What you will need

- Bible
- Copy of Pope Francis’ Letter, *Laudato Si’*
- Lutheran Study Guide
- Barbara Rossing’s short video on eco-Reformation: [https://vimeo.com/lstchicago/review/123208390/40aa084650](https://vimeo.com/lstchicago/review/123208390/40aa084650)
- Optional readings:
  - Shishmaref, ten years later: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/12/14/shishmaref-alaska-climate-change-relocation_n_6296516.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/12/14/shishmaref-alaska-climate-change-relocation_n_6296516.html)

Opening

Prayer

Merciful and most high God, creator and giver of life, you have called creation from darkness into light, from error into truth, from death into life. Grant grace to us with all creation and bless us. Raise us by your Spirit. Revive us by your word. Form us by your hand. Bring us to the water of life and the bread and cup of blessing, that with all creation we may bear witness to your grace and praise you forever, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

(Adapted from *ELW* prayer for those preparing for baptism, p. 75).

Scripture

*Read Psalm 104 together.*
In love, through Christ, God has claimed us as daughters and sons. Luther’s famous “Freedom of a Christian” recounts the freedom flowing from this claim: we are freed from pouring our resources into achieving God’s love and freed for love and service to neighbor. In 2017 we will commemorate 500 years since the beginning of the Reformation. In the scope of the Reformation tradition little thought has been given to our non-human neighbors. It is now becoming increasingly clear that where we do not care for our non-human neighbors our human neighbors—and we ourselves!—suffer the consequences also. In light of this situation and the upcoming anniversary of the Reformation, a number of Lutheran scholars suggest a new kind of reformation would be a fitting tribute to the one Luther and others initiated: an eco-reformation. Describing this call, New Testament scholar and Professor Emeritus at The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, David Rhoads, writes,

“I am proposing that we inaugurate a new reformation. We Lutherans have always considered "perpetual reformation" to be an ongoing dimension of our common life. Nevertheless, what I am proposing is more than mere adjustments in Reformation trajectories. We are facing unprecedented changes in our life on Earth and the times are calling for something much more substantial. If we are to be prepared to face these crises and to address them, some paradigm shift, some foundational transformation of our church, needs to take place.

The ecological crises, particularly the alarming progression of global climate change, are rapidly becoming matters reaching to the heart of faith.

Twenty years ago, in the social statement “Caring for Creation,” the ELCA issued a warning for the church to respond to the looming ecological crises and the social justice issues related to them. Now it is time to meet the challenges presented by that document. This is a clarion call for a new re-formation.

The list of crises we are facing as a planet is long and substantive. To name a few: global climate change; unpredictable weather patterns; increase in frequency and intensity of storms; drought; rampant wildfires due to dry conditions; deforestation; desertification; shifting agricultural conditions; movement of species of plants and animals; loss of species diversity; deterioration in air quality; pollution of fresh water sources and oceans; degradation of soil; rise of seas levels, human overpopulation, and more—all of which produce negative impacts on human life, particularly the most vulnerable people and societies. Every eco-system on Earth is under stress. Earth itself is under stress.

Father Thomas Berry has said that humanity is entering a new era, the Ecozoic Age—a new era in which ecological issues will dominate our global life together. He argues that creating a sustainable environmental lifestyle on the planet is the “great work” of our time. It is a work in which all people can participate, a work that all must embrace if human life on this planet is to be sustained. This work will require intention and sacrifice; and it can be joyful.
The environment is not a fad. It is not an add-on, not one more issue alongside others. It is not just for those who happen to be interested in this cause. Earth is our home. It involves everyone. It has an impact on all living things. And we humans, we Christians, we Lutherans, need to step up and embrace dramatic changes in ourselves and in our life together for the sake of Earth – and for the sake of the God we confess to be the creator and preserver of our planet and the whole universe.

What would it look like for the church to claim a calling to what Berry refers to as the “great work” of our time? What would it look like to claim this calling as Lutherans? What resources might we draw from? Where do you see this work being done? What Lutheran themes would be most fruitful in this regard? These may not be questions you are prepared to answer yet! Hopefully, in the course of engaging in this study you will begin to find resources for reflecting on these questions.


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*Laudato Si’, “What is Happening to our Common Home”*

Chapter One of Pope Francis’ encyclical lists several areas of ecological concern:

- pollution and climate change
- water
- loss of biodiversity
- decline in the quality of the human life and the breakdown of society
- global inequality
- weak responses from global leaders to these problems

**Discussion**

Choose one area of concern that seems most relevant to your local community and one that may most affect people far from your local community. Read both sections corresponding to these areas of concern. Share with the group:

- What issue seems closest to home for you? How do you see this issue emerging on a local level? Who is or will be the most affected by it? Who has the power to change it?

- What issue seems the farthest away for you? Who is (or will be) the most affected by it? Although the issue seems far away are there ways you are indirectly impacted by it or that you and your community directly or indirectly contribute to this issue? Who has the power to contribute to change in this area of concern?

- Identify the parallel or repeated concerns Dr. Rhoads and Pope Francis articulate.
Preparation for Week 3

- Return next session with Bible, Study Guide, and encyclical
- Optional: Reading ahead
  - Read Joseph Sittler’s “Called to Unity” speech: [http://www.augie.edu/pub/values/sittler.pdf](http://www.augie.edu/pub/values/sittler.pdf)