

NEPA Synod Green Team

e-newsletter #11, Winter/Spring 2026



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 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 the editor, Pastor Paul Metzloff, at pwmetzloff@gmail.com.

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

"Ecologies of Grace:" Exploring the teaching of Dr. Chad Rimmer

*Rev. Inge Williams, Green Team co-convener,
and pastor, Friedens Lutheran Church, Shartlesville*

In May 2025, Lutherans from across the commonwealth gathered in Harrisburg for Lutheran Day at the Capitol. At a moment when the headlines coming out of DC were sucking all the air out of the room, we were blessed to hear from two Lutherans with international perspective: Christine Mangale of the Lutheran Office for World Community at the United Nations in New York, who was born in Kenya, and Rev. Dr. Chad Rimmer, formerly of the Lutheran World Federation in Geneva and now Dean at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary.

In their joint workshop "Baptism in a Time of Breakdown" and Dr. Rimmer's keynote address "Ecologies of Grace," the stories of our Lutheran siblings across the world provided a helpful lens to view our advocacy and grounded the gathering of US Christians in what Lutheran witness can look like "at such a time as this."

Because Dr. Rimmer will be presenting at the Lutherans Restoring Creation gathering in North Carolina in January, I thought I would share some of his thinking with a few highlights from his keynote address "Ecologies of Grace" and his workshop with Christina Mangale, "Baptism in a Time of Breakdown."

Beginning at the beginning

Dr. Rimmer began with the words of fellow eco-theologian Celia Deanne-Drummond: "Overall, eco-theology seeks to uncover the theological basis for a proper (just) relationship between God, humanity, and the cosmos." In our creation narratives in Genesis, God creates diversity and balance, and when those relationships are properly maintained, the creation creates life. He quoted Meister Eckhart, who, when asked what God does all day long, replied, "God lies on the maternity bed and gives birth." In Genesis 1, God creates relational balance, and in Genesis 2, humans are called to maintain that balance (to till and keep). This is our first job description as a species.

Rather than refer to Adam and Eve's decision to eat the fruit and their subsequent expulsion from the garden as "the Fall", Dr. Rimmer refers to this story of sin as "the Disintegration," because these humans began to focus on their individual shame (what Luther referred to as self-turned-in-on-self) rather than their relationship to each other and other creatures. Relationality,

part of our human imago Dei, disintegrates, causing harm to ourselves and creation.

Justification to continuing creation

God creates, and God also reconciles. Dr. Rimmer mentioned that there is a growing justice fatigue in youth, partly rooted in the fear of getting it wrong, which leads to paralysis. The good news of justification is that we are freed from the need to be perfect. Justified by God's action, no longer trapped in isolation by shame, we are freed for new relationships.

"Grace doesn't give us what we deserve," he said, "but opportunity for new relationships." These new relationships he calls "ecologies of grace-" niches where mutuality and cooperative diversity have both social and ecological benefit. This is God's continual creation- the mission of God entrusted to the church.

The ABC's of Lutheran Public Witness

In their workshop Baptism in a Time of Breakdown, Dr. Rimmer and Christine Mangale referenced the Lutheran World Federation's study document, The Church in the Public Space. (It can be found easily via search engine.) The main question they sought to answer in the workshop was, "What are the confessional and faith commitments upon which Lutherans stand around the world?"

Grounded in Luther's notion of Two Realms (the spiritual and the worldly) and the Christian political ethos of love (re: the apostle Paul, 1 Corinthians 13), the LWF document offers an **ABCDE** of the Church's Engagement in the Public Sphere:

- A**ssessing public issues in participatory ways
- B**uilding relationships of trust
- C**hallenging injustice
- D**iscovering signs of hope
- E**mpowering people in need

Stories of Public Engagement

Christine and Dr. Rimmer also offered us examples of the church's public engagement around the world:

#1: Engagement for refugees - begun after World War II, reaching out to refugees remains one of the core activities of the LWF. Lutherans are to

this day the largest actor in United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees work.

#2: Engagement for gender justice - the affirmation of women's ordination has been a core commitment of LWF, and LWF also empowers women to tell their stories of gender violence in order to publish a "Shadow Report" ahead the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to hold countries accountable to their international commitments.

#3: Engagement for climate justice - LWF's commitment to mitigate the impacts of climate change dates back to 1977, and LWF has a presence at every COP, partnering in multi-religious advocacy efforts with special concern for indigenous people and the poor.

Although neither of these sessions was recorded, you can watch a similar version of Dr. Rimmer's keynote address on the YouTube page of Grace Lutheran Church in State College, who hosted a six-week speaker series this past fall entitled, "Ecology of Grace." Dr. Rimmer presented on September 17, 2025. I have honestly watched it several times in preparation for this article, and I learn something new from Dr. Rimmer each time I do!



Lutherans Restoring Creation is hosting "Multiply!" At Lutheridge Camp in Arden, NC January 23-25, 2026. Chad Rimmer and Barbara Rossing will be teaching, among others. More information is available at lutheransrestoringcreation.org/2026-lrc-gathering/

Concern for the Environment in Texas and Louisiana

by Carl D. Shankweiler

We here in Northeastern Pennsylvania are one of sixty-five synods in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Some of these synods are very different compared to ours. Consider, for example, the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod, which includes “a network of 108 Lutheran congregations, missions, and ministries working together to plant churches, support churches around the world, prepare pastors, help congregations find pastors, support congregations in crisis, encourage evangelism, generosity and ministry among people of all ages.” This synod includes the huge metropolitan area of Houston; it also features natural landscapes that are completely different from ours. Think turtles and alligators—which I encountered there by the dozens, if not hundreds!

In spite of these differences between us, our two synods share a concern for the environment. In the case of the Texas-Louisiana Synod, this concern is spearheaded by Dr. Lisa Brenskelle, who heads Lutherans Restoring Creation for that synod. She is also the founder of the Interfaith Environmental Network of Houston.



Lisa’s work for the synod can be found to some degree on their synod’s website, but she suggests that a better place to look is her own website, <http://creationcares.org>. Events are also advertised on the national Creation Care website: see <https://www.elca.org/our-work/publicly-engaged-church/creationcarenetwork>.

Lisa holds many workshops and classes, mainly online. For example, when the holidays are over and regular programming resumes, there will be an event titled “Faith Perspectives Panel: Faith & Water,” January 11, 2026, from 3:00 to 4:30 p.m. This event is free.

Although Lisa has been involved in synod ministry for over twenty years, her career has been that of a Ph.D.-level engineer working on the cutting edge of research and development. With that powerful background in applied

science, she brings a special level of credibility to her volunteer work on the environment. Indeed, she expressed to me her interest in the “intersection of faith and science.”

It seems that these days our society is fractured not only by our holding different opinions, but also by our accepting different “facts.” Lisa observes that people do struggle to know what is credible and what is not. Given her scientific background and expertise, she can assist others in knowing what can be believed in regard to the environment and what is bogus.

Given the size of the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod (which does not include the entire state of Texas), Lisa conducts most of her classes and other events online. This approach means that people who cannot travel are able to attend; and by reducing travel for everyone, these online events are more ecologically sound. An on-line approach also means that people from far beyond that synod can attend her events; and she has in fact had people attending from as far away as Australia. Not surprisingly, Lisa said that members of our synod are “very much welcome” to take part, with her regular classes beginning January 12 and 13.

In virtually all of our ministries, we have partners throughout the ELCA. The Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod is a resource as close as our computers.

Inspiration: "Under a Spreading Chestnut Tree..."

So many times, we long for things from bygone days, be it for plain nostalgia, or for the excitement of the 'impossible', ie: Jurassic Park (many a child's wish!).

The quoted first line of Longfellow's "The Village Blacksmith" above is one I often heard my mom begin, and true to form, she knew most of the poem. The blacksmith's example of a strong, hard-working lifestyle is mirrored in the might of the Chestnut tree itself. As a child, I had little idea of the magnitude or range of the American Chestnut, but now I yearn to know what it was like 'back then' when they covered our land and gave us marvelous floors and furniture. Since I began writing this piece, I have been told that the tree of the famous poem was a Horse Chestnut, not the American Chestnut...so many species!!!

A woodlot owner right here in our Synod, in Schuylkill Haven, has just invited part of his land to be used to grow over 7,000 seedlings of the first "most disease resistant" crossbreeds. The Chinese Chestnut has immunities to the blight that wiped out our American Chestnut. So, they have been cross bred with some remnant American Chestnuts. Of the first batch, only a handful produced viable seeds. Those were then again crossbred, and a higher percentage of the ensuing generation proved viable. Several generations later, survivability increased to a much stronger lot. These seedlings are now planted on Steve Zuk's property, a completely volunteer driven undertaking. They will be monitored over the next several years and then be made available once they reach about six feet tall (free!) to the public.

It is not so much about nostalgia or the marvels of cloning or crossbreeding. It is about finding the means to restore God's gifts, whether harmed by human action or disease. In our prayers every week we ask for God's blessing in this. It is about blessing coming generations with the health and resources that we will not see ourselves.

Joyfully submitted,
Sue Reier

Event Review: Sun Day

by Paul Metzloff

Below are photos from a nationwide event held in September to highlight the hope, promise, and success of solar energy. Details for the event as a whole can be found at <https://thirdact.org/sun-day/> ; this event was held at Reformation Lutheran Church in Reiffton. Highlights included a local pep band (the Rally Rousers), tables from other environmental organizations, Electric Vehicles, e-bikes, and solar cooking.



Closing Prayer

from the ELW *Service of Night Prayer for the Winter Solstice*

Creator of the stars of night,
bless the long hours of this night
with the warmth of your presence.
Come to all who suffer in any way.
Grant rest to the weary,
freedom to those who are burdened,
and bright hope to those who despair.
Strengthen us as we await your coming once again,
through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

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.

Questions or comments can be sent to Pastor Paul Metzloff, editor, at pwmetzloff@gmail.com.