



Ecumenical Creation Care

by Rebecca Ferguson

Although we at First Congregational, River Falls, had already made some dedicated environmental improvements to our own building and behaviors, we have found that when we began connecting with our neighbor congregations, we together began making some real impacts on our local world.

It started simply in late 2015 when we reached out to St. Bridget Catholic Community Church to share a couple of meals and discussions with just a few folks about Pope Francis' just published encyclical, *On Care for Our Common Home: Laudato Si*. We made sure to have one meal at our church, one at theirs, and, while we asked everyone to read the text, we organized our discussion around a handout with a few key quotations, coupled with open-ended questions, so that everyone could participate. The conversation was more engaged than we few planners could have imagined, and the energy to continue connecting and acting on these issues moved us all forward together.

The more immediate outcome of those two meals was our shared creation of a [Lenten Devotional 2016](#). Members from both churches contributed to a document we wanted to be both deeply faithful and widely practical. While every daily entry began with Scripture and ended with prayer, the middle sections reflected a weekly pattern:

- Mondays listed immediate actions we can take in our personal lives;
- Tuesdays were meditations on the connections between poverty and pollution and on how environmental changes are already harming the poor;
- Wednesdays used longer quotations from the encyclical itself,
- Thursdays included poems and songs encouraging our love for the created world;
- Fridays emphasized healthier living, with lots of meatless recipes;
- Saturdays were dedicated to the wisdom of other thinkers and theologians and our own clergy; and
- Sundays were wholly devoted to meditations on longer Lenten scriptures.

We two congregations are glad to share our document (minus its artwork!) with you: feel free to use the pieces of it! [Click here to access the devotional](#).

From these two events, the group now calling itself Hope for Creation has continued to meet, plan and work together, and to reach out to the entire River Falls Community. We have had several guest speakers, including an insurance expert about the costs already affecting that field, a long-time activist-theologian on how to continue in hope, and most recently, a former Twin Cities' meteorologist and avowed conservative, Paul Douglas, on how the data has persuaded him of the reality of climate change and the need for us to take action now (see his book, coauthored with Rev. Mitch Hescox, titled *Caring for Creation: An Evangelical's Guide to Climate Change and a healthy Environment.*) This event drew 300 citizens, an enormous outpouring of interest for a town of only 15,000! Our latest gathering was designed primarily for key members of the now eight congregations (from most progressive to quite conservative theologically), so that we could learn how to begin moving towards becoming carbon-neutral congregations. Our next meeting will be focused on how we can encourage individual members of our churches to take small and large actions to show our faithful commitment to God's creation.

We encourage you to connect ecumenically: you will strengthen your own church's commitments, you will encourage your neighbor congregations, you will provide a wide and powerful witness to your entire community—and you (and we!) will hear and see the way God leads us to be blessings to our earth.