

## Study Guide: Session I “Earth’s Climate Crisis”

### **Introduction:**

Read Psalm 24:1 “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it”

Genesis 9:12 “God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations.”

Sing *For the Beauty of the Earth* ELW 879

Prayer: Dear God: We want to be good stewards of your creation. Give us the strength and courage to look with honesty at how what we do affects the earth and all that is in it. Give us hope over hopelessness, wisdom and power to make a difference. In Jesus name we pray. Amen

Summary: God gave humans a sacred responsibility to care for the earth. The ELCA first addressed this calling in 1993 with the first social statement “Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice.” Now it is critical that we take decisive action.

### **1. How are Christians called to care for creation?**

Read Genesis 1:14-31 and Genesis 2:4-15

Summary: God shows us with poetry the beauty and goodness of each element of creation and declares it good. The sun and moon to regulate and bring order, the seas and earth to sustain every creature and to be fruitful and multiply. Humans share responsibilities with the sun and moon to regulate and bring order to creation.

Discussion: Has God made humans a part of nature or set us apart from it?

What do the words “have dominion over” and “subdue” the earth mean to you?

Sin’s entrance into creation in Genesis 3 reminds us that humans have rebelled and disrupted creation. What evidence do we see today of God’s disrupted creation?

### **2. How are changes in Earth’s atmosphere affecting our climate?**

Summary: The thin layer of earth’s atmosphere (carbon dioxide, water vapor, ozone, methane, nitrous oxide) that shields the earth and maintains the temperature has been getting thicker and keeps the sun’s heat from escaping much like a greenhouse. Burning fossil fuels, that are carbon stored in the earth, releases more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere which traps more heat.

Figure 1 Carbon Dioxide

Figure 2 Carbon Dioxide and Methane, and Nitrous Oxide

This energy imbalance has led to an increase in global warming and related climate change.

Figure 3 Global Average Temperature

Figure 4 Ocean Heat

Discussion: Scientists agree the climate is changing but not all scientists agree that the cause is from burning fossil fuels. What do you think?

Do you think that changing climate science is accepted in our community?

Is there enough evidence for you to change your behavior?

### **3. Are we facing a critical moment with regard to Earth's climate?**

Summary: The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the United Nations Environment Programme warn that global warming is projected to continue throughout the 21st century and could reach catastrophic levels by the end of the century unless deep reductions in greenhouse gas emissions occur in the coming decades.

In Christian theology, the word *kairos* is used to describe a decisive moment or call from God for action and to remind believers of the hope and power found in that call. We are now in a *kairos* moment for creation. We will either act now to protect it, or we will fail to act.

Discussion: How can we focus on the power of God's call to action and not be overwhelmed by the size of the job?

Have you ever experienced a time when hope moved you or someone you know acted in the face of overwhelming odds to protect or restore creation?

Prayer:

*O merciful Creator, your hand is open wide to satisfy the needs of every living creature. Make us always thankful for your loving providence; and grant that we, remembering the account that we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of your good gifts; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (LBW,p.41.)*

## Session II

Sing *This is My Father's World*, ELW 824

Prayer: *Pour out upon us, O Lord the spirit to think and do what is right, that we, who cannot even exist without you, may have the strength to live according to your will; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.* (LBW,p.25.)

### 4. How Should Christians begin to respond to this *kairos* moment?

Summary: It is clear that humans have failed to live out their vocation to be good and caring "keepers" of creation. Living in right relationship with God and creation begins with **confession** and **repentance**.

We confess:

- Our failure to consider future generations.
- Our disregard for victims of environmental injustice.
- Our insufficient concern for other species facing extinction.
- Our personal complicity through high-carbon lifestyles.
- Our dismissive disdain for those with whom we disagree.

Sin is also collective or communal called "structural sin". Some of us benefit from structural forces at the expense of others. Once we understand our own participation in this systemic harm, we can identify it as sin, confess it, and through the grace and strength of God, begin to act differently.

Discussion: In what ways have you benefited from structural forces at the expense of others regarding the environment?

Who are the victims of environmental injustice in our community?

### 5. What insights from ELCA social teaching are helpful?

Summary: Lutheran insight regarding the **law, gospel and role of government** help guide the development of our policy and decision making. We believe that God is active in the world through the law and gospel.

- The law is God's gift through civil authorities to protect and coordinate the well-being of individuals, communities, and creation.
- God's work through the church is to proclaim the gospel, serve the needy, promote mercy and reconciliation through Word and sacrament.

We consider **three dimensions of climate justice** to understand the burdens associated with greenhouse gas mitigation and the cost of adaptation. They are;

- *intragenerational* (present generation),
- *intergenerational* (future generations) and
- *intersectional* (race, class, gender) dimensions.

We use **four moral principles** to help us discern what justice requires.

- Justice through *participation* means that all living things are entitled to be heard and have their interests considered when decisions are made.
- Justice through *solidarity* means we stand together as God's creation.
- Justice through *sufficiency* means meeting the basic needs of all humanity and all creation.
- Justice through *sustainability* means providing an acceptable quality of life for present generations without compromising that of future generations.

These four principles imply;

- the *ethical priority for the most vulnerable and marginalized* and that;
- action be taken to avoid or diminish harm as a *precautionary* measure when harm is scientifically plausible but uncertain.

Discussion: Keeping these principles in mind, what are the challenges we face in Iowa to maintain agricultural productivity and keep our water and air clean?

Keeping these principles in mind, what should we advocate for in Iowa to keep our air and water clean?

## **6. How does the ELCA teach that climate change should be addressed?**

Summary: The ELCA *encourages Christians to participate in the affairs of government.*

The ELCA calls upon individuals, agencies, organizations, corporations, and governments *to pursue goals, set policies, or establish practices* that: (bottom of page 12 & 13)

Likewise, this church *rejects beliefs, goals, and policies* that: (page 14)

The ELCA will *raise searching questions about goals and policies* that: (bottom page 14)

The ELCA *challenges all expressions of this church to:* (bottom page 14)

Discussion: What commitments has Redeemer made or could make to protect and keep God's creation? What steps has Redeemer taken or could take to act on that commitment?

## **Conclusion: Where do we find hope and power for facing climate change?**

Summary: The climate crisis is a *kairos* moment. It is possible to be too late in our response. As God's people we address the climate crisis with active hope rather than paralyzing despair. We should view this moment with honest fear and a vision of flourishing and abundance. "Captured by hope, we proclaim that God has made peace with all things through the blood of the cross (Colossians 1:15-20), and that the Spirit of God, 'the giver of life,' renews the face of the earth." We need to do the work and the Spirit will renew the earth.

Prayer: *Almighty God, in giving us dominion over things on earth, you made us fellow workers in your creation. Give us wisdom and reverence to use the resources of nature, so that no one may suffer from our abuse of them, and that generations yet to come may continue to praise you for your bounty; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.* (LBW,p.49)