

Lent is traditionally a time for greater discipline in our lifestyles, in order to focus more on God's priorities. This Lent let us explore environmental issues, ways to love our neighbor and the least in our midst. A critical self and societal reflection will reveal that we have been living in ways that has damaged God's creation and our relationship with our neighbors, near and far. Our Lenten journey is a time to repent and recalibrate our faith lives by putting our faith into action as we reflect on our faith journey and the path that Christ asks us to follow.

In each of the six weeks of this Lent discipline there are suggested environmental and actions of reconciliation and ways to love our neighbors. Some are quite small things, some are challenging. Some are actions that you could do as a family or household, some are individual. You may well be doing some already. Each week has a theme corresponding to one aspect of concern for the environment (transport, water, energy, waste, shopping thoughtfully, and improving biodiversity).

You are invited to take on two or three items from the action list each week. If you feel able, you may want to try carrying on one of these items through the whole of Lent. But remember, *everything* that we do for the environment, however small, is a vital contribution and a witness to our belief in God the Creator; this environmental challenge is for you to experiment with, not to be oppressed by. One of the most important contributions you can make to caring for the environment is to be informed about the issues.

In addition to the environmental issues, we invite you to prayerfully consider 2 or 3 actions related to loving your neighbor and helping those in need that you can carry this Lent and beyond.

LOVE OF ENVIRONMENT

Week one – use of transport

We all know that gas and diesel engines burn irreplaceable fossil fuels and that short journeys have high fuel consumptions. High altitude flying dumps greenhouse gases directly into the upper atmosphere. We expect to buy all kinds of fruit and vegetables at any time of year. Our attitude to transport is costing the earth.

Actions - Choose two or three of these:

- Walk or cycle everywhere
- Cut your car journeys by X%
- No car journeys less than one mile
- Replace your car with a second-hand model, and one that has a lower CO2 output
- Use public transportation whenever practicable
- Car share whenever possible – school run, work, shopping trips
- Sell your car and buy a bicycle
- Commit not to travel by air this year

Research and campaigning - Choose one of these:

- Look at the country of origin of the food you buy and choose items that have travelled less
- Campaign for wider use of bio-diesel (fuel made from vegetable oils)

Week two – use of water

It's rare for us to experience water shortage, and when we do we tend to blame it on the water companies. Unlimited supply of drinking water is still an unattainable luxury in many parts of the world. By avoiding excessive use of water we help to ensure that supplies in this country are sufficient without the creation of more reservoirs and we remind ourselves of the many people in our world who have no access to clean drinking water – let alone the chance to flush the toilet with it!

Actions - Choose two or three of these:

- Fix dripping taps
- Turn off the tap while brushing your teeth
- Have a shower rather than a bath
- Shower less than 2 minutes per day
- Turn the shower off while soaping
- Wash your car using a bucket (not a hose)
- Only do full washing loads
- Use economy settings on washing machines
- Don't wash clothes unnecessarily
- Only run the dishwasher when it's full
- Don't wash the car
- Collect rain water for use in your garden

Research and campaigning - Choose one of these:

- Research the amount of water used in making products so that you can avoid products manufactured with an intensive use of water
- Investigate installing a rain water system for flushing the toilet

Week three – use of energy

The electricity, gas and fuel oil we use in our homes come mostly from fossil fuels. For most of us there is no realistic alternative, but we can be responsible about our consumption of energy and adapt our lifestyles to reduce our use of fossil fuels. There are electricity suppliers who will guarantee to supply customers from renewable sources of energy (usually at no added cost). If you have investment capital, you can install solar PV (electric) panels, with a moderate rate of financial return under the current grant scheme.

Actions - Choose two or three of these:

- Keep your windows and doors closed
- Hang your clothes to dry instead of using the tumble dryer
- Turn your central heating down and wear warmer clothes
- Only heat the room you are using
- Use eco light bulbs
- Turn off garden water features and outside lights
- Improve your home's insulation
- Reduce the amount of hot water you use
- Switch your energy provider to one that uses renewable energy sources
- Give up using your TV and computers
- Go to bed at sunset and get up at dawn

Research and campaigning - Choose one of these:

- Consider installing a solar PV (electric) or a solar water system
- Research the use of energy in the manufacture of the goods you buy, and the amount of energy used in transporting them
- Look into replacing existing appliances with energy efficient (A rated) ones
- Write to your representative about streetlight pollution

Week four – reducing waste and pollution

Landfill mountains have risen like monuments to our waste-making society. Councils who have introduced recycling schemes are to be praised, but, sadly, our national annual volume of waste is increasing faster than the amount going into recycling. Change is up to us. We have choices. We are responsible for the amount of waste we create and the way we dispose of it.

Actions - Choose two or three of these:

- Don't buy anything that has more than one wrapping
- Buy recycled products
- Avoid individually wrapped and bleached sanitary items
- Don't flush non-degradable items down the toilet
- Use recycled garbage can liners
- Set yourself a target for waste reduction
- Use only biodegradable detergents
- Measure and record the amount of garbage that you don't reuse or recycle
- Don't buy anything that you can't eat or recycle in its entirety (including packaging).
- Compost your kitchen and garden waste
- Buy in bulk, if this reduces packaging and you can carry the items home
- Use organic products in your garden (fertilizers, weed control, pest control)
- Buy organic – avoid products from intensive farming.
- Repair products whenever possible

Research and campaigning - Choose one of these:

- Write to your representatives about reducing our dependence on nuclear power
- Ask your local council about how it recycles – what it collects and why it doesn't collect more

Week five – shopping thoughtfully

One of the advantages of living in a free market economy is that we have choices about what we buy and how we buy it. What we often lack is information about how things are produced and a full understanding of the implications of a particular product choice (materials used, expected working life of the product, practicality of repair). By exercising informed choice we put pressure on producers to work in more environmentally conscious ways.

Actions - Choose two or three of these:

- Buy only what you need
- Repair and reuse rather than replace
- Check through the products you bought last year. How useful were they?
- Buy second-hand goods
- Make a list before you shop for food/household goods to avoid buying things you don't need
- Cook from primary ingredients (e.g. use fresh vegetables rather than processed food)
- Use the Mailing Preference Service to remove your name from junk mail lists
- Subscribe to a magazine like Ethical Consumer
- Eat vegetarian
- Eat vegan

Researching and campaigning - Choose one of these:

- Research the environmental behavior/records of the companies you buy things from
- Write to your representative about improving labelling information on food and household goods

Week 6 – maintaining and increasing biodiversity

The song has a new verse: ‘Where have all the sparrows gone, long time passing...’

Fortunately there are many organizations actively promoting and working for species conservation and there is strong public support for this work. There are plenty of ways we can help, and it is often delightful and rewarding work.

Actions - Choose two or three of these:

- Don’t drop any kind of litter (including cigarette butts to avoid danger to wildlife)
- Go litter picking
- Provide food for a variety of birds
- Visit a farm
- Put up bird and bat boxes
- Put up places for insects to hibernate in
- Drive slowly in the country and watch for animals
- Plant wild flowers and native species in your garden
- Leave wood piles to rot (habitat)
- Do not use weed killer or fertilizers on your lawn
- Have a meadow area in your garden (strimmer-cut once a year)
- Visit a local nature reserve
- Plant hedges
- Build a pond or bog garden

Research and campaigning - Choose one of these:

- Join a local conservation group
- Support farmers who manage for conservation
- Campaign for habitat creation in semi-public places (churchyards, play areas)
- Write to your representative about the need to control the use of genetically modified Organisms

LOVE OF NEIGHBOR

Promote Justice

- **Examine your beliefs and habits:** Many of us hold onto beliefs that we learned as children, and they can influence how we engage in social justice. Positive action toward inclusion and advocacy begins at home. Becoming a strong ally in a social justice movement requires ongoing self-reflection, learning, and openness to growth.
- **Educate yourself about social justice issues:** Navigating how to get involved can be overwhelming. The best way to start is to familiarize yourself with social justice issues you're passionate about and research what is being done about them. Whether it's hunger and food insecurity, gun violence, voting rights, or another issue, you'll gain a better understanding of an issue's current state by learning about its history.
- **Discover your local organizations:** Many advocacy groups for social justice, such as the [American Civil Liberties Union \(ACLU\)](#), have local chapters. To build connections and get involved, seek out organizers and activist groups in your community, such as the [Minneapolis Council of Churches](#), [Interfaith Action of Greater St Paul](#) and [Suburbanramseycoalition](#).
- **Take positive action in your own community:** You can learn about issues within your community by watching local news broadcasts, reading the newspaper, and listening to podcasts. Write letters and call your elected city and state officials regarding the issues your community faces. Find your elected officials' contact information [here](#).
- **Harness the power of social media:** Twitter, Facebook, and other social media platforms have become powerful tools for sharing messages with large audiences without leaving home. They provide resourceful ways to stay focused and organized around important causes. From joining groups to posting articles and sharing personal experiences, they can help facilitate community building, awareness, and collaboration.
- **Attend demonstrations and protests:** The pandemic hasn't put a damper on large, in-person protests, but we all must take precautions to prevent spreading the virus further. Make your voice heard at social justice protests happening in virtually every major U.S. city. These events give you the chance to hone your activism and public speaking skills, which you'll need to become a social justice leader who motivates others. If you decide to attend a demonstration, always maintain safety precautions: wear a mask at all times and keep your distance from other people.

- **Volunteer:** Volunteering can take many forms, depending upon your availability. These websites, among others, can help you find volunteer opportunities that align with your interests.
- [Idealist](#) - Browse by area of focus, language, and time availability.
- [GozAround](#) - Search by category and find matches for your abilities and schedule.
- [VolunteerMatch](#) - Search for local and virtual volunteer work by topic and by organization names.
- **Donate:** Every cause-oriented organization will appreciate financial support. Use sites like [Charity Navigator](#), a resource that independently rates organizations based on their financial health, accountability, and transparency to find projects that fight for issues you're passionate about.
- **Get involved with politics through civic engagement:** Align yourself with candidates—in local, state, and congressional elections—whose platforms and policies will further the causes you believe in. Learning about their stances on social justice issues is an opportunity to push for equity. Consider volunteering at a phone bank, canvassing to raise awareness, or sharing on online platforms.
- **Invest responsibly:** There are now mutual funds that focus on gender diversity, global equality, and other social justice issues. [Investopedia](#) publishes a list of the best-performing funds that focus on companies with sustainable environmental, social, and governance practices.
- **Support minority-owned businesses in your community and online:** As a consumer, you have the power to affect social justice change with every dollar you spend. In light of the recent Black Lives Matter protests, many businesses have vowed to give more visibility to Black-owned companies nationwide. Support local businesses that advocate for change and pay close attention to smaller, minority-owned companies.
- **Be kind, understanding, and compassionate:** These are trying times. In dealing with our own issues, we may forget that we're all in this together. Whenever you feel stressed out around other people, consider their circumstances and what they may be dealing with. Social justice, like charity, begins at home.

Pray

- **Prayer Partners:** Submit your name to your pastor to be paired with a prayer partner. You will be given contact information of your prayer partner and you can discuss prayer requests and what prayer method works best for you. Perhaps you want to pick a certain time of day when you will both pray for each other or regularly throughout the day.

- **Structured Prayer:** At a retreat I was given modern rosary beads that helped me to structure my prayer around the beads that touches upon various spheres of life. For example start with what you are thankful for, specific prayers for others in your family, friends, church. Pray generally and specifically if you can for the needs of the world and end with prayers for your own requests.
- **Prayers:** Sometimes we are at a loss for words and need to just read a prayer. If you need a prayer take a look thru the many historic and contemporary prayers listed [Here](#).

Reconcile Relationship

- **Scriptural Mandate:** We are instructed by scripture to go out and teach the world all the things that Christ has commanded us. First, we must put that into practice in our own lives. “Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” (Colossians 3:13)
- **Forces of Division:** During this stressful time of political, racial and economic division that has been compounded by the pandemic, our relationships have been tested. Given our collective situation the call to reconcile with one another remains stronger than ever.
- **Prayerfully Consider Fractured Relationships:** It can be easy to intentionally or unintentionally offend another, especially those closest to us. Prayerfully examine your relationships especially those that have been strained or those you value that you have drifted away from. How might you extend the olive branch even if you were not at fault? This might require you to examine your conscience and ask if we are living as Christ has called us to. This works takes courage and gentleness, so take it easy on yourself.
- **Steps to Healing:** Here are some steps that might assist you in the reconciliation process. 1) Emphasize the positive, de-emphasize the negative. 2) Share your feelings and try to see the other’s point of view. 3) Make the first move. 4) Reach out for help if you need. Contact your faith leaders or an organization such as Community Mediation MN (<https://communitymediationmn.org/>) Peacemaker Minnesota creates a more peaceful world. Their mission is to help schools to be safer places, free from bullying and harassment, and to help youth learn positive relational skills like empathy, respect, cooperation and how to resolve conflicts peacefully. (<https://www.peacemakermn.org/>)

LOVE OF THOSE IN NEED

Food (Pray, volunteer, give)

-North Saint Paul Area Food Shelf (nspafoodshelf.org)

-Second Harvest Heartland (www.2harvest.org)

Housing/Clothing (Pray, volunteer, give)

- Presbyterian Disaster Assistance enables congregations and mission partners of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to witness to the healing love of Christ through caring for communities adversely affected by crises and catastrophic events. (pda.pcusa.org)

-Houses for Haiti-- With your generous donations, we are able to help people secure their lives by providing them with a stable home outside the walls of Cite Soleil. The protection of four sturdy walls is one of the greatest gifts in life that most take for granted. (housesforhaiti.org) Diane the president is a member of North Presbyterian. She travels to Haiti yearly to build houses.

-MICAH - Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing - lives out the prophetic vision that calls us "to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with God". MICAH envisions a metropolitan area where everyone without exception has a safe, decent, accessible and affordable home. (micah.org)

-Project Home - For more than 23 years, Project Home has provided overnight shelter for area families facing homelessness in partnership with dozens of area churches, synagogues, and schools. Additionally, in 2019, Project Home added day shelter services and rapid exit case management services. This 24/7 support helps families achieve both stability and economic mobility through assistance in finding permanent, affordable housing and employment.

Education (Pray, volunteer, give)

-Your local school district

-Faith Christian Home Educators meets at North Presbyterian Church (faithchristianhome.net)

-North Metro Flex (northmetroflex.com)

-Remember Niger is dedicated to unifying people and mobilizing resources to expand quality educational opportunities in Niger, Africa. They partner with and support Nigerien organizations who have a remarkable vision for their country and share our core values. Through a holistic approach and by working side-by-side with our Nigerien partners, who own and operate their schools, they are able to ensure that more children receive a high-quality education in Niger, the least developed country in the world. (rememberniger.org) Some members of North Presbyterian have served on the board and have traveled to Niger.

Food, Housing, Clothing, and Education

-For over 70 years, **One Great Hour of Sharing** has provided Presbyterians a way to share God's love with our neighbors in need around the world. OGHS provides sustainable food sources, clean water, sanitation, education, and opportunity. (<https://specialofferings.pcusa.org/offering/oghs/>)

EveryMeal formerly known as The Sheridan Story, Fight child hunger through community and school partnerships; weekend program, winter program and summer program.
www.everymeal.org Volunteer to attend food packing events or donate money.

SoWashCoCares South Washington County Foundation. The goal of SoWashCo CARES (Community Action Reaching Every Student) is to have our community help our community, help our students and families in need in South Washington County. Requested items could include food, clothes, toiletries, gas cards etc... The items can be dropped off at the school and will go directly to the students/families who need it! Thank you so much for your generosity!