

Living Faithfully into a New Climate

Activities for Youth and Young Adults

A resource in support of church education and engagement on the road from the September 2014 United Nations Climate Summit to the December 2015 international climate change negotiations (COP21).

*With excerpts from **Living Ecological Justice: A Biblical Response to the Environmental Crisis (CPJ, 2013).***



CITIZENS FOR PUBLIC JUSTICE

*The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it.*

Psalm 24: 1

Introduction

Creation Advocacy and Care. Through a sense of wonder with creation we are invited to seek insights into God's will for a just society, a fair economy, and a flourishing land. Creation care rests on biblical foundations uniting spirituality with scientific, ecological, and political insights into dynamic and energizing relationship.



Creation advocacy sets its sights on God's vision of an abundant and ecologically flourishing life for all creatures; it aligns itself with God's passionate work in the world, enacting the divine purpose through faithful worship, engaged community, and prophetic action.

The Climate Crisis. It is now widely accepted that the massive increase in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are largely the result of human activity. And, as the concentration of GHGs continues to grow, climate change is causing the rising of sea levels, species extinction, and glacial melting. Agrarian and fisheries-based livelihoods are threatened by extreme and volatile weather, resulting in conflict over natural resources, food insecurity, hunger and poverty.

The [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) has clearly stated that in order to limit global warming to 2°C above pre-industrial levels — the threshold for “dangerous climate change” — most known fossil fuel reserves must stay underground.

The Road from New York to Paris. In response to this global crisis, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has invited Heads of State along with business, finance, and civil society leaders to a Climate Summit on September 23, 2014, in New York. The [UN Climate Summit](#) is part of a global effort to mobilize action and ambition on climate change. It comes just one year before countries aim to conclude a global climate agreement at the 21st meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP21) in Paris through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

A Role for Faith Communities. Union Theological Seminary in New York will hold the [Religions for the Earth Conference](#), September 19-21. Alongside the UN Climate Summit, the World Council of Churches and Religions for Peace will organize an [Interfaith Summit on Climate Change](#), September 21-22, also in New York, in order to highlight the specific contributions that faith traditions bring to the international climate debate. And environmentalists active in the 350.org movement are planning the biggest March New York has ever seen.

A Call to Engagement and Action. To have an impact on the climate agenda, action needs to happen at all levels. As key leaders meet in New York, their efforts will be supported by grassroots activities around the world. Canadian Christians are urged to get involved.

“Living Faithfully into a New Climate” is a package of materials assembled by Citizens for Public Justice, a member of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) Commission on Justice and Peace, that aims to assist Canadian faith communities to highlight the importance of the September 2014 events, and also to enable increased engagement in creation advocacy and care as we move towards the December 2015 COP21 meeting in Paris. It is our hope that these resources can be used in the worship activities of all of the 25 member Christian denominations of the CCC.

“Living Faithfully into a New Climate” includes a wide variety of resources that can be used as part of Sunday worship or to support additional learning opportunities in communities of faith. All are centred around responding to God’s call to care for creation.

- A Bible Study on Creation Advocacy and Care
- Sermon Notes for September 21, 2014
- Hymns for Creation
- Prayers of Intercession
- Activities for Youth and Young Adults (this document)
- Additional Activities
- A Living Faithfully into a New Climate Infographic (available at cpj.ca/climate)

All of these materials are as PDFs at cpj.ca/climate. Text-only versions of these resources (except the infographic) are also available.



Overview of Activities for Youth and Young Adults

God calls us to care for God's wondrous world, to advocate on behalf of God's magnificent creation.

Drawing on materials originally published in *Living Ecological Justice: A Biblical Response to the Environmental Crisis* (CPJ, 2013), the activities contained in this study invite us to begin with wonder and to explore how we can more deliberately living into the Christian call to creation advocacy and care.

Working through the activities here will take approximately two hours. You may wish to mix it up or include additional activities available at www.cpj.ca/workshop.

1. Welcome
2. Begin With a Place You Love
3. Of Garden Spiders and Galaxies
4. Who is Your Neighbour?
5. Parables from Nature
6. Nothing Else but Miracles
7. Doing Our Part for Creation
8. Closing Prayer

Materials and Set-Up

- A flexible workshop space. Chairs arranged in a circle for most activities, and around tables for others.
- Flipchart, masking tape, and markers, pens or pencils, digital cameras (optional), paper, scissors, glue, paint or coloured pencils, and modeling clay.
- Natural materials gathered from outside.
- Readers (you may wish to identify volunteers ahead of time)
- "Who is My Neighbour" worksheets (one copy for each participant), p. 8
- *(Optional)* Videos: "Living Faithfully into a New Climate," "Begin With A Place You Love;" and a laptop, projector, and screen*

*Video and PDF materials referred to are available at www.cpj.ca/workshop

Please note: instructions are printed in grey; text that is to be read aloud is in *black italics*.

Welcome

Welcome participants and explain that as we work through these activities, we are invited to begin with wonder, and to explore how we can more deliberately living into the Christian call to creation advocacy and care.

Share the information from the introduction (pp. 1-2) about creation advocacy and care, the climate crisis, the UN Climate Summit and related events, and the road to Paris 2015. Alternatively, show the introductory video, “Living Faithfully into a New Climate.”

Begin With A Place You Love

Invite participants to sit quietly. Read the following meditation aloud (or use the **video guide**):

Think of a place and time where you felt a strong connection with and/or love of nature. Where were you? What did it look like? What did it feel like? What did it smell like?

As you continue to reflect on the experience of this place and time, consider what contributed to the love you were feeling. Was it the air, the trees, the earth, the view?

Close your eyes and take a moment to reflect in silence.



Try to hold on to this feeling as you move through the remaining activities.

After a few moments, invite participants to go around the circle and briefly introduce themselves, giving their name, the place they were thinking about, and their interest in this study. (Please allow 1-2 minutes per participant).

Have one of the participants read “Of Garden Spiders and Galaxies” aloud.

OF Garden Spiders and Galaxies

a reflection by Sister Sheila McKinley, OSU

That all creation belongs to God is a theme threaded through the sacred scriptures from Genesis to Job to Revelation. What does this truth mean for us today?

First of all, let us reflect on the God to whom all creation belongs, from whom all creation draws life. The creation stories in the Bible paint lively pictures of an artist fashioning a masterpiece, of a creator delighting in all life and of a living God who breathes God’s very breath into us. Again and again God looks at creation and proclaims its goodness. Clearly, the world and everything in it is precious to God. This passionate and compassionate Creator makes a covenant, not only with human beings, but with all creation. We have a God who takes note of the sparrow, who is familiar with fields of flowers, who has chosen to make a home with us. Our God is Emmanuel and we walk on holy ground.

When we consider “all the worlds” our God has made, how do we respond? The Creator and all creation invite us to wonder, reverence, and right relationship with the world. When I was little, my mother took my siblings and me down to the end of the backyard to show us a garden spider suspended in her orb-shaped web. To my young eyes, the spider looked huge and frightening with her dramatic black and yellow markings. My mother explained how important the spider was to the garden and to us. Many years later, my mother, now a grandmother, sat in another backyard with her first grandchild in her lap. They were gazing at the star-filled summer sky, no doubt pondering the great mysteries of life. She would have agreed with Walt Whitman when he wrote, “I know of nothing else but miracles.” Wonder is a good place to begin when we consider our relationship with God and all God’s works of art.

Whether we see our world through microscopes, telescopes, bifocals, or the naked eye, it becomes evident quite quickly that the world is rooted in relationships which we disrupt at our peril. Our world is filled with examples of the interrelatedness of life, whether we are considering ant hills, nurse logs, companion gardening, compost heaps, or the carbon cycle. Creation itself is teaching us that everything is connected. We are part of a good and gracious family.

When I was at the end of the backyard, maybe I should have paid as much attention to the web as I did to the spider. I may have understood earlier in life what both modern science and ancient peoples tell us: that everything in creation is connected and that humans are, in the words attributed to Chief Seattle, a strand in the web of life.

Poets and mystics seem to have a better grasp of the reality of our interdependence. Francis of Assisi talks of Brother Wind and Sister Water. The poet, Francis Thompson, writes that we cannot stir a flower without troubling a star.

We are part of creation, the part that is able to reflect and to be filled with wonder at a baby's tiny fingers, at singing whales, migrating monarchs, spiral galaxies, and the cycles of growth and change, life and death. We can "consider all the worlds thy hands have made." We have been blessed with the ability to make choices that help all creation to flourish.

Indeed, it is very good.

For Discussion:

Post these discussion questions on a flipchart.

- What are your "garden spiders and galaxies"?
- What beauty moves you so much that you feel called to action?

Set aside some time (a least 15-20 minutes) and invite participants to discuss the questions in pairs or groups of three. Reconvene in plenary and ask each group to report back (for a total of 10-15 minutes). Invite the reporters to be as descriptive as possible when speaking about the beauty that moves them and their group.

Sr. Sheila McKinley, OSU has been a member of the Ursuline Religious of Chatham for over 40 years. For 26 years she worked educating students at the elementary and secondary level. Sheila now works primarily with small groups leading reflections in the areas of spirituality, justice, and Scripture. As an Ursuline, Sheila has been involved in areas including consensus building, networking with and supporting women, especially women at risk, and Earth justice. She is a former member of the Citizens for Public Justice's board of directors.

Who is Your Neighbour?

In preparation for this activity, make copies of the worksheet on page 8.

Read this brief statement and these questions aloud:

The natural environment in and around our human communities has a profound impact on a neighbourhood, yet when we think of our neighbours, we often limit our thinking to the people who live in our building or on our street. Do you know your other neighbours? What animals, birds, insects, trees, and other plants share the space in which you live, work, worship, and play? How are they connected to one another and to you?

Take your group for a walk outside. Establish boundaries for the walk (e.g. from the corner of church parking lot to the next intersection) and set a time limit (approximately 30-45 minutes). Suggest that they work in pairs or small groups (or all together if your group isn't too large) to complete the first two columns of the worksheet.

Bring the group back to your meeting space. Reconvene for a bit of research, using these questions as a guide. Ask participants to use the "follow-up" column on the worksheet to record their answers.

- Are the species you found native to this area?
- Are they invasive or considered pests?
- How have they impacted the neighbourhood?
- How have they been impacted or adapted to changes in the immediate environment?

Invite everyone to sit quietly and close their eyes. Ask them to consider these questions:

- What would the neighbourhood look like if the species they found were gone?
- What would the neighbourhood look like if the well-being of these creatures was considered in development planning, in our landscaping, and in our gardening?

Take a few minutes for participants to share their reflections with the group.

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR WORKSHEET

Find 10 trees or 10 species of wildlife in the neighbourhood. Take note of their characteristics (colour, texture, size) so that you can learn their names. You may also wish to take a picture for reference.

NAME:	CHARACTERISTICS	FOLLOW-UP
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		

*While you are out, gather a few **fallen** leaves, keys, twigs, or stones; save them for a later activity. Please do not damage any plants or property in your collection.*

Parables from Nature

Read the introduction below. Then, invite participants to work through the activity in pairs or small groups. If creativity, time, and space allow, you may wish to encourage participants to role play the parables and their lessons learned.

Many lessons can be taken from the earth. In his teachings, Jesus often used parables based on nature. Read one or more of the following texts (or another nature parable). Take time to reflect. Imagine yourself present in the stories. What do they teach you?

A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they had not much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched; and since they had no root they withered away. Other seeds fell upon thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear. Matthew 13:3–9

The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how. The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come. Mark 4:26–29

A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, “Lo, these three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down; why should it use up the ground?” And he answered him, “Let it alone, sir, this year also, till I dig about it and put on manure. And if it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.” Luke 13:6–9

Nothing Else but Miracles

In addition to the natural materials gathered from outside during your earlier activity, you will need paper, scissors, glue, paint or markers or coloured pencils, and modeling clay for this activity.

Set up in a space that allows everyone to spread out. Arrange craft materials across several tables so that everyone can see what is available and can access materials easily. Read this introduction:

Think of your “garden spiders and galaxies.” In other words, those gifts of creation that cause you to pause in awe and wonder at the beauty of what God has made. Using the materials you gathered from outside, along with craft materials available, create a symbol to serve as a reminder that we have been blessed with the ability to make choices that help all creation to flourish.

Once the creations are complete, invite participants to share both their inspiration and their final products with others in the group. Participants may wish to take their creation home or place them somewhere in the church where the inspiration can be shared with others.



Doing Our Part for Creation

Post the discussion questions on a flipchart. Read the following introduction and invite participants to discuss. As this is the final activity in the session, you are encouraged to work as a full group.

Creation is often perceived as “apolitical” in nature, but it really isn’t. How we relate to the Earth is influenced by our political, religious, and moral beliefs.

World leaders are now moving towards a new global climate deal. As they do so, it is imperative that we do our part, and actively engage in both creation care and creation advocacy.

Creation care rests on biblical foundations uniting spirituality with scientific, ecological, and political insights into a dynamic and energizing relationship. Through a sense of wonder with creation we are invited to seek insights into God’s will for a just society, a fair economy, and a flourishing land.

Creation advocacy sets its sights on God’s vision of an abundant and ecologically flourishing life for all creatures; it aligns itself with God’s passionate work in the world, enacting the divine purpose through faithful worship, engaged community, and prophetic action.

Reflecting on the day’s activities, discuss the following questions:

- When was the last time you heard a sermon on creation? Or better, on creation care?
- Have you ever prayed for an endangered species? A threatened ecosystem? Or for polluted air or water?
- When was the last time you engaged your church leaders on questions of creation advocacy?

As participants prepare to leave this workshop, encourage them to think carefully about one or two things they might do to engage in creation advocacy themselves, or to encourage their faith community to become more aware of and more engaged in protecting, preserving, and advocating on behalf of the Earth.

Closing Prayer

Invite one of the people present to read this closing prayer.

Creator God, we thank you for the beauty of your Creation, and for giving us the privilege of caring for it. We confess that we have not cared for the earth with the self-sacrificing and nurturing love that you require of us. We mourn the broken relationships in creation. We repent for our part in causing the current environmental crisis that has led to climate change.

Faithful God, sustainer of all, we pray with hope, because you are already at work through Christ to reconcile all of creation to Yourself and to renew all things.

Loving God, help us to turn our lives around to be people of restoration. Help us build just relationships among human beings and with the rest of creation. Help us to live sustainably, rejecting consumerism and the exploitation of creation.

God of justice, give us courage and persistence to work for justice for those most affected by environmental degradation and climate change.

God of mercy, hear the cry of the poor who are already suffering and will continue to suffer water and food shortages and who will be displaced by climate change.

God of all wisdom, give wisdom to the leaders of all the world's nations to work together for a global agreement to tackle climate change. Give them the determination to find a just solution that protects the people who are most vulnerable in our world, and protects creation.

Creator God, give us your Spirit to work together to restore your creation and to hand on a safe environment and climate to our children and theirs.

*Let our care for creation be our act of worship and obedience to you.
Your kingdom come, and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

Amen.

Micah Challenge Australia for the StandUP kit for churches, 2009. Reprinted with permission.

CITIZENS FOR PUBLIC JUSTICE

a national organization inspired by faith to act for justice

We at CPJ hope you have found these resources useful, educational, and inspiring towards your pursuit of climate justice.

CPJ has been a faithful voice for public justice in Canada for more than 50 years, bringing together justice-oriented Christians, churches, religious orders, and organizations. Still, there is much work to do – and we could use your support! CPJ depends on donations from committed citizens like you who value our unique Christian perspective on justice issues. Please go to cpj.ca/support and join your voice with ours!

For additional resources or to support our work, visit:

www.cpj.ca

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