

THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S: CARING FOR GOD'S CREATION

A 5-part Study Unit for Vacation Bible School,
weekly Church School, or Summer Camping Programs



by Michael Anderson, Barbara Kucynda, the Very Rev. John Matusiak and Dr. Constance Tarasar

Education and Community Life Ministries • Educational Resources • **95/1**
Orthodox Church in America • 1995

INTRODUCTION

This unit is intended to accomplish the following:

1. To foster an appreciation and concern for the entire "cosmos."
2. To instill within students the concept that Christian stewardship is at the very center of the human person's purpose and place within God's creation.
3. To strengthen students' sense of identity as stewards of the gifts of God.

By the end of this unit the student should

1. understand that creation (the world, i.e. "cosmos," human persons, etc.) is a gift by which God shares His life and His love.
2. identify himself/herself as a part of – and the "crown" of – God's creation, made in God's own image and likeness.
3. have a sense of appreciation and joy for God's creation.
4. be able to name several ways to bless or thank God for His gift of creation.
5. feel a sense of responsibility for the care of creation.
6. recognize, name and avoid abuses against creation.
7. understand the consequences of the abuse of creation for our lives.
8. be prompted to do things to help the environment and reverse the processes of abuse to creation.

Age and grade level

Understanding that Vacation Church Schools and Camps have participants ranging in age from pre-school to high school, each session contains several options from which the teacher can choose to best serve his or her students. This includes objectives as well as ideas for discussion, reflection and action.

Reproducing the unit

This unit was designed to be reproduced locally. Every teacher and staff member should have his or her own copy.

Additional resources

While there are many resources which you may wish to interface with this unit, the following are indicated in the session outlines.

1. *Saints for All Ages*. A series of books available from **Orthodox Christian Publications Center, PO Box 588, Wayne, NJ 07470-0588; 201/694-5782; FAX 201/305-1478**.
2. *Old Turtle* by Douglas Wood, Pfeifer-Hamilton Publishers, a Caldecott Award book. Available at most religious and major bookstores.
3. *Animals and Man: A State of Blessedness* by Joanne Stephanatos. Available from **Light and Life Publishing, 4818 Park Glen Road, Minneapolis, MN 55416; 612/925-3888; FAX 612/925-3918**.

Be flexible and creative! It is important to note that these session plans require local input, talent and creativity. Do not be afraid to alter the sessions to fit your own situation.

In general, the units are self explanatory and allow for a great deal of flexibility. Discussions and activities may easily be adjusted to appropriate age levels or groups of students representing a broad age span. While the unit assumes that students are between the ages of 4 and 18, you will have to decide how to adapt the program to the specific conditions in your community.

Let us hear from you! If you use this unit of study, in its present form or in your own adapted form, please let us know. Share your experience and your photos! You can reach our Ministry Unit at the following address:

**Orthodox Church in America Education and Community Life Ministries
Box 675, Route 25A
Syosset, New York 11791**

We hope this unit is helpful in your ongoing ministry!



SESSION 1

AN INTRODUCTION TO GOD'S CREATION

By the end of this session the students should be able to

1. tell the basic story of creation.
2. discuss the ways every part of creation – water, land, air, fish, trees, plants, birds, animals, humans, sun, moon, stars – is interdependent.
3. define creation as a gift from God.
4. explain God's special relationship with creation as the One who continues to care for everything and everyone He made.

Useful scriptural texts

Genesis 1:1–2:25; Psalm 49; Psalm 50:10,11; Psalms 104 and 145–150; Leviticus 25:23; 1 Chronicles 29: 14–16; Haggai 2:8.

Presentation ideas

a/ Tell or read the story of creation as found in Genesis 1:1 - 2:1. (*Use a children's text and/or a scriptural translation appropriate to the age level.*)

b/ Show the students pictures of different things that exist in nature: plants, animals, planets, clouds, examples of different climates, etc. Discuss which things in the pictures were made by God. Divide students into groups of 6–10. Give the students five minutes to brainstorm other things that God created. Compare and discuss their lists.

c/ Take the students for a walk. Stop in different places and ask the students to point out things made by God. (*With older students, consider visiting a park, woods, lake, beach front, zoo, botanical garden, etc.*). Ask the students to discuss their observations and to offer reasons why certain things appear in some places and not in others.

d/ Initiate an outdoor nature hunt game. Divide into teams of 2–3 persons each. Give each team an identical list of 20–25 items that can be found within a designated area. Challenge them to gather as many things as they can in 15 minutes. When they are finished ask them to describe in detail the things they have found. (*For example, if they found a bird, ask them to describe its color, its behavior, its needs, the sounds it makes, etc.*) Depending on the accuracy of their descriptions, award 1–3 points apiece. Award a prize to the team with the most points.

e/ Ask the teens to find Genesis 1:1–2:1, 2:4–25, and Psalm 104. Instruct them to read these passages to themselves. Ask them to explain the similarities and differences found in each passage. Afterward, read Psalm 148. Initiate a discussion on how these passages might be compared to the understanding of creation they have gained in science classes. What similarities and differences are to be found?

Discussion ideas • Questions • Reflections

1/ Why do you suppose God made people? Animals? Plants? The Sun? Insects? Other things? Focus their attention on the diversity and interdependence of everything made by God. (*Refer to verses in Psalm 104*). Ask "what if" questions, such as, "What if God hadn't made water? Sun? Air? Trees?" etc. How would the world be different?

2/ What did God think or say after He made the different parts of creation? (*"And God saw it was good," "It is not good for man to be alone"*). If you were going to create a special place for yourself, your own natural environment, what would you put into it? (*Students can only include those things made by God.*) What would make your own natural environment "good" to you? Would you be happy if you were the only person in your environment? (*See Genesis 2:4–9, 15–23.*) Would you want another person or persons to be with you? Why or why not? Is there anything you would leave out of your creation? What and why?

3/ Why do you think God made the world? Us? (*Because God is Love, and love creates life.*) If you wanted to tell God how you felt about His creation, what would you say? Have the students look at the beginning and end

of Psalm 104 or Psalms 145–150. Ask the older students to find verses that they especially like. Have them share their reasons for selecting these verses. What do these verses say about our relationship to creation, to other persons, and to God Himself?

Activities • Projects

1/ Creation banner. Draw a large circle on a white or light-colored bed sheet that is no longer being used. Above the circle place the title “God’s Creation.” Using scraps of cloth, felt, or construction paper, have the students cut out or draw pictures of God’s creation and mount them within the circle. Focus their attention on illustrating texts from Genesis or Psalm 104 which emphasize the relationship between the different elements of creation. Hang the finished product on a wall.

2/ Creation puzzle. Get an extra large posterboard. Draw puzzle-shaped pieces on the board, one for each student plus an extra piece at the top or center for a title. Cut out the puzzle pieces. Set aside the title piece. (*Place an X on the back side of each piece.*) Ask each student to select a verse from Psalm 104 to illustrate. Instruct them to use the side of the puzzle piece that does not have the X on it. Ask them to make their pictures colorful and to fill their entire puzzle piece. (*Younger children may mount pictures they have cut or torn out of magazines. Nature, wildlife, flower magazines and catalogues with pictures of waterfalls, birds, insects, rain, mountains, lightning, etc. are especially useful.*) When the students are finished with their artwork, ask them to fit the puzzle pieces together. Mount the assembled pieces on another piece of posterboard. Add an appropriate title, such as “One Creation, Many Parts,” on the piece reserved for this purpose. Discuss how taking one or two pieces out of the puzzle changes the completed picture. What would happen to creation if one or two elements were removed?

3/ Creation skits. Divide students into small groups. Assign each group verses from Psalm 104. Ask them to develop a skit by which they might illustrate the content of their respective verses. Provide a variety of props and materials that can be used in the skits. Especially relevant verses include 1-4, 5-9, 10-13, 14-15, 16-18, 19-23, 24-26, 27-30, and 31-35. Regroup and present the skits, or present them to the entire parish during the following Sunday’s Coffee Hour.

4/ Sing Psalm 8. Refer to the Divine Liturgy music book published by Saint Vladimir’s Seminary Press or use the arrangement sung by the parish choir. Piano accompaniment might be helpful, especially for smaller children.

5/ Personal reflection. Take the students outside. Let each find a comfortable place to sit alone. Give the students 15 minutes to make a list of everything they see within their area that God made. A variation is to mark off a 3’ X 3’ area for each student. Ask them to observe the “smallest things on earth” – ants, spiders, grass seed, sand, etc.

6/ Make a terrarium. In a large glass jar or bottle, have the students create mini-ecosystems. Place rocks, pebbles and sand inside the jar. Add a layer of dirt. Ask the students to discuss what they feel should be included in the terrarium and what they think is necessary to keep everything alive. Plant seeds – rye grass and bird seed grow very quickly – or small plants in the dirt. Add a few insects. Seal each terrarium with a lid or plastic wrap. In the days that follow, ask the students to observe the raindrop cycle inside the terrariums. Discuss ways the elements in the terrariums are interdependent. Keep the terrariums in the classroom for future sessions. Note and discuss the growing process and the things that help and hinder growth.

Conclusion

God called everything in His creation “good.” Every element in God’s creation – including *us!* – has an important and unique purpose and relationship with every other element. When one element in God’s creation is harmed, it affects all of creation.



SESSION 2

KINGS AND QUEENS OF CREATION

By the end of this session the students should be able to

1. identify that we are an important part of God's creation.
2. explain that God has made us in His image and likeness, with a special relationship as kings and queens of creation.
3. define a king or queen as one who is responsible for a kingdom.
4. list ways in which we are responsible for the care of creation, God's Kingdom.

Useful scriptural texts

Psalms 8:6; 21:1-7; 22:28; 24:7; 29:10; 47:7; 103:1-5,17-22; 138: 4-5; Isaiah 43:15; 1 Timothy 1:17; 6:15; 31:1; Matthew 2:2; 21:5; 27:1-24; Luke 19:38.

Presentation ideas

a/ Read *Old Turtle* by Douglas Wood, Pfiefer-Hamilton Publishers. (*Important note: While the book contains two or three references to God as "she," the vast majority of the story is very useful and appropriate. As you read the story replace those references with the traditional "He."*) What does the story say about who God is? What did the Old Turtle say about God? Where is God? (*God is not just this or that, or in this place opposed to that one. He is the One who created everything and is therefore present in everything. You may wish to refer to phrases in the prayer "O Heavenly King" that mentions the Holy Spirit as the one "who is everywhere filling all things" and the "Giver of Life."*) What does the story say about people? How are people special? How did the people change? What did they end up doing? How do you think God's creatures should relate to God and each other?

b/ Ask the students to talk about their pets. What kind of pets do they have? What are their pets' names? Ask the student how they selected their pets' names. (*Looks, behavior, relationship, etc.*) Ask them to discuss how they take care of their pets, to keep them alive, and to make them happy. What kinds of things should they do with their pets? What kinds of things should they never do? How would these things hurt their pets?

c/ Ask one of the teens to read Genesis 1:26-31 and Genesis 2:18-21. Discuss with the students the relationship between humans and animals. Divide students into groups. Give each group a copy of the life of one of the following saints: Saint Sergius, Saint Seraphim, Saint Gerasimos, and Saint Herman of Alaska. (*Some of the lives of these saints may be found in the Saints for All Ages Series, Orthodox Christian Publications Center, Wayne, NJ.*) Ask each group to read the assigned life and to discuss their saint's relationship with animals. Regroup the students. Ask them to report on their assigned saint. Ask them to explain the reasons these saints had such good relationships with wild animals? (*See also Animals and Man: A State of Blessedness by Joanne Stephanatos, Light and Life Publishing, Minneapolis, MN.*)

Discussion ideas

1/ With older students and teens: According to the book of Genesis, humans are created in the image and likeness of God, *The King*, to have dominion over the earth. Hence, humans are "kings and queens" of everything God has made. Ask the teens what they think this means for us today? Are there things that we do to creation that we should not be doing? What? Are there things that we should do that we ignore? What? List five things you could change in your neighborhood and in the neighborhood of the church. (*Students should work on this in groups, reassemble, and offer reports.*) On a large posterboard, list their recommendations.

2/ Make a crown out of construction paper or aluminum foil. Decorate a chair to resemble a throne. Ask for a volunteer to put on the crown and sit on the chair. Ask the students, "What is this student's name?" (*King/Queen _____*.) What do kings and queens do? (*They make rules, protect their kingdom, etc.*) How should kings and queens treat their people? What makes a good king or queen? (*Love and care for their people, good and just rules, concern for providing the basic necessities of life, fairness, righteousness, etc.*) Ask the students to describe what their kingdoms would be like if they were kings and queens.

Activities • Projects for younger students

1/ Ambassadors of a Kingdom. Divide students into two or three groups. Ask the members of each group to appoint a king or queen for the group. Give the groups 10 minutes to create a kingdom. They will need to describe their kingdom's daily life, laws, and religion; the means by which their kingdoms' problems are resolved; the process employed to deal with the king or queen when he or she is wrong or unjust; etc. Remind each group that the king or queen has the "last word" on every decision. Have each king or queen appoint an ambassador to report on his or her kingdom to the "foreigners." Regroup and share the ambassadors' reports. Encourage people from other kingdom(s) to ask questions. Create a "court" atmosphere for the presentation of the ambassadors' reports.

2/ My Kingdom. As persons made in the image and likeness of God, each of us is a king or queen of creation. Hence, each of us has a "kingdom." Ask each student to describe what is in his or her kingdom? (*Home, room, pets, yard, friends, plants, school, books, cars, toys, etc.*) Appoint two "scribes." Give each scribe a piece of posterboard, one with the title *Helping Creation* and the other with the title *Hurting Creation*. Ask the students to discuss the ways they nurture or destroy the things in their kingdoms, and ask the "scribes" to write each response on the appropriate posterboard. Make a third sign that says *My Kingdom* and display all three.

3/ Personal crests. Explain how kings and queens are never any better than the kingdoms they rule. Wherever they go, they represent their kingdoms. Kings and queens always had coats of arms, or crests, bearing emblems signifying what they and their kingdoms stood for. Invite the students to design crests which communicate what their kingdoms are like and what they stand for. Have students draw or cut out pictures from magazines that communicate something about their kingdoms. These may include symbols for their family, pets, interests, likes and dislikes, etc. Mount the pictures on a piece of cardboard cut into the shape of a shield. Display the students' crests.

4/ Skits. Divide the students into small groups. Ask each group is to develop a skit illustrating acceptable and unacceptable uses of creation. Regroup, present and discuss their skits.

5/ Psalm study. Divide teens into groups of 2 or 3. Ask each group to find Psalm 24 and Genesis 1:26-31 in their Bibles. Give the groups 10 minutes to outline what each text says about God and human beings. Regroup, share and discuss outlines.

Conclusion

As a person made in the image and likeness of God, each of us is a king or queen of creation. How we treat the things in our kingdom determines if our kingdom thrives or dies. When we nurture the things in our kingdoms we show God that we are thankful for them and, as a result, we grow closer to Him. Unfortunately, when we hurt the things in our kingdoms we show God that we are ungrateful and we distance or separate ourselves from Him.

SESSION 3

PRIESTS OF CREATION



By the end of this session the students should be able to

1. define priests as those who offer gifts to God.
2. explain that, as priests of God's creation, we are to offer ourselves and the whole creation back to God as a gift.
3. explore ways we offer gifts to God as good stewards, caring for all the things He has given us, even our own selves.
4. define blessing as identifying God's gifts and using them in the way God intended them to be used.
5. name several ways of blessing or thanking God for His gift of creation.

Useful scriptural texts

1 Peter 2:5; 1 Peter 2:9; Psalms 26, 50 and 51.

Presentation ideas

a/ Take students into the Church (or chapel, if you are at camp). Ask Father to open the royal doors so that the students, standing on the ambo, can see the altar. Discuss what happens on the altar. (*We offer our gifts of bread and wine back to God and ask that the Holy Spirit will make them the very Body and Blood of Christ so that we can eat and drink of it and be closer to Him.*) Discuss who stands before the altar (*the bishop, priest, deacon*) and what they do. When do we see things being offered during the Liturgy? (*The Great Entrance, "Thine own of Thine own", etc.*) Explain how priests are always the ones who offer gifts to God and who lead all of God's People in offering gifts to God.

b/ Discuss gifts. What are gifts? Why do we give gifts to others? How do we feel when we receive a gift? Have you, after being given a gift, been sad instead of happy? (*Perhaps you didn't get what you wanted, maybe you didn't think you deserved it, or maybe you didn't offer anything in return, not even a thank you.*) What does love have to do with giving and receiving gifts? Ask if any of the students has a gift at home that makes them think about the person who gave it to them. If we give something "useful" to someone, what do we expect them to do with it? How do we feel when they don't use it? Is the proper or good use of a gift a way to express our appreciation? Why? How?

Discussion ideas • Questions • Reflections

1/ What is the best gift you ever received? How did you feel when you received it? What did you do? How did you treat the gift? How did you express your thanks to the giver? What kinds of gifts has God given us? What do we do with these gifts? How can we show our thanks to God for the gifts He has given us? How can we offer ourselves as a gift to God? (*Along with prayer and other direct ways of thanking God, direct the students' attention to ways by which the wise use of God's gifts and offering love and assistance to others are important ways of expressing our thanks to God.*)

2/ What do we bless in Church? (*Water, candles, flowers, our homes, bread, meals, baskets of food, fruit, cars, other people, etc.*) When do we bless these things? Why do we bless them? What does it mean to bless something? (*To acknowledge that it is from God and use it as He would want us to.*)

3/ Ask the teens to look up Psalm 26. Discuss what it says about God and priests. Ask for a volunteer to read 1 Peter 2:5. If we are supposed to be a "royal priesthood," what does the psalm say about us and what we are supposed to do and not do?

Activities • Projects

1/ Make prosphori. During the Divine Liturgy we hear the exclamation, "Thine own of Thine own, we offer unto Thee in behalf of all and for all." With thanks, we thankfully offer to God the gifts He has given us. Food is an important gift from God. We need food to live and grow. In the Liturgy we receive the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ as our spiritual food. The bread which we offer at the Divine Liturgy is called *prosphori*. It is prayerfully made

of gifts given to us by God – flour, water, etc. Have the students bake prosphori to be used in the Divine Liturgy. (*Ask Father for the recipe.*) Ask the students to bring the ingredients from home. Discuss how, by making prosphori and offering them in the Divine Liturgy, we show our thanks to God for the many gifts with which He has blessed us. Have students prepare lists of names of the living and departed for commemoration with their prosphora. Commit to doing this regularly, maybe monthly or once or twice a year.

2/ Liturgy study. Distribute Divine Liturgy books to the teens. Ask the teens to read the Eucharistic prayers of Saints John Chrysostom and Basil the Great. Have the students find words in each prayer that describe how we thank God and why we thank Him. Compare, contrast, and discuss their responses.

3/ Liturgical calendar. Using posterboard, design a calendar that denotes the feasts and seasons on which we bless things liturgically, such as fruit, flowers, candles, homes, baskets of food, etc. Title the calendar "A Year of Blessings."

4/ Mural. Tape a long roll of shelf or butcher paper onto the wall. Divide into sections, one per student. Ask each student to draw or paint and label a specific thing we bless in his or her section, or to mount magazine pictures. Discuss with the students what it means to bless the things pictured in each section. What are we really asking God for? How does it change the object? What should I do, or how should I behave because I have asked for and received this blessing? List their conclusions at the bottom of each section.

5/ Celebrate! If you are using this program at a Camp or Vacation Church School, celebrate one or more services of blessing during chapel time. Some camps feature the blessing of lakes or streams as part of their programs. Make banners with symbols reflecting the theme of the service and use them to decorate the church or chapel or to carry in procession. As always, ask Father to help you make all arrangements.

Conclusion

We are priests of God's creation. Hence, when we remember that everything we have is a gift from God, we should strive to use His gifts properly, according to His will, not our own. When we do so, we are blessing it and offering it back to Him.



SESSION 4

THREATS TO CREATION

By the end of this session the students should be able to

1. recognize and name abuses against creation.
2. list examples of waste and misuse of creation in our world today.
3. identify reasons that contribute to our misuse and carelessness toward creation and the other gifts we have received from God.
4. list ways we can help stop the abuse of God's creation.
5. take steps towards the restoration of God's creation.

Useful scriptural texts

Romans 8:18-25; 1 Corinthians 10:26.

Presentation ideas

a/ Take one of the terrariums made in Session 1. Stop watering it. Add salt, oil, soap, or trash to it. Over the next few days or weeks, observe what happens within the terrarium. How has it been polluted? Discuss how the polluted terrarium differs from the other terrariums. What has happened to its environment? Discuss how the pollution seen in the terrarium is similar to the pollution which takes place when creation is abused.

b/ Invite the students to "take a stand" on a variety of ecological issues. Ask the students to stand in the center of the room. As you read each of the following phrases, ask the students to stand to your right if they think this is a problem about which they are willing to do something, to your left if they think it is not a problem or if they are unwilling to do something about it, and stay in the center if they are uncertain about what they would do or if they have no opinion. After the students "take their stand," discuss why they hold the views expressed by where they are standing. If they state that they are willing to do something about the problem, ask them to share concrete solutions in which everyone might wish to participate.

- Rain forest destruction
- Air Pollution
- Acid Rain
- Ozone Depletion
- Natural resources depletion
- Species Extinction
- Garbage Overload
- Hazardous Waste
- Water Pollution

c/ Before students arrive, litter the room with newspapers and other safe household trash. (*At camp, use the litter – wrappers, towels, paper, soft drink cans, etc. – that inevitably appears.*) When students arrive keep the litter on the floor to use as an illustration during the discussion. Discuss what happened to the room. Where did the litter and trash come from? How does it feel to see so much litter scattered around the room. Did the students feel any responsibility to pick up the litter? Why or why not? Ask the students to estimate how much trash they generate in a week. Ask them to gather their own trash for a week and to compare their estimates with the amount they actually collected.

Discussion ideas • Questions • Reflections

1/ Ask the students to list ways they see creation being abused on a typical day. How do they abuse creation, often without thinking? Why are people so careless? Do they realize that even the water with which they brush their teeth is there because of God? Why or why not? What could be done to change things?

2/ How does your mother or father feel when you don't take care of your possessions? How do you feel when you see someone abusing a gift you have given them? How do you think God feels when we mistreat the things He made? Why do we neglect things? How can we take better care of the world God created?

Activities • Projects

1/ You decide. Read the following two scenarios. Discuss the problems they describe and determine how each problem should be resolved.

Scenario A

A group of people were evicted from their homes in the city. They are being relocated by a paper making company into a forest area that is being cleared to meet ever-increasing paper demands. An environmentalist group is suing

them so that they won't destroy the forest. Unfortunately, if the environmental group wins the case, the people who were evicted from their old homes will have no place to live.

Scenario B

In the woods near a stream there lived a whole community of animals: birds, snakes, deer, bears, squirrels, bats, beavers and a wise old owl. One of the beavers just found out his wife was going to have babies. He decided to expand his home to make more room for his children. He started chopping down trees to build his house. Unfortunately, there were a lot of birds, bats, and squirrels who made their homes in the trees. As the beaver enlarged his house he stopped the flow of water in the stream. The meadows where the deer ate started to dry up. Needless to say, the birds grew angry when the beaver started chopping down the trees, and the deer were more than a little upset that they didn't have any food. No one knew what to do, so they sought advice from the wise owl who had the last say in such cases. The wise owl knew that there was no simple solution. The beaver's babies still needed a place to live. So as owls do, he invited everyone to help figure out a solution. In seeking a solution to this problem, you may wish to stage a trial. Appoint students to serve as the judge/owl, beaver/defense, birds/plantiff, witnesses and jury. Listen to their arguments and determine a solution.

2/ Making paper. Collect old newspapers or other used paper. Follow the recipe below.

Paper making recipe

You will need a mixing bowl, an egg beater, old newspapers, a 6" square of a window screen, a cup and a large spoon, water and instant starch.

Procedure:

1. Tear 1/2 of a page of a newspaper into tiny pieces. Place the pieces into a mixing bowl 1/4 filled with water. Let the paper soak for at least one hour.
2. Beat the paper and water with an egg beater approximately 10 minutes or until the paper becomes soft and mushy.
3. Dissolve two heaping tablespoons of starch in a cup of water. Add this to the paper mixture. Stir well. The mixture is now known as *pulp*.
4. Carefully dip the screen into the bowl. Hold the screen horizontally. Lift it out of the bowl so that it is well covered with pulp.
5. Put the rest of the newspaper on the table. Then place the screen, covered with the paper pulp, on one half of the newspaper.
6. Fold the newspaper over on top of the screen and paper pulp. Press down very hard with your hands. Carefully fold back the newspaper so you can see the pulp in the screen. Let it dry over night. The next day, peel the recycled paper you made from the screen.

Note: Students may personalize the paper by adding bits of flowers, dried leaves, or colored construction paper during step 2.

Have students use the paper. Ask the students to write letters to their parents, to send invitations to friends to visit an aquarium, zoo, or museum, or to design flyers advertising a collection time and place for recycling paper, glass, metal, etc.

3/ Giant ribbon. Divide students into small groups. Give each group a 1' X 3' panel of burlap, paints, markers, scrap material, felt, etc. Ask each group to make a banner that shows something in creation that is being destroyed instead of nurtured. Sew or connect the panels together into a giant "ribbon." Title the ribbon "Do we know what we are doing?"

4/ Contract to care. Have each student complete the *Contract to Care* on the next page. After they have listed ways they plan to take better care of God's creation, ask the students to sign their contracts. Authorize each with your own signature and a seal or stamp. Ask the students to create frames in which to mat their contracts. Decorate the frames with leaves, flowers, pinecones, etc.

Conclusion

When we abuse and hurt creation we hurt others and ourselves. We show that we do not care about the gifts God has given us. We reject God. If we love God we will love His creation and use it in ways for which He would bless us. Hence, we should treat God's creation the way He wants us to and fix things that we and other people have hurt.

CONTRACT TO CARE

I _____

am a person made in the image and likeness of God.
I am called to be a good caretaker of the gifts God has given me.
The earth, sea, air, plants, animals, my family, friends, and
neighbors, as well as my own body, brain and soul,
are gifts given to me to use the way God wants me to.

In the presence of these witnesses, I hereby pledge
to be a better steward of these gifts by doing the following things
to take better care of God's creation:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Further, I hereby pledge to stop doing the
following things in order to take better care of God's creation:

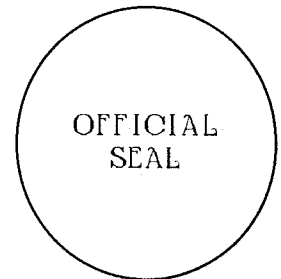
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

SIGNATURE

FIRST WITNESS'S SIGNATURE

SECOND WITNESS'S SIGNATURE

TEACHER'S SIGNATURE





SESSION 5 CARETAKERS OF GOD'S CREATION

By the end of this session the students should be able to

1. define what it means to be a caretaker or steward as one who is given the responsibility to care for and develop the gifts given by God.
2. compare and contrast the differences between consuming and conserving, destroying and restoring, excess and moderation, and to offer examples of each.
3. develop and complete an environmental inventory for the different environments in which they live.
4. compare the idea of Christian stewardship to monastic ideals of self-discipline or self-control, moderation, fasting, simplicity, and balance in their life.

Useful scriptural texts

Matthew 21:33-44; Luke 10:25-37; Luke 12: 13-21; Matthew 25:14-30

Presentation ideas

a/ With the teens, read the parables listed above. How does Christ use the parables to illustrate what it means to be a good steward? For example, in the parable of the rich fool, why did the man want to build bigger barns and storehouses? What else could he have done with his excess goods? If the purpose of life is not to pile up riches, what is it?

b/ Call the students' attention to the terrariums made in Session 1, including the polluted one. Compare the status of each terrarium. (*Some, hopefully, are still growing, while others are dying or dead*). Discuss why some are growing and others are not. Ask the students who cared for the thriving ones to explain how they cared for them.

c/ Prepare two gift boxes. Fill a large box with the contents of a trash can. (*Be sure it's not too messy!*) Wrap it so that it looks very attractive. The other box should be smaller. In it, place a \$10.00 bill. Wrap it in newspaper or paper bags. Tie a simple string around it. Put a note that says "Use for the glory of God" on each gift. Place both boxes in the center of the room. Place a big sign saying "Do Not Touch" on the gifts. State that two students will be given these gifts. Ask the students which gift they would prefer, and why they would prefer it. Choose two students (*possibly the two who participated the most*) and give one of the gifts to each. Remind both of them that they have to use the gift for the glory of God. Have the person with the large gift open his/hers first. Ask each student how he or she feels about his or her gift. Discuss what they would like to do with the gift. What is wrong with not using the gift as the giver intended? Discuss how each student could use his or her gift as the giver intended.

Discussion ideas • Questions • Reflections

1/ Discuss consuming and conserving, destroying and restoring, excess and moderation. Ask the students to give examples of each. We are also creations of God and should take care of our minds, our bodies, our souls, and each other.

2/ The monks and nuns of the Church spend their entire lives trying to perfect the ideals of self-discipline or self-control, moderation, simplicity, and balance. How does each ideal relate to our lives as stewards of God's creation?

3/ Write the terms below on a poster or black board. Give each student a pencil and paper. Instruct each student to rate the following things in terms of which ones they would most likely (1) or least likely (9) spend their money on:

New clothes

Something the Church needs

Helping with family expenses

Helping others

Going out

School supplies

CDs/Videos

Something for girlfriend/boyfriend

Saving for college

Share and discuss the results. How would God want us to use our money? Could this vary in different situations? How?

4/ Should a person get whatever he or she wants? If not, what determines what he or she should or should not get? Do you think the more a person gets the less they want? Why? Can a person have too many possessions? What is too many? Why?

Activities • Projects

1/ Urban garden. Plant and maintain an urban garden in the corner of the Church property (with Father's permission). Invite the students to volunteer to take care of it. Distribute flowers and/or vegetables grown in the garden at Coffee Hour, to shut-ins, or to people in hospitals or nursing homes.

2/ Environment inventory. Discuss the different environments we live in each day (*home, church, school, work, parks, etc.*). Develop and complete the environmental checklist found on page 13. Ask the students to complete the checklist. Determine one way the class can help reuse, reduce or recycle (*i.e., collecting and waste from the copy machine, or trash from Church hall and bringing to recycling center*). Discuss the possibility of setting aside periodically a day to collect hard-to-recycle items, such as batteries. Take the items to a recycling center.

3/ Team work. Ask the students to commit themselves to gathering one Saturday each month or four times each year to clean the grounds, Church hall, Church etc.

4/ Another ribbon. Divide students into groups of 3 or 4. Give each group a 1' X 3' panel of burlap, paints, markers, scrap material etc. Ask each group to make a banner depicting ways we might personally be good stewards of creation. Connect ends of panels into a long "ribbon." Title the ribbon "Ribbon of Hope." If you chose to do the first ribbon project as well you can display both sets under the title "Caretakers of the Gifts of God"

Conclusion

Regardless of age, read or reread *Old Turtle*. God created us as the most special things in creation: we are, as noted in *Old Turtle*, "a message of love from Him to the world, and a prayer from the earth back to God." Since only we are created to be like God, only we can hurt the world or nurture it to grow. To be close to God is to take care of what He has made: the earth, the sky, the water, the plants, the animals, and especially each other.

ENVIRONMENT INVENTORY CHECKLIST

Instructions

Read through the following list of things that can be done to protect God's creation and put checks under the appropriate columns according to the following key:

Y = Yes, I do this most of the time.

N = No, I have not yet developed this habit.

NA = This does not apply to my situation.

Y	N	NA	
_____	_____	_____	My family recycles newspaper, glass, aluminum, tin, and plastic when possible.
_____	_____	_____	Members of my family turn off lights when they're not needed.
_____	_____	_____	Members of my family don't leave water running while brushing our teeth or washing.
_____	_____	_____	My family plants a garden every year.
_____	_____	_____	My family uses products with pumps rather than aerosol.
_____	_____	_____	My family doesn't use products made from endangered species.
_____	_____	_____	Members of my family don't take lengthy showers.
_____	_____	_____	Members of my family walk or ride bikes for short trips.
_____	_____	_____	Members of my family see themselves as stewards of God's creation.
_____	_____	_____	My family uses the blank back sides of waste paper for scratch pads.
_____	_____	_____	My family conserves on paper use.
_____	_____	_____	My family donates used clothing and furniture to worthy organizations.
_____	_____	_____	My family has insulated our house to conserve energy.
_____	_____	_____	My family has indoor plants that purify the air.
_____	_____	_____	My family buys recycled products.
_____	_____	_____	My family avoids using pesticides and chemical fertilizers.
_____	_____	_____	My family keeps the temperature in our home at a reasonable setting.
_____	_____	_____	My family purchases products without wasteful packaging.
_____	_____	_____	Members of my family car pool to work and/or school.
_____	_____	_____	My family does not water the yard unnecessarily.
_____	_____	_____	My family avoids using styrofoam products.
_____	_____	_____	Members of my family use cold water to wash clothes.
_____	_____	_____	My family cuts down on the use of plastic and foil by storing food in reusable containers.
_____	_____	_____	Members of my family don't use cosmetic products tested on animals.

Follow-up

What can members of your family do to accomplish the important things listed above? What changes can you encourage them to make?