



Religious Groups

This section is for individuals and religious organizations who are involved with educating members of their constituencies who are interested in integrating spirituality or faith with environmental issues.

Outcomes

Religious communities will:

1. Understand fundamental ecological principles and integrate ecological awareness into spiritual practice, position documents, and celebrations so as to evolve from a predominantly **anthropocentric** world-view towards a more **ecocentric** world-view

Sample Indicators:

- Religious groups re-emphasize the sacredness of the whole of life in their communal celebrations.
- They examine the way they understand the non-human world to make their language more inclusive.
- They become ecologically literate and members have personal experiences connecting ecology with authentic spirituality.
- They organize community activities that celebrate nature, and educate about the spiritual value they place on all of creation.
- Their preaching and communal celebrations shift from an exclusive focus on human well-being towards earth justice, which is inclusive of human and non-human realities.
- Religious groups are aware of their environmental impacts and are prepared to make changes and see this as part of their spiritual task.

2. Transform the theological education of religious leaders to reflect ecological concepts

Sample Indicators:

- Sacred texts and **traditions** of interpretation are reviewed in the light of a deep ecological awareness in order to highlight a positive relationship with and care for the natural world.



- An ecological worldview is incorporated into the teachings of religion so as to reflect a commitment to the whole earth.
 - Ecological thinking and values that reflect the new scientific cosmology and the interconnectedness of the web of life are required teaching in training institutions.
3. Integrate **environmental education** programs into their regular activities

Sample Indicators:

- Religious groups create and develop educational resources that link spiritual practice with ecological integrity for use within their communities.
 - They recognize and reward individual and group environmental activities.
 - They make use of diverse approaches to environmental awareness in their stories and celebrations (e.g., they integrate religious references to nature, and use creative forms of expression [e.g., music, dance, film, art] in ways that heighten the awareness of human–nature connections).
1. Allow access to their facilities for environmental learning and activity

Sample Indicators:

- Religious groups initiate public forums on ecological issues.
 - They work with other organizations and groups to sponsor and support ecological education programs.
 - They encourage and facilitate dialogue and teaching, and they bring together diverse groups for community action.
4. Participate in community and political action regarding environmental issues, policies, and legislation

Sample Indicators:

- Religious groups work collaboratively with government, business, and environmental organizations to educate their constituencies and to support change.
- They offer political advocacy education in their faith communities.
- Religious groups organize within their communities for grassroots activism.

Needs

Religious group leaders and members need:

- An understanding that the universe is one sacred community, rather than a view of the world divided into the categories of sacred and secular
- A deeper understanding of the connection between religion or spirituality, and environmental issues



- A new perception about human identity in relation to the rest of the world
- An understanding that ecology isn't just one more issue, but is the ground upon which all human temporal issues are dependant
- A religious sense of awe and wonder at creation
- The recovery of lost values of religious commitment to justice, love, and the equity of life, in order to counter the prevailing consumerist mindset
- Models and mentors to lead them into a new awareness
- A view of themselves as viable partners with other interested groups
- Openness to different worldviews
- A shift towards sustainable choices in personal and collective behaviours and day-to-day activities
- Access to written and audio-visual resources to assist in their teachings
- The development of a strategy to fully engage faith leaders in environmental issues, discussions of the ecological crisis, and involvement in **environmental education**
- Affordable and accessible places of retreat and rejuvenation for those who are doing this work—care for the caregivers
- Learning skills for drafting grant proposals for fundraising and sponsorship
- A way to solicit all religious perspectives for building the connections between faith and the environment

Strategies

Programs, Projects, and Policies

1. Facilitate planning and partnerships that result in effective **environmental education** programs for faith communities.
2. Collaborate with other organizations in offering programs that introduce and integrate the spiritual dimension of E&SE.
3. Make regular official statements that provide information about and caution against environmental degradation, and support positive environmental policies and actions.
4. Emphasize in talks, readings, sermons, and other speaking or administrative situations, the value of environmental responsibility and accountability.
5. Offer small group forums for ongoing discussion and action.
6. Organize events for outdoor education in the natural environment.
7. Actively participate in community actions for environmental **sustainability**.
8. Organize community ecological projects such as tree planting and recycling programs.
9. Organize and participate in neighbourhood environmental action programs and celebrations (e.g., community gardening, composting, Earth Day, and Earth Week).
10. Demonstrate practical environmental responsibility in decision-making, especially around building, new construction, grounds landscaping and maintenance and purchasing.



11. Develop E&SE classes or components, and integrate them into existing religious programs.
12. Get involved with and promote political support for environmental protection.
13. Develop courses on ecology and spirituality for religious training institutions.
14. Run continuing education programs that integrate ecology with spirituality.
15. Include E&SE classes in religious camps and religious retreat centres.

Resources

1. Work with environmental organizations to develop **environmental education** resource materials that can help religious communities understand and live out the interconnectedness of the web of life.
2. Develop program materials around special days, and other ecologically relevant religious resources related to the ordinary ritual life of the community.
3. Research and compile a contact list of representatives from different religious communities who are willing to discuss and collaborate on **environmental education**, strategies, and projects.
4. Form an interfaith environmental awareness and learning group.

Support

1. Advocate for religious leaders to raise consciousness about environmental issues.
2. Emphasize a sense of the sacredness of the whole earth and universe in all celebrations and gatherings.
3. Provide incentives that encourage faith communities to develop plans for **environmental education** and action.
4. Officially recognize and celebrate individual and group commitments to ecological **sustainability**.
5. Offer facilities as free meeting places to environmental educators, strategists, and activists.
6. Support—financially and through participation—initiatives that seek to integrate an ecological worldview into theological understandings.
7. Create and fund regional spiritual centres that can address the theological and practical connections between religious world-views and the ecological crisis.

Please see Appendix 1 for a list of useful websites.

