incarnational grace, can, when planned with water as an intentional focus, promote watershed care.

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<sup>76</sup> Santmire, *Ritualizing Nature*, 94.

<sup>77</sup> Santmire, *Ritualizing Nature*, 103–104.

<sup>78</sup> Myers, "Toward Watershed Ecclesiology," 204.

## *Preaching*

Schade builds on Santmire's embrace of descent imagery in care-for-creation liturgies. She argues that to preach effectively about the current ecological crisis requires an eco-feminist approach (reading Scripture "through a green lens to ascertain how texts may be oppressive or liberating to women and the Earth community") and "*creative actualization*, which seeks to retell biblical stories from Earth's and women's perspectives."<sup>79</sup> She asks what it would mean to include the voices of other creatures in worship. She also inquires: What is nature to us? Our mother? Our sister (as St. Francis of Assisi articulated)? Our co-worshiper (as envisioned by the psalmists and articulated in Psalm 148)? For Schade, nature should be a central participant in preaching. She makes mention of several sermons preached by nonhuman preachers (water, Earth). To read these sermons feels startling, thus emphasizing how far we Christians have distanced ourselves from nature's voice.

This brief discussion of Smith, Goto, Santmire, and Schade suggests four principles of watershed stewardship worship. First, such worship will embody care for the watershed either by taking worshipers outside or incorporating water in meaningful practices that keep water central to the liturgy. Second, the liturgy and sermon will engage worshipers bodily in activities that incarnate water care or reverence for water. Third, the liturgy and sermon will witness to God's presence among the people and in the watershed, thus focusing participants' attention on God's abiding presence in this world and on salvation as inherently related to care for creation. Finally, stories and narratives

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<sup>79</sup> Schade, *Creation-Crisis Preaching*, 110.

should give voice to water so that parishioners listen both to water's groaning under oppression of pollution and abuse as well as its praise of God.<sup>80</sup>

In the end, a guest worshiper should be able to discern from a congregation's worship or sanctuary decor that the congregation is well acquainted with their surrounding ecosystem. Further, a guest worshiper should be able to tell how this particular congregation perceives nature as a partner in worship, prayer, education, and/or advocacy through, for example, sanctuary architecture or aesthetics; through prayers, music, sermon, or liturgy; through advocacy efforts; or through the congregation's website. Drawing on contemporary theologians such as those discussed, congregations may challenge themselves to explore how their worship is attentive to and inclusive of the natural world and the local watersheds. Because watersheds have similar characteristics, and yet are unique, each congregation's worship will vary and can inform and inspire worship in other communities of faith.

### ***Water Care and Love of Watershed***

Caring for water ideally constitutes an important part of a Christian's life. After all, "Water is the *universal* wonder that, so far as we know to date, is the singular medium of life."<sup>81</sup> What is it to care for water? We may not be able to speak about all the qualities of water—for example, the hydrological, symbolic, chemical properties of water, and the role of water in photosynthesis—yet to pay attention is to grope toward a

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<sup>80</sup> See H. Paul Santmire, "The Two voices of Nature: Further Encounters with the Integrity of Nature," in *Eco-Reformation*, 71–93, in which Santmire draws out the implications of hearing Creation voice both the experience of bondage and praise.

<sup>81</sup> Rasmussen, *Earth Honoring Faith*, 275.

proper response to the life-sustaining, essential, properties of water. Poet Robert Cording notes that, “Attention necessarily involves an act of love—the infinite extension of imaginative understanding toward that which remains irreducible in its otherness and yet opens to our understanding and recognition.”<sup>82</sup> Water care derives from such love.

According to Cording, sacraments reveal essential truths: “right worship is right perception.”<sup>83</sup> It is no accident that living water symbolizes eternal life (John 4:10) and that Christian life begins in a water sacrament. Nevertheless, as stated above, the meaning of baptism needs to be relearned by Christians; baptizing outdoors “dramatically broadens the meaning of being Christian”<sup>84</sup> by binding us to literal waters. Love of watershed means hearing the Word in living nature, and a posture of commitment, even sacrifice, for nature’s good. Love opens the heart to experience Christ’s beauty and suffering writ large in the Book of Nature, where life began in water.

### ***Watershed Discipleship***

Congregational watershed stewardship has already begun. Among Christian calls for action is the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCA) Resolution Urging Stewardship of the Gift of Water, passed at the 2016 Churchwide Assembly. Urging Christians to engage in “watershed discipleship,” the resolution offers an exciting and potentially transformative opportunity to strengthen engagement in caring for the watershed, indeed,

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<sup>82</sup> Robert Cording, “The Art of Devotion: Some Thoughts on Poetry and Prayer,” *Image* 49 (2006): 88.

<sup>83</sup> Cording, “The Art of Devotion,” 84. The quote is from Marilynne Robinson’s novel, *Gilead*.

<sup>84</sup> Dahill, “Rewilding,” 185.

to practice “watershed discipleship.”<sup>85</sup> According to the resolution, “Christians acknowledge that water lies both at the center of our Christian rite of baptism and our current ecological and climate crisis, thus deserving deep theological treatment.” Further, the resolution urges that waters be named and known in worship and prayers and that Christians attend to social problems related to water contamination and floods. By grounding such work within the official concerns of the national church, this resolution gives inspiration and acceptability, even a mandate, to a congregation’s effort to steward a watershed, and it supplies impetus to our project, “A Watershed Moment.”

Several Lutheran organizations have developed valuable resources for congregations who wish to grow in water care. Lutherans Restoring Creation promotes many care-for-creation actions and resources on its website. One such resource is “Toolkit: Our Watershed Moment,”<sup>86</sup> produced by the EcoFaith Network, an official program committee of the Minneapolis Area synod. The toolkit opens with a letter from the bishop, commending resources focused on worship, buildings and grounds, and actions, which individuals and congregations can take to care for their local watershed. It also references the important work of Ched Myers in watershed discipleship.

Ched Myers, the prominent theologian who has focused in recent years on building a Christian movement toward watershed discipleship (not only through his book,

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<sup>85</sup> The resolution defines a watershed as “the ground that water flows within as it moves toward a stream, river, or lake, and is a natural boundary within God’s creation, unlike arbitrary and haphazard geopolitical boundaries, and all of God’s creatures live in a watershed.” See “Motion C: Resolution Urging Stewardship of the Gift of Water,” accessed February 14, 2018, <http://www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org/events/synod-and-church-wide-resolutions/water-stewardship-resolution---2016-churchwide-assembly>.

<sup>86</sup> “Toolkit: Our Watershed Moment,” EcoFaith Network, Minneapolis Synod, ELCA, accessed February 12, 2018, [http://mpls-synod.org/files/EcoFaithToolkit\\_-Our-Watershed-Moment.pdf](http://mpls-synod.org/files/EcoFaithToolkit_-Our-Watershed-Moment.pdf).

but his dedicated website), passionately argues that to engage in true discipleship today is necessarily to be watershed stewards.

It is both theologically sound and politically radical to propose...that we Christians ought to recenter our citizen-identity in the *topography of creation* rather than in the *political geography of dominant cultural ideation*, in order to ground our discipleship practices in the watershed where we embody our faith.<sup>87</sup>

Essays in Myers' book by young environmental and watershed activists in both urban and rural settings treat eco-justice in relation to water and watersheds, as well as the domination paradigm that leads to degradation of God's creation, including water. Several authors poignantly state that Christians are more apt to know the geography of the Holy Land (that they may never see) than of the holy land in which they live. Writer and activist Lydia Wylie-Kellermann notes, "Ironically, it is likely that we know the names of Jesus' waters better than we know our own. We know our water as it comes from a tap or bottle, but are ignorant about from which stream, lake or aquifer it comes."<sup>88</sup> Summing up an idea of farmer and author Wendell Berry, activist and permaculturist Jonathan McRay notes that "most American Christians have no place to lay their heads; they are eternal strangers to their landscapes because their only Holy Land is one they may never see."<sup>89</sup> Watershed discipleship means discovering the holy land—at home.

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<sup>87</sup> Myers, "A Critical, Contextual, and Constructive Approach," 15.

<sup>88</sup> Lydia Wylie-Kellermann, "God's Gonna Trouble the Water," in *Watershed Discipleship*, 78.

<sup>89</sup> Jonathan McRay, "The Transfigured Earth," in *Watershed Discipleship*, 64.

The authors in Myers' book insist that because we are imbedded in landscapes and because God is present with us in landscape, loyalty to God requires us to serve and preserve these landscapes. The authors further challenge Christians to renew our awareness of baptism by integrating worship into the outdoors, becoming ecologically literate, and "reinhabit[ing] our watersheds *as church*, allowing the natural and social landscapes to shape our symbolic life, mission engagements, and material habits."<sup>90</sup>

Myers offers numerous ways to care for watersheds, including watershed mapping, installation of road signs with names of local water sources, applying economic metrics, and learning from traditional people of the land. Ideally, care for a watershed would not only serve the purposes of watershed health but also community justice by mapping marginalized people and engaging in restorative justice through a process of truth and reconciliation. Myers advocates that the watershed inform all aspects of the church's life; only in doing so can we forego anthropocentric superiority.

Myers' work advances the ELCA resolution by offering evidence of Christians from varied denominations and in varied settings who have written about and lived watershed discipleship in ministry prior to the resolution. Their courage, tenacity, and love of creation will inspire Lutherans to continue developing work based on the Resolution. They show that watershed discipleship reinvigorates life and ministry and insist that the time is now to engage in such work, ecumenically and denominationally.

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<sup>90</sup> Myers, "Toward Watershed Ecclesiology," 210.

## **Conclusion**

Now is the time to engage in watershed discipleship, and work has already begun. Such work involves a worldview shift. Industrialized capitalism promotes a worldview that sees nature as a commodity. Alternately, congregational watershed stewardship and other care for creation efforts and insights (including Lutheran theology) see nature as sacramental. When we experience and promote a vision of nature as sacramental, we illuminate the reality and the life of God embodied in creation.

Worship should and can help us to envision a sacramental world in which people care for water as divine gift, and all people have access to fresh water. In worship, we longingly explore and celebrate the world as if it were already full of abundant and flourishing life. Thus, we address creation as in need of care, and feel inspired to work to redress harm. Worship that cares for water will foster the possibility of I/Thou relations with creatures beyond the human. A nuanced theology that sees the presence of Christ in nature enhances such a sacramental view. Such ecological incarnation theology and experience may be explored and embodied by locating Christian baptism outdoors as well as by providing flowing water for indoor baptisms. Use of inspiring metaphors such as living water and flowing water to image downward-flowing grace helps renew a commitment to the well-being of creation and water. In this ecological incarnational theology, consideration of sin widens to four levels: a species level, structural level, Earth-level, and age-of-the-universe level. Finally, recognition of water for what it is, a universal wonder, can be encouraged (within each church's bioregion) through practices

of water stewardship, which in turn help us to grow in awareness of water-related eco-justice issues around the world.

In the next chapter, I consider water for the sheer wonder of its properties. Any consideration of water worldwide leads also to consideration of environmental justice issues and ethical principles, reflected in water access and use.

## Chapter 2: Water Facts and Environmental Justice

Each church resides in a local bioregion with its own history, both cultural and ecological. Ascension Lutheran Church makes its home in the Lake Champlain watershed, and this chapter will give consideration to the Lake Champlain watershed, but first, we will touch on the history and science of water itself. I will outline factors of injustice when it comes to water's availability by discussing climate change and women's roles in providing water for their families. I will also explore routes toward ethical water use and discuss how watershed discipleship contributes to "coming home" to local waters. Finally, this chapter celebrates water's beauty and the creative responses water elicits, including a spiritual response, which can inspire resolve toward water stewardship.

### Water Facts

Water is foundational for life; no living organism exists without it. Professor of theology, science, and ethics Christiana Z. Peppard writes, "Fresh water's status as *sui generis* and *sine qua non* for life must be recognized and considered as a first principle of ethical reasoning."<sup>91</sup> Without access to enough water, illness and disruption ensue. Science writer Philip Ball states that "for humankind, water is a force of social change—

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<sup>91</sup> Christiana Z. Peppard, *Just Water: Theology, Ethics, and the Global Water Crisis* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), 186.

a precious resource to be treasured, nurtured, and used wisely, for the alternative is deprivation, disease, environmental degradation, conflict, and death.”<sup>92</sup>

It is not hard to be stunned when you begin to study water’s dynamic properties.. Although essential to all life, water is unique and “thoroughly...disrupts the theoretical landscape.”<sup>93</sup> For example, the molecular structure of water, related to the unusual attractive force of the hydrogen bonds, results in water as “more highly structured, than most liquids. It is more akin to a crystal than to a gas.”<sup>94</sup> Water is so elusive to full understanding that scientist and water expert Felix Frank claims, “Of all the known liquids, water is probably the most studied and least understood.”<sup>95</sup> In sum, Ball writes, “Water still offers up profound challenges to science.”<sup>96</sup> The complexity and unique qualities of water may easily lead to excitement, curiosity, and wonder.

Scientists believe that the possibilities for water began, essentially, with the Big Bang 13.8 billion years ago. Hydrogen formed, and stellar evolution created oxygen, along with all the other elements. Hydrogen and oxygen reformulated into the H<sub>2</sub>O molecule. Over eons, water and other substances froze and condensed. Planetesimals formed, coated with ice, some colliding with a planet in the Milky Way solar system, Earth, as did similarly ice-coated comets and meteorites, all bringing water to Earth. As Earth cooled enough for water to condense, water vapor rose and rain fell, creating

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<sup>92</sup> Philip Ball, *Life’s Matrix: A Biography of Water* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), x.

<sup>93</sup> Ball, *Life’s Matrix*, xi.

<sup>94</sup> Ball, *Life’s Matrix*, 172.

<sup>95</sup> Ball, *Life’s Matrix*, 153.

<sup>96</sup> Ball, *Life’s Matrix*, x.

oceans, an atmosphere, and deep vents in the ocean floor where multicellular life probably began. Ball describes the result: “Over two-thirds of the planet’s surface is covered by liquid water, and over one-twentieth by ice. We call our home Earth—but Water would be more apt.”<sup>97</sup> The essential role of water in creating and making life possible indicates that water rightly should be central to Christian worship, which normally celebrates life as the Creator’s gift.

Though life depends on water, fresh water, depended on by human societies through the centuries, does not flow in great abundance. This is because, as author and economic journalist Steve Solomon puts it, “Only 2.5 percent of Earth’s water is fresh. But two-thirds of that is locked away...in ice caps and glaciers....In all, less than three-tenths of 1 percent of total freshwater is in liquid form on the surface.”<sup>98</sup> The non-liquid form of fresh water exists in permafrost, soil moisture, vapor, and the bodies of plants and animals. Thus, the relative rarity of flowing surface water conveys water’s preciousness.

But water quality has deteriorated, creating stress for living creatures. Celebrated Harvard scientist Edward O. Wilson writes, “The world as a whole is already well into a water crisis.”<sup>99</sup> Water around the world is depleted and polluted, and yet increasingly in demand due to an exponential rise in human population as well as the heightened materialism and consumerism that has accompanied higher living standards in many

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<sup>97</sup> Ball, *Life’s Matrix*, 22.

<sup>98</sup> Steven Solomon, *Water: The Epic Struggle for Wealth, Power, and Civilization* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010), 12.

<sup>99</sup> Edward O. Wilson, *Half-Earth: Our Planet’s Fight for Life* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2016), 171.

countries. The abundance of populations of other-than-human species living in fresh water habitats declined by an alarming 81 percent between 1970 and 2012; 31 percent of fish stocks declined due to overfishing; and three-quarters of the world's coral reefs bleached or degraded due to overfishing and pollution.<sup>100</sup> Further, the World Wildlife Foundation reports that “nearly 50 countries experienced water stress or water scarcity in 2014, up from just over 30 in 1992.”<sup>101</sup>

The World Wildlife Foundation's *Living Planet Report 2016* has made an important recommendation for addressing issues of water and rivers, recognizing that the realities and projections of current human demand surpasses Earth's regenerative capacity: “A strategic, [river] basin-level approach to management by governments, communities and businesses can optimize the balance between water resources development and maintenance of critical ecosystem functions. It can also help to minimize costly restoration activities in the future.”<sup>102</sup> This suggestion highlights the importance of watershed care by congregations and others as part of overall needed care for Earth.

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<sup>100</sup> Natasja Oerlemans, ed., “WWF Living Planet Report 2016: Risk and Resilience in a New Era,” accessed January 12, 2018, <https://www.worldwildlife.org/publications/living-planet-report-2016>, pdf. See “Freshwater living planet index” and “A closer look at coral reefs,” 30, 31, 42.

<sup>101</sup> *Living Planet Report*, 54.

<sup>102</sup> *Living Planet Report*, 111. The report notes that “under a business-as-usual path human demand on the Earth's regenerative capacity is projected to continue growing steadily and to exceed such capacity by about 75 per cent by 2020.” (83)

## **Environmental Ethics and Eco-justice**

Water scarcity and pollution often affect the well-being of economically underprivileged people the most. Thus, the Resolution Urging Stewardship of the Gift of Water states: “Many of the watersheds in this country are degraded, and this environmental damage leads to water shortages and a crisis that disproportionately affects people of color and people with lower incomes.”<sup>103</sup> This sentence summarizes the concerns behind the phrase “environmental justice.” Environmental justice notes that environmental problems, such as climate change and pollution of water, soil, and air often have a deeper impact on economically poor communities, who are often people of color. The history of energy production from hydroelectric dams on the Columbia River and those built by Hydro-Quebec, among other sites, reveals environmental racism. Thus, according to ecofeminist writer Greta Gaard, “There is a pattern of power companies locating their plants in rural communities, using up the water, polluting the land and the health of the people, and transferring the energy to the wealthier urban residents.”<sup>104</sup> Looking at the other side of the equation, environmental justice calls attention to the fact that ecological degradation often creates conditions for poverty. For example, climate change creates more drought periods, making farming difficult, especially for poorer

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<sup>103</sup> “Motion C: Resolution Urging Stewardship of the Gift of Water,” accessed February 14, 2018, <http://www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org/events/synod-and-church-wide-resolutions/water-stewardship-resolution---2016-churchwide-assembly>.

<sup>104</sup> Greta Gaard, “Women, Water, Energy: An Ecofeminist Approach,” in *Water Ethics: Foundational Readings for Students and Professionals*, ed. Peter G. Brown and Jeremy J. Schmidt (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2010), 69.

communities in which a family may live simply on a small plot of land. Lack of water during the planting season may cause famine conditions for such families.

Throughout history, societies have successfully built their economies on local ecosystems, whether in terms of sustained fisheries, rice farming, rubber tapping, forestry, or other small-scale activities. The rise and fall of these subsistence societies depended on environmental stability. But pressures noted above combined with climate change increasingly undermine environmental stability.

Viewing the interaction between culture and environment on the worldwide stage offers helpful perspective. Proponents for environmental justice consider how changes emerge around the world due to at least three factors: exponentially increasing human population; the partly unforeseeable consequences of interacting global ecological and economic changes, augmented by climate warming; and the effect on species other than human beings of these interrelated pressures.<sup>105</sup> But consequences are unevenly felt. For example, developed countries—especially the United States—and some developing countries such as India and China are the major contributors to climate change, yet people who suffer from the immediate effects of climate change (drought, sea level rise, disease, lower water levels for irrigation) often live in less developed countries or in low

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<sup>105</sup> Lutheran theologians who have written extensively on environmental justice include Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2013); and Larry Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), and *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996). A summary of ecojustice considerations may be found in Nancy G. Wright, “Christianity and Environmental Justice,” *Crosscurrents* 61, no. 2 (2011). Nearly all writing on environmental justice refers to the term “environmental racism” used in the groundbreaking study of 1987: *Toxic Wastes and Race*, (Commission for Racial Justice, United Church of Christ), accessed February 12, 2018, <https://csu.edu/cerc/researchreports/documents/ToxicWasteandRace-TOXICWASTESANDRACE.pdf>.

income, minority communities in developed countries. With almost any environmental issue, one recognizes, in the words of Moe-Lobeda, a point of

soul-searing moral import...The horrific consequences of climate change, toxic waste, and other forms of ecological degradation are not suffered equally by Earth's people. Nor are the world's people equally responsible. Those least responsible for Earth's crisis are suffering and dying first and foremost from it.<sup>106</sup>

Environmental issues expose class disparities. For example, although catastrophic environmental disasters such as nuclear meltdowns or tsunamis affect both rich and poor, poorer people have fewer resources and options for rebuilding their lives. Water specifically mirrors these environmental justice issues. Moe-Lobeda writes, "Rise in sea levels will not force economically privileged people like me from our homes and livelihoods. Not true for many of the world's more impoverished people in low-lying areas."<sup>107</sup> Like many environmental issues, water, when viewed from an environmental justice standpoint, illuminates layers of economic and political power and privilege, including the right to farm or own land that remains healthy and productive. As populations grow and development expands, suburbanization encroaches on sensitive wetland and coastal areas, leading to increased runoff and flooding. In wealthier communities, recovery from ever more frequent coastal disasters will be possible, while the poor may entirely lose their homes and productive land, and, with little no savings, be forced to try to start over to rebuild their lives.

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<sup>106</sup> Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, "A Haunting Contradiction," in *Eco-Reformation: Grace and Hope for a Planet in Peril*, ed. Lisa E. Dahill and James B. Martin-Schramm (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016), 40.

<sup>107</sup> Moe-Lobeda, "A Haunting Contradiction," 41.

Humanity as a whole negatively impacts Earth through our water use. As Solomon puts it, “Almost everywhere civilization has taken root, man-made deforestation, water diversion, and irrigation schemes have produced greater desiccation, soil erosion, and the ruination of Earth’s natural fertility to sustain plant life.”<sup>108</sup> Yet, richer communities bear the greatest responsibility for unjust water use. A recent controversy about water and just access to it illuminates fundamental issues of water accessibility. Around the world, international corporations seek to purchase the rights to water for bottling and sale.<sup>109</sup> Commodification of water conflicts with just access to water. While proper pricing of water for agriculture and household use may foster justice and wise use of water, ensuring stable ecosystems, corporate profiting from water bottling and distribution often meets with local resistance. When treated simply as a commodity, “water flows upwards towards wealth,” as Mark Twain purportedly said,<sup>110</sup> and “*clean water flows toward power.*”<sup>111</sup> Because water has value far beyond its economic worth, “The many types of rights, laws, and values that shape human behavior must receive attention” in water care and equitable use, according to policy experts Rajendra Pradhan and Ruth Meinzen-Dicknote. Additionally, “Religions and community norms” may helpfully contribute both to water conservation and equitable sharing.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Solomon, *Water*, 14.

<sup>109</sup> For more information on the industry of bottled water, see Elizabeth Royte, *Bottlemania: How Water Went on Sale and Why We Bought It* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2008).

<sup>110</sup> This apocryphal phrase is attributed to Mark Twain and quoted in Peppard, *Just Water*, 44.

<sup>111</sup> Peppard, *Just Water*, 184.

<sup>112</sup> Rajendra Pradhan and Ruth Meinzen-Dick, “Which Rights Are Right? Water Rights, Culture, and Underlying Values,” in *Water Ethics*, 54, 55.

Let us briefly consider two critical aspects of environmental injustice related to water: climate change and the role of women and girls in water procurement. First, the National Academy of Sciences reported to the Pentagon on the nexus between climate change and water in 2012: “The security establishment is going to have to start planning for natural disasters, sea-level rise, drought, epidemics, and other consequences of climate change.”<sup>113</sup> Climate change makes wet places wetter and dry places drier. When rainfalls become heavier, runoff quickly carries away topsoil while decreasing available water for sustainable agricultural and household use. Higher storm surges affect people in low-lying coastal areas. Drought increases the possibility of famine, disease, conflict, and environmental refugees. This international injustice is evident in the fact that, according to the World Resources Institute, the “top three greenhouse gas emitters—China, the European Union and the United States—contribute more than half of total global emissions, while the bottom 100 countries only account for 3.5 percent.”<sup>114</sup> Thus, to foster eco-justice, U.S. Christians should curb energy use and address other practices that negatively contribute to global climate change. This would do much to stabilize water-related conditions worldwide. Second, around the world, especially in Africa and other developing countries, women and girls collect and carry water for their families, and they bear the burden of gendered injustice. This physically demanding task (which may deform skeletal structure due to the weight), exposes them to further hardships:

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<sup>113</sup> Quoted in Peppard, *Just Water*, 129.

<sup>114</sup> Johannes Friedrich, Mengpin Ge, and Andrew Pickens, “This Interactive Chart Explains World’s Top 10 Emitters and How They’ve Changed,” World Resources Institute blog, April 4, 2017, accessed January 12, 2018, <http://www.wri.org/blog/2017/04/interactive-chart-explains-worlds-top-10-emitters-and-how-theyve-changed>.

involuntary absences from school and the possibility of rape and other violence as they walk farther to water sources in rural areas. As Peppard notes, “Exile, thirst, and vulnerability are more than historical memories: they are constant realities for many women worldwide. The burden of water is gendered.”<sup>115</sup> Since women and girls around the world often face injustices due to fewer economic and educational opportunities than those available to men, burdens associated with procurement of diminished water resources manifests gendered injustice.

The gendered injustice surrounding water in many countries is exacerbated by the fact that the international market economy attributes no cash valuation for women’s water procurement or for clean water. When pollution of water necessitates clean up, “the clean-up activity itself is performed by men and recorded as generating income.” Similarly, an electrical grid created by dammed water for distribution to cities may cause water to “enter the accounting,” as Gaard points out. “In these ways, both water and women do not count in the international market economy....”<sup>116</sup> Water injustice is gendered injustice, diminishing quality of life for women and girls, and often written, if invisibly, not only in their bodies but also in economic accounting.

We need to adapt policy and ethical values that promote the health of watersheds and environmental justice. Lutheran ethicist Larry Rasmussen articulates ethical issues surrounding water in this way: “Planetary *water* health is primary, human health is

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<sup>115</sup> Peppard, *Just Water*, 183.

<sup>116</sup> Gaard, “Women,” 64.

derivative. To repeat: no blue, no green; no green, no us.”<sup>117</sup> What ethical values and policies does he offer to guide responses to environmental injustice related to water? First, make clean, accessible water available to everyone. Second, keep nature’s integrity uppermost in mind while making choices between conflicting demands and needs. Such conflicting demands and needs include potential conflicts between human needs and the rest of creation’s needs; between urban and rural uses; between varied agricultural practices (e.g., intensive agriculture, industrialized agriculture, organic farming, vegetarianism, and meat-based diets). Conflicts arise, too, about industrial products and toxins often produced with waste generated and dumped into local water sources. Pros and cons about dams, desalination, and public versus private land or water receive heated debate and sometimes generate corruption, injustice, and violence. Third, we need an understanding that water is a “Thou” not simply an “it,” and that, therefore, humans should reverence water with a sacramental sense and care for the web of life it makes possible. As Peppard similarly notes, “water is never ‘just’ any one thing.”<sup>118</sup> Therefore, humans who regard water with respect and reverence rightly respond to its unique value and properties, hopefully taking responsibility for fostering policies around conflictual demands and needs that foster ecological watershed care creatively, mindful of the precious gift of water for all the lifeforms that depend on it.

Water as a nexus for environmental justice concerns illuminates aspects of social sin for which individual contrition and confession do not suffice. As discussed in Chapter

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<sup>117</sup> Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith*, 280.

<sup>118</sup> Peppard, *Just Water*, 187.

1, environmental injustice is an example of structural sin, a kind of sin that festers in political, economic, and cultural structures that harbor and foster discrimination, racism, or environmental abuse and which decrease the possibility of abundant life for many. Response to structural sin meets formidable obstacles; individual actions toward reparation or repair seem not to matter. But because structural sin may pertain to any or all areas of social life, so may redemption.

Structural sin must be confronted with Christ's love. Moe-Lobeda argues, "If sin is structural as well as individual, then love, the force that redeems from sin, must also have both social structural and individual relevance."<sup>119</sup> With Christ's presence, one may have courage and strength to work for justice to confront structural problems that don't seem moveable, and against which one will not necessarily see a positive result. Specifically, courage may come. Moe-Lobeda suggests courage may be derived through an understanding of the cross. Jesus' suffering on the cross demonstrates that "even in the furthest reaches of human brokenness and in bondage to structural sin, the saving Christ is present, is healing, and is liberating."<sup>120</sup> Thus, a relationship with Christ emboldens a Christian to work for environmental justice.

A further support to the Christian acting for justice, in Moe-Lobeda's view, is Luther's conviction that when God seems absent, God is surprisingly and savingly present. This conviction, when embraced, offers Christians the courage to face squarely "reality, rather than pretending that the economic systems that create our wealth are

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<sup>119</sup> Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, 15.

<sup>120</sup> Moe-Lobeda, "A Haunting Contradiction," 47.

beneficial to all.”<sup>121</sup> One may affirm that “The purpose of economic life is not only production and distribution, but also the well-being of Earth’s ecosystems”<sup>122</sup> and act accordingly.

Lest activist Christians be overwhelmed, citizens can be encouraged to learn—beginning in the local ecosystem and community—and then act, as Peppard, Rasmussen, and Moe-Lobeda have asserted. Churches are well positioned to increase awareness and engage activism at all levels, from local to international, individual to national. Churches have the power to address environmental injustice by supporting policies and practices that promote and embody, in Peppard’s words, “justice, sustainability, and equity” when it comes to “the management and provision of fresh water.”<sup>123</sup> Through worship, example, and practice, churches communicate such a vision. Striking a similar note to Smith and Goto, Moe-Lobeda asks, “What if the alternative vision of the world embodied in worship portrayed water, trees, and bodies—rather than buildings—as sacred abodes of God?” Further, through church leaders’ examples and the stories they tell, congregations may be “morally formed to see themselves as walking in the footsteps of fiercely loving resisters.” Such practices have the power to help Christians understand and renounce structural sin and to care for a “planet in peril.”<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Moe-Lobeda, “A Haunting Contradiction,” 46.

<sup>122</sup> Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, 121.

<sup>123</sup> Peppard, *Just Water*, 186. Peppard provides nine principles to guide ethical discernment about water (186–187).

<sup>124</sup> Moe-Lobeda, “A Haunting Contradiction,” 52.

A final important motivating factor for watershed activism is the inspiration that comes from seeing, acknowledging, and celebrating the beauty, power, and mystery of water. Over millennia, people have attempted to express their perception of water's beauty in art and literature. The seascapes of English Romantic painter J. M. W. Turner as well as many traditional Chinese paintings offer a visceral appreciation for water's force, beauty, and power. We recall the mystery of the sea in the timeless resonance of Homer's image of the "wine dark sea."<sup>125</sup> We sense the danger and dignity of sea voyagers and fishing fleets in the Psalms: "Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the mighty waters; they saw the deeds of the Lord, his wondrous works in the deep" (Psalm 107:23). We remember the classic image of the church's sanctuary as an ark.

Anyone may spend time looking into a raindrop, or a snow crystal, or a river, or a pond and feel, with Irish writer and philosopher John O'Donohue, an upsurge of joy in witnessing beauty. O'Donohue remarks that St. Thomas Aquinas understood each thing as having integrity, order, and beauty. "He speaks of *delectation*, the surge of delight and joy we feel when we experience beauty."<sup>126</sup> Could Christians more often experience delight and joy, even *delectation*, around or in water? Further, as O'Donohue asks, "If religion could put the beauty of God at its heart, what refreshment and encouragement it

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<sup>125</sup> Homer uses this epithet dozens of time in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. See Homer, *The Odyssey* (New York: Penguin Books, 1946), 30; Athene says, "As for my arrival in Ithaca, I came with my own ship and crew across the wine dark sea."

<sup>126</sup> John O'Donohue, *Beauty: Rediscovering the True Sources of Compassion, Serenity, and Hope* (New York: Harper, 2004), 48.

would give and what creativity it would awaken.”<sup>127</sup> Well-spoken words that may free up and entice worship planners and many other Christians to think and feel more broadly when it comes to joyfully engaging worship and other expressions of faith in relation to water.

Perhaps more is at stake in the water crisis than human and environmental health, but creativity itself! Seeing through or with water alters our vision. Marjorie Ryerson asked sixty-six musicians from around the world to write about or create music in celebration of water. The result was a coffee table book featuring Ryerson’s photographs—a volume that well sustains many hours of meditation.<sup>128</sup> Fourth-century Christian Cyril of Jerusalem expressed the marvels and ministry of water with reference to Jesus’ invitation in John 7:37, “Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water”:

And why has He [Christ] called the grace of the spirit by the name of water? Because by water all things subsist....For one fountain watered the whole of the Garden, and one and the same rain comes down upon all the world, yet it becomes white in the lily, and red in the rose, and purple in the violets and pansies, and different and varied in each several kind; so it is one in the palm tree, and another in the vine, and all in all things...adapting itself to the nature of each thing which receives it, it becomes to each what is suitable.<sup>129</sup>

Water engenders wonder and creativity, as these examples reveal.

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<sup>127</sup> O’Donohue, *Beauty*, 48.

<sup>128</sup> Marjorie Ryerson, *Water Music*, intr. Paul Winter (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

<sup>129</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, quoted in Rebecca Ann Parker and Rita Nakashima Brock, *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire* (Boston: Beacon, 2008), 138.

Further, I would add that the phrases “living water” used by Jesus (John 4:10) and “river of the water of life” in the final chapter of Revelation (Rev. 22:1) conjure up the physical and mystical beauty of water.<sup>130</sup> These symbolic expressions, worthy of prayer, meditation, and creative response have the capacity to nurture the watershed activist.

### **Lake Champlain**

“A Watershed Moment,” a multifaceted action project designed by Ascension Lutheran Church (ALC) in South Burlington, Vermont, focuses on the Lake Champlain bioregion. Though much smaller than the five Great Lakes, Lake Champlain is the sixth largest U.S. freshwater lake. It crosses three political boundaries (Vermont, New York, and Canada) and is deeper than Lake Erie. Nestled between the Adirondacks and Green Mountains, the lake is home to eighty species of fish, and its 435-square-mile surface area draws the viewer’s eye.

Lake Champlain provides safe drinking water for 145,000 people, with the water treated and monitored for eighty-four potential contaminants.<sup>131</sup> Every acre of the lake drains eighteen acres of land around it, far exceeding the drainage basin statistics for the Great Lakes (which have a two-to-one ratio) and making Lake Champlain much more sensitive than other water bodies to practices on the surrounding land.

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<sup>130</sup> For a reflection on living water, see Nancy G. Wright, “Living Water,” in *Living Cosmology: Christian Responses to Journey of the Universe*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016), 212–219.

<sup>131</sup> Lake Champlain Basin Program, *2015 State of the Lake and Ecosystems Indicators Report* (Grande Isle, VT: Lake Champlain Basin Program), 17.

Regarding its health, Lake Champlain shares many characteristics with other major lakes, estuaries, and watersheds in the United States, such as Puget Sound, Long Island Sound, and the Chesapeake Bay. Agriculture and development degrade the water. Restored wetlands, enhanced storm drainage, upgraded sewage treatment, and lessened farm runoff create momentum toward healthy water bodies.

As is true for other water bodies, many groups are working to help improve Lake Champlain, with the goal of making it fishable, swimmable, and drinkable (the U.S. Clean Water Act goals). Challenges can seem insurmountable. According to the Lake Champlain Basin Program, “Lake Champlain is experiencing environmental, biological, and chemical stresses that influence the ecosystem and are causing the character of the Lake to change.”<sup>132</sup> The warmer and wetter conditions created by climate change negatively affect the lake. The lake freezes less often, phosphorus runoff has spawned algae blooms during summer months, and some species of fish carry consumption advisories due to mercury content. Beaches may close due to sewage runoff or other sanitation issues, resulting in unhealthy levels of coliform bacteria, especially after heavy rainstorms. Other pollutants in the lake include pharmaceuticals, microplastics, and household trash.

The fact that Lake Champlain drains such a large part of Vermont means that ALC parishioners encounter and appreciate rivers and streams that drain into the lake; several parishioners have served as river or lake monitors. Parishioners come to the church from within a fifty-mile radius that includes mountains and valleys, streams,

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<sup>132</sup> Lake Champlain Basin Program, *State of the Lake*, 20.

rivers, and lakes. The proximity of parishioners to fishable, swimmable, and visible water creates a fertile possibility for enjoyment and deepened leadership at ALC when it comes to caring for the watershed.

When citizens identify themselves with their local watersheds, they experience a deepened sense of being at home. To widen the perspective to shared watershed facts, Lake Champlain numbers among 2,110 watersheds in the United States. Ched Myers explains the vital importance of watershed care: “Watershed Discipleship [is] a new (and ancient) paradigm for ecological theology and practice that I and my fellow contributors believe is key to addressing the new (and ancient) crisis confronting human civilization.”<sup>133</sup> Myers describes a watershed as both a cradle and an ark. Watersheds sustain virtually every living creature. Reengaging with a watershed reorients a people to home and roots. Displacements from roots through migratory patterns, extractive development, and modern economies can create rootlessness. Such rootlessness activates alienation, even despair, and may promote violence against others as well as against the surrounding ecosystem.<sup>134</sup>

Roads and towns usually do not follow water courses, as evidenced when laying a topographic map over a map of the built environment. Thus, the life-giving role of water is hidden, unjustly and unhelpfully. Watershed stewardship actions that uncover the truth

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<sup>133</sup> Myers, “A Critical, Contextual, and Constructive Approach,” 1.

<sup>134</sup> Myers quotes Simone Weil’s statement from her 1947 *The Need for Roots*: “Uprootedness is by far the most dangerous malady to which human societies are exposed, for it is a self-propagating one. For people who are really uprooted there remain only two possible sorts of behavior: either to fall into a spiritual lethargy resembling death, like the majority of the slaves in the days of the Roman Empire, or to hurl themselves into some form of activity necessarily designed to uproot, often by the most violent methods, those who are not yet uprooted, or only partly so...Whoever is uprooted himself uproots others. Whoever is rooted himself doesn’t uproot others.” In Myers, “A Critical, Contextual, and Constructive Approach,” 9.

about water helpfully destabilize anthropocentrism in the process. Christian watershed awareness can start with church judicatories overlaying their faith bodies onto a watershed map, available on the judicatory websites.<sup>135</sup>

## **Conclusion**

When Christians steward creation, caring for water in their region and beyond, they grow in awareness of their identity as stewards of creation and may become involved in multifaceted areas of concern and sources of inspiration. Water quality has deteriorated around the world, affecting people unequally with poor and marginalized communities most affected. Environmental justice issues of particular note encompass climate change and the roles of women and girls. Through the ages, and currently, theology, spiritual writing, and art attest to the power of water, offering inspiration for watershed activists. Further, activists can create art, theology, and spiritual writing that express their delight in and wonder about water, as well as their resolve to promote water justice.

To conclude, all watersheds thus share many qualities, but each is also unique. When Christians learn about their own watersheds and act to care for them, they also may quickly learn about environmental justice and water issues around the world. We are all connected. Anyone can act! If people in the U.S. curbed their use of fossil fuels, and advocated for cleanup of water, people around the world would benefit and water would

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<sup>135</sup> The author gave a PowerPoint presentation on watershed stewardship at the June 2017 ELCA New England synod assembly. Many participants did not know what watershed their communities or churches were in. However, one church in the synod is so aware as to have baptized an adult in the Charles River. Further, several years later, a pastor in that church was inspired to preach on Jesus' Transfiguration, using the daylighting of a river as an example of transfiguration.

be healthier. Work to foster environmental justice is difficult work. The belief that God's grace is present in vulnerability and suffering may provide spiritual support for activism and watershed stewardship.

### **Chapter 3: Transformational Leadership and Transformational Education**

Previous chapters have considered the critical importance of watershed stewardship, the reasons for Christians to engage deeply in watershed care, and pertinent theological explorations that foster such stewardship. Further, water itself, its history and properties, as well as water deterioration and increasing scarcity of potable water, provide a critical contemporary context for watershed care. The miracle of water as the source of all life and its deterioration through pollution and climate change motivate toward watershed stewardship. The beauty of water and its symbolism through the ages can activate and revivify the struggle to protect and care for water.

We turn now to additional ways to encourage congregations toward watershed care. A consideration of pertinent findings from practitioners regarding transformational leadership and transformational education provides principles for congregational motivation. The question to answer is, How do people in churches foster education and leadership to make change possible, especially change directed toward caring for creation?

This chapter compares the thought of several theological educators and theologians to several secular writers when it comes to leadership and education with a focus on environmental care. This comparison should help distill valid and helpful approaches to enhance watershed awareness and stewardship. Transformational educators and leaders use the word “transformation” in contexts where there is need for significant change in perspective or action. This project argues that the church should change—be

transformed and become an active transforming agent—to care for God’s creation through watershed stewardship.

## **Transformational Leadership**

Transformational Leadership is a field within leadership studies. Political sociologist James MacGregor Burns divides leadership into two categories: *transactional* and *transformational*. Communications scholar Peter G. Northouse explains the difference:

Transactional leadership refers to the bulk of leadership models, which focus on the exchanges that occur between leaders and their followers ... [whereas] transformational leadership is the process whereby a person engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower.<sup>136</sup>

Behaviors of a transformational leader include setting a strong example, showing competence, articulating goals, communicating high expectations, expressing confidence, and arousing motives.<sup>137</sup> I have chosen to highlight psychiatrist Ronald Heifetz as a transformational leadership educator because his approach addresses conflict in changing environments with a focus on values. Because of his emphasis on values, he succeeds in fostering higher moral responsibility in leaders and followers, which is a key to transformational leadership.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: 2010), 172.

<sup>137</sup> Northouse, *Leadership*, 174.

<sup>138</sup> As Northouse notes, “Transformational leadership involves attempts by leaders to move followers to higher standards of moral responsibility. This emphasis sets transformational leadership apart from most other approaches to leadership...” (384).

In this section, I compare theological leadership educator Erin Biviano to the secular leadership educator Ronald Heifetz, both of whom are concerned with overcoming challenges to transformational leadership in pursuit of a “less poor and more just world,” in Biviano’s words.<sup>139</sup> Comparing these two writers offers opportunity to learn from a highly experienced transformational leadership educator, who has focused on many types of institutions, with an educator concerned primarily with the study of religions and activist faith groups.

The church has much to gain from broad leadership studies. Heifetz notes that challenges to transformation include the necessity for new, effective action in response to changing and challenging contexts. He says, “What is needed from a leadership perspective are new forms of improvisational expertise, a kind of process expertise that knows prudently how to experiment with never-been-tried-before relationships, means of communication, and ways of interacting...”<sup>140</sup> Experimentation with ways of interacting seems highly pertinent to living out Gospel ideals applicable to effective congregational activism. Further, we will find that both Heifetz and Biviano address values, and we will analyze their views about values to deepen our understanding of transformational leadership dynamics within congregations as applied to watershed stewardship.

Before addressing values, however, I discuss the beginning of transformational change within any organization, a process that Heifetz describes as “getting on the

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<sup>139</sup> Erin Lothes Biviano, *Inspired Sustainability: Planting Seeds for Action* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016), xviii.

<sup>140</sup> Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 2–3.

balcony.”<sup>141</sup> I believe that Biviano’s work analyzing faith groups’ attempts to create change toward care for creation is successful because she got “on the balcony.”

### ***Getting on the Balcony***

For Heifetz, the first step in ethical leadership is “getting on the balcony.” This is necessary in order “to gain the distanced perspective you need to see what is really happening.”<sup>142</sup> This perspective enables diagnosis not possible during action. Diagnosing adaptive challenges is inherently difficult even when one has gained distance by being on the balcony: “Adaptive challenges are typically grounded in the complexity of values, beliefs and loyalties rather than technical complexity and stir up intense emotions rather than dispassionate analysis.”<sup>143</sup> Stages that Heifetz delineates as successive to “getting on the balcony” include: diagnose the adaptive challenges, keep attention disciplined, give the work back to the people, build trust, regulate distress, generate more leadership, and infuse the work with meaning.<sup>144</sup> I address these stages as applied to “A Watershed Moment” in Chapter 4. In this chapter, I will focus only on “getting on the balcony” in order to begin comparing the thinking of Heifetz and Biviano, later narrowing the comparison to their focus on values.

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<sup>141</sup> Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice*, 7.

<sup>142</sup> Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice*, 7.

<sup>143</sup> Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice*, 70.

<sup>144</sup> Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice*, 7–8, 70–87, 84–86, 162–163, 155–156, 159–161, 170–175, 2–3.

Biviano, a Columbia Earth Institute Fellow and Christian theologian, witnessed the increased attention to the need for environmental care among faith groups in the past several decades, attention which resulted in conferences, statements, prayers, resources, and people of faith meeting around the issue. Yet, she noted that transformational leadership and action proposed or carried out by these groups often seemed to fall short of accomplishing the major societal changes needed for environmental restoration and care. The disconnection between the possibility of change and its actuality inspired her to ask why change was not more evident.

To address this question, she met with twenty-nine focus groups consisting of Christian, Jewish, and Native American environmental leaders as well as environmental leaders of other world religions and of unspecified religion affiliation. Participants answered the “question of how love and concern for the earth overflow into action, despite all the forces that make it so easy to do...nothing.”<sup>145</sup>

Biviano has coined a term for the gap between intention and action that she witnessed among the interviewees: “the green blues.”<sup>146</sup> Her definition of the “green blues” precisely describes the adaptive challenges noted by Ronald Heifetz, whose work on ethical leadership<sup>147</sup> creates a secular framework with which to compare Biviano’s findings. To compare Biviano’s findings with those of Heifetz indicates a path toward

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<sup>145</sup> Biviano, *Inspired Sustainability*, xxiv.

<sup>146</sup> Biviano, *Inspired Sustainability*, xxiii, for first mention.

<sup>147</sup> Northouse, *Leadership*, 383.

transformational leadership in churches that will ideally result in congregations engaging in acts of care for creation.

When Biviano met with the varied faith groups, she asked systematic questions, gave participants opportunity to explore the gap between belief and action, and thus provided both herself and the participants an opportunity to get on the balcony. She was then able to diagnose the adaptive challenge of helping fellow people of faith become more active in care for creation.

Through her focus groups, Biviano discovered seven positive patterns in green spirituality among people involved in faith-based creation care: scenic literacy; awareness of global interdependence; commitment to social justice; reverence for creation; interfaith connections; expanding religious visions of God, neighbor, and self; and independent thinking.<sup>148</sup> To address the gap noted above between belief and action—the “green blues” that Biviano noticed—she then asked, “How can we more clearly understand why people act on some of their values, some of the time, to support more sustained environmental engagement?”<sup>149</sup> Further, she inquired as to what hinders or propels such action.

### ***The Importance of Values***

Issues of values emerge quickly in the discussion of gaps between goals for transformational change and the effectiveness of action designed to promote and create

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<sup>148</sup> Biviano, *Inspired Sustainability*, 2–37.

<sup>149</sup> Biviano, *Inspired Sustainability*, 145.

change. I will now compare Biviano’s diagnosis with that of Heifetz, with a focus on the question of values, which are central for both writers.

Biviano addresses values when she describes how a recognition of and positive response to the “green blues” may emerge:

The new interpretation of conflict and faith will begin to bring forth the outlines of a theology of green possibility: a more hospitable and interdependent view of the world. A new set of core concepts will emerge... We start to see a vision of green possibility, rooted in recognizing and accepting our limits—and the limits of the earth—realistically and critically assessing our choices as they affect the earth, and prioritizing our values to act decisively and peacefully.<sup>150</sup>

Thus, for Biviano, amid the conflicting possibilities for action, one must continually become conscious of and prioritize values. A decision to adopt values and habits that foster transformational change toward the well-being of the wider community and creation care is then made possible.

One aspect of Heifetz’s diagnosis around adaptive challenges also centers on values. He writes,

People think of themselves as holding many values simultaneously. But they will focus on only a few of those values when the going gets rough.... To mobilize stakeholders to engage with your change initiative, you have to identify their strongest values and think about how supporting your program would enable your stakeholders to serve those values.<sup>151</sup>

For Heifetz, connecting with people’s deeply held values, helping them to know what those values are, and examining the gap between their values and actions are keys to transformational change.

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<sup>150</sup> Biviano, *Inspired Sustainability*, 190.

<sup>151</sup> Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *Practice*, 92.

The first of four types of adaptive challenges Heifetz and his coauthors lift up is the “gap between the organization’s espoused values and behavior.” Working to close the gap (which will likely never be completely closed) may be “painful, traumatic, impossible, or disruptive.”<sup>152</sup> To lead adaptive change presents a series of challenges. You must “connect with the values, beliefs, and anxieties of the people you are trying to move.”<sup>153</sup> The leader should then “think about how supporting your program would enable your stakeholders to serve those values.”<sup>154</sup> Then, “Connect your language to the group’s espoused values and purpose.”<sup>155</sup> If the new idea, which is the desired change or “intervention strategy,” has been successfully connected to the group’s core values, the leader can then step back and wait for it to take hold. The leader should be patient, as people need time to orient to a possible change, think about it, digest it, and modify it, so it becomes theirs. The leader then, with understanding and respect, helps people who face fears or potential loss, while keeping “the work at the center of people’s attention.”<sup>156</sup>

To move the group even farther, it may be necessary to allow a situation to move into conflict. Conflict may help people “to appreciate how deeply held the competing values are and how committed each faction is to avoiding taking any losses.”<sup>157</sup> Through the process of change, the leader will continue to inspire people by listening, allowing for

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<sup>152</sup> Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *Practice*, 78–79.

<sup>153</sup> Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *Practice*, 38.

<sup>154</sup> Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *Practice*, 92.

<sup>155</sup> Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *Practice*, 128.

<sup>156</sup> Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *Practice*, 130–131.

<sup>157</sup> Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *Practice*, 152.

silence, holding oneself and others through their emotions, and speaking “value-laden or historically weighted words”<sup>158</sup> that also come from the heart, from one’s own deeply held values.

How does Biviano, a religious writer concerned with environmental care, describe the need for values in ways that are similar or distinct from the secular leadership proscriptions of Heifetz and his colleagues? Biviano considers the arduous process of values recognition, comparison, and prioritization, leading to more effective action:

The power to support and reinforce environmental values and motivate decisive action is the critical secret of success of congregations. This is more critical given the acknowledgment of many participants that religious teachings, statements, and articles do not alone inspire action.<sup>159</sup>

Using the thoughts and reflections of the participants and weaving in the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur on the phenomenology of fallibility, Biviano observes that a person is always situated between her finitude and the world’s infinite options. This leads to the “sadness of the finite,” which makes choice difficult and can lead to being overwhelmed. To cross the gap between hope for a better world and action, bridges must exist: “intellectual hospitality, prioritized values, and cooperation.”<sup>160</sup>

To prioritize values is a process. First, one notices something, pays attention, which helps to prioritize feelings; second one compares feelings, and when they are prioritized, values emerge; finally, one compares values, which “...engages feeling and knowing...thought about feeling, recognition about what I feel to be important about my

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<sup>158</sup> Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *Practice*, 273.

<sup>159</sup> Biviano, *Inspired Sustainability*, 144.

<sup>160</sup> Biviano, *Inspired Sustainability*, 148.

feelings.”<sup>161</sup> Such comparison of values involves conflict, which must be endured. Very helpful to enduring the conflict for religious people are prayer and community conversation—discernment with others. Finally, values become reinforced by action, or habits: “Active values become habits, a new being....Knowing becomes a permanently energizing motivation through conversion to new habits.”<sup>162</sup>

To make a final overall comparison between Biviano and Heifetz, I believe that Biviano has set herself to consider how preferred values change (e.g., from consumerism to Earth-care habits). Heifetz, on the other hand, understands some values to be so deep (what he calls, “core values”<sup>163</sup>) that adaptive change methodology involves uncovering and connecting those values pertinent to the desired change to the deeper core values. In both cases, however, working with values is critical to transformational leadership.

Another way to explore values in relation to Biviano and Heifetz is to highlight a third resource: a study by GreenFaith and Climate Outreach. The purpose of the study, called Faith and Climate Change, was to “develop and test language around climate change that could mobilize activity across five main [faith] groups.... [by holding] narrative workshops [that] discussed values, identity and attitudes to climate change.”<sup>164</sup> The study found that principles “for effective climate communication.... respect and

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<sup>161</sup> Biviano, *Inspired Sustainability*, 183.

<sup>162</sup> Biviano, *Inspired Sustainability*, 184.

<sup>163</sup> Heifetz et al., *The Practice*, 92.

<sup>164</sup> George Marshall, “Faith and Climate Change: A guide to talking with the five major faiths,” Climate Outreach and GreenFaith, February 2016, accessed February 13, 2018, [https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/arcc/pages/332/attachments/original/1456375676/Faith\\_and\\_Climate\\_Outreach\\_Fin.pdf?1456375676](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/arcc/pages/332/attachments/original/1456375676/Faith_and_Climate_Outreach_Fin.pdf?1456375676), 4.

validate their [the audience's] values....and...include words they use themselves to describe their values.”<sup>165</sup> For Christians, as an example, the strongest narratives are: “climate change is a moral challenge,” “creation care—a precious gift,” and “we live our faith through our actions.”<sup>166</sup>

To synthesize Biviano, Heifetz, and the GreenFaith study's findings, individuals, including those connected to world religious traditions, have only partially lived out their deeply held values. Many people experience gaps between ultimate values rooted in hope, faith, and religious commitment; a natural desire not to harm others and creation; and the felt urge toward a consistency between belief and action.

In order to live and work with some integrity and consistency, people create value systems that interweave their understanding of deepest values and moral judgments within a structure of habits and obligations they have developed for navigating their familial and socio-political contexts. Transformational leadership around creation care prods people to review their habituated thinking so as to consider the wider implications of the deep values at the core of their religious traditions and their personalities. Such review encourages reexamination and reapplication of core values to new contexts, including climate change and the church's ministry of watershed care.

A narrative arc that represents careful review of habituated thinking and works across faiths is the GreenFaith study's statement: “We have been entrusted with the care of the Earth; climate change is harming the Earth; we need to return to our appropriate

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<sup>165</sup> “Faith and Climate Change,” 5.

<sup>166</sup> “Faith and Climate Change,” 20.

relationship to it; by doing so we fulfill our responsibility and restore harmony.”<sup>167</sup> To insert climate change as part of a desire to fulfill an ancient value (“entrusted with care for the Earth”) creates new demands for action that may be expressed in new habits. This goes a long way to healing the so-called green blues. “A Watershed Moment”—the action project at Ascension Lutheran Church—and other watershed projects work similarly, by discovering and emphasizing the ways that deep Christian values illuminate and encourage action for watershed care.

### **Transformational Education**

In the Anthropocene, when human power controls the fate of life on Earth as we know it, education about the need for action is essential. Astronomer and earth systems scientist George A. Seielstad calls the Anthropocene “the epoch when a single species controlled the destiny of all other species and of the planet’s physical, chemical, and geological features.” Such a watershed moment calls for a transformation systems approach—across society and academic disciplines—to promote “sustainability, meeting our needs while ensuring future generations will be able to meet theirs.”<sup>168</sup> Seielstad suggests that education toward sustainability succeeds if “we will each have adopted a Global Golden Rule: living such that, if everyone on the globe lived as we do, we would

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<sup>167</sup> “Faith and Climate Change,” 6.

<sup>168</sup> George A. Seielstad, *Dawn of the Anthropocene: Humanity’s Defining Moment* (Alexandria, VA: American Geosciences Institute, 2012), Kindle Edition, Loc. 3157.

be creating a better world for our children.”<sup>169</sup> How is such education to proceed? What is its context and content? For Seielstad, such education teaches the study of nature and humanity as interrelated and promotes holistic education “appropriate to the study of systems,” which include “political, economic, social, and moral aspects of human societies,” which are just as important to comprehending Earth processes as are the Earth sciences (e.g., biology, physics, geology, chemistry).<sup>170</sup> Further, such transformational education pays attention to interconnections, globalism, interdependencies, morality, shared learning, holism, and planetary literacy. It prepares students of all ages to synthesize knowledge so as to create a sustainable world.

We will now give consideration to educational approaches and principles that promote changed behavior and perception toward a sustainable world, consistent with Seielstad’s Global Golden Rule and urgently needed in the Anthropocene. Richard Louv addresses children and nature, while George Marshall promotes transformational education for addressing climate change. Jane Vella illustrates group teaching planning for transformational learning. Mary Elizabeth Moore and Evelyn Underhill elucidate the spiritual and psychological dynamics in faith and educational communities that promote moral action.

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<sup>169</sup> Seielstad, *Dawn of the Anthropocene*, Loc. 2578, 2579.

<sup>170</sup> Seielstad, *Dawn of the Anthropocene*, Loc. 2615.

### *The Need for Exposure to Nature*

Educators are finding that experiences in nature promote transformational education in the realm of environmental care due to a deep reconnection with nature and spirituality that takes place during time spent outdoors. Experiences in nature not only educate, but they entice us to do the work of care. For example, a wilderness guide, several Episcopal bishops, a Lutheran theologian, and others participated in a forty-day pilgrimage on the Connecticut River from May 31 to July 8, 2017. One participant spoke about being inspired to pray as the sun came out after days of rainy weather. “I was moved...That was what the pilgrimage was about, so that we could connect with nature and commit ourselves once again to doing a better job of taking care of...this river.”<sup>171</sup>

Journalist and author Richard Louv is well-known for emphasizing the importance of children’s play in natural settings. For Louv, education through experience in nature should start in the early years: “More time in nature—combined with less television and more stimulating play and educational settings—may go a long way toward reducing attention deficits in children, and, just as important, increasing their joy in life.”<sup>172</sup> Nature is unequivocally the best and essential teacher needed for children to develop their physiological and psychological senses and the “richness of human experience.”<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Kathy McCormack, “River pilgrimage takes paddlers on quest,” *Burlington Free Press*, June 12, 2017.

<sup>172</sup> Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 2005), 107.

<sup>173</sup> Louv, *Last Child*, 3.

Nature exploration provides needed experiences in coming to know, interact with, and care about the non-human creation. The “health of the earth is at stake” unless this broken bond (between humans and nature) is healed, says Louv.<sup>174</sup> Educators, parents, and teachers foster such learning by emphasizing “the right of future generations to God’s creation—with its formative and restorative qualities...the most emotionally powerful weapon we can deploy in defense of the earth and our own species.”<sup>175</sup> Louv offers a startling theological assertion as having traction even for nonreligious people: he believes that spiritual arguments based on God as creator are “more effective than utilitarian arguments.”<sup>176</sup>

Turning from the writing of Louv, a secular children’s educator who nevertheless offers a spiritual argument for connecting children to nature, we now investigate the ideas of writer Evelyn Underhill, who explores the link between spirituality and nature as essential to transformational education for ecological care for all ages. In several addresses to teachers, the Anglican writer stated unequivocally that good teaching is not possible without a “steady appropriation of the strength of God and a constant forgetfulness of self and loving subordination to His Will.”<sup>177</sup> Such immersion in God, which may be deepened and expressed in worship, enables “the whole of the visible

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<sup>174</sup> Louv, *Last Child*, 3.

<sup>175</sup> Louv, *Last Child*, 298.

<sup>176</sup> Louv, *Last Child*, 298.

<sup>177</sup> Evelyn Underhill, “The Spiritual Life of the Teacher,” in *Collected Papers of Evelyn Underhill*, ed. Lucy Menzies (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., Inc., 1946), 215–216.

world...to be seen by attentive eyes as having ‘a peculiar quality and radiance.’”<sup>178</sup> For Underhill, then, the ultimate transformational education comes from adoration of God. Further, and very relevant to reconnection to nature, one learns to see the “beauty and sacred character of all life”<sup>179</sup> through the eyes of love nourished by attention to God.

The Connecticut River pilgrims, Louv’s studies, and Underhill’s teaching together celebrate and value exposure to nature on the one hand, and on the other hand, attention to the reality of God as essential, existential contexts for transformational education toward ecological care. Thus, exposure to nature and worship of God provide a horizontal thread in the woven tapestry of transformational education toward creation care, while experienced educators, discussed below, who foster transformation through dialogic teaching methodology provide the vertical dimension in this tapestry.

### ***Dialogic Teaching for Transformation***

Jane Vella, founder of Global Learning Partners, promotes an educational planning method that builds on students’ knowledge, prepares learning tasks applied to students’ contexts, and promotes knowledge and proficiency. Vella builds on Brazilian philosopher and educator Paulo Freire’s dialogic approach to teaching “in order to confront the ubiquitous threat of the domination system in education, in public policy, in health care, and, indeed, in all aspects of culture and society”<sup>180</sup> for “transformation

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<sup>178</sup> Underhill, “The Spiritual Life,” 228.

<sup>179</sup> Underhill, “The Spiritual Life,” 227.

<sup>180</sup> Jane Vella, *On Teaching and Learning: Putting the Principles and Practices of Dialogue Education into Action* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), xviii.

toward peace.”<sup>181</sup> Although not specifically mentioned, human domination of Earth, termed the Anthropocene, may well be described as a “domination system” over Earth, to be transformed by education that consists of a dialogue “among learners, of whom the teacher is one.”<sup>182</sup> Vella’s approach seems highly applicable as pedagogy consistent with Seielstad’s education for sustainability and the Global Golden Rule.

Vella’s approach focuses on teaching preparation theory and methods to create dialogic education. The structure is fairly simple, while the implementation can be complex. Planning for dialogic education includes five considerations: learning needs and resources assessment, seven design steps (Who? Why? When? Where? What? What for? How?), a listing of learning tasks, designated important principles and practices, and evaluation indicators. The learning needs and resource assessment and the seven design steps played a role in designing Ascension Lutheran’s “A Watershed Moment” and are discussed more fully in Chapter 4.<sup>183</sup>

Over decades, theological educator Mary Elizabeth Moore may be said to have engaged in dialogic teaching for transformation illuminated by Christian theological and

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<sup>181</sup> Vella, *On Teaching and Learning*,” xxii.

<sup>182</sup> Vella, *On Teaching and Learning*,” xxi.

<sup>183</sup> The learning needs and assessment was carried out at a church meeting of people interested in water issues and held at the beginning of the “A Watershed Moment” project. The design steps were answered in this project’s structure and proposal: *Who?*—Ascension Lutheran Church and the New England Synod, ELCA; *Why?*—the need for Christians to care for degraded water; *When?*—February through October, 2017, and more broadly, on the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the Reformation; *Where?*—the Lake Champlain bioregion and other watersheds; *What?*—a study of environmental care and a twelve-month action research project; *What for?*—serving Christ means healing creation; *How?*—literature review, description of the congregational action project, evaluation of the local action, interpretation, constructive proposals, and conclusions.

biblical traditions. In so doing, she unites the writings we have considered, distilling valuable descriptions of movement toward transformation through education to foster a sacramental awareness of creation. She notes that “*the heart of sacramental teaching is mediating the grace of God through the concrete stuff of creation for the sanctification of human communities and the well-being of all God’s creation.*”<sup>184</sup> This description highlights the themes we have been exploring, the themes of transformation through awareness of God in creation and the theme of environmental justice toward watershed care. Moore describes sacramental teaching in terms of six essential acts: expect the unexpected, remember the dismembered, seek reversals, give thanks, nourish new life, reconstruct community and repair the world.<sup>185</sup> She notes how these acts reflect biblical and liturgical theology and practices of teaching.

### ***Addressing “Wicked” Environmental Problems***

A brief comparison between religious educator Moore and secular educator and communicator George Marshall distills principles of transformational education. As Marshall focuses on climate change and “A Watershed Moment” focuses on water, it is necessary to consider briefly the relationship between water issues and climate change.

While climate change and water issues intertwine (climate change creates droughts, more extreme weather events, flooding, changes in rain patterns), they are also distinct, and I have found water issues appreciably more approachable than climate

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<sup>184</sup> Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2004), 10.

<sup>185</sup> Moore, *Teaching*, 229–231.

change problems in educating congregations. Climate change has become much discussed, divisive, and politicized, especially in the United States. Opposition to understanding climate change derives from a few conservative Christian perspectives and from public relations promotions funded by fossil fuel companies. Climate change—urgent, complex, and politically contested—has stimulated international, ground-breaking discussions about education to address it, from which we can learn.

Water issues offer an accessible entry to environmental care, partly due to the immediacy of water—humans daily ingest and wash with water—and also because water is physically observable. Yet, in spite of citizen activism and outcry, over a year transpired before Flint, Michigan, authorities admitted to the fact that unprecedented and hazardous lead particles corroded from local water pipes into citizens' drinking water. The findings about the causes of the water contamination (insufficient protection in pipes that allowed lead to leach into the drinking water, poisoning children) brought accusations against those responsible, who then delayed action.<sup>186</sup> Water issues are also thus not immune from denial by responsible authorities. In sum, I argue that deeper transformational education about water issues could result from effectively applying principles related to climate change education and transformational education more broadly.

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<sup>186</sup> More information may be found at Josh Sanburn, "Flint Water Crisis Still Isn't Over. Here's Where Things Stand a Year Later," *Time*, January 18, 2017, accessed February 13, 2018, <http://time.com/4634937/flint-water-crisis-criminal-charges-bottled-water>.

Marshall<sup>187</sup> examines the difficulty in communicating and educating about the serious threat of climate change, outlining principles for effective communication. Climate change poses a “wicked problem,” which Marshall defines as a problem that is multivalent, uncanny, and complex.<sup>188</sup> Unfortunately for scientists, scientific facts do not inspire people toward action. “Research shows that oppositional views can rarely be challenged effectively by new information...”<sup>189</sup> What, then, does promote transformation, causing the emotional brain to fully appreciate the dire threat of climate change? Marshall stresses values: Personal stories that connect people to scientists and to shared values (e.g., employment, crime, defense, etc.), as well as to positive or even sacred values (e.g., civilization, life, hope).<sup>190</sup> In a very helpful final chapter,<sup>191</sup> Marshall lists additional constructive approaches: emphasize climate change as a reality, restore past loss, lift symbolic moments, resist simple framings, create a heroic quest, offer a variety of solutions, acknowledge grief and anxiety, and emphasize conviction and choice.

To once again compare a secular with a theological perspective, Marshall’s suggestions and Moore’s six acts of sacramental teaching invite a sense of mutual

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<sup>187</sup> George Marshall, *Don’t Even Think About It.: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Ignore Climate Change* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014).

<sup>188</sup> Marshall, *Don’t Even Think About It*, 95.

<sup>189</sup> Marshall, *Don’t Even Think About It*, 123.

<sup>190</sup> Marshall, *Don’t Even Think About It*, 126, 131, 133.

<sup>191</sup> Marshall, *Don’t Even Think About It*, 231–238.

emphasis.<sup>192</sup> (1) Moore’s “expect the unexpected” positions us to hear Marshall’s instruction to “create the symbolic moment,” “encourage positive visions,” “never accept your opponents’ frames,” “create a narrative of positive change,” “create a heroic quest,” and also to “ensure that a wide range of solutions is constantly under review.” (2) Moore urges transformational educators to “remember the dismembered,” comparable to Marshall’s encouragement to “emphasize that climate change is happening here and now,” “be honest about the danger,” “recognize people’s feelings of grief and anxiety,” and “mourn what is lost.” (3) Moore’s “seek reversals” would seem to correspond with Marshall’s urging to “resist simple framings and be open to new meanings.”

The comparison continues. (4) Moore’s “give thanks” may parallel Marshall’s advice: “relate solutions to climate change to the sources of happiness,” “emphasize that action on climate change makes us proud to be who we are,” “emphasize the qualities that create trust,” and “be glad to be [an original] Pollyanna.” (5) Isn’t Moore’s “nourish new life” similar to Marshall’s suggestions to “present climate change as a journey of conviction,” “create moments of commitment,” “invoke the nonnegotiable sacred values,” and “tell personal stories”? (6) Moore’s “reconstruct community and repair the world” evokes Marshall’s “create communities of shared conviction,” “stress cooperation not unity,” “enable fresh, real voices,” “restore past loss,” and, summarily, “Remember that how we respond now will provide the template for future responses. Acceptance,

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<sup>192</sup> A quick overview of the six acts is given by Moore, *Teaching*, Appendix, 229–213. The summary of Marshall’s points is found in chapter 42, “In a Nutshell,” in *Don’t Even Think About It*, 213–238.

compassion, cooperation, and empathy will produce very different outcomes than aggression, competition, blame, and denial. ”<sup>193</sup>

The similarities between Moore, a theological educator, and secular communicator Marshall, both concerned to recreate the world toward justice, peace, and integrity of creation, may reveal that people of insight and good will discern similarly a way forward. As educators, clergy, and citizens, we may well adapt their suggested pattern of practices in assurance that we are on a path toward transformational education for active care of Earth.

## **Conclusion**

Transformational leaders within communities or organizations “get on the balcony” to better understand a situation in need of transformation. That is, they remove themselves from immediate action, need, or crisis in order to view the whole “dance floor,” which includes the actor-dancers, the flow, the situation as presented, as well as some of the causal factors in the situation. They can then begin to diagnose the situation, framing key issues and questions in order to create and implement a strategy, while developing leadership in the group as a whole.

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<sup>193</sup> Marshall, *Don't Even Think About It*, 298.

Changed values reflect transformation. Transformational changes help people either to discover and hopefully live out more fully their core values or to adopt new values. Creation care transformation in congregations will show evidence of this shift.

Both secular and religious transformational leaders and educators write about change as dynamic. Even while education and leadership processes are planned, they foster a process that cannot be determined in advance and that takes time. Community building, attention to values, room for grief and psychological change, growth in self-awareness and knowledge, and commitment and openness to being transformed, among other dynamics foster possible change. Leaders, educators, and learners engage in these processes. Specifically, creation care awareness deepens relationship with both God and nature. Such care requires experiences in nature and attention to the dynamics of spiritual change and growth.

## **PART 2**

### **CONGREGATIONAL ACTION PROJECTS**

Transformational change, as discussed by Paulo Freire and other transformational educators and leaders in Part 1, involves reflection in order to illuminate a situation and action, and to transform it. Further reflection then follows the action. In the action-reflection-action process, themes and methods pertinent to further change emerge. Therefore, “A Watershed Moment” includes both reflection, primarily discussed in Part 1, and action, described in Part 2. By exploring this link between reflection and action, I aim to offer strategies and themes useful to other groups wishing to pursue watershed care.

The chapters in Part 2 describe several faith-based watershed projects and evaluate their effectiveness to stimulate future projects. Since “A Watershed Moment” concentrates on an action project at Ascension Lutheran church, Chapter 4 describes Ascension’s project. Chapter 5 details the evaluation of this project by the church council, the congregation, and the Care for Creation Committee. Chapter 6 broadens the perspective, regionally and internationally. Two Minnesota ELCA synod watershed stewardship programs offer insights into how to organize churches for action. In addition, Ched Myers’ book and resources on watershed stewardship highlight several fascinating ecumenical watershed groups, including West Atlanta Watershed Association (WAWA). WAWA began when a predominantly African American community organized to partner in decisions about sewage treatment changes that potentially negatively affected their

community. WAWA successfully changed public policies. Chapter 6 also describes international water education and projects supported by local churches, considering how a local church's watershed awareness links to securing access to water worldwide. Finally, Chapter 7 synthesizes varied approaches to watershed stewardship and offers recommendations for the growth of the movement.

Watershed stewardship arises from a variety of social contexts, watershed conditions, and organizing structures, worldwide. As we encounter the varied groups discussed in this section, we realize not only that the watershed movement is growing and gaining strength, but that virtually all involved groups are keen to share resources and experiences as well as offer each other support.

## **Chapter 4: The Action Project, “A Watershed Moment”**

In previous chapters, we considered theology foundational to watershed stewardship, water facts and environmental justice, and theories of transformational education and leadership. This chapter describes the action project, “A Watershed Moment,” carried out at Ascension Lutheran Church (ALC), South Burlington, VT. The action project involved varied activities over a period of nine months, approved by the church council at the project’s beginning and evaluated by the council and congregation at its conclusion. This chapter situates the project within the ALC community itself and the church’s sociological and ecological contexts. The chapter describes the project’s design within the format of Jane Vella’s steps for Dialogue Education and describes the project’s implementation as informed by Ronald Heifetz’s Adaptive Framework for leadership.

### **Jane Vella’s Structures of Dialogue Education: The Seven Design Steps**

Jane Vella’s seven design steps for Dialogue Education helpfully organize the project description and guide the project’s planning and development.<sup>194</sup> Vella formulates the design steps as simple questions: “Who?” “Why?” “When?” “Where?” “What?” “What For?” and “How?” These questions helped me and the church consider “A Watershed Moment” as an educational process with a beginning and an end. Thus, I had confidence that, as we planned the various activities (e.g., water testing, boat trips), we

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<sup>194</sup> Jane Vella, *On Teaching and Learning* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), 2.

offered a deliberative learning sequence. This structure ensured that participants experienced freedom to engage fully, experiment, and even enjoy each of the project's activities, while promoting an atmosphere of creativity. We entered into each activity knowing that, however it went, the parishioners and I would evaluate it and thus expand our learning.

### ***Who?***

“A Watershed Moment” focused on parishioners of Ascension Lutheran Church (ALC), a medium-sized congregation in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, which I have served for twelve years. The church building nestles in tall white pine trees in a suburban area in South Burlington, Vermont. About seventy parishioners worship each Sunday at ALC, their ages averaging around fifty. A growing percentage of the worshippers, who tend to be middle class, recently retired and moved to the area because their children reside here. Parishioners generally express liberal political views and commitment for environmental care; three families are of color. A Care for Creation committee guides the environmental activities, with strong pastoral support.

Prior to the project, with my suggestion and with the council's support, parishioners created a meditation trail in the woods and devoted time over the course of four summers to cleaning up adjacent Bartlett Brook. The clean-up involved volunteers from the University of Vermont and Ascension's youth program. Further, the church also received a Lily Endowment sabbatical grant in 2012 focused on “living water.” Activities and reflections in the grant proposal encouraged parishioners to be aware of water in their

spiritual reflections and activities. During the sabbatical, I traveled to Turkey, the Holy Land, and Alaska; studied and reflected; and wrote a blog on water and environmental justice.

Over the past twelve years, an emphasis on environmental awareness at Ascension Lutheran received varied support from parishioners, with some feeling so positively about the emphasis that it inspired them to join the church and commit to involvement. A few others wondered whether the activities precluded other important emphases. With these learnings and experiences, we designed “A Watershed Moment” to involve all the age groups in the congregation, appeal to people with varied perspectives, encourage learning about the watershed, and promote responsibility toward water as part of the church’s ministry.

Many young adult parishioners who rarely attend church feel strong connection to the watershed. For a graduate course project (STH DM902 “Contextual Analysis and Transformational Leadership,” January 2015), I interviewed and collated responses from nine young adult parishioners. I asked four questions on four topics: Sabbath, attitudes toward church, the value of nature, and the importance of water. The majority of respondents stressed the importance of water, especially Lake Champlain, and communicated that water cleanses, is beautiful, and gives a “whole healing.” I discovered that water significantly centered them spirituality. They mentioned feeling peaceful as they looked at the lake and said they felt renewed by being in river or lake waters. I wondered how much of this awareness stemmed from their having grown up as Lutheran (with the Lutheran emphasis on baptism); how much to their living in close proximity to

the lake; and how much was a byproduct of both their age cohort and their home state (while Vermont has a high percentage of people who describe themselves as spiritual but not religious. This spirituality is often expressed in an appreciation of Vermont's natural beauty and out-of-doors activities but not necessarily in structured religious participation). At the time of the interviews, I sensed all four dynamics as contributing factors.

This cohort of young adults fits Nancy T. Ammerman's description of an Extra-Theistic group.<sup>195</sup> People described as Extra-Theistic locate spirituality "in the core of the self, in connection to community, in the sense of awe engendered by the natural world and various forms of beauty, and in the life philosophies crafted by an individual seeking life's meaning."<sup>196</sup> While I find that this cohort also shares some traits with Ammerman's other two modalities (Theistic and Ethical),<sup>197</sup> the young adult parishioners' positive response to nature as central to their spirituality (for most, more central than organized worship), located them within the Extra-Theistic group. I learned that ministry involving creation care potentially draws this group more closely into the church, at least in the group's acknowledgement of ALC's care for creation efforts, if not in actual participation

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<sup>195</sup> Nancy T. Ammerman, "Spiritual but Not Religious? Beyond Binary Choices in the Study of Religion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 52, no. 2 (2013): 258–278.

<sup>196</sup> Ammerman, "Spiritual but Not Religious?" 268.

<sup>197</sup> The majority of regular attendees at ALC may be described as within the Theistic group for which, as Ammerman notes, "spirituality is about God; spirituality is about practices intended to develop one's relationship with God; and spirituality is about the mysterious encounters and happenings that come to those who are open to them" ("Spiritual but Not Religious?" 266). I sense that a minority of ALC parishioners reflect most strongly the Ethical modality of spirituality because for them, "Real spirituality is about living a virtuous life" (272). Ammerman postulates that in the United States, all three groups value the importance of living ethically in everyday life. Thus, I conclude that watershed discipleship projects hold strong ground if they emphasize the morality of water care in everyday life but also link watershed discipleship to theistic beliefs and to spiritual growth.

(several of these young adult parishioners spoke positively about Ascension’s care for creation emphases even though they did not often participate).

A second answer to the question, “Who?” is ALC’s leadership in the New England synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), which includes a synod Green Team. As co-coordinator of that Green Team, I hold responsibility for encouraging the nearly two hundred New England synod churches to care for creation. Periodically, I send emails through the synod office to address two issues I believe of greatest importance: climate change and water. I intend to disseminate the findings of “A Watershed Moment” throughout the synod via a watershed stewardship “toolkit” that ALC parishioners and I develop. As an added development from “A Watershed Moment,” the church council president and I led a workshop on watershed stewardship at the June 2017 New England synod annual meeting, describing the need for watershed stewardship and for the ALC’s projects to address that need. I developed the Power Point and sought suggestions from Ascension’s Care for Creation Committee and the adult Sunday school class.

### ***Why?***

The “Why?” of the study is multifaceted. First, the project lifts up a critical aspect of the looming environmental crisis—water (more fully considered in Part 1, Chapter 2). The question, “Why?” also offers opportunity for the church to reconsider the meanings inherent in the church’s liturgy of baptism (discussed in Part 1, Chapter 1). Further, the project questions how to respond faithfully to a call from Jesus to care for the thirsty in

this time of water shortage. In addition, the project offers opportunities to engage ALC in transformational leadership and education. Finally, the overarching task of this action project is to foster sacramental living. Sacramental living (the affirmation that “all of creation is sacred” and the grace of God...is everywhere revealed”<sup>198</sup>) enlivens both worship and attention to the environment. It also inspires congregational-based action and advocacy, which in turn, may inspire and equip other congregations to do the same. Thus, ALC’s working through the various stages of the project hopefully deepens parishioners’ awareness of and care for water, as well as the congregation’s worship life and its outward ministry in the community and synod.

### ***When?***

An incisive consideration of the question, “When?” leads to unprecedented adaptive challenges facing humans and the planet during the Anthropocene, when humans control the well-being, or degradation, of the web of life.

The question, “When?” therefore embraces the planetary water crisis and the need for humans to solve it as quickly as possible. “When?” also asks when local churches will respond (and be perceived by others as responding) to the urgent need for environmental care.

From within the ELCA, several responses to the question, “When?” have emerged. First is the Resolution Urging Stewardship of the Gift of Water (discussed in Part 1), which calls for the development of resources over the next few years to address

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<sup>198</sup> Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2004), 9.

watershed stewardship. Hopefully, the development of a watershed stewardship “toolkit” at the completion of “A Watershed Moment” will help meet this need.

Second, 2017 marks the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Responding to the planetary crisis, ELCA theologians developed an Eco-Reformation process.<sup>199</sup> In anticipation of the anniversary and to contribute to the Eco-Reformation process, many of these theologians reformulated theology to highlight perspectives essential to care for creation and Eco-Reformation. Their writings provide substantial guidance—both theological and practical—to ALC’s “A Watershed Moment,” especially as they are collected in one volume.<sup>200</sup>

Finally, the series of action steps in “A Watershed Moment,” designed to take place between Earth Day (4/22/17) to the Feast of St. Francis (10/4/17), is discussed under “How?” below. The “toolkit” to resource other congregations for watershed stewardship will be completed by summer, 2018.

### ***Where?***

The question, “Where?” addresses ALC’s ecological location. Ascension’s Vermont context features a population that tends to see itself as spiritual while largely rejecting institutionalized religion, with only 22 percent of the state attending religious

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<sup>199</sup> More information about Eco-Reformation may be found at [www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org](http://www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org).

<sup>200</sup> Lisa E. Dahill and Martin-Schramm, eds., *Eco-Reformation: Grace and Hope for a Planet in Peril* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016).

services almost weekly.<sup>201</sup> Vermont's hill-and-dale topography and town meeting history promote independent thinking and civic engagement. As forests returned to Vermont after pasture grazing declined, Back-to-the-Land and Locavore movements grew, strengthening environmental consciousness and activism. The population in 2016 was 94.6 percent white,<sup>202</sup> but an influx of international refugees and migrant workers on dairy farms creates some diversity.

Although every congregation locates home within a watershed, the proximity of Lake Champlain enables Ascension to respond well to the ELCA national "Resolution on Stewardship of the Gift of Water." Bartlett Brook, adjacent to ALC's property, flows into Lake Champlain, a few miles beyond. Awareness of the lake abounds among many parishioners. As mentioned earlier, several parishioners have actively stewarded streams and rivers close to their homes, regularly sampling the water for contaminants. Due to the few number of ELCA churches in Vermont, ALC parishioners live within a fifty-mile radius of the church. Thus, they live close to and feel familiar with watershed streams and rivers over a wide area: the Winooski River, Potash Brook, Muddy Brook, Lewis Creek, LaPlatte River, Otter Creek, Middlebury River, and New Haven River, among them.

Similar to other estuaries, such as the Chesapeake Bay and Long Island Sound, the lake is degraded due to sewage and farm run off. Toxic algae blooms occur during the

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<sup>201</sup> Frank Newport, "Mississippi Most Religious State, Vermont Least Religious," *GALLUP News*, last modified February 3, 2014, <http://news.gallup.com/poll/167267/mississippi-religious-vermont-least-religious-state.aspx>.

<sup>202</sup> "QuickFacts Vermont," United States Census Bureau, July 1, 2017, accessed February 13, 2018, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/VT/PST045217>. See also Graffagnino, J. Kevin, et al., *The Vermont Difference: Perspectives from the Green Mountain State* Woodstock, VT: The Woodstock Foundation, 2014.

summer, which curtail water access and can be dangerous to swimmers and animals. Some families rely on the lake's fish for sustenance. Yet, the lake generates much tourist revenue for Vermont. Millions of dollars will be needed to clean up the lake. Most citizens know that their state government must balance the use of state monies among many pressing needs. As citizens, including ALC parishioners, become more aware, their understanding and commitment to care for the lake improve the potential for its effective healing.

### ***What?***

The question, "What?" refers in part to a study of Christian scholarly work on environmental care and environmental justice, transformational leadership and education, and also environmental justice work connected to water, summarized in Part 1. That work concentrates attention on sacramental theology, with an emphasis on Lutheran theology. The work also compares secular and religious writers on methods to mobilize society and faith groups to care for creation. The question, "What?" also refers to a local, nine-month Action Research Process at Ascension Lutheran Church, South Burlington, Vermont. Learnings from our project provide a lens through which to view other watershed projects, locally and globally, and to draw conclusions about principles for effectiveness.

### ***What For?***

The question, "What for?" asks how Christians faithfully minister in their particular time and place. This project strives to answer the question in part through a

local church action project. The stated goals of the project portion of “A Watershed Moment,” as summarized to the church council, were to: *(1) discover that water is a gift from God; (2) define the breadth and scope of the Lake Champlain watershed and identify its socioeconomic, cultural, and spiritual importance; (3) discover the health of the watershed in parishioners’ neighborhoods; (4) experience the gift of water physically, emotionally, and spiritually; and (5) value constructive engagement with water as part of Christian discipleship.*

Parishioners would learn to perceive water as a gift through a focus on water in worship and education as well as through a variety of reflective water-focused practices (Goal 1). Since creation is physically groaning (Rom. 8:2) through pollution, species extinction, and climate change, healing creation involves learning about local water bodies (Goals 2 and 3), which includes embodied practices of restoration, repair, and habitual care (Goal 5). As we have seen, practical theologian Courtney Goto describes the importance of playing at/in God’s new creation, when “Christian communities attempt to create the world in which Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection point—a place where all of creation can live in justice, harmony, and authenticity.... performed by body-mind.”<sup>203</sup> Heart, soul, mind, and body express love of God. Thus, “A Watershed Moment” invites parishioners to engage in comprehensive actions, including household and personal habits, prayer, boat trips, waterside worship, and community advocacy (Goals 4 and 5). One project emphasis is learning about discipleship that respects the web of life by how we approach the daily water-related habits (showering, washing cars, and brushing teeth)

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<sup>203</sup> Courtney Goto, *The Grace of Playing: Pedagogies for Leaning into God’s New Creation* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2016), 33.

that connect us physically with the whole of life, and by activities that invite us to reflect theologically and spiritually on these practices (Goals 1, 4, and 5).

### ***How?***

The question “How?” is addressed immediately below in the description of Ascension’s action research project. The project began prior to the focused scholarly study discussed in Part 1. The study and project continued simultaneously through October 2017.

### **Action Project at ALC through Ronald A. Heifetz’s Adaptive Leadership Framework**

I describe the steps in the action project “A Watershed Moment” using Ronald Heifetz’s work on adaptive, transformational leadership strategies. As described in Chapter 3, Heifetz’s theory of leadership focuses on adaptive challenges and the importance of transformational, organizational change to respond to those challenges: “Without learning new ways—changing attitudes, values, and behaviors—people cannot make the adaptive leap necessary to thrive in the new environment. The sustainability of change depends on having the people with the problem internalize the change itself.”<sup>204</sup> For Christians to embrace the “new environment,” to embrace awareness of looming dangers to Earth, requires transformational change in the work of ministry. Such change

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<sup>204</sup> Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002), 13.

potentially creates conflict and loss, as does any major change. Transformational leaders plan a process toward such change exemplified by “A Watershed Moment.”

Heifetz takes into account the challenges faced by some or perhaps many parishioners when it comes to change, which is helpful for pastors and other leaders promoting change. As Heifetz notes, “The hope of leadership lies in the capacity to deliver disturbing news and raise difficult questions in a way that people can absorb, prodding them to take up the message rather than ignore it or kill the messenger.”<sup>205</sup> Positive change that responds to “disturbing news” must be integrated, physically and spiritually, into peoples’ lives. As noted in Chapter 3, Heifetz teaches the following specific strategies: get on the balcony, diagnose the adaptive challenges, keep attention disciplined, give the work back to the people, built trust, regulate distress, generate more leadership, and infuse the work with meaning.<sup>206</sup>

### ***Get on the Balcony***

Implementing Heifetz’s first step, getting on the balcony, where you (the leader) take “yourself out of the dance, in your mind, even if only for a moment,”<sup>207</sup> I spent time learning from various churches that have responded deeply to their ecosystems. I imagined ways for Ascension to commit more deeply to its local ecosystem, in which water plays such an obvious part. Ideas began to formulate around watershed restoration

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<sup>205</sup> Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 12.

<sup>206</sup> Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009).

<sup>207</sup> Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 53.

activities and worship connected to water. I then talked to national care for creation leaders to ask their opinions about the importance of watershed work.

Once I decided on this focus, I began to imagine a project that could heighten ALC's awareness and at the same time position ALC to be a leader in ecosystem and watershed care. I then formulated and proposed potential elements of "A Watershed Moment" to the February 2017 church council. The council made a unanimous positive decision on the project and envisioned various specific activities to be overseen by each of ALC's committees. In this way, the council itself "got on the balcony," envisioning a new ministry at ALC aimed at fostering adaptive change. At the council meeting, I outlined a monthly schedule of activities to be promoted and overseen by each committee. Further, ALC had received a \$5,000 grant from the ELCA New England synod for a sabbatical project to aid the synod. I proposed that the sabbatical be an "in place" sabbatical, focused on water, the findings from which we could later disseminate to the synod. Church council accepted the proposal.

### ***Diagnose the Adaptive Challenges***

Heifetz's second step is to diagnose adaptive challenges, and so I called a "Love Your Watershed" meeting in March 2017, a gathering of everyone interested in watershed stewardship. I also planned this meeting as a learning needs and resources assessment (LNRA), as outlined by Jane Vella, which she recommends at the beginning stages of designing an educational process. Vella writes,

The learning needs and resources assessment (LNRA), inviting a pre-course response from learners about their experience with the content, is a structure that can be helpful in the design of an effective learning event. How is such an assessment done? *Ask, study, observe*—a simple three-step approach. You can *ask* with a survey, *study* available information about learners, and *observe* them in their own setting.<sup>208</sup>

This first meeting, to gauge the knowledge and interest of water discipleship among parishioners, built fellowship and yielded helpful information about parishioners' interests and hopes. At the beginning of the meeting, I handed out questionnaires that asked parishioners to answer four questions: "What is a watershed? What are the important issues affecting our water in Vermont? Is there a particular river or stream in VT you are close to? Are you willing to engage this issue in the coming months?" I invited several parishioners to speak at the meeting, including a retired chemistry teacher and a young college graduate who had majored in biology with a focus on water. The speakers, conversation, and questionnaires elicited various but similar understandings of the issues facing our watersheds and ways to address them. Seventeen people attended the meeting; they all seemed to understand what a watershed is and issues affecting water, and each expressed a desire to work on this issue.<sup>209</sup> I interpreted the responses as a positive foundation for the watershed work.

With support of council and the positive results of the LNRA meeting, I then divided the sabbatical funds of \$5,000 by committee. On a worksheet, I noted the allotted

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<sup>208</sup> Vella, *On Teaching and Learning*, 19.

<sup>209</sup> A typical response to the question, "What is a watershed?" was "land surrounding waterways and surface water that affect the health of water by helping buffer water before getting to the streams, lakes, etc." Regarding issues affecting water, respondents said that salt from roads, pollution, phosphorus, and other farm runoff were the contributing factors.

amount (in parentheses in the summary below) and also several possible activities, with an added note that encouraged committees to propose their own ideas. I instructed each committee to return the worksheet to me with their planned activities, noting that, if they did not use all their allotted funds, I would assign the funds to another committee (I observed that this instruction galvanized the committees!). See Appendix I for the list of possible actions given to committees 1. The committees took their task seriously, each submitting proposals to me. Examples: Care for Creation: (\$1,000 allotted) *Budget priorities: \$325 for cruise, \$200 for Bartlett Brook plantings, \$250 for multipurpose sustainable landscape demonstration project, \$275 for water-focused family activity programs.* Education Ministry: (\$1,000 allotted) *Budget priorities: \$150 for art supplies and materials, \$100 for science equipment, \$150 for professional assistant stipends, \$300 for ECHO Leahy Center trip, \$100 summer for KidzKamp (summer Sunday school) snacks, \$100 for pre-Confirmation event, \$100 for Rally Day (Sunday school portion).* Social Action: (\$500 allotted) *Budget priority: for contribution to a nonprofit of the committee's choice, focused on water (the committee allotted the funds to the Vermont Haiti Project).*

As part of diagnosing the adaptive challenges to watershed care, we engaged in a water-testing exercise. We gave parishioners test tubes and a set of instructions for collecting water from local water bodies. After collecting the water sample, they brought the water to the church. A knowledgeable parishioner tested the samples for phosphorus and nitrogen. Parishioners then attached the tubes with strings to a laminated map of the watershed to show where they had collected the water. The parishioner in charge

developed a chart of findings and sent a letter to participants to follow up with action possibilities (Appendix II).

Yet another diagnostic step involved inviting families to become watershed stewardship covenant families. We asked that throughout the summer they keep in mind a number of questions pertaining to their household water use and their knowledge about the watershed. We also invited them to write a prayer about water (Appendix III). I scheduled a September meeting of all the families and others who were interested in talking about the experience.

On June 16, ALC cosponsored with the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum a morning boat trip on the lake, followed by afternoon lectures from scientists and activists. During this all-day Lake Champlain Watershed Action Cruise and Tutorial, the event participants heard about the lake's problems and various means of addressing those problems (Appendix IV).

Further, children's Sunday school activities during the summer acquainted them with links between the Bible and water, including ways that water needs care. The entire Sunday school spent a morning at ECHO Leahy Center for Lake Champlain, where they participated in learning activities about the lake (Appendix V).

Finally, I placed questions about water in summer Sunday worship bulletins. All of these activities were part of the diagnostic process.

***Keep Attention Disciplined, and Give the Work Back to the People***

Heifetz's third step is to keep attention focused on watershed care, while giving the work back to the parishioners. At the beginning of the action project, I created a "Love Your Watershed" brochure featuring a photograph of the map we created of the lake with test tubes brought in by parishioners linked by strings to the watershed area from which water had been drawn (Appendix VI). I also included in the brochure a description of the problems in the lake; biblical quotes; a list of best practices for households, yards, spiritual growth, and citizen activism; and a calendar of "Love Your Watershed" activities. Throughout the project, parishioners could visit a table in the Fellowship Hall positioned under the map of the lake, with extra copies of this brochure and books about the lake.

The Care for Creation committee purchased and decorated rain barrels, one of which, painted with a lake scene, they raffled. Further, due to the financial gifts to the committees made possible by the synod, monthly committee meetings included assessments of how the monies were being spent. In addition, in the weekly E-news, we alerted parishioners a month ahead of the September 10 regular worship service on the lake (Appendix VII). The Social Action committee allotted their funds to the Vermont Haiti Project, which works internationally to create BioSand Water Filters. The committee had first confirmed the project's excellence with a parishioner stationed for two years in Haiti.

Finally, I enlisted two people (one of whom is an artist) to organize a water-themed art show, held on October 8<sup>th</sup> (originally planned for Oct. 1<sup>st</sup> but moved to the 8<sup>th</sup>

due to travel by the organizer). All parishioners were invited to contribute art of any type to the show. The two organizers kept track of the contributors, organized the display area, and created labels for the art. The show featured painting, sculpture, poetry, a self-published “Divine Hours” prayer book of lake reflections, children’s art, photographs, kayaks, a baptismal bowl, decorated greeting cards, and sculpture made with wood. The show, which seemed to delight and surprise all parishioners who saw it, resulted from a truly generous outpouring of talent, affection for water, and commitment to the “Love Your Watershed” project.

### ***Build Trust and Regulate Distress***

Heifetz’s fourth step is to build trust. This ongoing step included my asking the committees to be responsible for their own activity planning and for the use of the synod funds. I believe that we (church council, office manager, and I) regulated distress by pacing the work and giving regular information about the projects’ flow (through the “Love Your Watershed” brochure, regular mention in worship of upcoming events, the large wall calendar, and regular write-ups in the weekly E-news). At several junctures, a few parishioners questioned the seemingly intense focus on water, expressing concern that it might impede attention to other issues. In response, I intentionally focused most sermons on reflections outside of specific water themes and carefully attended to regular parish duties in addition to the watershed activities.

I was aware that the outdoor worship service on September 10 could create distress due to the change in venue, the possibility of inclement weather, and the need to

pick up handicapped people. I worried that a few people might expect the service to be entirely different from our regular Sunday service and would therefore stay away. I regulated distress around this worship service by mentioning in the weekly E-news that a change in worship space can cause anxiety and explaining that the service would include readily identifiable Lutheran practices, including Affirmation of Baptism, sermon, and Holy Communion. I offered to meet after worship on the prior Sunday with anyone who needed a ride or who drove physically challenged parishioners. I visited the designated spot for the outdoor service several weeks in advance, so I could clearly describe the parking site and handicap access, and I emphasized that the synod grant would pay all the parking fees and the catered meal. I hoped that such detailed information and the catered meal (instead of the normal potluck) would help people feel cared for, enticing them to attend this special event.

This preparation proved successful, as the response to the day was universally positive, and many commented that we should hold a lakeside service again. Conveniently, the Education Committee had made this Sunday Rally Day, when Sunday school registration begins. The Sunday school superintendent sent a special notice to families about the fun that families would be enjoying at the beach, following worship. Explaining that ALC had rented the beach pavilion for an entire twelve-hour period (again, through synod funds), she encouraged everyone to come prepared for fellowship and fun after worship.

The worship bulletin for the waterside worship service included water liturgies from published sources. The sermon and service reflected learnings from Leah Schade,

Mary Elizabeth Moore, and George Marshall, with the intention of motivating and inspiring toward awareness and action. The service included a dialogue sermon (“What fun did you have this summer?” “What are the lake’s problems?” “What can we do about them?”), a brief explanation of the miracle of water (its chemistry and properties), a story about an eighth grader who advocated for a Marine National Monument, and sensory awareness of the lake (renewal of baptism using lake water, with sprinkling by children). Thus, we included themes of positive change and reversal, acknowledged grief about the lake’s problems, gave thanks for water and water advocates, and encouraged continued cooperation toward healing.

The photograph on the bulletin cover placed the worshipers on the shore of the lake, with a photograph featuring rock cliffs and sunbeams on the water, taken just up the shoreline. The liturgy was a standard Lutheran liturgy, beginning with renewal of baptism composed for the occasion and drawn from several liturgies in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. The publications *River of Life: 40 Days of Prayer, Connecticut River Pilgrimage 2017*, and *Respect Water—Protect Water* sourced the Prayers of Intercession, Closing Prayer and Blessing, and other bulletin materials.<sup>210</sup> The contemporary choir led wonderful relevant hymns that felt inspiring to sing.

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<sup>210</sup> *River of Life: 40 Days of Prayer, Connecticut River Pilgrimage 2017* (Canterbury, NH: Kairos Earth, 2017); Rosemary Partridge, Ellen Powell, and Annette Smith, *Respect Water—Protect Water: Facts, Prayers, Actions and Rituals for Water* (Danby, VT: Vermonters for a Clean Environment, 2008).

### ***Generate More Leadership***

The fifth step Heifetz gives is to generate more leadership, which can include honoring people's risk-taking and encouraging an ongoing cycle of action and reflection.<sup>211</sup> The September church council evaluated the project (Appendix VIII) and considered how to task the entire congregation to do so at the October congregational meeting. Parishioners who volunteered to covenant as watershed stewards met on September 25 to evaluate the effectiveness of keeping the covenant questions in mind during the summer. The Care for Creation committee used this information to determine how to engage the congregation in the upcoming October congregational meeting evaluation so as to encourage the congregation to continue developing leadership. Finally, throughout the project, I told council and the committees that ALC parishioners and I will develop a "toolkit" for the synod and the wider church once "A Watershed Moment" has concluded. The congregation's work on planning the toolkit will encourage deep thinking about the project and the larger vision; it will also heighten their awareness that they can teach others and foster watershed stewardship, as called for by the Churchwide Assembly Resolution (Appendix IX).

### ***Infuse the Work with Meaning***

The final step Heifetz outlines is to infuse the work with meaning. To give liturgical meaning to "A Watershed Moment," we scheduled the project to begin and end on two significant dates: Earth Day Sunday and the Feast of St. Francis. Further, we

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<sup>211</sup> Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice*, 171–175.

infused meaning through the September 10 worship service on the lake, which gave liturgical expression to the overall project.

We also infused the work with meaning through several other actions: I inserted two questions about water into the weekly worship bulletins over a period of six weeks (the same questions given to the covenant families). During one June worship service, I asked parishioners to respond to one of the questions (about ways they have seen water as beautiful). Several spoke movingly to all gathered in worship about their encounters with water in the past several weeks. In addition, I shared the “Resolution Urging Stewardship of the Gift of Water” several times over the course of the project, including during the Rally Day worship service at the lake, along with advocacy letter writing samples and Lake Champlain Committee materials. These materials infused meaning by linking ALC’s work to that of the national church and local advocacy groups. Finally, through the watershed toolkit developed for use by other congregations, ALC parishioners will hopefully see themselves as teachers and leaders, confirming the dignity and meaning of their work on this project.

### ***On the Balcony Again—Personal Pastoral Reflections***

Over the months of the project, I recorded in my personal log my delight to have funds to give to the committees for their watershed work. These funds gave them opportunity to envision and implement their own ideas related to their area of ministry. It was rewarding for me to see leaders responding to my invitation and stepping up. These leaders included the Sunday school superintendent, who happily realized in the spring

that plans for the summer sessions could flow from a water focus, and that she would have funds to purchase curriculum materials as well as pay for an afternoon for the children at the ECHO Leahy Center on the lake. A member of the Care for Creation Committee arranged with the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum for the full day action cruise on the lake and afternoon speakers (attended by community as well as congregation members). The artist who coordinated the art show also painted the rain barrel (later raffled) with scenes of the lake. An engineer created the water sampling activities with a map connected to the sample test tubes.

The leadership flowed from council's decision to implement "A Watershed Moment," which was then further planned and led by the committees, free to use the synod funds for their activities. In relation to Heifetz's categories, we kept attention focused through the committees' plans. I felt reassured and refreshed by the work generated by others and happily supported creative endeavors that arose. I felt trust develop in the congregation in part because of the varied respected individuals involved in the work, as well as due to the fairly constant communication about it. This trust freed me to relax and purposely plan for activities—leading them when appropriate, but also enjoying them.

I assumed responsibility for infusing the work with meaning in part because I fill the teaching and preaching role weekly. Thus, I knew that the lakeside worship service was very important. My goals were to create an enjoyable service for both children and adults that taught about water-related issues, brought those issues into a liturgical format, and grounded water awareness in Christian faith and worship. I felt very good about the

overall appreciation participants expressed—indeed the happiness they clearly felt—in response to this service.

Through each of these activities, I noticed fellowship developing through the opportunities we generated for creative planning, not to mention the activities themselves. This experience of fellowship inspired joy and investment while decreasing anxiety about the environmental focus or new emphases.

During the project, a few people expressed concern about an overemphasis on water. I wondered if people were becoming tired of the focus. Do they have theological concerns that the project does not sufficiently relate to Jesus and salvation? Are they tired of the activities? Do they feel that I have become distracted from regular parish duties? In addition to trying to discern answers to these questions, I also tried to discern how much advocacy was developing during the project. Have people engaged in actions that benefit water? This was an especially important question to answer, as it would shed light on the project's relative effectiveness. Finally, I wondered whether the project changed perceptions and values. These questions remain with me, but my worries somewhat settled after the October congregational evaluation described in Chapter 5.

## **Conclusion**

In sum, Ascension Lutheran Church developed “A Watershed Moment” to include a number of varied activities designed to encourage the congregation to learn more about water, enjoy connecting more deeply to lakes and streams in the Lake Champlain watershed region, see water as enhancing their worship and spiritual life, and

advocate for water health. A grant from the New England synod of the Evangelical Lutheran church in America enhanced the activities, making it possible for committees to plan water-related activities backed by funding. Ronald Heifetz's Adaptive Framework for leadership informed the project design and implementation.

Generally, the congregation very much appreciated the project, as revealed by the church council's evaluation. The evaluation noted that the varied activities, taking place at different days and times, involved people of all ages. The council decided to implement future projects similarly, with varied scheduling to encourage people of all ages and schedules to participate. Fellowship among parishioners grew, adding pleasure and joy, an unanticipated byproduct of the activities. What is unclear is how much congregant values changed as a result of the work, which is a goal in transformational leadership. Further, advocacy activities were not pronounced. Few parishioners signed advocacy letters during the Sunday worship at the lake, and we do not know how many individuals undertook new advocacy efforts as a result of the project, or will do so in the future. These questions will be considered in Chapter 5.

## **Chapter 5: Evaluation of Local Action “A Watershed Moment” at Ascension Lutheran Church**

In the previous chapter, I described the planning for and realization of “A Watershed Moment.” This chapter discusses the project’s effectiveness based on the evaluation conducted by Ascension Lutheran Church (ALC). First, I discuss ALC’s congregational findings about the effectiveness of “A Watershed Moment.” Second, I draw out the effectiveness of the project in relationship to transformational education and leadership principles discussed in Chapter 3.

### **Congregational Findings**

The congregation evaluated “A Watershed Moment” in three formats. First, the regular council meeting on September 18 discussed the project’s effectiveness, based on the original goals that council had set in February: *The goals were to: (1) discover that water is a gift from God; (2) define the breadth and scope of the Lake Champlain watershed and identify its socioeconomic, cultural, and spiritual importance; (3) discover the health of the watershed in parishioners’ neighborhoods; (4) experience the gift of water physically, emotionally, and spiritually; and (5) value constructive engagement with water as part of Christian discipleship.* I gave council a simple questionnaire (Appendix VIII). At this meeting, council not only evaluated the project but also planned how to enable to congregation to evaluate the project by including an evaluation into the October annual congregational meeting. Thus, the second evaluation took place at the October 8 congregational meeting, in which parishioners answered a written

questionnaire about the activities they had attended and their responses to them. The Care for Creation committee oversaw this portion of the congregational meeting. Finally, the third evaluation took place in the Care for Creation Committee, when they discussed the effectiveness of the entire project at their October 26 meeting.

### **Council Report on Effectiveness, September 18, 2017**

The church council discussed the effectiveness of “A Watershed Moment” at the regular September meeting. I prepared a simple series of questions as part of my regular pastor’s report. I gave council the form in Appendix VIII. Council members spent about twenty minutes to recall the activities, their own responses to them, and comments from others. I took notes on the discussion. Council members reflected that:

- Water is important to our health and central to life, so it was good to devote time and attention to it.
- Water stewardship was helpfully presented as a large issue. This helped to focus attention, but in future we could well take on a more bounded issue.
- We have become known as a congregation concerned about water within the state, which is good.
- Activities allowed for diversity in schedules and diverse participation. They were excellent and well-planned. Varied activities over a period of time ensured that one could enter whenever one could, which was especially important to those who could not attend everything. Activities involved parishioners not usually involved, especially young persons and children. One young adult (a council member’s

granddaughter who is not normally active in the church) felt inspired by the boat trip and water professionals she met there to change her vocational direction.

Sunday School teachers felt they led coherent and exciting summer sessions, due to the water focus with extra funds to expend.

- Test tubes helped people learn about the watershed. Even though the person coordinating the test tubes sent a follow-up letter to participating families, this did not give a strong, clear statement about the implications of the findings for water health and for advocacy.
- The congregation is more aware of water issues, but the waters are no better now than before we started this process began! That feels frustrating. What more can our church do?
- People loved the lakeside worship service—the liturgy and service itself, the catered meal, and the fellowship provided. Folks said that they could talk to varied people, and it was great to be outdoors. We should do this again next year.
- One council member said she felt the church put too much emphasis on water over a fairly long period of time. In future, an emphasis on water or another area of congregational concern could helpfully be broken up or more episodically introduced to the congregation throughout the year.

## **The “Sacred Waters Questionnaire”: Congregational Report on Effectiveness, October 8, 2017**

At the semi-annual congregational meeting, which focuses on ministry areas, the Care for Creation Committee members gave Ascension parishioners the “Sacred Waters Questionnaire” about the various activities in “A Watershed Moment.” Forty parishioners took ten minutes in silence to write answers. The “Sacred Waters Questionnaire” first inquired as to which activities parishioners had attended, then asked the following three questions: “How have these events helped you develop in your spiritual life? How has your experience with these events helped you feel more connected to, inspired by water? How has water become a part of your Christian ministry?” I analyzed the responses and discerned themes, under which I have grouped responses below. The themes are leadership, enjoyment, learning, relation to spiritual aspects of water, relation to water care or advocacy, and relation to God.

### ***Leadership***

Parishioners expressed gratitude for the leaders who designed “A Watershed Moment” and created the activities. They felt the activities encouraged them to be involved in new activities that fostered knowledge and leadership. Comments included: “Thank you for offering this. We appreciated the chance to test our neighborhood stream.” “Excellent way to involve us personally with our watersheds—thank you!” Of the Lake Champlain Action Cruise and Tutorial, participants wrote, “Fantastic, well-executed and well-attended event to experience firsthand and learn from experts.” “Very

well done. Very informative day. This activity altered the direction of my 21-year-old granddaughter's educational life [who decided to go into the study of environmental law].”

Of the art show, parishioners wrote: “Our family had fun preparing to bring work to the exhibit.” “Thanks to all our contributors and especially to those who helped set up!!!” “Amazing talent in our congregation.” “At first I thought it was a crazy idea, but I sure was wrong.” “It was great to reconnect with my photography and choose photos I had forgotten I took.”

The projects helped participants to see water with new understanding. “Water has/was important in my work life before I retired, so I guess this focus at church put ‘an accent mark’ over what I’d already been thinking.”

The project activities inspired a deeper appreciation for the congregation and its activities. “A church with a purpose. These events made us admire and love this church and its beautiful people even more.” “I am thankful for and impressed by so many members who involve themselves in all aspects of our church.” “Increased awareness of the importance—vital necessity—of this resource has become more central to my thinking and worship. Thank you to all—Pastor Nancy, Care for Creation Committee, and all who have made this so meaningful to all, especially as we confront the problems/opportunities of confronting climate change.”

Several comments directly addressed leadership for watershed care: “I am very aware of the importance of water in all Earth’s ecosystems and am convinced that all

work toward protecting this gift is an important form of stewardship.” “The events show how we can influence others that we know.”

### ***Enjoyment***

The joy that people felt in varied activities in and around water was apparent and reflected in their comments. This connectedness to water that parishioners felt links to the discussion in Chapter 3 about the importance of children and adults being outside and in nature in order not only to learn but also to develop a love for nature and the commitment to care for it. Of the water testing project, a participant wrote, “Fun & educational.” “Fun to explore an environment we normally pass by!” The lake worship service elicited, “Wow! A great day!” “Totally enjoyed the worship opportunity at lakeside and beach.” “Very enjoyable. It’s nice that the organizers arranged such wonderful weather. We should repeat this.” A parishioner who attended the Lake Champlain Action Cruise and Tutorial wrote, “I realized that although I’ve spent a lot of time on water, it was the first time on a creek in rain. A whole different experience.”

### ***Learning***

The participants felt they learned about the issues facing water, the importance of water, and the resultant actions to conserve and care for water. Participants also learned about themselves (“parts of my life I have overlooked”). Of the water testing, a parishioner wrote, “It helped to understand the problem. It provided useful results.” The cruise/tutorial day elicited the comment, “Fantastic day—very enjoyable and

educational.” The summer Sunday school was felt to be a “good program for kids because it used available time and resources to teach in a fun, active setting.” The art show inspired the comment, “Wonderful to see all the talent and to realize how much water means in our lives.” Another comment noted that the project overall “has made me aware of parts of my life that I have overlooked and undervalued.” Addressing the question of how these activities helped parishioners feel more connected to water, a respondent noted, “We live in an area where there is an abundance of water and we tend to take it for granted. I value water more so and conserve and recycle water. More aware of the role of water in this area.” To the question about how these events helped develop a deepened spiritual life, a parishioner wrote, “More emphasis on the *spiritual* dimensions of our very precious water is wonderful. We take water for granted—we can’t do that any longer. Please continue into the importance of ecosystems—really small ecosystems—most people need more awareness; all these things teach!”

### ***Relation to Spiritual Aspects of Water***

The “Love Our Watershed” brochure encouraged people to sit by water and to create a prayer, with the intention of deepening a spiritual connection with water. The congregational questionnaire did not ask about engagement of individual spiritual practices, so we may have missed some information about how many felt more spiritually inspired by water. The respondents did comment about the waterside worship service, which was “an effective and meaningful worship experience;...a way to connect spiritual growth and God’s creation.” Other comments included: “We attended, and it was

wonderful to worship in a place surrounded by water. Maybe we could do it again and have the service on the beach [instead of the beach pavilion].” “This event was very special—to worship outside with fresh air, sunshine, surrounded by friends—it cannot get much better. Please do repeat!!!” “Wonderful opportunity to commune with nature.”

In response to the question about development in spiritual life, a parishioner wrote, “It has made me more aware of the peace being near water gives me. I am going to make a commitment to be near water, if only just a stream at least twice a week and to give myself time to meditate and contemplate the peace it gives me.” Further responses included: “Connected us to the parish and community in new ways; connected us to scripture and stories in the in new ways.” “Water is so important to our Christian belief as the water of our Baptism gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit. This could have been more a part of our service.” “I have always felt connected to water. These events have strengthened my connection to a Christian spirituality.”

The activities, especially the worship service on the lake, seemed to affirm people who already feel a spiritual connection to water (“water is such a great metaphor for my spirituality”). The beach worship service elicited no negative responses (“repeat, again, please”).

I feel that the worship service, which seemed to cap the activities, perfectly summarized and expressed the earlier events. The service positioned the water focus and activities within our regular service framework (renewal of baptism, sermon, Holy Communion), intended to give the sense of water awareness as a normal, not radical, part of Christian life. Yet the service was very unusual in being outdoors. I hoped the

worshippers would experience water as a fellow worship participant rather than simply as backdrop, and that water would be honored through the liturgy. I believe the service accomplished this purpose, suggested by the comment, “Wonderful opportunity to commune with nature.”

However, despite the positive responses to the worship service and opportunities for prayer reflections, one parishioner commented on the overall watershed project: “I would have wanted more clear connection to Jesus and the many examples he provided through the Holy Spirit as living water. The emphasis was too much on water and not how it connects with the word and our expected way of life.” However, another participant wrote, “Connected us to the parish and community in new ways; connected us to scripture and stories in the Bible in new ways.”

### ***Relation to Water Care or Advocacy***

Some participants reflected that the activities fostered their water care or advocacy.

I feel this has started me thinking about the role of water in my life and the life of my family. I hope we can sustain the attention we give this so I have some encouragement and some help. When I visit Lake Champlain or draw water from my tap I feel both gratitude and responsibility to do my part, even if only a small contribution, to sustain this precious resource.

The offering of rain barrels provided some participants with a fairly easy way to care:

“Works great. Water houseplants with it.” “Good opportunity to encourage water conservation.” The water testing “...gave us a nice opportunity to connect (or reconnect)

with the stream that is our neighbor. It was good to find out that a stream near an agricultural field was relatively low in Ph.”

Perhaps advocacy is still arm’s length away for some, as expressed in this comment: “Heightened our awareness. Helped me appreciate how much effort by so many to save and improve our water resources.” This comment suggests appreciation for others doing advocacy and points to fertile possibilities for further action toward care and advocacy. The Care for Creation Committee has called for advocacy for the upcoming year, and committee members say they feel parishioners are ready for action.

### ***Relation to God***

A few responses to the question about spiritual life mentioned God. These include: “Outdoor worship/activities have always helped me connect with God through nature.” “Any activity that immerses me in God’s creation helps me to feel his presence more.” A mother appreciated all the activities: “As a Mom, I look for any opportunity to share God in our lives/world with my kids, and all these are very kid friendly activities.” The lakeside worship service emphasized Jesus and water (Jesus as “living water” and Jesus asking people to give drink to the thirsty).

The parishioners’ responses indicated that activities throughout “A Watershed Moment” deepened parishioners’ knowledge about aspects of water and themselves. It appears that water’s multivalent aspects—as source of life and joy, as a resource in need of care, and as connected to human experience and identity—captured the attention of parishioners and elicited varied emotive and intellectual responses.

## **Care for Creation Committee Summary of Effectiveness, October 26, 2017**

The Care for Creation Committee had overseen all aspects of “A Watershed Moment.” Following the council and congregational evaluations, the committee took some time at their regular meeting to appraise the entire effort. This committee had worked most closely with me through the project, and I felt eager for the group to share their impressions and also to discern where the watershed care impetus could now take us. The questions I wanted aired included, What had we learned? What could we do differently? What did we want to repeat?

As the Care for Creation Committee reviewed and discussed the congregational responses, they observed that, overall, Ascension parishioners enjoyably engaged in the activities. Parishioners felt positive about the variety of activities, which they perceived as fun, interesting, and inspiring. These activities brought people out to and on the water. One committee member said, “You can study and think about water. But then when you are on or around it, you really internalize it, you feel it, you integrate it.”

Over time, the varied activities involved every facet of the congregation and people of all ages. The Care for Creation Committee sensed that the activities supported some parishioners in commitments and awareness that they already had, and that the church strengthened and supported them. Further, the committee observed a felt sense of surprise and delight (especially at the quality of the art show contributions) and at the fellowship generated by the varied events and the new experience of worshipping on the beach. One committee member observed a continued “hunger” reflected in the congregants’ responses. When I asked about the hunger, he said he felt parishioners

wanted to share more experiences together outside. Further, the committee noted that the positive responses may have been in part because there were no right or wrong ways to approach the activities. Thus, parishioners brought their own values and interests to activities, engaging them at their respective levels of interest. The activities empowered people to make connections with water, with one another, and with other groups in an atmosphere of trust (such as those represented by the speakers at the June 16 Lake Champlain action cruise and tutorial).

When the Care for Creation Committee reviewed these responses and discussed the activities, they summarized several aspects of the project's effectiveness and identified the following keys to success:

- We sustained a thematic emphasis;
- We received funding, which supported new ideas (e.g., a member remarked that having funds took the pressure off of planning for the \$1,000 lake action cruise costs, which then attracted sufficient paying participants to offset the cost);
- Varied activities, activity locations, and a flexible calendar of events meant people could choose whatever attracted them or their families;
- Every part of the congregation (age levels and committees) participated;
- Activities included both fun and learning: people appreciated getting near or on the water, the brochure, speakers at the tutorial, the worship service, rain barrels, and displays.
- Further, all these activities took place in a hospitable, nonjudgmental atmosphere.
- Advocacy and linking the activities to scripture could have been strengthened.

- From our congregation’s experiences, we recommend that a successful watershed stewardship program in other congregations will combine varied activities, applicable to all ages, in varied settings, with the opportunity for fun and learning, all in a well-coordinated and communicated themed ministry approach, which inspires people to engage in a process they come to trust. This process will lead to learning and to deepened commitment to care for water in varied ways (both household practices and advocacy). The process is best integrated with scripture and spiritual emphases.

### **Effectiveness in Relation to Principles of Transformational Education and Leadership**

To conclude the evaluation of “A Watershed Moment” I will look at the evaluation date from the council, congregational, and Care for Creation Committee to see parallels and divergences from principles of transformational education and leadership. As described in Chapter 4, Ascension’s “A Watershed Moment” was designed and implemented through the framework of Ronald Heifetz’s Adaptive Leadership. To review and restate those principles, transformational leaders “get on the balcony” in order to properly see a situation in need of transformation. That is, they take themselves away from immediate action, need, or crisis to view the whole dance floor, which includes the “dancers,” the flow, the situation as presented as well as some of the causal factors of the situation. Leaders then move forward to diagnose the situation in order to frame the key

issues and questions to create and implement a strategy, while developing leadership in the group as a whole.<sup>212</sup>

Transformational leaders and educators discussed in Chapter 3 (Richard Louv, George Marshall, Jane Vella, Mary Elizabeth Moore, Erin Biviano) offer insight into the dynamics of individual and group change to promote values reevaluation and further desirable change. Transformation occurs either when emerging leaders adopt new values or shift the emphasis among values toward a desired outcome. Creation care transformational work within congregations likely will show evidence of these value shifts.

Finally, as discussed in Chapter 3, transformational leaders and educators view transformational changes as dynamic. Change cannot be determined beforehand, and it takes time. As Mary Elizabeth Moore and George Marshall explicate, transformational change will involve community building, attention to values, making room for grief and psychological change, deepened self-awareness, commitment and ability to be transformed, among other dynamics.<sup>213</sup> Both leaders and learners will be involved in these processes. Further, as Richard Louv and Evelyn Underhill insist, creation care

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<sup>212</sup> Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009).

<sup>213</sup> Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2004); George Marshall, *Don't Even Think About It: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Ignore Climate Change* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014).

awareness evolves from sustained relationship with both God and nature, requiring more experiences in nature and attention to dynamics of spiritual change and growth.<sup>214</sup>

How did Ascension's process manifest these principles? All activities offered through "A Watershed Moment" constituted an opportunity for parishioners to put themselves "on the balcony." And since everyone at Ascension participated in "A Watershed Moment" at some level, all parishioners, in the end, put themselves on the balcony. Through the theme and varied activities and observations, water became a focus of discussion, reflection, spiritual growth, experimentation, enjoyment, and worship. Members of the congregation reflected that they learned about water issues and appreciated water more fully as a result of the project, reporting that they now see water differently and are aware of the need to care for it. Appreciative notes from the congregation indicated both that "A Watershed Moment" simultaneously reinforced already-held values of water care and strengthened their commitment to watershed stewardship.

This leadership project enabled authority to develop, some authority delegated by church council to the committees and some which arose spontaneously (such as assistants for the art show). Thus we "gave the work back to the people." This development of leadership was partly due to a theme (water awareness) that provided focused opportunities for planning activities; the funding provided by the synod; my initiative in bringing the proposed project to council for discussion and anticipated adoption; general

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<sup>214</sup> Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 2005); Evelyn Underhill, "The Spiritual Life of the Teacher," in *Collected Papers of Evelyn Underhill*, ed. Lucy Menzies (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., Inc., 1946).

interest and knowledge within the congregation about water combined with openness of the congregation to try something new; and creative individuals who planned and took charge of activities. The Sunday school lessons, boat trip, rain barrels, test tubes project, art show, and partnership with the Vermont Haiti Project were the fruit of planning by people in the congregation. Since I needed an oversight group, I had asked at the beginning for a Care for Creation Committee to oversee the project. I, too, felt empowered both because of funding and because of the congregation's awareness that they were helping me lead a doctoral project, with its implied back-up accountability and authority. I felt renewed authority to ask committees for their plans and evaluations, and then request evaluations from council and congregation.

As I review these responses, and the principles of transformational leadership and education, I picture a leadership cycle. The components include a motivated small group that creates excellent activities that propelled others to create excellent activities. Parishioners, stimulated by these experiences, feel galvanized toward more appreciation, knowledge, and action. In turn, parishioners not only appreciate the original leadership but feel delighted by the high quality of their fellow parishioners' work and organizing abilities, which in turns helps them to appreciate the church and its focus, in this case, water. Being in and near water grounded the experiences, taking them deeper into individual spirituality and into awareness of the need for more action. The council's awareness that water had not improved despite the efforts may be seen as a moment of grief that leads to new commitment toward transformed action and awareness.

Parishioners' responses to "A Watershed Moment" also highlight the ability of water itself to draw people into new awareness, fun, fellowship, worship, and creativity. The success of this project indicates the potential of water to focus ecological stewardship learning and leadership, in contrast to a potentially politically divisive, and elusive issue such as climate change.

As we would expect from the literature on transformational education and leadership, the project was a process that unfolded over time, a process that allowed for both joys and perplexity. The joys centered on (1) fellowship, (2) discovery through new experiences and relationships with new groups, and (3) fun. The perplexity centered on (1) the question of whether sustained focus on water caused other issues and themes to be overlooked, such as climate change, species diversity, or more extensive connections with the Bible and Jesus; and (2) the extent of advocacy and actual change generated by the project's water focus.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the congregational evaluations, I believe that "A Watershed Moment" empowered Ascension's ministries and promoted deepened spiritual grounding for creation care. Several people shared important and moving experiences. For example, during the Lake Champlain Watershed Action and Cruise Tutorial, we stopped on a river for five minutes of silence. One participant, who owns a home on the lake and has much boating experience, subsequently reported to church council that she had never been in silence on the lake before and that the experience moved her spiritually. Further, the

young adult who didn't conclude confirmation class several years earlier and who rarely attends church told her grandparents that her life completely changed by talking with one of the organizers about her hopes to work for environmental care. She changed her educational plans because of the boat trip, to pursue a joint environmental-law degree. One of the educators on the boat helped her to think through her educational plans to network with people in the field, while pursuing a degree at the University of Vermont, with its sound environmental programs.

The empowerment of Ascension's ministries through "A Watershed Moment" derived from the opportunity to explore aspects of a problem together over time, with varied activities and involvement and supported by sermons, worship, and reflection opportunities. As described, the exploration of water occurred with the test tubes that families took to sample water near their homes, as well as the worship service on the lake, learning about rain barrels, and the introductory meeting through which we discussed problems in the watershed. All committees participated and parishioners discovered one another's gifts. For example, parishioners gasped in delight as they emerged from the October congregational meeting into the Fellowship Hall to discover the art show exhibits.

Because some parishioners already knew quite a lot about water, I cannot evaluate the extent to which the project contributed to changed values or enhanced advocacy. I sense fertile ground for continued watershed stewardship activities. The Care for Creation Committee did commit to carrying the emphasis forward.

Two areas that can be strengthened going forward are connecting watershed awareness to scriptural teaching as well as providing more education and opportunity for advocacy. To strengthen the link between scripture and the activities, a Biblical text could have been printed at the top of every activity announcement or flier. Further, a group discussion about scriptural basis for watershed care could promote deeper connections between care for creation, scripture, and parishioners' spiritual growth. To promote advocacy, a sermon about Lutherans and advocacy could promote deepened awareness of the need to link watershed care to legislation and policy. A specific Sunday designated for letter writing after the worship service, with a focus on water, could aid in the linkage between awareness and advocacy.

Ascension's "A Watershed Moment" contributed to a broader community effort when Ascension cosponsored a "pilgrimage" on Lake Champlain in September. Ascension initiated the effort, but worked with several other agencies; they based their plans on the five-week Connecticut River pilgrimage. The organizers used Ascension's "Love Your Watershed" brochure (appropriately modified) for that event.

One final note is important to make: Ascension is not in a community that suffers from water shortage or water conflicts, but it does minister in the context of a degraded watershed that needs citizen mobilization and adequate funding for clean-up. The Care for Creation Committee has planned actions in 2018 for the congregation, which include boat trips, education, and advocacy training, granting further opportunities for parishioners to live out their belief that Earth is God's creation and the watershed needs care.

## **Chapter 6: Interpretation of Local Action in a Global Watershed Movement**

Church groups around the world have mobilized to improve water access and promote water health. The watershed care efforts whose stories unfold in this chapter reveal strengthened awareness and leadership from people in varied contexts as they have learned how to be effective in watershed care. This chapter considers fascinating watershed projects in the United States and then moves to international efforts.

Ascension's "A Watershed Moment" has been vitalized and informed by wider watershed efforts, which have helped to make visible the critical importance of watershed discipleship (1) to a region's enhanced ecological health, (2) to community social justice, and (3) to the ways in which such ministry involves people of all ages and backgrounds. The formative watershed efforts that have had a bearing on "A Watershed Moment" include the ELCA Resolution Urging Stewardship of the Gift of Water. Passed by the entire Churchwide Assembly in August 2016, it provides inspiration and authoritative undergirding to watershed discipleship projects and promotional resources around the country. Further, Ched Myers fosters interfaith grassroots efforts, which powerfully reinforce the growing movement. His book, *Watershed Discipleship*, includes a chapter about the West Atlantic Watershed Alliance (WAWA). When I read this chapter, I was inspired. I had hoped to be in touch with a local watershed group in an urban area. I called WAWA to ask about how their watershed work developed and ways that churches were involved. An additional inspiration is Lutherans Restoring Creation (LRC). The LRC website provides a document called "Toolkit: Our Watershed Moment." Because

the Toolkit was published by the EcoFaith Network of the Minneapolis synod of the ELCA, I called that synod to ask how the toolkit was developed.

These contacts inform this chapter, which explores groups around the country that have learned about watershed stewardship. Further, many churches provide financial resources to international church bodies that help protect water and increase access to potable water. Questions to be considered in this chapter include: How does leadership toward watershed stewardship develop? Who begins and leads it? What have churches focused on as most important in watershed work (e.g., worship, education, hands-on experiences, advocacy, fun)? What can be learned by comparing various church or community-based efforts? And, how are churches fostering worldwide water efforts?

### **Watershed Discipleship Movements in the United States**

As we have noted, watersheds provide a natural ecological area in which churches of varied denominations may join with other churches and groups to care for local lakes, rivers, streams, and underground waters. Two ELCA synods that have fostered watershed work in their bioregions are the Minneapolis synod and the Synod of Northeast Minnesota. These provide guidance for church groups wishing to engage in watershed stewardship.

#### ***Minneapolis Synod, ELCA***

The Minneapolis Synod's story is very interesting because of the synod's Care for Creation Team's efforts to organize congregations for water stewardship. Here is some

background: the synod had recently employed Congregational Organizer for Environmental Justice Emilie Bouvier. After meeting with the Rev. Dr. David Rhoades of LRC, Bouvier spent time in one-to-one conversations with leaders and congregations to build a base of leaders. They synod created the EcoFaith Network and decided to choose a lens through which to engage environmental justice. For several reasons, the synod chose water: Leaders saw that water stewardship links to worldwide ecological concerns but can be practiced in participants' backyards or nearby. Further, there were sound biblical resonances; as Bouvier noted, Jesus "hung around water a lot." Finally, water has sacramental meaning and brings up the question of baptizing in local waters.

The synod created the Toolkit for congregations to help them focus on aspects of watershed awareness through worship, education, advocacy, household practices, and maintenance of buildings and grounds.<sup>215</sup> The EcoFaith Network team used the Toolkit while working with congregations to enable leaders toward action. In some churches, the leaders were pastors or members of the Care for Creation team. In other churches, the leadership team was comprised of the buildings and grounds staff. In some cases, Care for Creation work had previously been undertaken by a committee or group of people in isolation from other groups in the church. The conversations and Toolkit enabled participants to develop next steps for their work, build more focused skills, and join with others in the congregation and community. To foster their work in congregations,

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<sup>215</sup> A conversation with Emilie Bouvier provided these facts about the organization within the synod. The synod created "Toolkit: Our Watershed Moment: An Initiative of the EcoFaith Network," EcoFaith Network, Minneapolis Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, accessed February 14, 2018, [http://mpls-synod.org/files/EcoFaithToolkit\\_Our-Watershed-Moment.pdf](http://mpls-synod.org/files/EcoFaithToolkit_Our-Watershed-Moment.pdf).

EcoFaith Network team members preached, taught adult forums, maintained a Facebook page, and sent out a weekly E-blast.

The Toolkit begins with an introductory letter from the bishop. It then defines a watershed, helping people understand the water cycle and how a watershed becomes degraded. The Toolkit then offers activities for youth education, worship resources (prayers, scripture readings and stories, hymns, and a consideration of questions regarding outdoor baptism in local waters). The work of important Lutheran theologians (Larry Rasmussen, Ben Stewart, and Gordon Lathrop), along with Ched Myers, plays an important role in the Toolkit. Finally, the Toolkit provides action suggestions for protecting the watershed at home, in the yard, and as a congregation.

A grant from the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District Water Stewardship Fund enabled Bouvier to enlist and support the efforts of nineteen watershed leaders from sixteen congregations to engage in water stewardship. Reports from the churches show that all aspects of church life were involved. In worship, congregations found naming the local water bodies to be moving. Some parishioners brought water from local sources near their church to be placed on the altar. The parishioners reported that prayers, hymns, and litanies about water increased awareness of the watershed and water concerns, and helped them to feel emotionally engaged with the process. They experienced watershed-related preaching as a powerful part of enabling people to act.

Education was also an important component. The synod churches held several adult forums called “Watershed 101,” in which participants received technical information about the watershed in their area and its state of health. Facilitators then

asked participants: “What did you hear?” “What was exciting?” “What could you imagine yourselves as individuals and community doing with this?” and “What’s the first step you would take to get that going?”

Congregations became involved in action projects and advocacy. These included storm water assessment, work toward pesticide-free and sustainable grass maintenance, watershed clean-up projects, and storm drain marking days. Several congregations participated in the “Connect the Drops” program for confirmation-age students. Church youth hiked along a local creek to collect trash, researched plastics in waterways and plastic recycling, studied the connection between energy efficiency and water use, promoted energy-efficient lightbulbs, set up small permaculture planters atop impervious surfaces, and built rain barrels.

Larger community events involved congregations and community participants. They included a walk with Sharon Day, an Ojibwe elder, along the Minnehaha Creek, and work with a local organization, Growing Green Heart, which invited participants to tell stories about their connection to the greater Mississippi River watershed, to sample water, and to canoe the river. The EcoFaith Network of the Minneapolis synod then infused watershed stewardship awareness into annual synod assemblies. In May 2016, the assembly passed a resolution urging each church to know the name of their watershed.

A critical evaluation of the work summarized above (an evaluation done both by synod staff and selected participating churches) finds that the EcoFaith team lifted up the importance of working with congregations on water stewardship as an aspect of environmental justice. The synod staff felt the watershed focus provided a strong impetus

for education and action. The use of standard one-on-one organizing methods with congregations, availability of resources, and the planning of local events all positively influenced the churches and wider community. Participants from the varied churches spoke about their gratitude for preaching and study that helped them interweave faith and creation care. They relished opportunities to promote a healthy watershed through buildings and ground care, to walk along Minnehaha Creek with Sharon Day, and to develop leadership skills. Importantly, the leadership skills taught gave a few participants the ability to speak in community fora about the importance of watershed care in the context of controversial proposals affecting the watershed.

As I step back to appraise the work of the EcoFaith Network, I am impressed with the capacity of staff and congregational leaders to develop a movement within the synod toward watershed care. Funding and staff members to catalyze watershed care in churches were critical. So, too, was the support of the bishop. Bishop Ann Svennungsen wrote in an Introduction to the Toolkit:

Watershed discipleship is becoming a central understanding of our life of faith. It invites us as congregants to re-inhabit our context. We are literally ‘grounded’ by our ongoing connection to place—theologically, spiritually, physically, and morally. We are stewards of what has been entrusted to us.<sup>216</sup>

Finally, the Toolkit offered a powerful way to educate churches and to energize and motivate Lutherans through the wider synodical enthusiasm and authority. The Toolkit’s success speaks to the importance of published resources developed for watershed care,

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<sup>216</sup> “Toolkit: Our Watershed Moment: An Initiative of the EcoFaith Network,” EcoFaith Network, Minneapolis Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, accessed February 14, 2018, [http://mpls-synod.org/files/EcoFaithToolkit\\_-Our-Watershed-Moment.pdf](http://mpls-synod.org/files/EcoFaithToolkit_-Our-Watershed-Moment.pdf).

which are then utilized by congregations, as envisioned by the Resolution Urging Stewardship of the Gift of Water.

***Northeast Minnesota Synod, ELCA***

Another example of an organized Lutheran response to creation care also under the banner of a synod team is that spearheaded by the Rev. Dr. David Carlson. Pastor of Gloria Dei Lutheran church, Duluth, Minnesota, Carlson both researched and led care-for-creation activities in the synod churches as part of his research for a D.Min. thesis at Luther Seminary. Although the church projects did not all focus directly on watershed care, Carlson found that church leaders rated water as the second most important of environmental problems (they rated climate change first and energy third).<sup>217</sup> Study participants who mentioned water as a very important issue noted it as an essential resource currently suffering from degradation even while “‘rising populations’ will accelerate the decline of fresh water, affecting other interrelated systems including ‘food and habitat.’”<sup>218</sup>

Carlson researched congregations’ understanding of and involvement with environmental issues by analyzing surveys of 134 respondents from 84 out of 137 synod churches, and 13 participants in four congregations’ focus groups. Survey questions about creation care involvement focused on worship, education, practices (household and financial stewardship, regular prayer, care for the poor, study of scripture), and advocacy.

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<sup>217</sup> David M. Carlson, “Earth Stewardship and the Missio Dei: Participating in the Care and Redemption of All God Has Made” (D.Min. thesis, Luther Seminary, 2016), 113.

<sup>218</sup> Carlson, “Earth Stewardship and the Missio Dei,” 114.

Carlson found that congregational creation care teams are very important, organizationally, because they effectively mobilize a congregation, acting as leaven in the loaf. He further found that a synodical team, providing oversight and support, keeps these congregational teams vital and active.

Carlson's research revealed that, while a large majority of church members hope to foster Earth stewardship, advocacy is still a growing edge in many congregations. His study led Carlson to a significant conclusion:

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 ...congregations were demonstrating it, despite risks.<sup>219</sup>

One should bear in mind that study participants were overwhelmingly Democratic, with few Republicans represented.

Carlson's work demonstrates the importance of synodical engagement. Prior to his doctoral study, the synod had a Creation Care Team. In 2008, a Resolution on the Care of Creation asked congregations to take responsibility as stewards of creation, with the Synod Council appointing a Green/Creation Care Task Force. In 2014, a further resolution passed, stating that Care for Creation should be practiced in all church ministries. However, Carlson found that while three-fourths of parishioners knew that the synod fostered care for creation work, they did not necessarily know the content or focus of related synod resolutions. This finding underlines the importance of continued work to make synod or national resolutions known to congregations and the important role of parish-level creation care teams to inspire and support sustained congregational action.

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<sup>219</sup> Carlson, "Earth Stewardship and the Missio Dei," 231.

ALC's "A Watershed Moment" finds a foundation in Carlson's conviction that congregations are the "ideal setting" to model earth stewardship. ALC's project is also a testament to the value of synodical encouragement of churches in their creation care work.

### ***Ecumenical and Grassroots Projects***

The inspiring and profoundly important movement for watershed discipleship flows from many emerging sources, including ecumenical and grassroots projects, national resolutions, and decades-long international work for environmental sustainability and promotion of human health. We learn from similarities and differences. The stimulus for watershed stewardship varies. West Atlanta Watershed Alliance (WAWA) formed because a proposed upgraded sewage treatment in West Atlanta would negatively affect the surrounding communities. Activist theologian and author Ched Myers has worked to articulate watershed stewardship from a theologically grounded perspective. In his work, he has encountered and supported varied types of watershed activism, including WAWA.<sup>220</sup> Myers compiled and published a collection of essays written by colleagues under the age of forty who have worked as activists and educators "under the shadow of climate crisis."<sup>221</sup> His website and speaking tours continue to encourage developing watershed projects around the country.

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<sup>220</sup> Ched Myers, "A Critical, Contextual, and Constructive Approach to Ecological Theology and Practice," intro. to *Watershed Discipleship: Reinhabiting Bioregional Faith and Practice*, ed. Ched Myers (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016). See also Myer's website, <https://watersheddiscipleship.org>.

<sup>221</sup> Myers, "A Critical, Contextual, and Constructive Approach," 1.

Myers frames his discussion of grassroots watershed groups with a wide and critical context, asserting that a reorientation to watersheds is both necessary and radical. Because watershed stewardship requires a radical shift in values, such work means nothing less than becoming disciples of watersheds (taking seriously that there are two books of scripture: the Bible and creation). Very importantly, such identification with watersheds motivates disciples to move beyond civic responsibility to “loyalty” to God’s creation through bioregional watershed care. This loyalty, Myers points out, involves relearning how to live in a local ecological region, naturally defined within a watershed. Reorienting ourselves toward learning about and caring for watersheds is a key to creation care and restorative justice.

One of the many intriguing and inspiring chapters in *Watershed Discipleship* is by Sarah Thompson, executive director of Christian Peacemaker Teams, which tells the story of the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance (WAWA). Historically, Atlanta communities that have experienced the most widespread racial and economic exclusion and exploitation have been situated in the most damaged watersheds. When the Atlanta municipal government upgraded sewage infrastructure to create a combined sewage overflow system, it did not consult the most affected population, the African American communities in West Atlanta.

WAWA developed, first, when its founding members initiated one-on-one relationships, canvassing door to door and organizing meetings and phone trees to spur neighborhood conversations and help people feel connected to impending policy decisions. Second, WAWA strengthened the relationship between these communities and

their watersheds through watershed clean-up days and water quality monitoring, which involved taking water samples to groups who analyze the water for toxics and pollutants. Third, WAWA also cleaned up land areas within the watershed in order to create public spaces, including the Outdoor Activities Center (26 acres) and the Hampton-Beecher Nature Preserve (102 acres). This work and resultant access encouraged community residents to spend time outdoors and enjoy being in nature.

A fourth step in WAWA's development had to do with changes in understanding on the part of local West Atlanta leaders. As Thompson points out, seeing environmental justice as "a convergence of environmental and public health, health equity advocacy and civil rights,"<sup>222</sup> elder community leaders began to realize that environmental sustainability activism simply continued and advanced their work in the Civil Rights and social justice movements. In the words of Na'Taki Osborne Jelks, board chair and volunteer executive director of WAWA, environmental justice issues united and undergirded "where we live *and* where we work, where we worship *and* where our kids and grandkids learn...both the natural *and* the built worlds."<sup>223</sup> Fifth, WAWA worked with the city to open Cascade Springs, a gated preserve, previously only open Monday through Friday from 8 in the morning to 3 in the afternoon, now open until late, so that working people can enjoy the preserve after working hours, thanks to the advocacy efforts of WAWA. Responding positively to WAWA's request, the city gave the organization the key and with it, the responsibility for opening and closing the preserve

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<sup>222</sup> Sarah Thompson, "An Ecological Beloved Community: An Interview with Na'Taki Osborne Jelks of the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance," in *Watershed Discipleship*, 112.

<sup>223</sup> Thompson, "An Ecological Beloved Community," 112.

daily. Residents of the area who had never been in the wooded area were now able to walk it for enjoyment. Historically, for African Americans, the natural world has involved the social trauma of disempowered relationships with land and water, so this change served as an important invitation to African-Americans to engage in positive experiences of nature.

To build on its work in connecting West Atlanta residents with positive outdoor recreational opportunities in nature, WAWA initiated a “Great American Backyard Campout,” where, within the city, hundreds of local residents slept under the stars. The community residents might not have naturally gravitated to camping out beyond their immediate neighborhoods, but this event, organized by a group they had come to trust, provided an overnight outdoors experience close at hand that helped them enjoy being outside and ultimately deepened their relationship to their local watershed.

WAWA extends its concerns far beyond West Atlanta. WAWA promoted education about conditions in communities farther afield, but related to West Atlanta through production and shipping of clothing, food, or other commodities available in West Atlanta. This education promoted environmental justice awareness of world-wide issues. Further, WAWA has tried to learn from indigenous peoples around the world.

Thompson concludes:

As we build relational and analytical capacity among communities struggling in specific places, making connections between watersheds will enable us to cultivate multi-layered expressions of justice and righteousness. For just as every watershed is connected through the hydrological cycle, so too, though we work in different places, are we part of the same struggle and story.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Thompson, “An Ecological Beloved Community,” 119–120.

WAWA has discovered that a community's connection to its ecological place empowers it for self-determination and health and binds its struggle with those of other communities around the world. As Thompson notes, "Including the welfare of nonhuman nature in the work of social change will bring healing power to people's movements."<sup>225</sup> Human health and community justice require ecological health, as discovered and affirmed by many communities worldwide.

WAWA was created with the help of surrounding churches that have assisted in various ways.<sup>226</sup> One church gave financially and hosts an annual WAWA Day, extended now to a capital campaign. Other churches have helped with citizen science projects. The pastor of another church who has been involved over decades in environmental justice serves as a spokesperson for the cumulative impact of injustice on African American populations, including degraded air, water, and land, and has participated in a speaker's bureau on climate change. Various churches have further contributed through rain gardens, reforestation of native hemlocks, urban gardens, board walks, trail maintenance, and pollinator gardens—some of these projects situated in preserves and others on church land. These activities have helped parishioners learn about how their actions at church and home promote watershed health.

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<sup>225</sup> Thompson, "An Ecological Beloved Community," 106.

<sup>226</sup> This information was provided through a phone call with a WAWA staff member.

### *Conclusions on Ecumenical and Grassroots Projects*

The several projects discussed above reveal that churches respond positively to organized leadership helping them to care for creation. Organized leadership offers staff, funding, lessons from other groups, and international and theological perspectives. As occurred with Ascension's "A Watershed Moment," people involved in the projects discussed above expressed positive feelings about watershed stewardship.<sup>227</sup> (1) Participants expressed delight in discovering new relationships: relationships between Christian faith expressed in words and in actions of care for land and water, between local congregations and other community groups through collaborative action, and between synod-level ministry and local congregations. (2) Many creative ideas emerged to care for the watersheds. (3) People deepened their awareness of water around them. (4) Such deepened awareness fostered advocacy: some individuals and communities saw the danger to their local neighborhood ecosystems posed by policies written by leaders outside the region, and they voiced their concerns by organizing to protest or speaking at public meetings. (5) The findings from these umbrella groups or judicatories about the results of their interventions to promote local leadership reveal that church groups, and neighborhood communities, when given support and information, become energized stewards for the watersheds in which they exist.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> I derived these conclusions from the written resources discussed above; Ascension Lutheran Church's evaluation, discussed in Chapter 5; and phone conversations with WAWA staff, Emilie Bouvier, and David Carlson.

<sup>228</sup> For a list of additional watershed groups, see "Water and Watersheds," Lutherans Restoring Creation, accessed February 14, 2018. <http://www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org/water-and-watersheds>.

## **International Watershed Projects**

Because clean water is essential for sustainable, healthy communities, church-sponsored development work around the world has focused on increased access to safe drinking water. Issues of hygiene, infant health, the roles of women and girls in collecting water, and the success of food production all obviously connect to water availability and therefore to a community's health and sustainability.

Between 1990 and 1994, I was fortunate to participate in several projects in India and Africa, sponsored by an ecumenical consortium, CODEL—Coordination in Development. Although CODEL unfortunately closed its work in 1995 after twenty-five years of ministry due to decreasing funds from its ecumenical consortium of thirty-five Christian organizations, its work was prototypical of development work that continues through Lutheran World Relief (LWR) and other similar church-based international organizations.

Among the work projects I witnessed was the creation of a small-scale check dam in India. The dam collected rainwater so people could harvest several crops throughout the year. Due to the increased wetland created by the dams, migratory waterfowl, including egrets, began flying over this oasis in an otherwise parched area. When community leaders opened the pipes to release the collected water and let it flow, the participants expressed a sense of exhilaration.

Nonetheless, leadership of this project experienced tensions around questions of gender, questions that have caused tension in many development projects and which have slowly started to be addressed over the past several decades. As economist Jeffrey D.

Sachs notes, “Cultural or religious norms in the society may block the role of women...leaving half of the population without economic or political rights and without education, thereby undermining half of the population in its contribution to overall development.”<sup>229</sup> Development workers have tended primarily to train and involve men when it comes to agricultural leadership in developing areas. Perhaps this is because men have been perceived as leaders in this area within their cultural contexts or simply because they are more available. However, development workers are now recognizing that women and girls actually spend most of the cumulative farming time in the field (and, of course, they draw water). Thus, involvement of women in leadership projects—from planning to implementation—is currently seen as foundational to community development.

Over the years, LWR has developed additional water projects around the world, the funding of which derives from local congregations in the United States. Further, in 2015 the ELCA National Youth Gathering asked the thousands of youth who attended to contribute to the ELCA World Hunger’s Walk for Water. An attractive flier provided information about the walk, which gave pertinent information about water and suggestions for activities. The flier pointed out that 2.5 billion people do not have basic sanitation and that one-quarter of the world’s population does not have access to safe drinking water.<sup>230</sup> The brochure gave facts about water: women in Sub-Sahara Africa typically walk three miles each day for water, usually carrying it in a five-gallon jug

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<sup>229</sup> Jeffrey D. Sachs, *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 60.

<sup>230</sup> *Walk for Water* (ELCA World Hunger, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America).

weighing forty pounds when filled with water, while in eastern Uganda, on average, family members spend 660 hours per year collecting water. In a large activity area at the youth gathering, youth filled five-gallon jugs with water and walked laps, covering one tenth of a mile as a fundraiser for projects that included toilets in Zimbabwe, irrigation canals in China, and education by ELCA members in the U.S. about the human right to water.

According to the ECLA website, the 2015 gathering's fundraising goal was met, then doubled through a generous family gift. The website summarizes the critical importance of water:

Clean water is one of the most powerful ways to create change in the world. When a community gains access to clean water, close to home, **everything changes**. Women don't spend hours gathering water. They are healthier than ever. They can work and farm. Earn money and grow food. Send their children to school. Support the local economy. And then teach neighbors how to do the same.<sup>231</sup>

While the ELCA World Hunger Walk for Water campaign focused on the youth gathering, it continues to raise funds for water projects, as do Lutheran World Relief and Lutheran World Federation, as well as many other denominational efforts.

International projects for water care align with the church's mission to care for people in need as Jesus taught. Many international church projects intended to foster well-being and health have centered the work on water access. From sanitation to food production, from the daily life of children to educational possibilities, water's availability

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<sup>231</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, "The Water Crisis: Our Impact," last modified 2018, accessed February 14, 2018, <http://www.elca.org/Our%20Work/Relief%20and%20Development/ELCA%20World%20Hunger/Media%20and%20Resources/Walk%20for%20Water/Our%20impact>.

is foundational to any community's well-being or failure. Thus, teaching church youth from more fortunate communities about international water access and congregational fundraising for international water projects is important in order to foster sympathy and promote eco-justice knowledge and awareness.

## **Conclusion**

Church ministry in relation to water derives from several imperatives and takes multiple forms. With the help of judicatories and other broad-based coalitions, churches in the United States have mobilized to understand their parish community and parish responsibility to include the human and other-than-human beings living in their watershed. They have learned about the health of local waters, worshiped in a more conscious relationship to water, and, in some cases, joined with other religious or community groups to protect or restore local water bodies. On a basic level, the deepened relationship to watersheds has recreated the church's sense of belonging, widening the usual sense of civic belonging (e.g., in a city, town, suburb) to an ecosystem or bioregional belonging. This deepened identity offered new opportunities for worship, which have included naming creatures or water bodies in worship and a profound commitment to care for water. This localized knowledge of water and reflection of water in worship led, for some churches, to increased knowledge about water issues worldwide.

In most settings, a regional or denomination leader helpfully informed and enticed the congregation into action. In other cases, certain leaders or groups within the church promoted the ministry (e.g., Care for Creation, Buildings and Grounds, or Stewardship

committees). The churches, when galvanized for watershed ministry, have generally engaged people from all age groups and with varied interests. They enjoyed the varied projects undertaken (from riverbank clean-up to boat trips to chemical analysis of water). Some parishioners reported increased ability to advocate for water at public fora due to watershed discipleship ministry.

Church judicatories that work internationally to alleviate poverty have long promoted water projects, including sanitation, water access, well construction, and other activities. Churches in the U.S. have been mobilized to support these projects through organized offerings and information campaigns. Further, the recent ELCA National Youth Gathering focused on raising funds for water. This activity, in which youth walked with containers filled with water to experience the heaviness of water that women and girls carry, gave them a visceral experience of the burden of water felt by people whose lives are distant in location and experience from theirs. Walk for Water generated understanding, even compassion, while developing in youth the ability to create change. Churches and organizations would do well to replicate Walk for Water in their own contexts, because it quickly and physically promotes awareness of the burden of water especially felt by women and girls.

Local, regional, and international efforts to care for water not only increase the well-being of communities receiving more water access but also enhance understanding and compassion of people around the world. Even though projects vary by ecosystem and local need, water itself provides the common thread for understanding and awareness. All the projects discussed in this chapter have created leadership opportunities. New leaders

have emerged in parishes, in communities, and at the national youth gathering. Water awareness, when it includes a sense of ministry to a watershed or to people who lack access to clean water, offers exceptional and critically needed opportunities for leadership development to meet a deep requirement for human and natural flourishing.

## **Chapter 7: Proposals and Conclusions for Future Work**

This chapter situates watershed discipleship within four wide considerations. First, the state of the world's waters, and of the planetary crisis, demands a moral response. The world's religions should offer a passionate and courageous response to the crisis of the world's waters through retrieval, reevaluation, and reconstruction of essential religious traditions and practices to provide rich resources to move humanity toward care for our planetary home. Second, Christian watershed discipleship promotes this engagement by understanding a range of cultural and religious views of water to foster those that engage deeply with current ecological issues. Third, all aspects of the church's life—worship, advocacy, community relations, education, and fellowship—contribute to critically needed watershed discipleship. Fourth, transformational leadership and educational principles strengthen the planning and activation of this essential Christian ministry.

### **Earth's Watershed Moment and Religions' Response**

We now live in a watershed moment. On the one hand, humanity's awareness through scientific discoveries of DNA, plate tectonics, and the age and complexity of the universe, has expanded very recently, with beguiling mysteries, such as dark matter, still unsolved. Images of the wonders of the universe abound, including the "Earth rise" image taken from space. On the other hand, Earth's fragility and unpredictability are more evident. Scientists worldwide raise the alarm about the fraying of the web of life

and life's support systems—air, soil, and water. Sudden droughts, storms, and bleaching of coral reefs due to climate change make the nightly news and affect people of greatly varied lifestyles within diverse ecosystems. Feedback loops of changes in atmosphere and acidity of the oceans remain unpredictable. Thus, the burning of fossil fuels, decline and degradation of forests and other ecosystems, and use of water for dumping of sewage and toxics lead to unpredictable consequences for the planet. Scientists have termed this age the Anthropocene.

Religions offer both a conservative protection of traditions and worldviews and an impetus for change, inspiring response to new challenges.<sup>232</sup> The academic and practical field of religion and ecology has developed to answer the questions and problems raised by human power over planetary processes by combining the science of planetary systems with a *retrieval*, *reevaluation*, and *reconstruction* of religions to meet the challenge. This new academic field may be described as augmenting the contributions of transformational educators and leaders discussed thus far.

The plight of creation exerts a moral claim on humanity for action to care for the web of life. Christianity is situated within a worldwide religious response to the environmental crisis. The plight of Earth requires attention from all the world's religions. If humans, the most conscious, morally developed, and intelligent of creatures (to our

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<sup>232</sup> For a detailed summary of the field of religion and ecology, see John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker, "Emergence of the Field of Religion and Ecology," in *Ecology and Religion* (Washington DC: Island Press, 2014), 85–95. This chapter offers an excellent overview of Christian theologians in the field, including formative eco-feminist theologians Sallie McFague, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Carolyn Merchant; Latin American liberation theologian Leonardo Boff; and many other formative theologians. This thesis cannot do justice to their important work. The Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, developed by Grim and Tucker, continues to collect and present the most extensive contributions worldwide in the emerging field of Religion and Ecology. Grim and Tucker formulated the challenge to religions to retrieve, reevaluate, and reconstruct traditions and practices to respond to the planetary crisis.

knowledge), fail to protect the sources of life, what moral claim can we make to be bearers of intelligence, promoters of ethics, and planners for future generations' well-being? If we humans cannot control our population growth and economic development, causing Earth's systems to fail in supporting life as we know it and undermining the living ecosystems of creatures that inhabit Earth, how can we assume the spiritual responsibility of being ethical stewards of creation?

Religious traditions through the centuries have offered symbols, rituals, and community practices to strengthen moral leadership. Humans have made progress in morality, thanks in part to the influence of religion (for example, in the abolition movement, which helped many see slavery as unacceptable). How can religions influence thought and action in the present context of dire planetary stress? We need a new appraisal of our situation informed by the expertise of science and the moral traditions and wisdom of world religions if we are going to move beyond this watershed moment of crisis. As historian of religions Thomas Berry writes, "If the planet fails then we fail, not only as Christians but even as humans."<sup>233</sup>

In the following section, we will situate "A Watershed Moment" within the thrust of reorientation work in religion and ecology that leverages religious dynamics to heal planetary stress. We will focus even more particularly on essential points for Christianity's work in the area of watershed discipleship.

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<sup>233</sup> Thomas Berry, *The Christian Future and the Fate of the Earth*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 36. See 36–45 for a cogent description of the difficulty of Christianity in appreciating the "sacred dimension" of Earth, caring for creation, and responding effectively to the planetary crisis.

## ***Retrieval***

Retrieval efforts investigate a religion's traditional teachings and practices to understand and describe the religion's relations to the natural world. Retrieval efforts review how traditions "actualize" a religion's "teachings about the natural world in communal beliefs and practices."<sup>234</sup> Such an important effort as "A Watershed Moment" requires a Christian retrieval of essential elements in the tradition that contribute to its understandings about the environment and potential for environmental care or neglect.

"A Watershed Moment" retrieves biblical and theological expressions that may position Christianity to attend to the environmental crisis. Jesus' statement that giving drink to the thirsty is rewarded with eternal life presents care for water as front and center to a Christian life. Further, the Cosmic Christ scriptural theology (John 1:1–14, Col. 1:15–20), powerfully urges Christians to contemplate Christ in all things created. In addition, we noted the image of "living water" in the *Didache*, the early Christian catechesis for baptism. The first Christians favored baptizing outdoors in actual running water, a practice being reconstructed in some Christian communities today.

Further expressions of actualized religious teachings about the natural world in Christianity include the scriptural recitation of creation history at the Easter Vigil and the prevalence of Christian images of deep orientation toward paradise in mosaics such as those found in the Basilica of Sant' Apollinare in Classe, Italy. Jesus may appear as a nature mystic, praying to his Father out of doors at night to regain strength for his ministry (Mark 1:35) and teaching about God's care for sparrows and lilies (Matt. 6:26–

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<sup>234</sup> Grim and Tucker, *Ecology and Religion*, 86.

34). In the Middle Ages, theologians, such as Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas, and mystics, such as Hildegard of Bingen, extolled the beauty and order of creation within Christian theology and spirituality.

In sum, retrieving expressions of care for creation within Christianity reveals an emphasis that is perhaps secondary through the centuries to emphasis on human salvation gained through love of God and human neighbor. A retrieval and reemphasis on creation themes may bring Christianity into a leadership position for the present context of planetary disruption.

### ***Reevaluation***

The Christian tradition requires reevaluation in response to the ecological crisis. The theologians discussed in Chapter 1 of “A Watershed Moment” engage in reevaluation through reconsideration of Christian texts and Christian theology, reemphasizing aspects of the tradition and calling for new statements and rituals (discussed under “Reconstruction” below). As historians of religion John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker note, reevaluation can shape “more ecologically sensitive attitudes and sustainable practices. Those engaged in reevaluation also sift through and question ideas that have been retrieved and may lead to inappropriate environmental practices.”<sup>235</sup> Examples of reevaluation include the expansion of sin to structural sin, a discussion of what salvation means in relation to Earth, a reconsideration of the significance of baptism in polluted waters, discussion of the mutually enhancing relationship between science

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<sup>235</sup> Grim and Tucker, *Ecology and Religion*, 86.

and religion to address contemporary challenges, and a reappraisal of the church's ministries to include efforts such as watershed discipleship.

In Confirmation class or Sunday school, students may learn that the church is the congregation, not the building (using the hand motions that open out to show the fingers as the people), but reevaluating engages Christians in understanding that nature co-worships with us (Is. 55:12). Therefore, does the church include all of creation? (How would hand motions express that wider awareness of church?) To recognize nature as co-worshippers, or as part of the body of the Cosmic Christ, renders nature as numinous or sacramental. No longer do humans exclusively take up the center of God's attention. Further, humans no longer see the discontinuity between their life and that of creation. The emergent universe, made available to humans through science, reveals that untold transformations gave rise to the possibility of life and the abundance of creatures that have existed.

This New Story of an evolving universe, as Berry describes it, elicits wonder and must be incorporated into Christian understanding and expression. The church, then, offers healing in the Anthropocene by urging a view of humanity in the primary and unique role of caretaker for all of life in a precarious moment. As Berry notes,

The Church could provide an integrating reinterpretation of our New Story of the universe. In this manner it could renew religion in its primary expression as celebration, as ecstatic delight in existence. This...is the Great Work to which Christianity is called in these times.<sup>236</sup>

Reevaluation thus includes a focus on Christian ministry responsive to ecological awareness. Watershed discipleship, as described by Ched Myers and others, invites a

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<sup>236</sup> Berry, *The Christian Future and the Fate of the Earth*, 53.

reorientation of the church's ministry to include the watershed. This both destabilizes and expands traditional ministries that are focused on human beings in need. Watershed discipleship invites new foci of concern (e.g., the health of the fish and amphibians in nearby waters), scientific discovery (about creatures that inhabit the watershed), and spiritual awareness (new prayers, outdoor baptism, contemplation of God's presence while sitting by a local stream or drinking a glass of water).

### ***Reconstruction***

Reconstruction creates a new synthesis so that the religious tradition encourages a sustainable Earth-human relationship. The reconstruction method suggests "ways that religions might adapt ecological teaching and practices to current circumstances in creative ways."<sup>237</sup> To offer a framework of reconstruction for "A Watershed Moment," I lift up an image of the church positioned between two biblical images, that at the beginning of the Bible and that at the end. These images are the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:4–3:24) and the image of the New Jerusalem, with the "river of the water of life" flowing through the city and trees with leaves "for the healing of the nations" (Rev. 22:1–5). Positioned between the two images, we may ask how the church can envision moving from the Garden of Eden to the New Jerusalem.

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<sup>237</sup> Grim and Tucker, *Ecology and Religion*, 87.

## **Complexity and Promises of Christian Watershed Discipleship**

Before the biblical fall, Eden witnessed no harmful separation between humans and other creatures. God asked Adam and Eve to name the creatures, which implies that they knew the creatures intimately. Interestingly, Martin Luther expressed a belief that, had Adam not sinned, “we would have recognized God in all creatures, and we would have loved and praised God so that even in the smallest blossom we would have seen and pondered God’s power, grace, and wisdom.”<sup>238</sup>

In a move of theological reconstruction, since Jesus has made new life possible and given new sight to the blind (Luke 4:16–19), is it not possible that a restored relationship with nature, such that we see God in all creatures, must now be an essential birthright for Christians that we only need to claim? Wise leaders and churches help Christians to do so. Together, they envision a harmony between humans and other-than-human creation, which also moves beyond urban-rural divides.

The New Jerusalem is a city with a fresh water body in the middle, and with healing trees, not just bringing healing for people in that city but for all the nations. We envision a healing of class and racial divides, as well. As environmental justice activist Carl Anthony envisions, work to promote sustainability and justice in urban areas builds “a worldwide movement organized around a new story of unified effort to heal communities harmed by racial injustice so that they can participate in repairing our

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<sup>238</sup> Martin Luther, *Day by Day We Magnify You: Daily Readings for the Entire Year*, ed. Marshall D. Johnson, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Books, 2008), 85.

damaged ecosystems and social networks.”<sup>239</sup> Thus, the church may exist in part to foster healing of rifts between humans while also healing the divide between humans and all others with whom we share Earth. The New Jerusalem encompasses all.

To move toward realization of this vision, a church engaged in watershed discipleship grieves and celebrates the complexity of the current moment to move toward an enriched relationship with water that deepens humans’ relationship with God. On the one hand, climate change, depletion of water sources, and the flow of sewage and toxics into water bodies have affected water worldwide, as described in Chapter 2. As comparative religion scholar Kimberley C. Patton notes, “Marine pollution is rapidly becoming one of the greatest threats to the health of the planet, as the oceans and their swarming zootic populations are compromised, staggering with the weight of what they are asked to absorb, and poisoned by the toxicity.”<sup>240</sup> On the other hand, churches may celebrate success stories about water bodies that rebound. The 1972 Clean Water Act initiated clean-up of egregious pollution such as heavily polluted Lake Erie. The growing movement to demolish dams expanded fisheries in newly flourishing rivers. The Hudson River clean-up resulted in a river that is fishable and swimmable. Indeed, the Clean Water Act empowered a vision that all the nation’s waters would be fishable and swimmable, which continues to undergird committed action toward remediation and care.

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<sup>239</sup> Carl Anthony, *The Earth, the City, and the Hidden Narrative of Race* (New York: New Village Press, 2017), 9.

<sup>240</sup> Kimberley C. Patton, *The Sea Can Wash Away All Evils: Modern Marine Pollution and the Ancient Cathartic Ocean* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 9.

Further, water serves both as multivalent and nearly ubiquitous religious and cultural symbol. How strange that while religions use water in cleansing rituals, such use does not necessarily mitigate against polluting it. Do humans unthinkingly believe that water will absorb all our spiritual as well as physical sins, dirt, and unwanted pollution? This study has pointed out the wide range in views about water. As we reclaim the view of water as sacred giver of life, we enhance our own lives as Christians and possibilities for inspired worship and effective watershed care.

### *Views of Water*

For churches who aspire to become stewards of water, awareness of some of the prevalent varied views of water helps to enable nuanced thinking and actions for watershed stewardship. These views (which have been mentioned in earlier chapters and are now more specifically notated) include:

*Water as resource or slave.* This view derives from the economic system, which commodifies nature for human use and for continued economic growth. The negative expression of this view unquestioningly treats water as a pollution sink, “vast laundromat or a great toilet,”<sup>241</sup> thus enslaving water to dispose of waste. Water serves as a resource for industrial use for many manufactured products; jeans and automobiles require a surprising amount of water, even while many people around the world lack drinking water. Further injustice emerges when corporations bottle and sell water, making it accessible only to people able to pay for it and depleting local resources.

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<sup>241</sup> Patton, *The Sea*, 13.

By contrast, watershed stewardship lifts up the value of water for all life and promotes fresh and accessible water as a right for all people and other creatures. Larry L. Rasmussen expresses the move from slave relationship to spiritual devotion with reference to values (discussed in Chapters 3):

Without a virtue ethic that forms character and shapes conduct in keeping with ...the conviction that we inhabit a sacred universe, moral resolve will falter.... We will not escape the grip of the master-slave ethic of impersonal utility without a soul-deep, personal *feeling* for the families of creation, a gut connection that is profoundly personal, Earth-honoring, and Earth-healing. The subjective knowing of the other expresses a moral universe that nurtures certain ecological virtues, many of which have not been the coin even of Christian social justice traditions—wonder, awe, and reverence, for example, with all of “being” a companion and neighbor across time and space. These join virtues already at home in social justice—respect, empathy, and sympathy yoked to a passion for fairness and equality in lives that matter.<sup>242</sup>

Rasmussen’s view promotes “ecological virtues” that have not been sufficiently nurtured in Christian “social justice traditions.” Movements such as “A Watershed Discipleship” will hopefully foster wonder, awe, and reverence.

*Water as reflection of ourselves.* The image of Narcissus staring into a pool of water describes the intimate water-human relationship. Narcissus, in gazing into a pool, sees only himself in that reflection. Similarly, polluted water mirrors back to us our identity as polluters of water, soil, and air. Worship services that include confession of sin about water pollution help to energize activities that care for water. Such activities, and especially when they result in healthier streams and lakes, bring joy and satisfaction; they augment a genuinely mature human-Earth connection that fosters abundant physical and spiritual life.

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<sup>242</sup> Larry L. Rasmussen, “Creation—Not for Sale,” in Lisa E. Dahill and James B. Martin-Schramm, *Eco-Reformation: Grace and Hope for a Planet in Peril* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016), 33.

*Water as element necessary for life.* In this biological view, life is dependent on water; humans are water beings. The church's focus on justice lends itself well to promoting the right of all people to accessible water, spreading the knowledge that most children who die while in infancy suffer from lack of clean water, and bringing attention to unjust structures (economic, political, or physical) that cause lack of clean water (discussed further in Chapter 2).

*Water as gift from God.* This biblical view derives from many texts, including Psalm 24:1, which reads "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it." This view, when combined with the story of the Garden of Eden, can helpfully lead to appreciation of nature as divine gift and of the biblical challenge to humanity to act as steward, caretaker, and servant of the rest of creation on behalf of God and creation.

*Water as rabbi.* Water is a teacher. We learn who we are and where we are by studying our unique watershed, learning to love it, and thus becoming followers of (disciples of) the watershed. Such learning could derive from an appreciation of water as expressive of the interconnectedness of life and the need to support a healthy web of life. For example, a study of the nested ecosystems in a watershed may be taught by a parallel comparison with the nested lives and groups in the local congregation, as they, too, are dependent on one another for sustenance and healthy flourishing.

*Water as neighbor in need.* Jesus' teaching in the story of the Samaritan on the road to Jericho (Lk. 10:25–37) reveals water as vulnerable and in need of care, when water is seen as the suffering stranger. Theologian David Rhoads writes, "Now we are also challenged to widen the circle of our neighbors to encompass our vulnerable kin in

creation—including endangered species, distressed ecosystems, polluted air, land, and water.”<sup>243</sup> This view opens compassion felt not only to humans but also to the other-than-human creatures and ecosystems that together form the flourishing and vulnerable planetary web of life.

*Water as sacramental gift.* In water baptism, the new Christian dies to sin and is reborn in Christ. Jesus Christ was baptized in the Jordan as he began his ministry and became aware of his identity. As discussed in Chapter 1, some Christian theologians focused on water insist on baptizing out of doors, re-baptizing to signify a new relationship with the watershed,<sup>244</sup> or using proximate waters for the sanctuary baptismal bowl. Among many possible practices that honor water’s sacramentality by opening us to God’s presence in water are: sitting next to a body of water in silence or prayer, walking by the same stretch of water each day to pray, enjoying water’s beauty in the form of a snowflake and writing a poem of praise or gratitude, or writing a letter to promote a policy of water protection.

*Water as spiritual kin.* God’s spirit infuses all things. In Christ “all things hold together” (Col. 1:17b). Thus, humans connect to all things both spiritually and physically. Francis of Assisi’s *Canticle of the Creatures*, in which Francis extols water as his sister, expresses this beautifully. Christians do not worship nature, but see God in and through nature, and nature is sacred. This is the panentheistic view expressed by Luther, among

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<sup>243</sup> David M. Rhoads, “A Theology of Creation: Foundations for an Eco-Reformation,” in *Eco-Reformation*, 16.

<sup>244</sup> This radical idea is suggested by Ched Myers, “Toward Watershed Ecclesiology,” in *Watershed Discipleship*, ed. Ched Myers (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016), 207–208.

others. God's grandeur encompasses nature. Water, thus, takes her place as a member of the Christian's family, both physically and spiritually.

*Water as necessary for eternal life.* Jesus said that if we give water to the thirsty, it is as though we gave it to him: eternal life depends upon whether we carried out acts of compassion that include feeding the hungry and giving drink the thirsty (Matt. 21:35-46). Thus, the sharing of physical water mystically links humans to salvation. Further, in John's gospel, Jesus identifies himself as bearer of "living water" (John 4:10) welling up to eternal life, presenting a beautiful and mysterious image of water based in a story about water's physical reality opening to deep spiritual meaning.

*Water as bearer of our identities.* When we acknowledge water as life's essential element, ourselves as water beings, and Earth as water planet we attune ourselves to essential truths; water thus teaches us who we are. To honor water is to rightly honor ourselves and our planetary home, and to rightly honor God, the source of all life. An inspiring metaphor for discovery of new identity through a sacramental encounter with creation, mediated through water, is Helen Keller's famous experience at the well-house:

We walked down the path to the well-house, attracted by the fragrance of the honeysuckle with which it was covered. Someone was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over one hand she spelled into the other the word water, first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten — a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that "w-a-t-e-r" meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! There were barriers still, it is true, but barriers that could in time be swept away. I left the well-house eager to learn. Everything had a name, and each name gave birth to a new thought. As we returned to the house every object which I touched

seemed to quiver with life. That was because I saw everything with the strange, new sight that had come to me.<sup>245</sup>

When we encounter water so that its wondrous properties touch our hearts, we may see through new eyes into the awesome mystery of nature, which sustains our lives and is at once numinous, awe-inspiring, and home. To come home is to return to our true selves.

### ***Water's Multivalent Meanings***

If we were to combine these various views of water, which cover a spectrum from water as enslaved resource to water as revelatory of new life and the presence of God, we will appreciate the mysterious and ubiquitous nature of water. Biologically, psychologically, culturally, and spiritually, water reveals us to ourselves and offers new ways of seeing and living. In many ways, then, water reveals truths about who we are and ways to be better stewards both of ourselves and of it. Further, water initiates those who are willing to undergo change or transformation, to be awakened spiritually in this life and transformed gradually in preparation for eternal life. Thus, the promise of baptism, as well as water care as described throughout this thesis, offers a lifelong relationship to water as the bearer of new life and revelatory of God's abiding love.

### **Constructive Congregational Actions**

To return to the story of Eden in Genesis, let us imagine that Adam and Eve still remain in harmony with the creatures. This beguiling picture may remind us of the simple truth that myriad creatures inhabit the Earth with us, and scientists are still in the

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<sup>245</sup> Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life* (New York: Random House, 1990), 15–16.

process of discovering and naming them. We live in an Eden, even if it is threatened. Such a realization adds poignancy and terrible urgency to the church's need to discover its role. How do we recognize the present Edenic Earth, protect the creatures that inhabit it, and work to restore cities, rural areas, and wilderness so that clean rivers and healing trees abound? Is it to discover Christ's true identity as the Lamb in the midst of a thriving city and ecosystem, or perhaps as the Cosmic Christ, whose love beautifully shines forth from a restored, healed creation?

Many church leaders claim the need for a paradigm shift in order for congregations to engage in the depths of transformation needed. Ched Myers writes:

If the roots of the Anthropocene crisis lie in our alienation from the earth, then it is to the earth we must return (to paraphrase the warning in Genesis 3:19)...discipleship must be restored to the center of ecological theology, and practices of genuinely sustainable reinhabitation restored to the center of discipleship.<sup>246</sup>

It is to such practices of "reinhabitation" in the name of Christ that we now turn. These are suggestions that hopefully inspire reflection, commitment, and action within churches to reclaim awe and wonder as we behold the beauty of Earth and of human habitation on it.

Projects and activities to bring churches home to their highly varied ecosystems and contexts honor the spectrum of the church's life and thus include worship, education, advocacy, community involvement, and many types of activities directly involving water. We have seen that transformational leadership and education provided by a denominational leader and/or by a passionate church leader galvanizes the church and

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<sup>246</sup> Myers, "A Critical, Contextual, and Constructive Approach to Ecological Theology and Practice," in *Watershed Discipleship*, 6.

keeps momentum going. Further, strength builds when church councils and committees participate. Consider some of the myriad activities that might be fostered and overseen by passionate church leaders:

*Worship.* A church engaged in water stewardship may choose to plan a baptism or service outdoors, purchase a fountain or pool with running water indoors, or create or purchase a beautiful baptismal bowl. During baptisms, clergy may sprinkle parishioners with water and preach sermons that describe water pollution as a sin. The prayers during such a service will lift up names of local waters, and descriptions of the health of local waters can be printed in the bulletin. Worship leaders may plan a water month or liturgical season for special focus, which also fosters the link between science and religion through guest speakers or the sharing of scientific information about water.

*Community involvement.* Churches may engage in removal of invasive plants on stream banks, adopt a watershed (with the church name listed strategically), and work with nonprofits to create road signs that identify water bodies for motorists passing over. Parishioners can visit sewage treatment facilities, learn about what nonprofits are doing to care for water, and work alongside these organizations in projects such as storm drain marking. If a church has a yard, parishioners may start a garden project that invites the neighborhood to participate and that teaches about the link between local farming and the health of soil and water.

*Education.* Educational opportunities abound for all ages, especially considering that children and youth love water activities.<sup>247</sup> The congregation might invite geologists or other scientists or speakers from local colleges or nonprofits to speak about water stresses around the world. A congregation might reach out to Native Americans in its region to learn about the history of the watershed and current issues from an indigenous perspective. An active congregation might display a map of the watershed and create a brochure about what to do in the household and community to protect water. Actually caring for water as a congregation by going pesticide free, planting native species, using rain barrels, planting a rain garden, and developing permeable parking lots teaches parishioners what they can do in the grounds around their homes. Sermons that encourage parishioners to learn from a stream or river and then to meditate beside the water or write a prayer about it can foster a coming home to the ecosystem. Awareness of the link between physical health and the health of local waters takes on urgency when a municipal water supply is threatened. Exposure to transformational education resources and processes described by Mary Elizabeth Moore and Erin Biviano, among transformational educators described in this thesis, gives helpful overview and encouragement.<sup>248</sup>

*Advocacy.* The justice issues presenting opportunities for advocacy by a congregation and its members differ by location, with different resources available to

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<sup>247</sup> See Appendix V for Ascension's Sunday School plans and youth and adult educational resources in "Toolkit: Our Watershed Moment: An Initiative of the EcoFaith Network."

<sup>248</sup> Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2004); Erin Lothes Biviano, *Inspired Sustainability: Planting Seeds for Action* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016).

support action. In cities, speakers from local watershed groups can illumine the issues of runoff from highways and developed areas that raises concerns about toxics and sewage capability. A study of international agreements and statements such as the Earth Charter and the One Campaign contribute to understanding how water issues link internationally to farming, housing development, and transportation systems. All of these are issues around which advocacy can develop. Letter-writing campaigns and testifying at public hearings have become part of church ministries involved with climate change, energy development, transportation, dams, and fisheries.

What may emerge over time is an increasingly fierce protection of water. I perceive in churches involved in watershed stewardship a common move from a stance of stewardship to one of strong, engaged advocacy. Some of the water advocates who make this move are Maude Barlow, Ched Myers, Betsy Damon, and Lisa Dahill.<sup>249</sup> Love will form the basis of this stance and work: as Lutheran theologian David Rhoades notes, “We need to have a love affair with nature, because we will not save what we do not love.”<sup>250</sup>

*Water excursions.* Water excursions help parishioners grow to love water. They may sample water in creeks or streams to determine the phosphorus and nitrogen content, picking up trash alongside the banks while they are out. There are many types of family or congregational trips a congregation or ministry can plan, such as a camping or canoe trip to the headwaters of a stream, or a guided walk alongside a stream with stops for prayer, counting waterfowl, describing the “melodies” of moving water, and the sharing

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<sup>249</sup> Maude Barlow cofounded the Blue Planet Project, serves as board chair of Food and Water Watch, and has published books on, and advocated for, the human right to clean water. Betsy Damon is an artist, lecturer, and water advocate. She founded and directs Keepers of the Waters.

<sup>250</sup> Rhoades, “A Theology of Creation,” 17.

of relevant scientific information. Congregations have researched about plastics in local water, and youth have taught others about what not to put down drains. Even visiting a water treatment plant can bring the concept of a watershed to life, fostering love and knowledge about ways to care practically for local waters.

### **Overarching Essential Principles for “A Watershed Moment”**

Many Christians have been caught up in the prevalent view of nature as commodity, but hope to learn to care for and reverence water. Ultimately, for this to happen, Christians must turn from an anthropocentric approach to salvation to understanding salvation as healing for both humanity and Earth. *Sozo*, the Greek verb “to save,” may also be translated as “to heal” or “to make whole.” Churches will grow in such understanding by reinhabiting their bioregion, their watershed. When Christians learn about their watershed and profoundly experience it, including it in worship, education, and advocacy, they grow to love and serve it, and they find themselves deeply rooted in it. They develop a humility toward it, fostering the view that humans engage in “compassionate retreat” in intervening in water cycles, so that “natural systems would not be considered simple mechanisms...[but] would be appreciated both for their complexity and their necessity.”<sup>251</sup> Over time and experimentation, churches will express their physical and spiritual kinship with water in renewed litanies, liturgies, and other worship expressions, as well as in daily congregational life.

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<sup>251</sup> Peter G. Brown and Jeremy J. Schmidt, “An Ethic of Compassionate Retreat,” in *Water Ethics: Foundational Readings for Students and Professionals*, ed. Peter G. Brown and Jeremy J. Schmidt (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2010), 277.

Work to express physical and spiritual kinship with water deepens theology. Christians active as water stewards often celebrate and worship God as creator of an abundant creation. Christ's incarnation affirms that Christ inhabits creation (Col. 1:15–20), the knowledge of which fosters a sacramental view of nature among his followers, including a sacramental view of water. Nature may be either honored as a location of God's presence or, alternately, as a sacred gift from God. In either case, Christians view nature not only with respect but also with reverence.

Worship that includes water discipleship envisions a Kin(g)dom in which water and all people and creatures have the water they need. In worship, we envision the world as if it were already full of abundant life, whether reliving the Garden of Eden story, with Adam and Eve still in the garden, or the vision of the New Jerusalem with water flowing through the city. Thus, we address water, knowing that water needs care, and we seek energy and courage from water and God to work toward such care. Worship that fosters care for water will also promote the possibility and experience of I/Thou relations with creatures, including water. A nuanced theology that seeks and finds the presence of Christ in nature nourishes such I/Thou encounters.

Outdoor baptism as well as indoor baptism with flowing water will enhance such ecological incarnational theology and enhance worship. Spending time outside—more time than most of tend to spend—is necessary for Christians and affords needed occasions to explore, pray, and worship. Additionally, the use of inspiring metaphors such as flowing water and downward-flowing grace in Christian worship and in written

or spoken church communication renews a commitment to creation and to water's well-being.

In this ecological incarnational theology, understanding of sin widens beyond the individual person. Ecocide, biocide, and pollution should be recognized and lamented as sinful. Recognition of water for what it is, a universal wonder, will happen locally (within each church's bioregion) through practices of water stewardship, water contemplation, water-honoring worship, and water advocacy. Watershed stewardship activities foster eco-justice issues related to water around the world. As parishioners learn about and celebrate the miracle of water and its vulnerability to pollution and overuse, they become sensitized to the crisis of watershed pollution and depletion around the world as well as ways that international organizations, including church judicatories, work to address these issues.

Transformational leadership and education toward watershed stewardship enables a community to design activities and resources that celebrate water and care for it. Transformational leaders will help a congregation discover the spiritual and biblical inspiration for such work. The original leaders delegate the work—both the planning and the implementation, with the expectation that new ideas will emerge from newer leaders. This delegation of work fosters creativity. Joy and celebration of beauty will often infuse water stewardship activities. Grief about water abuse and watershed injustice may surface and can be honored through confession in worship and acknowledgement of the paradigm shift in which humanity is engaging, a shift toward caring for rather than exploiting, the Earth. Deepened work for transformation toward watershed stewardship, thus, makes

room for expressions of grief, joy, and creativity through the varied activities a church may undertake. Renewed ties among congregation members strengthen as their relationship with water develops. Fellowship grows, inspiring further work and commitment.

While addressing concerns about watersheds, watershed stewardship promotes a rediscovery of the natural world that brings a church community home, ecologically. It fosters renewed compassion for the web of life and for people in varied circumstances around the world. Leaders and congregations experience deepened understanding of God as Creator, of Christ as incarnate in all things, and of the Holy Spirit as actively renewing creation.

Transformational leadership and transformational educational findings by Ronald Heifetz, Mary Elizabeth Moore, Erin Biviano, and others reveal processes of change that can be galvanized for watershed stewardship and for maximizing momentum and effectiveness, while minimizing burnout. Churches can effectively utilize the principles of getting on the balcony, giving the work back to the people, infusing the work with meaning, keeping attention disciplined, building trust, and generating more leadership for ecological care. The fact that intentions do not always generate success and, further, that action remediates a current harm that we had not fully appreciated before may cause consternation and grief.

Strength for the journey emerges from reconsideration of, and even change in, values, experiences in nature, dedicated spiritual practices, and collaborative action. Leadership from within the congregation usually emerges, expressed as practical know-

how, scientific literacy, and creative artistic endeavors. When supported and encouraged, such leadership augments excitement, commitment, and deepened relationships within and without the congregation. A supportive judicatory, or other groups in the parish neighborhood that are engaged in similar work, can enhance congregational leadership and the community effort. Sustained attention to a theme or project energizes a church's growth in leadership.

People may resist watershed stewardship or other care-for-creation efforts for several reasons. Some will view the emphasis as new and unusual, while others will perceive the initiative to be overly focused on water in the midst of other challenging problems, or overly focused on nature rather than on God. Also, such stewardship requires work and grief: people may become overwhelmed, and conflict may result. Such resistance stems from the new paradigm that deep watershed stewardship promotes. As Thomas Berry notes,

We need to move from a spirituality of alienation from the natural world to a spirituality of intimacy with it, from a spirituality of the divine as revealed in verbal revelation to a spirituality of the divine as revealed in the visible world about us, from a spirituality concerned with justice simply to humans to a justice that includes the larger Earth community.<sup>252</sup>

Such deep transformation, required by the knowledge that our planet is under siege and that religions must respond, will involve struggle as people develop a wide range of responses, including denial, concern, grief, anxiety, determination and commitment to respond to strengthen community, advocacy, and healing.

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<sup>252</sup> Berry, *The Christian Future and the Fate of the Earth*, 60.

If leaders prepare for these feelings, identify deep values in their parishioners, and link these values with suggested actions, the leaders offer the possibility of forward movement for transformation, albeit within a spectrum of commitment and involvement. Worship, as well as other forms of congregational or pastoral communication, will do well to portray the process of congregational change to envision and promote a renewed ecosystem, grounded in scriptural images, or current examples, and thus engage the congregation in a renewed commitment to reinhabitation of the watershed. Varied activities designed to help people of all ages and backgrounds find their own ways to participate will reduce anxiety about the project and introduce fun and discovery. New learning can be stimulating, including learning about watershed biology and geology, economic metrics, stories of past communities linked to the watershed, and imaginative retelling of biblical stories set in the community's watershed. Water's beauty, expressed perhaps through creative expressions among the congregation or experiences of enjoying water, softens and enlivens the activities and helps people appreciate one another and the project. Indeed, fun and laughter go a long way to bind the community in watershed stewardship and create hope that actions undertaken contribute to positive movements fostered by many people around the world.

## **Conclusion**

We will never truly understand water. We do not understand it in part because, as horticulturalist photographer David Cavagnaro notes, "In all the processes of living, water is..., indispensable, and life has made its adjustments accordingly. In that

relationship lies the true magic of water.”<sup>253</sup> Such a description of water is almost a description of God’s indispensable and ongoing presence. God’s love, revealed through Jesus Christ, is a love that underlies and supports all life. Jesus taught about God’s care of humans as a care also showered on lilies and sparrows. Relating more deeply with water is a process of discovery, developed, as in any enduring relationship, through embodied action (in water care and worship practices) as well as through intellectual and spiritual growth. Through watershed stewardship, people discover how to love water, identifying it as the beloved, and in the process, they grow in a deeper love of God.

To foster watershed care is to come home: To come home to the bioregion in which the church fosters worship in ministry, and also to come home to the final vision of the redeemed Earth. As Scripture tells us, the river of the water of life flows through the city and “on either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations [Rev. 22:2].” The redemption of humans, bound with the redemption of water, offers healing for all. In care for water, and in being watershed disciples, Christians celebrate this new discovery in worship, in daily life with and caring for water, and in advocacy. The central sacrament of baptism takes on new meaning. Water not only mediates our new identity as children of God, but we relish and welcome water as a holy participant in our family. Water bears the life of God. All who open their eyes and ears to water in its many forms and expressions receive abundantly.

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<sup>253</sup> Ernest Braun and David Cavagnaro, *Living Water* (Palo Alto, CA: American West Publishing Company, 1971), 24.

**Appendix I: Budget for Committees**

*This list of activities and allotted funds was given to the committees to solicit their decisions about their fund use as well as other possible activity ideas.*

**Ascension Lutheran Church as a Watershed Congregation  
Earth Day (April 22) to St. Francis Day (October 4)**

**Goals are that Ascension will:**

- (1) discover that water is a gift from God; (2) discover the breadth and scope of the Lake Champlain watershed and its socioeconomic, cultural, and spiritual importance; (3) value the health of the watershed in parishioners’ neighborhoods; and (4) value constructive engagement with water as part of Christian discipleship.*

**Worship and Music \$200**

*Undated* Sunday worship service on the waterfront (possibly on Rally Sunday, 9/10/17, as suggested by Education Committee)

*Undated* A bubbling baptismal font or water display to be purchased for the sanctuary or other area in the church

*10/1* St. Francis day concluding service for which committees help plan; possibility: how families/individuals depict themselves physically in relation to water (create an object that crystalizes how your family has grown in your water engagement/stewardship/awareness; how have you embraced Christian water discipleship?)

Other ideas: \_\_\_\_\_ Use of funds

**Outreach \$150**

*Undated* Outreach to the Burlington community to teach on rain barrels and rain gardens, and through a brochure about water awareness in the kiosk at the start of the church’s labyrinth (work would include input from CfC committee); Pr. Nancy to offer a spiritual walk along a lake or river

Other ideas: \_\_\_\_\_ Use of funds

**Fellowship \$150**

*April 22*—the Women of the ELCA VT conference workshop with a leader focusing on Living Water, held at Ascension

*July* Parishioners are encouraged to sit or pray (or swim or paddle) by water and write down their reflections, take photographs

*October* All-church art exhibit: poetry, painting, music, photography, pottery, culinary arts, dance; solicit writing/art from youth and children

*Undated* Church picnic on the waterfront

Other ideas: \_\_\_\_\_

Use of funds

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**Stewardship**

October Stewardship appeal to focus on the gift of water/baptism/care of water

Other ideas: \_\_\_\_\_

**Care for Creation \$1,000**

*4/30* Test tubes to be given out after worship service for water sampling, returned for testing after worship on 5/14; a brochure that summarizes the six-month watershed stewardship initiative given to all families. At least twelve watershed stewardship families will be determined to be part of a leadership group.

*April* Trail and labyrinth cleared of debris; kiosk will include information about Bartlett Brook and watershed awareness; flora will be labeled

*6/16* boat trip and study day from Lake Champlain Maritime Museum for parishioners and wider faith community

*9/9* Lake Champlain Interfaith Pilgrimage (cosponsored with ECHO, All Souls, LC Maritime Museum, Ascension)

Other ideas: \_\_\_\_\_

Use of funds

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**Education \$1,000**

Sunday School during the summer to focus on water

**Synod \$1,500**

*May* Pr. Nancy and others present a workshop on water at ALC (dry run for June Assembly workshop)

*6/9–10* Pr. Nancy presents workshop on water discipleship at New England synod assembly

*6/17* Pr. Nancy leads 4-hour walking water pilgrimage on CT River tributary

*6/19* Pr. Nancy preaches on water at Church of Our Savior, Hanover, or another local church, supply preacher at ALC supported by synod sabbatical grant and preaches at three other churches

Other ideas: \_\_\_\_\_

Use of funds \_supply preachers for

ALC for 6 Sundays plus travel

**Social Action \$500**

*Undated* ALC to adopt a country or area with a focus on water availability and/or ecojustice; ALC to receive/provide information and offer financial support

Other ideas: \_\_\_\_\_

Use of funds

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**Council/**

*May* 4 to 5 council members to volunteer to do in-depth reflection through the action research project.

Other ideas: \_\_\_\_\_

**Pastor \$500**

*March/April* Meet with committees to offer suggestions and possible use of funding according to their Long-Range goals; receive the committee funding items by May 1

*Undated* Do research on transformational leadership, education, Christian and Lutheran ecotheology, watershed discipleship, and scientific water facts and care to present at the May ALC workshop, sermons at three conference churches, and at the June Assembly; this will contribute to the D.Min. project thesis and to a follow-up “toolkit” for the New England synod based on ALC’s work.

*July 1 to 8* Pr. Study leave week using sabbatical funds

*September* Pr. Nancy writes D.Min. project thesis, taking sabbatical time, but preaching Sundays

**Note: each committee is to take this information to discuss with the committee, alongside the committee’s Long-Range plan. Create a simple planning worksheet, write out the planned use of funds and return to Pastor by May 1. Thank you!!!**

## **Appendix II: Water Test Results and What You Can Do**

*This information was given to Ascension parishioners who tested their local water bodies.*

### Water Test Results and What You Can Do

Having turned in your samples and having them tested has resulted in a profile of Nitrate and Phosphorous concentrations. These tests have been posted on the Caring For Creation Bulletin board, but in case you missed them the list is attached.

In general the tests showed that the farther down the watershed toward the lake you go, the higher the concentrations are. Obviously this is because there is less development, farming, and fewer roads at the higher elevations, so there is less opportunity for pollutants to enter the streams. Runoff from logging operations and isolated septic failure can occur, but this tends to produce spot concentrations.

We've attached the summer 2017 reports for June and July E-coli concentrations on the New Haven River as an example of tests along that river that show spikes at various locations. For example, at the York Hill Rd Bridge, high up in Lincoln, there is a spike that we suspect may be a failing septic system. By contrast, the spike at the Nash Bridge, down in the flats, is at the confluence of the New Haven and Muddy Creek where the creek brings in significant agricultural runoff. Also, note that the June event was a high water event with much more water running in the creeks and rivers.

So what does this all mean to us? Looking at these results, we can see that there are problems that need to be addressed. Your particular test is simply an indicator on one day, but river watch organizations around the state have collected data for generations: Addison County River Watch Collaborative has collected for more than 25 years and filed the data with state and federal agencies. And this data has been used to identify where Lake Champlain and its watershed needs help.

If this project has heightened your concern, the best action you can take is to join organizations such as those staffed by our presenters at the Lake Cruise event, Lake Champlain International, Vermont Natural Resources Council and the Conservation Law Foundation and many others around the state. Read their posts on the Internet and their mailings, and then talk to your state and federal representatives about your concerns. Numbers matter and your voice can make a big difference.

### **Appendix III: Family or Individual Covenant**

*This exercise was given out at the beginning of the summer to families who agreed to discuss the questions. Some families subsequently told me they had used it, and a few met with me about it at an informal meeting for that purpose at summer's end. I also posted two of these questions each week in the Sunday bulletins and on several occasions asked the congregation to respond to them during the announcement time in worship.*

At least twelve watershed stewardship families will be invited to covenant to be watershed stewards and to be part of a Leadership Team.

They will commit to tracking their watershed stewardship and to answer a questionnaire at the end of the project.

#### **The questionnaire asks:**

In what ways did you have fun in water in the past few months?

How do you see water as beautiful?

How do you imagine VT would look with clean, fishable, drinkable water?

Where does your household water come from?

What are the names of your local streams and rivers?

How much water does your household use? (go to [www.waterfootprint.org](http://www.waterfootprint.org)).

How polluted is your local stream or lake? (testing will be done May 7)

What have you been able to do to advocate for the health of your stream?

How many times a week do you thank God for water?

Do you buy bottled water?

Have you enjoyed water recreation this summer? How?

What have you done in the house, the yard, at school to care for water?

Name five living things in the lake.

Can one of your family members compose here a prayer for water?

How would you create an artistic expression about water?

## **Appendix IV: Lake Champlain Action Cruise and Tutorial**

*This agenda is a copy of what we gave to participants.*

The goal of this event is to inspire people of faith to become effective advocates for clean water and provide them with insights and information to enable them to engage with policy-makers at the local, state and national level.

- 9:30 Assemble at the Basin Harbor Club, 4800 Basin Harbor Rd. Vergennes, VT 05491. (See parking below.)
- 10:00 On the water  
*A cruise on Lake Champlain and Otter Creek on the Escape* leaving from the Basin Harbor Club led by **Elizabeth Lee**, Ecology Programs Director, naturalist/educator, Lake Champlain Maritime Museum.  
Also on the water  
*Why should clean water be a faith/spiritual issue?* Led by **Rev. Nancy Wright**, Ascension Lutheran Church, **Grace Oedel**, Executive Director, Ohavi Zedek Synagog, J. Bradley Materick representing the Burlington Shambhala Center.
- At the Museum
- 12:15 The conversation continues during lunch at *Gateway Auditorium* at the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum.
- 1:00 *How will the Federal budget affect the clean-up of Lake Champlain and how did the 2017 Vermont legislative session affect funding?* Led by **Julie Moore**, Secretary, Vermont Agency of Natural Resources.
- 1:45 *What is threatening to degrade the "Vermont Brand"?* Led by **Rebekah Weber**, Lake Champlain Lake Keeper.
- 2:30 *What measures need to be taken right now to address these issues?* Led by **James Ehlers**, Exec. Director, Lake Champlain International.
- 3:15 *What does Act 64 Require?* Led by **Jon Groveman**, Policy and Water Program Director, Vermont Natural Resources Council.
- 4:00 Open tour of the Museum

For more information contact:

Richard Butz  
(contact information)

Special thanks to our presenters and to the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum for the use of their facilities and their support.

Parking: please park at the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum and walk down to Basin Harbor. Those who are mobility challenged may park down the road at Basin Harbor.

## **Appendix V: Sunday School Plans**

*Below are the Sunday School plans developed by the Education Committee.*

**God Speaks to Us in Water Stories** is the title of the grant we wrote for the Watershed Stewardship designed by Pastor Nancy. We did a lot of brain-storming, us three teachers, and ideas flowed. **Summer KidzKamp** schedules is:

**June 18<sup>th</sup> Noah and the Great Flood / Conservation, Beth**

**June 25<sup>th</sup> the Samaritan woman at the well / worldwide water needs, Lydia**

**July 9<sup>th</sup> Noaman cured in the River Jordan, faith, healing waters / microscopes,  
Beth**

**July 16<sup>th</sup> Baptism of Jesus, spiritual, ceremonial, and life affirming water/ Life  
sustaining water and species. Lydia**

**July 23<sup>rd</sup> Water as life cycle, Sarah**

**July 30<sup>th</sup> Reflecting on Water learning, with acrylic painting on canvas, to be  
exhibited at October art show. Then lunch, and family trips to ECHO, with guide.**

**Appendix VI: “Love Your Watershed” Brochure [original is a PDF in color]**

*Below is the text for Ascension Lutheran Church’s “Love Your Watershed” brochure.*

**LOVE YOUR WATERSHED**

**Jesus said “I am living water...”**

**“When you give water to the thirsty,  
you give to me... “**

Water is life! Water is the source of all living creatures, and all creatures live in watersheds! Through baptism, God renews God’s people.

Lake Champlain, VT, is our watershed, Interesting datapoint: Every acre of Lake Champlain drains 18 acres of land around it. This far exceeds the drainage basin statistics for the Great Lakes (2 to 1 ratio) and makes Lake Champlain much more sensitive to what's being done to the land that surrounds it. We care for our waters by what we do in our homes, yards, schools, and businesses!

**What is a watershed?** A watershed is the ground that water flows within as it moves toward a stream, river or lake, and is a natural boundary within God’s creation.

**Vision:** Ascension Lutheran church (ALC) has done a lot to care for creation. Now, it will foster leadership to ensure that all Vermont waters are fishable, swimmable, and drinkable. ALC will lead faith communities to grow in spiritual awareness and stewardship by ensuring that the waters remain clean.

**Reality:** Pollutants harmful to humans and animals and invasive species that humans have introduced to ponds and lakes for over one hundred years have taken their toll. The largest pollutant by far is phosphorus. It contributes to a growing number of toxic algae blooms, which make our waters unfishable and unswimmable. Progress has been made to understand the situation and take corrective action. In 2016 Vermont Act 64 launched a twenty year program of remediation. But this program cannot succeed without sustained funding, which in turn requires broad community support.

Our faith community is called to action. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America asks churches to “locate each congregation within its watershed district, so that waters may be named and known in worship and intercessory prayers, and that theological and biblical themes may build awareness, care and thanksgiving for the gift of these waters” and that “congregations and individual members

encourage and support conservation and prayerful stewardship of water resources.”

Responsive to this resolution, families at ALC will become active in learning about and caring for the Lake Champlain watershed. At least twelve families will be invited to covenant to be part of the leadership team.

***What we can do to care for our watershed?***

**Household stewardship practices:** For example:

- don't run the water while brushing teeth
- take short showers
- do not use bottled water
- do not use phosphate dishwashing detergents
- install low flow toilets and shower heads
- don't flush medications, chemicals, or paints
- measure your progress reducing water waste ([www.waterfootprint.org](http://www.waterfootprint.org)).

**Yard stewardship practices:**

- pick up after the dog
- use pesticide alternatives
- avoid or minimize lawn fertilizer
- cut grass no shorter than 3” high
- install rain barrels and rain gardens
- wash cars on lawn
- use permeable material for paved surfaces
- plant gardens with native species.

**Stream practices:**

- create plantings along stream edges to control erosion and provide shady areas for fish

**Spiritual Practices:**

- sit close to a stream or pond and thank God for the water or simply absorb God's goodness as shown through the gift of water.

**Citizen practice:**

- Contact your legislator to say that clean water is important

**A Prayer:** “Blessed are you, Lord, through Sister Water, who is so useful, so humble, so precious, and so pure. We praise and thank you, Lord, for your gift of water in all its many forms and uses. Guide us to use it wisely, to learn from its humility, to consume it mindfully and project its purity, so that we may truly value water and share it generously. Amen.

**Learn more!** Start by getting to know your local watershed. The Vermont Agency for Natural Resources provides a map of Vermont watersheds: <https://anrweb.vt.gov/DEC/CWR/CWR-tool>  
Discover what others are doing to help by contacting the Lake Champlain Committee: [www.lakechamplaincommittee.org](http://www.lakechamplaincommittee.org).

**Calendar of Activities from Earth Day  
to  
St. Francis Day**

- **June 16** Educational boat trip and speakers, all day, for teens and adults (RSVP)
- **June/July Sunday school** will focus on water
- **September 9** All family Inter-faith pilgrimage on Lake Champlain
- **September 10** worship and picnic by the lake
- **October 1** worship service focused on water and art exhibit;

Can one of your family members compose here a prayer for water?

Ascension Lutheran Church  
95 Allen Rd., S. Burlington, VT  
802-862-8866  
Church.office@alcvt.org

## **Appendix VII: Worship Service Water Litanies**

*These litanies were printed in the worship bulletin for the lakeside worship service.*

[Bowl of lake water to be brought into the pavilion by several children]

### **Renewal of baptism**

Holy God, holy and merciful, holy and mighty, you are the river of life, you are the everlasting wellspring, and you are living water.

Thank you for oceans and lakes, for rivers and streams [offer names for which we are grateful]. Thank you for cloud and rain, for dew and snow. Your waters are below us, around us, above us: our life is born in you.

Praise to you for the creatures in the oceans, lakes and rivers. Praise to you for the Jordan River in which Jesus was baptized. Praise to you for the waters in which we were baptized.

At this font, holy God, we pray: Praise to you for the water of baptism and for your Word that saves all in this water. Breathe your Spirit into all who are gathered here and into all creation. Help us to minister in your name so that all people and creatures have the water they need. Illumine our days. Enliven our bones. Dry our tears. Wash away the sin within us, and drown the evil around us.

Satisfy the thirst of your creation and all our thirst with your living water. May we be living water to one another. We pray to you, Jesus Christ, the fountain of living water.  
Amen.

### **Prayer of the Day—**

Dear God, Creator of the Universe, we thank you for the gift of life. We thank you for the gift of water, which makes all life possible. Move us to love these waters as you do. Fill us with a vision of a renewed creation, and give us the will to be faithful stewards of all your gifts. We Pray in the name of Jesus Christ, who brings Living Water, Amen

### **Respect Water, Protect Water**

There are resources inside of us  
Resources outside of us\And water is one of the most precious

The condition of our internal water matters  
The hydration of our cells  
The fluidity of our emotions  
The waters of our psyche

The condition of our planetary water matters  
The health of our oceans  
The flow of our rivers, streams and creeks  
The well being of our underground springs

All species from trees to caterpillars  
Humans to river rocks  
Interact with and depend on  
Water

Mothers of many species  
Bring their young to drink and play  
At the water's edge

And from space  
The blue green nature  
Of our watery planet  
Is apparent  
All of creation knows  
And is affected by  
How we treat water

So when a resource is this crucial  
This important  
This valuable

How do we behave?  
We protect and we respect  
Sustainer of All Life  
Your flow is within us  
And all around us  
May we grow in consciousness

Teach us to protect and respect water  
May we receive  
The wisdom of interdependence and interconnectedness

May we change behaviors  
As individuals, as groups  
To value the waters of life

May we change policies  
As countries and as counties  
To value the waters of life

And may we welcome  
The inventions  
And the changes they will create  
That value the waters of life

We pray for the well-being of Planet Earth  
Protect Water, Respect Water  
(From *Respect Water—Protect Water: A Drop of Hope, An Ocean of Love: Facts, Prayers, Actions and Rituals for Water*, Vermonters for a Clean Environment, December 2008)

## **Appendix VIII Council Evaluation Form**

*This form was used at the September 18 council for evaluating the “Love Your Watershed” activities.*

### ***Evaluating the “Love Your Watershed” activities***

*The “Love Your Watershed” project is a series of action steps from Earth Day 2017 to the Feast of St. Francis. The goals are to: (1) discover that water is a gift from God; (2) define the breadth and scope of the Lake Champlain watershed and identify its socioeconomic, cultural, and spiritual importance; (3) discover the health of the watershed in parishioners’ neighborhoods; (4) experience the gift of water physically, emotionally, and spiritually; and (5) value constructive engagement with water as part of Christian discipleship.*

*At this council meeting, I’d like to ask council, How are we doing? Let’s do an informal evaluation. Aspects of the project are listed:*

- *Received a grant of \$5,000 from the synod, which I distributed to committees*
- *“Love Your Watershed” meeting in March 2017 of everyone interested in watershed stewardship*
- *On Earth Day, parishioners were given test tubes for water testing with follow-up letter*
- *Some parishioners were invited to be watershed covenant families, with questions to be thought about during the summer (repeated in the bulletin and The Church Mouse); I will ask to meet with them after worship on September 24.*
- *June 16 Lake Champlain Action Cruise and Tutorial*
- *Summer Sunday school focused on water*
- *September 10 worship service on the lake*

- *Upcoming art show*
- *Knowledge that ALC will write up a “toolkit” for other churches, so that ALC will be an example for other churches.*

*Please circle the activities in which you participated.*

*How would you evaluate them, either from your own experience or what you heard from others? (Each activity: excellent, OK, poor)*

*What would you change about the activities?*

*Which activities were most successful? Why?*

*Do you think that they benefited ALC? How?*

*Suggestions for future activities?*

*How do you think the activities met the goal of the project?*

*What do you wish to learn from other churches about watershed stewardship?*

*Thank you!!!!*

## **Appendix IX: Resolution Urging Stewardship of the Gift of Water**

*The ELCA Church Resolution on Water Stewardship that supports Ascension's watershed discipleship project, along with many other similar projects around the United States.*

### **Resolution Urging Stewardship of the Gift of Water**

2016 Churchwide Assembly

ASSEMBLY ACTION CA16.05.24 To adopt Motion C.

WHEREAS, Holy Scripture reminds us that “the Holy Habitation of the Most High” includes “a river whose streams make glad the city of God,” and that “waters of the sea may become fresh, so everything will live where the river goes,” and that “the Holy Spirit descended on [Jesus] in bodily form like a dove” when he was baptized in the River Jordan; and 2016 Churchwide Assembly: Legislative Update Friday, August 12, 2016  
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WHEREAS, a watershed is the ground that water flows within as it moves toward a stream, river or lake, and is a natural boundary within God's creation, unlike arbitrary and haphazard geopolitical boundaries, and all of God's creatures live in a watershed; and WHEREAS, many of the watersheds in this country are degraded, and this environmental damage leads to water shortages and a crisis that disproportionately affects people of color and people with lower incomes; and

WHEREAS, the ELCA social statement “Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope and Justice” states that “We see the despoiling of the environment as nothing less than the degradation of God's precious gift of creation,” and the social statement also reminds us that “congregations have various opportunities during the year to focus on creation... Thanksgiving, harvest festivals, and blessings of field, water, and plants and animals,” and encourages us to “observe Earth Day or Soil and Water Stewardship Week,” so as to protect and restore “natural and human habitats, including seas, wetlands, forests, wilderness, and urban areas”; and

WHEREAS, “watershed discipleship” requires that Christians acknowledge that water lies both at the center of our Christian rite of baptism and our current ecological and climate crisis, thus deserving deep theological treatment; therefore, let it be RESOLVED, that the ELCA, in Assembly, requests the Church Council to direct the appropriate churchwide unit to provide every active rostered leader with resources to locate each congregation within its watershed district, so that waters may be named and known in worship and intercessory prayers, and that theological and biblical themes may build awareness, care and thanksgiving for the gift of these waters; and let it be further RESOLVED, that the ELCA, in Assembly, requests the Church Council to direct the appropriate churchwide unit to provide resources to congregations and individual members to encourage and support conservation and prayerful stewardship of water resources; and let it be further

RESOLVED, that the ELCA, in Assembly, requests the Church Council to direct the appropriate churchwide unit to continue to develop strategies and provide resources to support areas struggling with natural or human-caused disasters that impact access to

clean water, such as water contamination, drought and floods, with an awareness that the impact of our environmental actions have disproportionate implication for communities of color with lower incomes; and let it be further

RESOLVED, that the ELCA, in Assembly, encourages congregations to plan events outside their doors and within their watersheds, utilizing the many biblical themes of renewal and liberation that water affords.

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