

Bearing Witness

Engaging People of Faith in Environmental Advocacy

*You are my witnesses, says the Lord, and my servant whom
I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and
understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor
shall there be any after me.*

—Isaiah 43:10 (NRSV)

*A thousand acts of Christian kindness can be wiped away
by a single act of Congress.*

—LeeAnne Beres, executive director,
Earth Ministry

The parish hall of University Presbyterian Church in Seattle, Washington was ready for a typical church function scheduled for the noon hour—circular tables with white cloths, name tags for participants, pitchers of iced tea, a buffet lunch, and the hum of social chitchat. But this was not the usual church luncheon; advocacy around climate change was the focus of this gathering of Methodists, Presbyterians, Catholics, Lutherans, Mennonites, United Church of Christ members, and evangelicals. Fifty faith leaders from these diverse traditions were assembled in Seattle for this event, “What Every Pastor Needs to Know about Climate Change.”

To begin the program, LeeAnne Beres, the executive director of Earth Ministry, a religious environmental organization based in

Seattle, posed a question to the group: “Why should Christians care about creation?” Hands shot up across the room, and the responses included our responsibility to protect creation for our children and our call to care for the poor. LeeAnne cited a study that found that 80 percent of people feel they have their strongest connection to God in the natural world. By the end of the luncheon, each faith leader had signed the Call to Care, a letter to members of the U.S. Congress asking for the protection of species imperiled by climate change.¹

“A thousand acts of Christian kindness can be wiped away by a single act of Congress,” said LeeAnne. This powerful sound bite reflects the importance of our prophetic voice in the care of God’s creation. As Christians, we hear the call to proclaim the good news. When we bear witness to God’s love, we move from the safety of our churches to the public arena, to congressional offices and city council meetings.

Churches involved with Earth Ministry are bringing their faith and moral voice to bear witness for the environment, protecting the Pacific Northwest and enhancing the relevance of Christianity in a region described as the most unchurched area of the nation.² Earth Ministry has become a leader for churches across the country that want to prepare Christians to influence the environmental agenda in a political landscape and incorporate progressive faith values into civic life.³ As LeeAnne said, being active followers of Christ should involve lobbying legislators, speaking at rallies, and engaging in environmental advocacy on behalf of all of God’s creation (fig. 8.1).

When she speaks with congregations, LeeAnne uses a metaphor of a three-legged stool to describe the religious environmental movement.⁴ The first leg is the individual, reflecting our personal connection with faith and the environment. As individual Christians, we are called to live lightly on the earth and to love our neighbors as ourselves. This manifests in everyday choices about how we eat, drive, use energy and water, and other aspects of daily life. The second leg of the stool is the community. Once people have made the connection between their faith and caring for the earth, they are naturally drawn to others who share those values; in the religious



Figure 8.1 Congregations affiliated with Earth Ministry express their care of creation through environmental advocacy. Photo by Earth Ministry.

community, this often translates into reflecting that faith at the congregational level. Earth Ministry works with churches through its Greening Congregations program in four areas: worship and education; facilities and institutional life; community outreach; and denominational, ecumenical, and interfaith efforts.⁵ The third leg of the stool is advocacy and systemic change. “We as people of faith have a right and responsibility to speak up and ensure our voices are heard in public policy,” LeeAnne told me. Earth Ministry approaches advocacy through specific values that address the reasons that Christians should care about creation, including sustainability, stewardship, justice, and spirituality.

With a staff of only four people, Earth Ministry incorporates these shared values in legislative campaigns like the Local Farms—Healthy Kids initiative and the Green Jobs initiative, both of which passed the Washington state legislature in the 2008 session, and in testimony before the EPA at hearings on the impact of climate change.⁶ Earth Ministry staff model this advocacy, writing opinion pieces on climate change for the *Seattle Times* and lobbying legislators

in Olympia, the state capital, and in Washington, DC.⁷ The work of churches in Earth Ministry reveals how Christians learn to articulate their faith story and its mandate for environmental stewardship.

This chapter shows how an environmental lens has transformed the ministry of bearing witness and increased the relevance of churches in a region more known for secular environmental values. Through this prophetic side of ministry, Earth Ministry and its member churches have become strong players in shaping legislation that affects the health of God's people and places. In this chapter, we meet advocates such as Earth Ministry's Jessie Dye, a former attorney who now trains parishioners in environmental advocacy, and Pastor Carol Jensen, who views the baptismal covenant as a call for both grace and activism. The lessons include working with diverse denominations in the political process, advocating for specific pieces of legislation, clarifying values and training church members in advocacy, and taking steps toward advocacy by the greening of congregations.

Presbyterians and Evangelicals: Bringing the Religious Voice to the Political Process

"You can turn on Fox News and see critiques regarding climate change or the environment, but now they have to criticize both evangelicals and the environmentalists who are supporting the same issues," said the Reverend Richard Cizik, a former vice president of governmental affairs with the National Association of Evangelicals. In 2008, *Time* magazine named him one of the hundred most influential people in the world. Earth Ministry invited Rev. Cizik to Seattle to add his evangelical message of creation care to the campaign entitled "Irreplaceable: A Faith Response to Wildlife in a Warming World." This advocacy campaign included a traveling art exhibit featuring wildlife threatened by climate change. During the exhibit's run in Seattle, Earth Ministry partnered with two other religious environmental groups, the Noah Alliance and Restoring Eden, to organize the pastors' lunch on climate change and then an

evening panel at the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture on the campus of the University of Washington.

At the evening event, a crowd of about 200 people snacked on local cheeses, breads, fruits, and teas before viewing the museum's colorful, bold photographs of wildlife. The panel for the event at the museum featured speakers from diverse faith backgrounds, including Rev. Cizik; Bishop Chris Boerger of the Northwest Washington Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA); the Reverend Lisa Domke, a Presbyterian minister; and Yolanda Quiroga, the youth and environmental minister of St. Mary's Catholic Church. LeeAnne began the evening with a succinct statement of her organization's mission: "At Earth Ministry, we work with individuals, congregations, and communities to engage people of faith in environmental stewardship." She asked each speaker to talk about how his or her faith tradition engages people of faith in creation care and halting climate change.

With a clerical collar and a cross around his neck, Bishop Boerger reminded the audience that the earth and all that exists were created by God. "In Genesis 2, humans were told to till and to keep the earth. Another translation is to serve and protect," he said. The bishop described humans as co-creators with God, here not to subdue the earth, but to protect it. Indeed, he called the care of the earth "a profoundly spiritual matter."

A minister and a mother, Rev. Domke then recalled her own call to faith in the arena of public policy. "I stopped being able to keep my faith in the private realm," she said. She believes that some churches spend time focused on maintaining institutions, acting as if this world, here and now, doesn't matter because we are going to heaven. "Jesus gives us permission to become concerned with what is going on now," she said, emphasizing that Jesus is a role model for engaging policy makers on important issues of the day. Rev. Domke stressed that the kingdom of God is not coming in some future time, but even now is here among us, within us. "It's not pie in the sky in the by and by," she said. "It's now."

Rev. Cizik followed her comments with his own story of growing up on a farm in eastern Washington but then leaving his home state

behind. He worked from 1980 to 2008 for the National Association of Evangelicals but admitted that, until 2002, he had given the issue of the environment “about one hour of thought.” Then, he was invited by evangelical leader Jim Ball to attend a conference on the science of climate change at Oxford University in England. That conference resulted in what Rev. Cizik called a “conversion” experience, a “repentance for living the wrong way for a long time.” The congruence and consistency of the messages from the diverse faith leaders on the panel pointed to the power of aligning political will, values, and behavior in the face of climate change.

Targeting Specific Legislation with Faith and Environmental Partners

The next morning, Jessie Dye, an attorney turned religious environmental activist, drove her weathered Subaru to a planning meeting for Faith Advocacy Day. As program and outreach director for Earth Ministry, Jessie works hand in hand with LeeAnne Beres to boost the efforts of congregations in environmental advocacy. With an engaging and straightforward manner, Jessie seemed to stay focused on the task in front of her while maintaining a sense of humor. As we climbed into her car, she apologized for the dog hairs on the seats. “I can’t get a new car until my second child graduates from college, and he’s a freshman now,” she said with a smile of resignation. In leaving her career as an attorney specializing in conflict resolution, Jessie took a two-thirds pay cut to work for Earth Ministry.

She talked quickly, stringing together stories of advocacy as she drove from the Earth Ministry offices, located on the third floor of Trinity United Methodist Church, to a meeting across town. Jessie grew up in the Catholic Church and uses that religious foundation in her work with Earth Ministry. “My two big areas of focus are outreach and advocacy,” she began. “What we accomplished at the pastors’ lunch was true outreach, with evangelical pastors in the room, along with mainline Protestant ministers,” she said. Earth

Ministry recruited clergy from twenty-five different congregations to the lunch, a showing that Jessie described as “phenomenal.”

Each year, Earth Ministry partners with the environmental community to plan Environmental Lobby Day and with religious organizations to plan Faith Advocacy Day for the state of Washington. On both days, individuals and organizations travel to the state capital to receive training in advocacy and to lobby legislators on priority bills. Environmental Lobby Day has been an annual event in Olympia for ten years, and in planning the event, Earth Ministry collaborates with the top twenty-five environmental groups in the state, including Climate Solutions, the Sierra Club, the Audubon Society, and the Washington Environmental Council. Earth Ministry was the first religious organization to join this coalition in 2006, in large part because of LeeAnne’s leadership, background in fisheries biology, and experience working with environmental groups. In 2009, there were 500 people involved in Environmental Lobby Day, and Earth Ministry was responsible for recruiting 20 percent of them. “Once you make the path from your house to the state legislature, it’s easy to do it again,” Jessie said.

Each year, the executive directors of the environmental groups meet to establish four legislative priorities.⁸ These “environmental priorities,” the targets for legislative advocacy during the year, focus on the health of the land, air, and water, and hence on the health of the people of the state. The record of legislative success speaks to the power of this coalition. In 2008, all four bills were passed: Climate Action and Green Jobs; Local Farms—Healthy Kids; Evergreen Cities; and Local Solutions to Global Warming.

In 2009, the priorities were bills focused on climate change, energy efficiency, transit-oriented communities, and clean water. Half of the bills passed in the state legislature, which LeeAnne called a success given the reality of the state budget deficit. The coalition uses a structured process to identify the year’s four legislative priorities. Jessie sits on the team of organizers for the Environmental Priorities Coalition and described the need for a long-term strategy to convince the other groups to support each initiative. In the fall, the executive directors of all the organizations gather for “intense horse-trading.” But once those four priorities are chosen, all the groups get on board.

Earth Ministry has an advantage in this process, she said, as the organization is not focused on single issues or ecosystems, such as salmon, health, or rivers. “We’re not an issues group. We are a constituency group,” she said. “We are not there every year for trees or salmon. We are there for the faith community.” Throughout the year, Jessie trains people of faith to identify why they should care and what they can do to help pass the legislation.

Jessie reiterated the image of the three legs of the stool in regard to religious environmentalism: individual action, congregational commitments, and public policy. “I’m going to teach you how to engage in the political process,” she said. “We have already established why people of faith should care about the earth. We are tenants of the creation. We are here to care for the poor, who are most affected by climate change and other environmental devastation.” As Jessie spoke, she pulled up to the Denny Park Lutheran Church, home of the Lutheran Public Policy Office, the advocacy organization for the three ELCA synods in the state. At this office, seven other members of the planning committee gathered, representing the Washington Association of Churches, the Church Council of Greater Seattle, the United Methodist Church, the United Church of Christ, and the ELCA.

One goal for the organizers of Faith Advocacy Day was to broaden the interdenominational representation. The facilitator, the Reverend Paul Benz from the state’s Lutheran Public Policy Office, called the meeting to order and asked for volunteers to recruit people for the day of lobbying in Olympia. “Who can contact the Presbyterians?” he started. “What about Disciples of Christ? the Quakers? the Unitarians? the Baptists? the AME church?” Everyone volunteered for different denominations or else volunteered someone they knew. The organizers called out the names of denominations, as if they were reading items off a grocery list. When committee members volunteered to target a denomination, Paul would ask them to commit to a number. How many people do you think you can turn out from the Methodists? The planning group set a goal of 350 participants for the entire event, which would involve registration, worship, briefing, an issues workshop, lunch, and lobbying.

Afterward, Jessie jumped back in the car, eager to recap the meeting with me. She reiterated her advocacy goal of passing the environmental priorities. She ticked off the names of denominations that will help to focus her own training efforts in congregations. To broaden its reach, in 2008, Earth Ministry added interfaith outreach to its advocacy efforts with the start of Washington Interfaith Power & Light.⁹ This initiative involves outreach to Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist groups, for example, in addition to Christian congregations.

Values and Spaces to Involve Churches in Advocacy

As she joined LeeAnne in a conference room to talk about Earth Ministry's training sessions in environmental advocacy, Jessie whispered to me, like an undercover agent, "Would you like a Fresca?" She laughed about the perceived environmental "sin" of drinking a soda, with its packaging and artificial sweetener. "That's the problem with the environmental movement," she said. "We're perceived as judgmental. In the end, we are all human. Our Earth Ministry blog is about sharing our struggles." Each staff member contributes to the blog and shares thoughts about practices as diverse as Lenten disciplines of reducing water consumption, using public transportation, or lobbying the legislature. One of Jessie's past blog entries revealed her personal attempts to eat more sustainably, and her writing portrayed her as a human advocate for God's earth.

Connecting Environmental Advocacy to Values of Faith To train people of faith in advocacy, Earth Ministry believes that church members must be able to articulate the values that connect faith to care of creation. As LeeAnne explained, this is a faith-based advocacy program, not simply another take on secular activism. "We believe we connect to the earth through God," she said.

She described the four key values that form the foundation of the trainings:

1. Sustainability. We must meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Sustainability means seeing ourselves and our neighbors as children of God.
2. Stewardship. We are tenants of creation for future generations and all species. Creation is good and sacred, because God created all of the earth and us. Thus, we are called by our love for God's works to protect them.
3. Justice. We are called to change structural systems that cause poverty, injustice, and environmental damage. We must create a society with laws and policies that allow the needs of all of earth's inhabitants to be met.
4. Spirituality. Many people have their most profound spiritual experiences in nature. Creation inspires us and calls us to care, and God is our inspiration to care for this earth.

In their Advocacy for All Creation workshops, LeeAnne and Jessie start by asking, "Why do people of faith care for the earth?" The answers look back to these core values. The next questions they frame are, "What is the response of people of faith? What are we going to do?" The answers lie in the three-legged stool, with its emphasis on individual action, congregational initiative, and political advocacy. In the advocacy workshops, the facilitators often start with an abbreviated version of Government 101. Most of the work done by Earth Ministry is in the state legislature, although it has a national presence in its work with the National Council of Churches and Interfaith Power & Light on key environmental bills in Congress.

LeeAnne showed me the handout for the workshop, subtitled "A Faithful Citizen's Guide to Participating in a Democracy."¹⁰ Their first question, "Why do people of faith care about creation?" prompts

workshop participants to write down the four values of sustainability, stewardship, justice, and spirituality as the most important reasons to advocate for creation when they talk to their elected officials. The second section, the Government 101 review, asks people of faith to list the three branches of government—legislative, judicial, and executive. The workshop also reminds participants of the three levels of government—federal, state, and local—and their respective legislative bodies, the U.S. Congress, the state legislature, and the city council. This introduction sets the stage for building comfort in interactions with the government and building concrete skills to influence policy.

Environmental Advocacy: As Easy as Ordering Pizza Jessie has developed an analogy that advocacy for God’s creation is “as easy as ordering pizza.” The last section of the training focuses on how to influence elected officials to protect God’s earth. Washington State has a hotline, a toll-free number to handle calls from voters about legislation. When a citizen calls that number, the operator asks for the caller’s name and address and will identify his or her representatives and senators. Callers then may tell the operator what bills they support, and why.

In the advocacy workshop, Jessie and LeeAnne explain that the “why” for supporting the bills involves values of faith. As the handouts detail, “Be sure to identify yourself as a person of faith by your denomination and specific church. That doesn’t mean you are speaking on behalf of your church or denomination, but it makes it clear you are representing the moral voice for protecting God’s gift of creation, which can’t speak for itself.” The metaphor of ordering pizza begins with knowing both what you want and the phone number for the pizza delivery place. Unlike ordering pizza, however, you don’t need to pay, as this service is free.

Having identified the year’s environmental priorities, Earth Ministry gives participants four concrete bills they can support that are backed by their faith values. In the training, parishioners practice articulating faith values in support of specific bills. As Jessie said, “I

believe that caring for God's creation is my responsibility as a Catholic, so I support the bill that will eliminate toxic chemicals from plastic baby bottles."

The trainings always incorporate hands-on, experiential learning about faith and advocacy; LeeAnne and Jessie distribute cardboard phones, similar to those that pizzerias provide, imprinted with the Washington state legislature's toll-free number. They ask people to pull out their cell phones, then and there, and program the Washington legislative hotline into their phones. Then, with no procrastination or doubts, two people from the class are asked to make calls and speak to the hotline operator. "When they hang up, people actually burst into applause," LeeAnne said. "It's empowering." Many people have never called their legislators; Jessie tells them that calling the governor is like adding double pepperoni to your pizza order. The workshop also walks people through the process of talking directly with elected officials. As Jessie said, "It takes seven contacts to any legislator to elevate an issue to the point where you have their attention."

LeeAnne believes that advocacy is what it means to be a follower of Christ. As Christians, we are taught to love our neighbors as ourselves. We house the homeless, feed the poor. For the environment, we may recycle, compost, and use compact fluorescent lights (CFLs). To her, loving our neighbor as ourselves means loving plants, animals, and ecosystems, in addition to our human brothers and sisters. But she believes we cannot stop there. Her personal witness to Christ calls her to advocacy. "Jesus was out there challenging the status quo," she said. "He healed on the Sabbath. That was a political act." She believes in her responsibility to speak up and offer a prophetic witness, which moves her to testify to the state legislature.

LeeAnne spoke about her own religious journey when she found her church home in the United Church of Christ. "I was raised in a nonreligious household," she said. "I became a Christian because of this work. It was never about personal salvation for me or sitting in church services since childhood. The prophetic voice was what drew me in."

She spoke about a personal desire to reclaim what it means to be Christian in the United States. She tires of people, especially in the secular Northwest, thinking that Christians are “war-loving, consumer-loving people.” In her previous job, LeeAnne worked as associate director for Save Our Wild Salmon in Washington. “When I left to work for Earth Ministry, a colleague of mine in the environmental community told me, ‘I can’t believe you are one of them.’” The “them” in this case was Christians. For her, the work has become a personal passion to identify Christians as people who are not judgmental of others and who work for the common good of all people and the planet.

With her connections in the secular environmental movement, LeeAnne brought Earth Ministry into the fold of the Environmental Priorities Coalition. “The environmentalists now see that we can deliver,” Jessie said. For the Seattle Green Festival in 2008, the city had two spots for speakers: one for the mayor and one for LeeAnne from Earth Ministry. As Earth Ministry has demonstrated its political will, environmental and government groups want to align themselves with this organized constituency from the faith community.

Their training workshops end with seven tips for communicating as people of faith with elected officials:

1. Identify yourself as a person of faith by denomination or church or as a member of Earth Ministry.
2. Try to find something good your elected official has done recently and thank him or her for it.
3. Pick one or, at most, two issues to focus on at a time.
4. Be clear about what you are asking the elected official to do.
5. Speak from the heart.
6. Don’t get sidetracked by rhetoric.
7. Remember that your elected officials work for you.

LeeAnne also preaches sermons linking advocacy to biblical texts, such as a sermon she gave on faith and advocacy to the First Congregational Church in Walla Walla, Washington. The gospel for

that day was Luke 5:1–11, when the disciples left their nets, boats, friends, and family to follow Jesus. LeeAnne’s sermon raised the question of how many of us would be ready to respond to God’s call to service today. “I’d probably be hemming and hawing on the shores of the lake, trying to negotiate some kind of telecommuting discipleship,” she said.¹¹

Her sermon suggests that the call to discipleship might not be about packing our bags but rather leaving our own comfort zones and our apathy—and, in the case of creation care, engaging our own voices in community action and advocacy. It also reminds people of faith of the words of Micah: “What does the Lord require of you? To do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.” As Christians, LeeAnne writes, we must work to change social systems, practices, and attitudes that lead to injustice. Justice can be achieved only through getting involved in our communities and our government. “If a single decision by a city council or the Washington state legislature can either enhance or undo thousands of individual acts of Christian caring, should we not try to influence such decisions?”¹² As Isaiah 58:1 compels us, “Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet!” Engaging in policy advocacy, LeeAnne said, is a necessary next step in our commitment to achieving Jesus’ vision of a just and loving society.

Steps toward Advocacy by Greening Congregations

A large part of Earth Ministry’s work is its Greening Congregations program, which supports congregations in cultivating creation care within their houses of worship and in moving toward advocacy. A major resource is its *Greening Congregations Handbook*, which includes a wealth of information and direction for churches taking the first steps toward greening.¹³ The text presents six dimensions of greening—mission statements, worship, education, institutional life, community outreach, and broader religious outreach—with examples of greening efforts in each area.

The process of greening a congregation often starts with the creation of a green team or a creation care task force. Indeed, a survey by Cassandra Carmichael, Laurel Kearns, and Rebecca Gould found that, at most churches, a small group of committed people lead the efforts to integrate environmental issues into the life of the church.¹⁴ But Earth Ministry encourages churches to seek institutional support from the church council or vestry so as to avoid isolated groups of people working on greening efforts. At an annual St. Francis event, Earth Ministry honors the congregations that have completed the greening process by presenting them with a banner to hang in their sanctuary. Integrating earth care throughout the life of a congregation results in more effective and strategic advocacy. The stories below reflect the different paths of two congregations in bearing witness for education, worship, and advocacy.

Raspberries, Blackberries, and Baptism The garden at Trinity United Methodist Church, the home of the Earth Ministry office, boasted an abundance of raspberries, blackberries, parsley, and basil in July. The small and inviting church garden featured painted wooden signs that read, for example, “Gardenkeeper June,” the name of the parishioner who tended that tiny plot. As the sun crept through clouds on this July day, the Reverend Rich Lang sat with me by the garden and described how his church took steps to green the congregation and promote advocacy for the earth. An engaging man with a sharp wit and self-deprecating sense of humor, Rev. Lang served as the pastor at Trinity United Methodist Church and as a board member of Earth Ministry. The church started a soup kitchen and wanted the organic garden as a resource for the food pantry as well as for the community. Now, different teams weed discrete plots, and each team decides what to plant.

The more theology he read, the more Rev. Lang realized that we were created with a purpose to partner with God in care of creation. He described his belief in the biblical concept of the jubilee—the recycling of wealth, of life. With a jubilee, the land gets rested, the slaves get freed, the rich have to return their wealth, and the poor get a slice of the pie. He aimed for Trinity United Methodist Church to

function as a jubilee church with environmental ministry as a part of that vision. Earth Ministry helped to jump-start the environmental work at Trinity, providing resources that focused on food, car-free Sundays, educational modules, special events, advocacy, and the *Greening Congregations Handbook*.¹⁵

At the congregational level, Rev. Lang emphasized the need to start small. Five years ago, the church got rid of Styrofoam. After that step, the members started serving fair-trade coffee and began the pesticide-free garden. The church integrated greening into the infrastructure of the building in partnership with Seattle Public Utilities, which promoted replacing all incandescent lightbulbs with CFLs. Faced with unsustainable heating bills, the church also installed a new \$60,000 natural-gas boiler system. “A wise church will understand that you go at this greening with small steps, and your faith will lead you to bigger steps,” he said. “Then, you will look back and see you have changed the mindset of the entire congregation.”

For Rev. Lang, baptism is an entry into a new creation. The Eucharist is a living sign that we give bread away. We feed people as a political act. If churches can begin with a commitment that no one who shares fellowship will be alone or homeless, that will revolutionize the church, he said. He also maintained that his church must integrate the environment into its ministry to stay relevant to younger parishioners, who want their church life to reflect their environmental values and, ultimately, want to influence public policy.

Soup Kitchens, Sanctuaries, and the Legislature Across town in the Phinney Ridge area of Seattle, parishioners at St. John United Lutheran Church described their small, red-brick building as a church whose soup kitchen has the best view of Puget Sound. And it did: from the windows of the church basement, the church gardens in the foreground were set off by the water, boats, and the surrounding peaks of the Olympic mountains as a backdrop. Advocacy, worship, and greening played supporting roles at St. John United Lutheran Church.

In the summer, to diminish paper usage, the ushers at St. John United distributed a set bulletin for the service, with a one-page

insert for that week's hymns and readings. The decision highlighted the need to conserve paper products as a concrete act of stewardship. As the service started, the congregation sang hymn 879, "For the beauty of the Earth, for the beauty of the skies," a reminder of the power of hymns to connect Christians to place and, more broadly, to God's earth.

Pastor Carol Jensen used the parable of the mustard seed to describe the power of God to transform the little things we do into big things. She highlighted the soup kitchen in the church, started twenty-five years ago and now going strong with the help of the organic church garden. From a small start, the church had served a half million meals. Small actions can grow bigger than anyone could have seen or imagined, she said.

After the service, in the basement with the beautiful view, two gray-haired women with perfect posture served tea and coffee from a silver tea service. Pastor Carol sat down with several women from the church, including Kris Freeman, an Earth Ministry member who grew up Presbyterian but described herself as "more agnostic than Lutheran." She turned to look me in the eye and said, "Pastor Carol knows this about me; it's okay." Kris described the important role of the church in civil rights as analogous to its growing importance in the environmental movement. Working in the church, for her, was a way to develop social consensus for environmental change. Kris drew a strong connection between the hope of her faith and her momentum around environmental work. "I was very depressed about the state of the planet," she said. "But now I have more hope that it is possible to make a small difference."

Pastor Carol spoke candidly about the strategic environmental emphasis of the church. "For the church to have any relevance to people in this Phinney Ridge/Ballard area, we need to have environmental relevance," she said. "The new people who come to our church come because the environment is part of our identity." Then she posed a critical question: "In the most secular city in the country, how do you sustain a church?" Indeed, there is a large Lutheran church right down the street. "We would be dead now without this environmental focus," she admitted, noting that the old categories of

church membership are less important than in the past, while practicing our faith is more important. At St. John United, parishioners talk about the “upstairs” church with the sanctuary and the “downstairs” church with the homeless shelter and the garden, both critical components of the ministry.

An Earth Care Season to Integrate Creation into Education, Worship, and Advocacy Pastor Carol believes in bringing the natural world—seeds, soils, rocks, and water—into the sanctuary. One year, she even brought a cherry tree into the church in a wheelbarrow. Bringing elements of God’s earth into the church was part of Earth Care Season, a liturgical season of creation developed by Pastor Carol and members of the congregation for the three Sundays after Easter. The worship services for these three Sundays followed the celebration of the resurrection of Christ, a sign of redemption for God’s whole creation, including wildlife, the seas, and the skies. The church started the season with Celebrate Planet Earth and the Land Sunday, which concluded with a procession and blessing by the entire congregation of the church garden. The next Sunday, the congregation focused on Save the Oceans and Puget Sound, which they can see from the church grounds. The concluding service featured the theme of Caring for This Place—our church, homes, and neighborhoods.

To integrate creation care into educational programming, the middle-school Sunday school class studied and presented ways that the church impacts the environment; the students did research on utility costs, water usage, number of CFLs, and how to improve energy efficiency. The culminating event for the season was an Earth Care Fair after the worship service on the last Sunday, with tables from community groups, opportunities for advocacy, music, and children’s activities. For each liturgy, the worship arts committee created fabric collages featuring the natural elements, such as Puget Sound, that were the focus of that Sunday.

Pastor Carol makes the connection among education, worship, and advocacy, as she sees direct links among these aspects of church life. She serves as chair of the Lutheran Public Policy Office’s advisory council. In 2008, her congregation partnered with Earth Ministry in

the passage of the Local Farms–Healthy Kids act in the state legislature. Parishioners mobilized letters of support and attended Faith Lobbying Day in Olympia. On the local level, members of the congregation used the time after church to sign postcards to the Seattle City Council supporting a twenty-cent tax on plastic bags in grocery stores, as part of an effort to persuade the city’s residents to opt for reusable canvas bags. Coffee hour often included a table with information about an issue, with opportunities to sign up for support.

To model advocacy to the congregation, Pastor Carol has represented clergy for Earth Ministry through such means as testifying before the governor’s climate action team. She also represented her church at the EPA hearings in May 2009 on the impact of global warming on public health (fig. 8.2). Pastor Carol brought the discussion back to the biblical texts and the baptismal covenants. “In the Lutheran Church, we affirm our baptismal covenant to live among God’s people, hear God’s word, share in the supper, serve all, and strive for justice and peace for all the earth,” she said. She talked about the need to keep partisan politics out of advocacy, a reality she



Figure 8.2 Clergy affiliated with Earth Ministry and Washington Interfaith Power & Light gathered at a rally during an EPA hearing in Seattle. Photo by Earth Ministry.

has learned in her eighteen years as a pastor in a church with both Republican and Democratic members. “I consider myself a biblical preacher,” she said. “To me, the texts call us to this work. When your activism is rooted in a theological understanding, who can argue with you?”

Pastor Carol had some advice for congregations wanting to bring the environment into the life of their church. Find out what people are already interested in, she recommended. People want to bring their passions to their church life, and clergy have to help them find those places. To that end, the congregation at St. John United has installed low-flow toilets, changed incandescent bulbs to CFLs, added rain barrels to collect water for irrigation, installed a worm bin to vermicompost the soup kitchen’s food waste, and composted yard waste.

The church’s property committee included several older men who initially challenged the environmental focus of the church, Pastor Carol said. But when the members saw the cost savings of the greening initiatives, they got on board. To date, St. John United has cut its electricity bills by one-third. Much of the funding for the improvements has come from the merger of two churches and the sale of one of the buildings. This church is bringing seeds, sand, and soil into the sanctuary, feeding the hungry from a community garden, affecting policy, and keeping baptismal vows with grace and action. The ministry of bearing witness at St. John United Lutheran Church has not only transformed the church but also made it relevant and viable in this community.

Bearing Witness as a Ministry: Lessons Learned

Christians like LeeAnne Beres, Jessie Dye, Rev. Rich Lang, and Pastor Carol Jensen have articulated the connection between their own faith and action for God’s earth in the political arena. Their work reveals key lessons and best practices for other churches wishing to use a prophetic voice in the political process.

Bring together diverse denominations to mobilize the power of the religious voice in the political process.

People of faith have a powerful voice when we organize and advocate in the political arena. Concern about the environment crosses political parties and has the power to bring together diverse constituencies to advocate for specific environmental legislation and action. Across denominations, churches share a moral mandate to care for the earth and steward God's creation. Working together with diverse faith traditions in support of policies and practices can have a greater impact than denominations working alone. Finding common ground around the care of creation is one of the most straightforward ways to ecumenical and interfaith collaboration.

Strategize ways to partner with both faith and secular environmental groups in advocacy for specific pieces of legislation.

In most communities, environmental organizations are working for legislation that promotes healthy environments and connects to Christian values. Partnerships with people of faith present a win-win collaboration. Environmental organizations benefit from the infrastructure and common values of religious groups. Aligning values between these groups can leverage political will and impact.

Clarify the values that connect faith to the care of creation and create spaces for church members to get involved in advocacy.

Why should people of faith care for creation? In Earth Ministry's work, the values include sustainability, stewardship, justice, and spirituality. Members of faith communities can articulate these values in concise ways that show the connection between faith and the environment. Consider organizing a basic training in your church on advocacy skills from a faith perspective. Keep it simple and remember the analogy that advocacy is as easy as ordering pizza. Research the websites of organizations such as Earth Ministry and

Interfaith Power & Light for resources to help organize such training workshops.

Take steps toward advocacy by greening a congregation in dimensions such as mission statements, worship, education, institutional life, community outreach, and broader religious outreach.

Sometimes, churches can approach advocacy through a specific piece of legislation, but taking concurrent steps toward greening a congregation can integrate an inward and outward focus on the environment. Earth Ministry's *Greening Congregations Handbook* should be in every church office, as the book includes concrete steps for greening across a variety of dimensions of church life.

On Reflection

My research in Seattle prompted a strong desire to reclaim my Christianity, as I watched fellow Christians and environmentalists using their faith for advocacy and stewardship. I remember when I began a small wall of icons in my 900-square-foot house after inheriting three icons from my grandfather's collection. After hanging the icons in my living room, I wondered what my Jewish friends might think of my display. I asked my Episcopal priest, "Do you think it looks too Christian?" With an endearing look, as if he were addressing a toddler who had forgotten her name, he said, "Mallory, you are a Christian." With this trip, I grew more comfortable introducing myself by both my vocation and my denomination. The latter label is taking up more space in my self-identity, as I claim my Christian identity in the space of my environmental vocation.

When I was growing up, the emphasis in church seemed to be on being with God in heaven. When someone died, we said, "They are with God in heaven." Rev. Domke's insistence that the kingdom of heaven is *now* stayed with me long after I left Seattle. If the kingdom of God is now, we won't face fancy gates after our deaths, but work awaits us now. I realize today that bearing witness and advocacy

are steps toward achieving Jesus' vision of a just and loving world. When we advocate in the name of our faith, we promote a world of peace and equity that includes stewardship of God's resources. From this perspective, advocacy becomes prayer in action.

The words of Rev. Lang also resonated with me, as he modeled liturgy as a radical act. "We are constantly practicing who we are in symbolic form in our liturgy, and then we practice in the world," he said. "We are being trained through the liturgy to live in the world." We repeat the same words each week, so we have a chance of hearing them and enacting them in the world when we leave the sanctuary. Church is like a dress rehearsal for the real deal. My conversations with Rev. Lang, while we ate raspberries and blackberries, awakened me to that baptismal calling of the responsibility we have as children of God: we are called to love and serve our neighbor in the broadest sense, and those duties include caring for creation.

My thoughts of baptism tend toward baptismal gowns, brunches, godparents, and family. I keep a photo in my bedside drawer of my grandfather, the Reverend Cecil Jones, holding me as an infant on my baptism day, after he made the sign of the cross on my forehead and sealed me as Christ's own forever. In the photo, I am held in front of All Saints' Episcopal Church, a tiny wooden church in Mississippi, where I became part of the family of God, with two sets of grandparents by my side, along with aunts and uncles.

My mom once told me that she and my dad couldn't afford nice white baby shoes for my baptism, so she had hidden my feet underneath my baptismal gown for the pictures. By the time her third child came along, my brother's bare feet were hanging out of the gown for all to see. At that time, she could afford the shoes but couldn't imagine spending \$20 on shoes for an infant. To me, God is in that story, mirrored in desires that change with age. But I realize that baptism means more than coming into the family of God, but also accepting responsibility to advocate and care for God's creatures in a public arena. We are not only receiving an invitation into the household of Christ. We have to do some domestic chores in the here and now to advocate for creation. And, perhaps, putting our bare feet on the ground, without fancy shoes, is the best place to start.

