

# **NEPA Synod Green Team**

e-newsletter #8, Summer 2024



ELCA Logo in sassafras leaves.

Created by Pastor Inge Williams at Friedens Lutheran Church, Shartlesville on October 13, 2021

Welcome to our newsletter!

We present to you this collection of prayers, tips and ideas on caring for God's creation, book reviews, news about and from notable places within the synod, advocacy opportunities, and inspirational stories of good work being done on our territory.

Any questions or comments on this newsletter would be appreciated – please send them to [pwmetzloff@gmail.com](mailto:pwmetzloff@gmail.com).

Please feel free to share this with anyone who would be interested!

**Prayer:**

from the new *All Creation Sings* hymnal:

God, creator of all living things, you fashioned a world in which lands and waterways, plants and animals, together meet the needs of all that you made. We pray that such vitality may flourish around the globe. Bless those who work the soil and who manage animals. Uphold their towns and villages. Nurture bees and other pollinators. Protect farmlands and ranches from drought and flood. Free children from forced labor in the fields. Grant an economy that can sustain those families who treasure a rural life. Teach us how to share with everyone the benefits of each harvest, and accept our gratitude for all sustenance you provide, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen!**

## **Is Our Synod Alone? Not At All!**

by Carl D. Shankweiler

The Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod has a Green Team to raise up our concern for the environment. You know that. After all, you are now reading our synod's newsletter about caring for God's good creation.

In this ministry our synod is not alone, which makes perfect sense. After all, in 1993 it was an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America churchwide assembly that adopted the social statement "Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice." Because that statement is a churchwide statement, not a synod statement, it is only natural that our synod has many partners in championing these issues. (You can find this statement at [elca.org](http://elca.org). Type "Caring for Creation" in the Search ELCA box and you will be shown a link to the statement.)

That ELCA statement sees caring for creation as a spiritual issue. As the prologue states, "We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are deeply concerned about the environment, locally and globally, as members of this church and as members of society. Even as we join the political, economic, and scientific discussion, we know care for the earth to be a profoundly spiritual matter." Given that level of importance, it is only natural that many synods would address these issues.

Here are only three examples of what other synods have been doing. Take a look! Their websites will provide many more details and information.

**NEW ENGLAND SYNOD.** Let's begin in the extreme northeast. Go to the website of the New England Synod, click on "Who We Are," "Synod Teams," and you will see "Green Team" as an option.

There you will find their newsletters, which are issued almost every month ("Green Team Magazine Archives"). They offer a recorded "Creation Care 101 And Beyond" webinar that anyone can watch. They list "Lutherans Restoring Creation Covenant Congregations" in five of their six states.

New England also gives evidence of how we can learn from one another by including a resource that was recommended to them by students in Alabama who discovered their website. This resource, "Go Green at Home," concerns how we can be more responsible in our homes. Here is one observation: "Another shocking statistic is that the average U.S. per capita water use is

170 gallons per day, while in Australia, it is only 36 gallons per day. Despite this massive difference, Australians still enjoy a high quality of life. This proves that there is plenty we can do to reduce water consumption while saving money."

New England offers a bibliography, articles and other information, and speakers who can visit congregations. Obviously, the New England Synod takes caring for creation very seriously.

**NORTHEASTERN IOWA SYNOD.** Now we will travel more to the middle of North America and visit the Northeastern Iowa Synod's website. Here the steps are to click "About," then "Networks and Ministries," and you will find "Care for Creation." You will see three options: Resources, News, and Events. Resources is by far the most populated of these choices. You will also want to click on their very fine "Care for Creation web page."

This webpage offers the following impressive statement: "The Care for Creation Network is called to make peace between people and the rest of God's creation. In partnership with the congregations of the Northeastern Iowa Synod, we:

- Affirm that care for creation is central to the life of God's people.
- Encourage worship that celebrates God's creation.
- Advocate education promoting understanding and stewardship of God's earth.
- Practice good earth citizenship.
- Model disciplined and fruitful community lifestyle."

This synod's webpage offers short articles for congregational newsletters and bulletins. Click on "Resources" and then go down the list to "Green Tips." These tips were provided by members of the synod's congregations.

**SOUTHWEST CALIFORNIA SYNOD.** Finally, we come to the west coast and the Southwest California Synod. On their website you may have a more difficult search for resources, which tend to be more dated and fewer in number. But on their website choose "Resources" and then "Green Congregation Resources."

Here you will find an amazing sermon by the Rev. Dr. Lisa E. Dahill, written for World Water Day of March 22, 2017. Dr. Dahill talks about her own experiences with water, including during her youth in California and later from her life in Ohio before returning to California.

This is a taste of what she preached: “We have depleted aquifers and destroyed rivers and commodified water to charge criminal rates to the poor – but as long as Earth’s hydrological cycle continues, there will still be rain, and rain is free. Rain is grace, and it will recharge the aquifers if we let it – the literal ones *and* the deep chasms of our hearts and the buckets of the poor. It will saturate the parched soil and fill the rivers. Such grace begins as a mist, drizzling, spitting, or suddenly: a downpour. It hammers the roof, runs down the windows, pelts our umbrellas, overflows our cisterns, gathers into trickles and gullies, creeks and arroyos and cascades and rivers, a gigantic tidal flow, and as the heavens open and the miracle pours forth, we can breathe again... the land can breathe, the air can breathe, the trees and wildflowers and animals drink, and all those who thirst – everywhere on Earth – tip their faces to the sky. They drink it in...”

Dr. Dahill’s comments bring us back to that ELCA observation that caring for creation is a spiritual issue, not simply a practical or economic concern.

In this article we have visited only three synods. To be honest, not every synod has something to say, at least on its website; and the amount of time, effort, and energy expended on environmental concerns does vary from synod to synod. But if you go looking, there are ideas, insights, and verbal artistry to be found. Our synod is definitely not alone in being concerned about creation. Happy searching!

## **Green Tips and Tidbits**

In keeping with Pastor Shankweiler's article, above, here is a fast and easy link to the Northeastern Iowa Synod's Green Tips section – 8 pages of great green tips!

<https://neiasynod.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/NE-IA-Synod-GREEN-TIPS-2022.pdf>



## **Inspiration: God's Garden of Grace**

### **at St Peter's Lutheran Church (Plainfield) Pen Argyl, PA**

by Pastor Chris Druckenmiller

In October of 2011 Jim Sandt, a member of St Peter's and a local farmer, was asked to attend the ELCA's National Conference on Studying World Hunger. He came away from the conference convinced that we needed to do something to help with this global crisis. In discussions with St Peter's Pastor, Frank Terhune, they decided to start a garden to supply fresh vegetables to local food banks. Through the church's Social Ministry group, they talked with the congregation to raise funds and recruit volunteers. Donations were secured from the local community to provide a water tank for storing water to irrigate the garden, posts and fencing to secure the garden from local wildlife, and plants and seeds for the first planting.

The first garden, spanning 9,000 square feet, was planted in the spring of 2012, with help from 18 volunteers to plant, weed and harvest the vegetables that were grown throughout the year, and then deliver them to five local area food banks. The local fire company ran water from a quarry on Jim's land to fill the water tank at the garden. A grant from the Synod's Witness and Service Team was also obtained to help with the initial costs of buying equipment and supplies. That first year, over 8000 pounds of vegetables were grown and distributed to those in need in our community.



Since that first year, our totals continue to grow, averaging anywhere between 10,000 – 15,000 pounds of produce every year, depending on the weather and other factors. In addition, we also encourage our members to bring in any “extras” that they might have from their own gardens, to be added to the distribution. This usually raises our deliveries to the local food banks by another 3,000 – 5,000 pounds per year, including a few hundred pounds of apples from Jim’s farm.



In 2019 we increased the size of the garden by another 4,000 square feet, planting different kinds of squash to help increase the amount of produce we could deliver without a lot of additional work. Butternut, acorn and spaghetti squash can be harvested and stored for a long time, so we were able to spread out the deliveries to not overwhelm the food banks with too much at one time.



Although our garden is not strictly organic, we minimize the use of any chemical sprays and try to find ways to address problems with natural solutions. We are fortunate to have some local beekeepers in the area whose worker bees make our garden produce abundantly, so we try to protect them as best as we can.

Over the years, St Peter’s has also worked with other local churches and community organizations to help them begin their own gardens. Sadly, many of these have ceased operations due to a lack of volunteer help. In 2022, at the age of 80, Jim Sandt retired from the garden, but he passed the reigns on to two others who have continued to follow in his footsteps. Jim still helps when he can, especially with the spring plowing and discing of the garden to get it ready for another year of planting. Every year we ask ourselves how much longer we can continue to do this, but every year God is good, and we find a way, with God’s help, to continue to feed the many who are in need in our community.



## **Book Review: *The Planet You Inherit* by Larry Rasmussen**

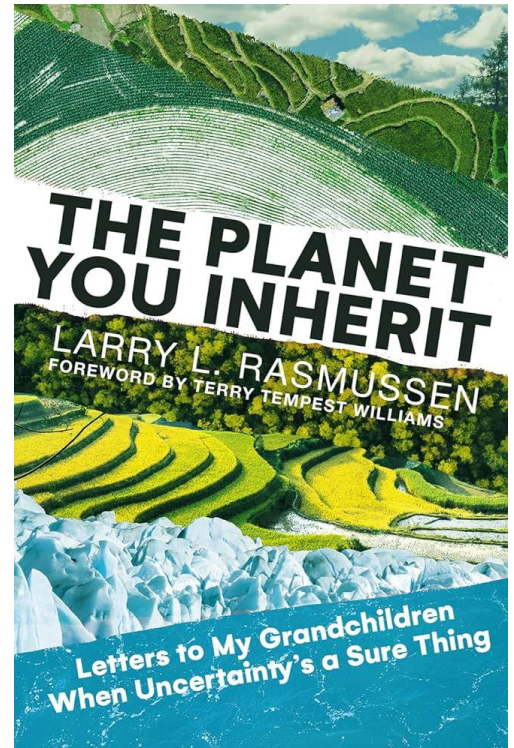
by Paul Metzloff

The full title of this book is *The Planet You Inherit: Letters to My Grandchildren when Uncertainty's a Sure Thing*, and it came to my attention when Dr. Rasmussen was the featured speaker at this year's EcoFaith Summit, given by a group of ELCA synods in Minnesota.

As the full title indicates, the book is presented as a series of letters – written during the difficult days of the pandemic lockdown, mostly – to Rasmussen's two grandchildren. As a result, the science, politics, philosophy, and environmentalism that he presents in the various letters is tempered and made more telling by the obvious love and attachment he feels towards the two young boys to which the letters are addressed. Even with the clear assumption that they won't be reading (or understanding) the letters for years, it makes for particularly compelling arguments.

One of Rasmussen's central points, made many times over, is that his grandchildren will be living in a different geological epoch than he and his wife lived in. The friendly and forgiving Holocene, which gave rise to human civilization, is over . . . having become the far harsher and less kind Anthropocene, where humans have degraded the environment and climate systems of the world. That, of course, is depressing (if not terrifying), but Rasmussen merges it with faith, hope, and love enough to make the reader – and his grandchildren – want to keep on living even in this broken world.

I would strongly recommend taking the time to read *The Planet You Inherit*, whether or not you have grandchildren -



## **Notable Places and Advocacy/Action Combined:**

Homegrown National Park



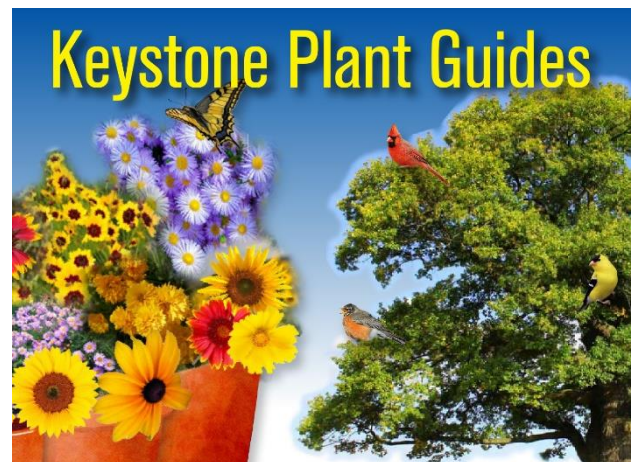
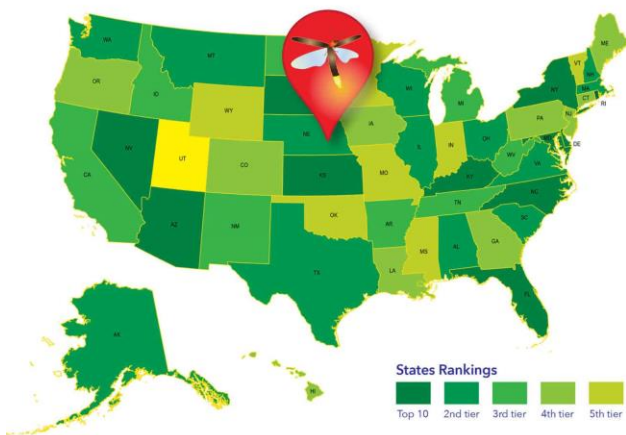
While we often, in this newsletter, point out a notable local place within the synod's territory (or at least in Eastern Pennsylvania) for you to visit, this month we'd like to point out that wherever you happen to be can also be notable – that is, be a useful, beautiful, and productive part of the ecosystem and of God's creation!

Whether you live in an apartment, house, townhouse, parsonage, or condo, whether your church is urban, suburban, or rural, you can take steps to plant native species and help support insects, birds, and animals. That's the major point that scientist and conservationist Doug Tallamy has made in several of his books, and which his organization – Homegrown National Park – supports.

<https://homegrownnationalpark.org/>

Their website has a vast amount of helpful information, from plant lists to videos to interactive maps where you can enter any native species that you have planted at your home or church. Even a single tree, bush, or clump of flowers can make a difference!

Consider becoming a part of the solution and check it out -



Thanks for reading! If you're interested in being a part of the synod's Green Team, please see our page on the synod website at [www.nepasynod.org/green-team](http://www.nepasynod.org/green-team).