

Creation Care Sunday School Lesson Plan

Lesson Title: Fulfilling our Vocation as Stewards of God's Creation

Educator Name: [Insert Educator Name]

Grade Level: Middle/High School

Duration: 30-45 minutes

Date: [Insert Lesson Date]

Please fill out this [Google Form](#) with any questions and feedback. I would love to hear how these resources were used in your community!

Learning Overview: [Provides a brief overview of the lesson, including its central theme, real-world relevance, and desired outcomes.]

This lesson aims to foster stewardship for creation and support the “Greening the Parish” initiative. Its contents will bridge the connection between the ancient Orthodox Christian Tradition and contemporary Ecology. This lesson plan template serves as an interdisciplinary guide to be referenced and replicated in Sunday schools to cultivate a spirit of stewardship for God's creation amongst the next generation of youth and young adults across parishes.

Learning Objectives:

1. Discuss the ecological crisis and the Orthodox Christian perspective on the environment, nature, and creation.
Guiding Questions: What is ecology? What is the ecological crisis? How is the solution to the ecological crisis found in the ethos of the Orthodox Church?
2. Introduce “The Green Patriarch” and his work.
Guiding Questions: How has His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew united science and religion? How is environmentalism a form of mystical stewardship?
3. Develop an understanding of the role of a Christian in being a steward of God's creation.
Guiding Questions: Why are Christians responsible for the preservation of the earth? How can we fulfill our vocation as stewards of the natural environment in the face of increasing human population growth, development, and environmental change?
4. Show students how they can take immediate action and commit to living in harmony with God's creation at the individual and community levels.

Guiding Questions: What does it mean to live sustainably? What is an ecological footprint? What action pathways can individuals take to reduce their ecological footprint? What are some ways to “green” parishes?

Materials/Resources:

- Material/Resource 1: [Creation Care Lesson Plan Slides](#) (content in speaker notes)
- Material/Resource 2: [Speaker Notes for Creation Care Lesson Plan Slides](#)
- Material/Resource 3: [Creation Care Checklists](#) (print out)
- Material/Resource 4: Laptop, HDMI cord, Projector
- Material/Resource 5: Seeds, Potted plant, Fruit (i.e. whole apple)
- Material/Resource 6: Bibles (optional: print out opening and closing prayers)

Lesson Overview:

1. Opening Prayer (time est: 3 minutes)
Presentation Slides: 2
2. Lesson Content (time est: 20 minutes)
Presentation Slides: 3-15
3. Creation Care Checklist Activity (time est: 5 minutes)
Presentation Slide: 16
4. Lesson Content (time est: 10 minutes)
Presentation Slides: 17-25
5. Discussion (time est: 5 minutes)
Presentation Slides: 26-27
6. Closing Prayer (time est: 1 minute)
Presentation Slide: 28

Speaker Notes for Creation Care Lesson Plan Slides:

Slide 1

[Teacher provides a brief introduction, and introduces this lesson as a discussion of our role as stewards of God's creation]

Teacher:

This is a discussion about our role as stewards of God's creation.

In this lesson, we will:

- Discuss the ecological crisis and the Orthodox Christian view on ecology.
- Learn how we can be better stewards of God's creation.

Slide 2

Teacher: [asks one student to read the opening prayer (Psalm 103:24 - 35)]
(*Lesson Plan on the Environment, n.d*)

Slide 3

Teacher: [introduces discussion question(s)]:

What is "Creation Care"?

What does it mean to care for creation?

How is caring for God's creation our vocation?

- Define *Vocation* as "one's unique and ongoing response to Christ's call to love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength, and the neighbor as oneself".

Slide 4

Teacher: [reads off slide]:

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the Earth Genesis 1:1

God is the Creator of the world and all things in it.

*And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have **dominion** over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air... and over the Earth.* Genesis 1:26

Humans were given **dominion** over Creation. Humans were given the task of stewardship of the Earth. The Earth is the Lord's. Therefore, we must protect it.

- Define *Dominion* as "control or the exercise of control; exercising power over someone or something".

Slide 5

Teacher: Define *ecology* and the word's etymology (on slide):

ECO- – from Ancient Greek οἶκος (oikos, “house, household”)

-LOGY – from the Greek verb λέγειν (legein, "to speak") the study of [a certain subject]"

Ecology is the scientific study of our home/environment.

Additional comments:

- Ecology is the study of relationships between organisms and their environments.
- Ecology is a broad, interdisciplinary, collaborative science.
- “Web of Life” = Everything is connected.

Slide 6

Teacher:

- “It’s no secret that our planet is hurting.”
- [ask students what they think the causes are and how the world is hurting]
- We (humans) are misusing natural resources and disturbing natural ecosystems.
- Emphasizes the 3 Major Environmental Challenges: Climate Change, Biodiversity Loss, and Pollution.

Define Terms:

Ecological Crisis - We are experiencing a great decline in nature and humans are causing it. Loss of nature has several consequences - damaged ecosystems exacerbate climate change, undermine food security, and put people and communities at risk (UNEP).

Ecosystem - a biological community of interacting organisms and their physical environment.

Biodiversity - the total variety of life on Earth.

Slide 7

Teacher:

- The Industrial Revolution (1760 – 1840) was the transition from creating goods by hand to using machines.
 - a. Our ancestors were “indigenous to place”. They lived off the land and relied on their natural environments for sustenance.
 - b. Since the Industrial Revolution, the human population has increased and industrial pollution has risen.
- Our environmental challenges are caused by the combined/synergistic effects of...
[go through the list on the slide]:

- Environmental problems are caused by the synergistic effects of:
 - Overpopulation
 - Overconsumption + Production
 - Inequality + Greed + Racism + Classism + Poverty
 - Poor Education
 - Lack of Faith*

*emphasize that we will get into this one more later...

Slide 8

Teacher:

- The reality is, that the Earth has its limits. Non-renewable resources (such as fossil fuels - coal, natural gas, oil) are finite.
- To conserve natural resources for future generations, we must adopt a new model of sustainable living for all levels: individuals, communities, nations, and the world.

Define Terms:

Sustainability - meeting the needs of the present while conserving resources for future generations.

Non - Renewable vs Renewable Resources - renewable resources like solar, wind, etc. will replenish themselves; while non-renewable resources, like fossil fuels, will not be replenished when used.

Finite - found in limited quantity, can't be renewed.

Slide 9

Teacher:

- While scientific, technological, economic, and political advances are necessary to assist this shift to more sustainable living patterns, what we really need is a change in the **attitudes and practices** of people at the individual level.
- **Overconsumption** and **greed** are at the root of all of our environmental and health challenges.
- Simply put, the root cause is the **human heart**.
- “**The Way** out of the ecological crisis requires a spiritual renewal at the individual level - not just a change in habits but a change in hearts - in Christian terms, **repentance.**”
- [Optional: a brief discussion on the Orthodox experience of repentance]

Slide 10

[Explore the Orthodox Christian Perspective on Ecology]

Teacher:

- The Orthodox Church believes “the solution [of the ecological crisis] is to be found in the liturgical, eucharistic and ascetic ethos of The Orthodox Tradition” (Belopopsky 1996).
- Define **Ethos** as the character or moral values of an individual or community.
- [Walk through each ethos on slides 11, 12, 13...]

Slide 11

Teacher:

- **Eucharistic Ethos** = The term *eucharist* means **thanksgiving**.
- This ethos emphasizes using natural resources with thankfulness, as they are gifted to us from the loving God.
- This ethos helps us remember our role of servants doing His will in creation and causes us to treat all things as sacred (as opposed to the superficial and material attitude toward the world).

Slide 12

Teacher:

- **Ascetic Ethos** = Fasting and other ascetic practices make us recognize even the simplest of foods as gifts.
- Fasting teaches us to voluntarily limit our food requirements and other worldly pleasures.
- Christians can realize they can live a fulfilling life with fewer material goods. This spirit is necessary to heal the earth because **consumerism** is at the root of our ecological crisis.

Slide 13

Teacher:

- **Liturgical Ethos** = We worship as a community.
- This ethos emphasizes cooperation, community, and sharing.
- God’s gifts are meant to be shared.

Slide 14

Teacher:

- **Summary:** The ethos of the Church means reverence for matter – the world around us, other creatures, our bodies – we engage the world with our bodies (*Krueger & Rossi, 2012*). **Everything is sacred.**

Slide 15

[Show His-All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew's "Harming the Environment is a Sin" video and facilitate a brief discussion on His-All Holiness's work on bridging science and religion.]

Teacher:

- His All-Holiness has been vocal about uniting science and religion.
- Emphasize: "environmentalism as mystical stewardship".
- His All-Holiness tells us that every person can participate in helping our environment.
- **Takeaway:** "The way we relate to nature directly reflects the way we relate to God, and to our fellow human beings." **Harming the environment is a sin.**

Slide 16

Creation Care Checklist Activity: [Students complete the creation care checklist and reflect on what they do in their everyday lives to care for God's creation.]

Teacher:

1. Distribute printed checklists to each student.
2. Go through each bullet point as a class, one by one.
3. Instruct students to check off boxes if applicable.
4. (At the end of the list), instruct students to count how many check marks they have.

Reflect as a class:

- What is my family already doing to care for God's creation? How can they improve?
- What can members of my family do to accomplish these goals? What changes can I encourage them to make?

Slide 17

Teacher: "So, what can we do? Here are some pathways for action!"

Slide 18

1. Live your Faith

- Apply your faith to every aspect of your life. Follow the ascetic examples of the saints in the church who minimized their use and abuse of the world.
Discussion Question: What are some examples of saints who lived according to the Orthodox Christian ethos we discussed?
→ St. Seraphim of Sarov (patron of nature and environmental conservation), St. John the Baptist, St. Mary of Egypt, etc..

Slide 19

St Seraphim of Sarov - a Russian monk and hermit.

- known for withdrawing into the forest wilderness
- friend of the animals
- lived on wild greens
- [pictured here feeding a wild bear]

Slide 20

2. Be mindful of what you eat

- **Food production/agriculture** plays a major role in environmental sustainability.
- As much as possible, **eat plant-based**. Avoid foods grown with pesticides/chemical fertilizers, nurtured in feedlots, and produced a great distance from where you live.
- Follow the **fasting periods of the church** (180-200 days of the year)!
 - a. “When we follow the fasting periods of the Church, our carbon footprints decrease dramatically.”
 - b. Emphasize **balance** and **intentionality**: “It’s all about moderation and limiting our consumption of animal products... and being conscious about where we are sourcing our food from.”
- Define the *carbon footprint of food* as “the total amount of greenhouse gases, either methane or CO₂, generated by agriculture”.

Environmental impacts of agriculture include:

- biodiversity loss
- land use change (half of the world’s habitable land is cleared for agriculture)
- GHG/methane production (from industrial and animal agriculture)
- freshwater use (70% of freshwater is used in agriculture)
- nitrogen pollution from fertilizer (eutrophication process creates dead zones in water bodies).

Slide 21

3. Vote with your dollar!

- Support the rise of the eco-friendly consumer!
- **Discussion Question:** What does it mean to **vote with your dollar**?
- Supply + Demand
 - a. When you buy a product (as a consumer) you are essentially telling the producer to produce more of it.
- Buy local, buy organic, buy certified fair trade.

- Every time you don't buy something, you are essentially telling the world that you don't need to buy more stuff to live a full life.
- Support businesses that have adopted green practices, support local economies and pay suppliers fairly (three principles: earth care, people care, fair share).
- Label to look for when purchasing products:

Regenerative Organic Alliance:

alliance = rodale institute, dr bronners, patagonia

regenerative practices = cover cropping, crop rotation, low to no-till, compost, zero pesticide/fertilizer, rotational grazing

social = living wages & safe working conditions

animal = pasture-raised and grass-fed

“Vote with your dollar” = a life-changing concept that empowers students to support green practices with every purchase.

Slide 22

4. The 4 R'S!

Reduce: only buy what you need

Reuse: buy used goods whenever possible, use items until you can't use them anymore

Recycle: send items back for reuse

Repair: fix items when you can

Slide 23

5. Minimize Energy Use

- Pay attention to how you use energy around the house...
- unplug appliances ('energy vampire' appliances drain power when plugged in, even if powered off)
- turn off lights when you're not using them
- limit screen time/use devices less (emphasize that every time you charge your phone you are using energy/fossil fuels!)
- **Discussion Question(s):** How can I be more intentional about how I use energy around the house? What is the source of this energy?
- Define *fossil fuels* as “a natural fuel such as coal, oil, or gas, formed in the geological past from the remains of living organisms”.

Slide 24

6. Reduce Travel/Travel Sustainably

- Walk whenever possible.
- Avoid unnecessary trips or vacations to distant locations.
- Traveling less will reduce your consumption of energy and improve your connection to your community or local parish.
- **Discussion Question(s):** What is sustainable tourism (ecotourism)? What does it mean to travel purposefully? How can I lower my carbon footprint by traveling less? How does traveling less strengthen communities?
- “The grass is always greener” → Focus on making change in the immediate community first → Ripple effect!

Slide 25

7. Green Your Parish!

- **Example:** “green” coffee hour.
 - Provide alternatives to plastic/styrofoam food service materials.

RESOURCES:

[UCLA Sustainability Office Depot Sustainable Purchasing Guide](#)
[World-Centric Store](#) (for food service materials)

Slide 26

As a Class: discuss ways to green the parish in the future.

- **Discuss:** What did we learn today? What can we take action on as a group?
- **Possible Activities/Project Ideas:**
Urban Garden: plant and maintain an urban garden in a corner of the Church property. Volunteer to take care of it. Distribute flowers and/or vegetables grown in the garden at coffee hour or use herbs (i.e. basil) in the altar.

Slide 27

Teacher [leads discussion]:

- Though our environmental challenges may seem daunting at times, we can create change by adopting these pathways for action into our lifestyles slowly/one at a time.
- The action pathways we discussed act as goals for a form of repentance that deals with how we live in the world and use its materials.
- This requires a change of heart in how we relate to God’s creation. The heart does not change without some commitment out of love for God to heal the world. This begins with our behavior.
- This **behavior change** (away from habits of overconsumption and energy use) requires prayer and a commitment at the individual level.
- The **Metanoia** (or change in thinking) to which Christ calls us to attain, implies a

- change in how we see the world, in how we think about it, and how we respond to it and each other (*Krueger & Rossi, 2012*).
- Ultimately, make the point that **small efforts with great love** are the most important thing - we are not expected to do it all!
 - (Go over discussion questions on slide)

Slide 28

Teacher:

- a. Perform seed-plant-fruit visual demonstration.
 - “Hopefully, this lesson will plant the **seed** [teacher holds up seed and small potted plant] that will eventually grow into a permanent behavior change, as the **fruit** [teacher holds up fruit, i.e. apple] of our prayer”.
- b. Read the closing prayer for vespers for the protection of the environment.
 - **Students:** read the closing prayer.
(*Lesson Plan on the Environment, n.d*)

References

Belopopsky, A. (1996). *Orthodoxy and ecology: resource book. [Hauptband]*.

Krueger, F. W., & Rossi, V. P. (2012). *Greening the Orthodox Parish*. CreateSpace. (Krueger & Rossi, 2012)

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