

**St. Thomas Green: Stewardship for God's Creation  
Plan Approved by Vestry February 4, 2008**

*Background*

At the October Vestry meeting, vestry members were asked to “vision” our future as a parish. Emerging from that discussion was a vision of St. Thomas as a “green” congregation, intentionally enacting our Christian responsibility to be good stewards of God’s creation for this and future generations. In response to the enthusiasm for such a vision and in recognition of the need for a comprehensive plan that would transform attitudes and commitments on the part of the entire parish, members of the congregation were invited to participate in developing a plan for articulating and realizing an environmental vision for St. Thomas.

A vision of environmental stewardship for our congregation is entirely consistent with the Episcopal Church Resolution on the Environment (1991) which:

1. Declares that Christian Stewardship of God's created environment, in harmony with our respect for human dignity, requires response from the Church of the highest urgency;
2. Calls on all citizens of the world, and Episcopalians in particular, to live their lives as good stewards with responsible concern for the sustainability of the environment and with appreciation for the global interdependence of human life and the natural worlds; and
3. Urges all Episcopalians to reflect on their personal and corporate habits in the use of God's creation; to share with one another ideas for new responses; and to act as individuals, congregations, dioceses, and provinces of the Episcopal Church in ways that protect and heal all interdependent parts of creation. Such action should include prayerful theological discernment and factual knowledge. It should also consider global and local links and the balance of environmental integrity with economic sufficiency for human living.

This document is the result of a planning process that involved several meetings, including an open forum on December 20. The plan includes concrete steps in each of five areas of congregational life to be implemented during 2008 toward realizing the goal of environmental stewardship as a core value of St. Thomas. The concrete plans included in this plan are viewed as illustrative rather than exhaustive and are designed to promote an ethic of environmental stewardship throughout the parish and broader community.

The planning team freely borrowed ideas from a number of sources. Primary among these resources was the *Training Manual for the Green Congregation Program* (2006), written by David Rhoads and sponsored by the Web of Creation , Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago ([www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org)).

### *Statement of Goals and Principles*

The goal of St. Thomas Green: Stewardship of God's creation is to transform this congregation to be an intentional community celebrating and restoring creation.

Recognizing that such a transformation takes a long-term commitment that promotes full participation, the following principles will guide our efforts:

- **Non-exclusivity.** All members of the congregation own the program, although different members will vary in their level of participation.
- **Acceptance of differing views.** We seek to avoid confrontation and move forward in areas where there is consensus.
- **Institutionalization.** We want to infuse environmental stewardship into what we already do at St. Thomas, rather than creating many new programs, and work with current leaders and committees.
- **Comprehensiveness.** The program addresses the five areas of church life: worship, education, buildings and grounds, discipleship at home and work, and public ministry.
- **Sustainability.** We want to keep stewardship of creation before the congregation all the time, so it becomes just the way we are at St. Thomas; it is no longer "a program" or "an issue" but who we are. Such an effort requires that at least a few individuals make a commitment for the long haul, ensuring that the environmental ministries we begin are sustained, thereby bringing about the desired transformation of the congregation.

*Concrete Plans for 2008 in Each of Five Key Areas*

*1. Worship. Coordinator: The Rev. Lisa Hines, in concert with Rev. William Fowler*

- A. Beginning immediately, incorporate prayers, confessions, and litanies that celebrate creation and remind us of the Christian responsibility to care for and to heal creation into worship services. There are several resources for this, including the Interfaith Power and Light Movement, the Episcopal Ecology Network, the Web of Creation ([www.webofcreation.org/Worship/](http://www.webofcreation.org/Worship/)) and the Season of Creation ([www.seasonofcreation.com](http://www.seasonofcreation.com)). We will avoid language that might lead to adverse reactions by some members of the congregation.
- B. Covenant with Creation. Parishioners who desire may make a covenant with creation, which consists of checking earth-friendly practices they agree to follow. An example can be found at Web of Creation ([www.webofcreation.org/GettingStarted/samplecovenant.htm](http://www.webofcreation.org/GettingStarted/samplecovenant.htm)). A Litany for this Covenant is also found there ([www.webofcreation.org/Worship/services/covenantwithcreationlitany.htm](http://www.webofcreation.org/Worship/services/covenantwithcreationlitany.htm)). Individuals may make this covenant at any time. The litany will take place on St. Francis Day in October 2008.
- C. Make creation banners for the Narthex and/or Sanctuary.
- We would like to unveil banners in time for St. Francis Day (October 2008) and the litany for parishioners who make a covenant with creation.
- D. Have a special liturgy for Earth Day 2008 (National Cathedral Earth Day Liturgy is a possibility).

*2. Education. Coordinators: Beth Lawrence and Lisa Hines for children and youth; Jan Hughes and Urs Kreuter for adults*

A. Children and Youth

- In Sunday School, celebration of creation and our responsibility to care for it will be a recurring theme, including projects such as the butterfly project.
- At the ELC, celebration of creation and our responsibility to care for it will be a recurring theme and will include a bird unit, the wilderness space, and participation in the community garden. The community garden is a multi-generational ministry, in which ELC children plant and care for plants, adults maintain in summer, and food is taken to food pantry. This activity crosses education, discipleship, and public ministry. Beth Lawrence will organize.

- Vacation Bible School will have an environment-centered theme. Stewardship based on our charge at creation will be the theological thread. The focus will be on the creation story, and each day a different ecological issue (sky, water, flora, fauna, and humanity) will be the focus.
- The EYC's Spring mission trip will be to Heifer International's Heifer Ranch near Perryville Arkansas. Heifer Ranch is a hands-on campus for education about world hunger and solutions through animal agriculture and through earth-friendly farming. Through education that emphasizes experience, the Ranch's outdoor "living classrooms" acquaint visitors with Heifer's mission and the need of those whom the organization serves. Participants learn about the distribution of resources on the earth and the ways in which we can preserve the environment and address poverty in the world.

#### B. Adults:

- Lenten Study/Support Group. All are invited to participate in a six week study/support group based on the book, *Simpler Living, Compassionate Life: A Christian Perspective*, to be held Tuesday evenings February 5 through March 18 (skipping March 11) from 7:00-8:30 pm in the Ministry Center.
- During the Fall semester, a symposium series titled "Social Justice and Environmental Sustainability" will emphasize the inter-relatedness of social justice and environmental issues. The series will be open to the entire community (publicity about it will appear on Channel 6 morning show, free story in The Eagle, among other venues). Urs Kreuter, Marvin Adams, and Richard Woodward will organize the symposium.
- Spring Bird Migration Walks. Jim Hughes will lead birding walks at Bryson Park, across from St. Thomas, on Saturday morning in late April/early May

#### 3. *Building and Grounds. Coordinators: Doug Welsh and Sarah Shelby.*

- A. Conduct an energy and water audit; create a plan for reducing irrigation water consumption by 40% and energy bill by 10%. An energy audit has been scheduled with Brian Henry, Energy Auditor for CS Utilities for Thursday January 24. Subsequent to the audit, Brian will develop a report and present it to all those individuals integral to the electrical demand/use at St. Thomas (i.e., staff and parish leadership of St. Thomas, ELC, Canterbury). Vestry members will be trained in new "Vestry Person of the Day" procedures for reducing energy costs.
- B. Conduct an audit of products used by church. Develop a plan to reduce environmental impact. Purchase/use green products throughout church, including cleaning supplies

4. *Discipleship at home and work. Coordinator: Jan Hughes*

Living Green. Offer 5 session weekly seminar series April 6 to May 4 on Sundays during Sunday School time titled "Living Green". The following topics will be discussed:

- Reflection: Living simply and with compassion (Kathryn and Chet Robinson)
- Environmental sustainability and social justice (Urs Kreuter)
- Doing an environmental assessment of your home (TBN)
- Earth kind gardening (Doug Welsh)
- Smart recycling and green (Janet Fox)

5. *Public Ministry/Political Advocacy. Coordinator: Jan Hughes*

- A. Sponsor a multi-generational trip in September to clean beaches on International Coastal Cleanup Day (last year was on Sept 15). Prior to event, sponsor 2-3 sessions on how we can protect our rivers and oceans.
- B. Sponsor multi-generational quarterly roadway clean up Saturdays for a selected road or stretch of road and take trash to landfill and recyclables to recycle center. First clean up is in collaboration with Keep Brazos Beautiful April 5, 2008.

## *Other Activities for 2008*

### *1. Communications and Publicity. Coordinator: Janet Fox*

- A. Tell our stories, advertise our projects, and stir up excitement for caring for creation through *The Voice*, bulletin board, webpage, stories for *The Eagle*.
- B. Create a logo for St. Thomas Green: Stewardship for God's Creation. The logo will be selected or modified from examples Janet Fox will create. The logo will be on the website link to St. Thomas Green, will be on a banner in Narthex, and will be on shopping bags for sale to church members (to help raise funds for initiative).

### *2. Determine parish interests and gifts through parish survey. Coordinator: David and Amanda Byrd.*

Finding out about parish members' abilities and interests will help identify projects that are of interest to this congregation and will encourage members to come forward. The survey could be inserted in Church bulletin or sent via internet. Example questions include:

- How would you state your concern or commitment to care for creation?
- What environmentally friendly practices do you do? Recycling, reusing, avoiding certain products, reducing consumption are example practices.
- Do you have interest or hobbies that might be helpful (e.g., nature interests such as birding; gardening; water or energy conservation)?
- Would you be willing to express or act on your concern for the environment by sharing your gifts through, for example, teaching or attending a class, leading a nature excursion, participating in cleaning up a road or river, making a financial contribution to environmental ministry activities, or helping with a community garden?
- Would you be willing to meet and express what our parish can do?