

Creation Care Alliance Guide Discernment Workshop

A culmination of congregational wisdom, science, sustainability, prayer, educational theory, and ecology, this guide provides tangible ways to act on behalf of your neighbors and Creation. It is a Guide designed specifically for churches, spiritual communities, and people of faith. This accompanying sheet is meant to be a guide to discovering the best way for your faith community to utilize the guide.

Of course, this is only one of many ways to begin your creation care journey. This discernment workshop is designed to take an hour and a half for a group of 15-20, and the time allotments indicated reflect that. If your group is larger, expect each section to need some extra time. The italicized text is there to explain the purpose of a section. The normal text is the content of that piece. On our website, you can also download slides that accompany this suggested workshop outline. Blessings on the journey.

Welcome: (7 minutes)

Take a moment to introduce yourself. Have all the folks in the room briefly share their names and what called them to creation care work.

Centering Practice: (15 minutes)

This practice is designed to help people connect with what inspires them to do creation care work and to find common ground with others who are also inspired to do this work. If the group knows each other well or has spent a lot of time working together, you may not feel the need to include this practice. Time breakdown: Intro to activity (1 minute), Eyes closed (3-5 minutes), Discussion with partner (5 minutes), Sharing with group (3-5 minutes).

Invite people to remember or envision an “awe moment” - a memory they have of being inspired by or in awe of nature. People may want to close their eyes or relax their focus. Some might call this a God moment or a “thin place” as they recall this connection in nature and the beauty of God’s work. Slowly and intentionally, encourage people to recall the sounds, the smells, the lighting, the way the ground felt, the temperature of the air and the presence or absence of others.

After several minutes, gently ask folks to return their attention to the present moment and to the facilitator. Then, have participants turn to a person near them and share the place or memory that came to mind. Encourage people to discuss questions such as: “What about that place or memory is special to you? What detail stuck out to you the most? How do you feel like that memory connects to your creation care work?”

If time allows, in the larger group ask folks to share common threads they found in their small groups with the whole group. Also you may ask “What was it like to have your story heard by others? What was it like to hear stories from others? What do you notice about yourself right now?” What do you notice about the group after having shared these stories?”

Listening to Your Community Exercise: (20 minutes)

This tool is designed to get people thinking about what issues they are aware of and which ones they have control over. It’s based on the SWOT analysis tool used by many organizations to identify an organization’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to help tackle an issue in the most effective manner. The goal for this exercise is to provide context in which to start your Creation Care work. You can download copies of the full-page pdf worksheet on our website.

Walk your group through the tool briefly. You’re asking your group to reflect on their Unique Strengths, Resources, Location and Time in regards to Creation Care. **Unique**

Creation Care Alliance Guide Discernment Workshop

Strengths asks folks to think through their skills, passions, and position in the community. **Resources** requires individuals to be aware of what you have at your disposal, whether it be material resources (land, funds, buildings) or non-material ones (volunteers, diverse perspectives, or relationships). **Location** encourages folks to be aware of the community and natural landscape of where your work will be done. **Time: Kairos Moment** ensures that people contextualize your work with the issues happening around you at this moment. Kairos is the ancient Greek word for the proper or opportune time for action.

Have folks spend about 5-10 minutes filling out the worksheet as it pertains to your congregation's ability to engage in Creation Care work. Encourage people to think on multiple scales (individual and congregational levels in particular).

As a large group, or in several smaller groups depending on the size of your gathering, have individuals discuss what they thought were some of the opportunities they saw for Creation Care work, as well as some of the issues that might prevent your group from taking action. Your goal for this discussion is to become more aware of the past and present moment and location before focusing on a specific action item in the next step (i.e. composting, community garden, education programs, etc.).

Pathways to the Creation Care Guide (10 Minutes):

The goal of this exercise is to settle on one area to begin your creation care work and a section of the toolkit to start guiding your journey to Creation Care. It prioritizes community consensus while still acknowledging individual strengths. A PDF of this worksheet can be found on our website.

Pass out the Pathways document that lists 6 of the categories (Sustainability Practices, Spirituality and Worship, Education, Buildings and Land, Community Building, Advocacy and Economics) and 19 subcategories found in the Guide. Give each person a few moments to look over the page.

Invite each participant to circle 3 of the subcategories that are top priorities for them as individuals (this will help them begin to visualize each of the categories and imagine what they might look like). Then ask each person to underline or check 3 subcategories that are or should be top priorities for the faith community.

Once everyone has marked their cards, ask for a show of hands of who marked which subcategories as individual priorities. Some may have no votes, that is normal. Compile the answers on your card or a whiteboard/flip chart.

Then do the same voting for the community, reading through all 19 and compiling the answers. Observe that there will be a diversity of passions and priorities among the group for individuals and the community. And most likely there will be a few of the 19 that have multiple votes. Ask them to keep in mind those subcategories that received the most votes as the group turns towards discerning the next steps. These are not necessarily what the group should focus on but may support the next steps.

Exploring the Creation Care Guide more deeply: (20 minutes)

Creation Care Alliance Guide Discernment Workshop

This is the section that should set up your group with concrete action steps. Be sure to familiarize yourself with the structure of the Guide in advance, it's a complex tool and can be challenging to explain at a glance.

Once your team has settled on a few specific areas of action, pass out copies of the Creation Care Guide or pull it up online. Begin by briefly orienting your group to the structure of the guide. The right hand side lists the focus areas and the left hand side lists the sub-focus areas, while the top row indicates different levels of engagement, beginning with Planting Seeds and ending with Deepening Roots.

To give direction to your group's work, start reading through the Planting Seeds section of the toolkit under one of the focus areas your congregation has settled on. This is a great time to have discussions about what is feasible for your faith community and begin encouraging individuals in your group to spearhead some of the actions suggested. For example, if you've settled on Waste Reduction, you may want to task an individual or group with researching recycling guidelines and schedules in your area and another group of people with figuring out who to ask for funding for recycling bins.

The online version is much more extensive and can provide insight for congregations that are struggling to settle on concrete actions. It also contains examples and contact information for faith communities that have already taken some of these steps should your group wish to ask for advice.

The Guide is designed to have multiple entry points, so if your congregation feels that it has already achieved some of the recommendations in the Planting Seeds section, feel free to begin by looking through the suggestions under Nurturing Growth or Deepening Roots.

Now that you have started assigning tasks to individuals or teams, be sure you commit to manageable amounts of work as you get started. Creation Care is an ongoing process and we hope no-one gets overwhelmed or risks burn out by taking on too many tasks at once. Stay mindful of any limitations identified in the earlier Listening To Your Community exercise while also ensuring each team member feels excited to get started on any assigned tasks.

Closing: (5-10 minutes)

We suggest that groups finalize their workshop by scheduling a follow up meeting and ensuring that all interested individuals have specific action items to work on prior to that meeting. Once logistics have been settled, we encourage you to offer a closing prayer or reading. Several suggestions have been included in the slide deck, but we welcome you to include one that speaks to you and your group.

Questions or Concerns? If you run into issues as you implement this workshop or the Creation Care Guide, don't hesitate to contact us. We're happy to support you on your Creation Care journey.