

Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago LSTC as a Green Seminary

LSTC has a legacy of environmental commitment going back to Joseph Sittler and continuing through Phil Hefner's work in the Zygon Center for Religion and Science to the present faculty, staff, and students—working together to establish the seminary as place to prepare leaders for church and community in the care for creation.

LSTC has already made great efforts to give leadership in environmental ministry. Efforts to green the seminary began during the 1988-89 academic year with the establishment of a working group that has fostered LSTC as a “green zone.” This report recounts the past and present activities at LSTC. The commitments and activities expressed at LSTC are strong enough to merit identification of environmental ministry as a distinguishing feature of our identity as a seminary.

- **National Recognition.** In 1993, Theological Education to Meet the Environmental Challenge (TEMEC), a subsidiary of the Humane Society, recognized LSTC as one of 8 “Leading Seminaries” in the country in preparing students to care for creation. At that time, the Board of Directors accepted the designation as “Lead Institution” and made a commitment to pursue with deliberateness its ecological commitments. This recognition has led to significant funding for LSTC to carry out its commitments and to a long-term relationship of guidance and support with Dieter Hessel, the director of TEMEC. Because this recognition was granted in Chicago to a cluster of seminaries, LSTC has engaged in significant cooperative work with the other members of the cluster, McCormick Theological Seminary and Meadville/Lombard Theological Seminary.
- **Collegial Recognition.** It is a perception of seminary faculty in the Chicago region and elsewhere in the country that LSTC has taken leadership in environmental ministry. Recently (2007), at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in San Diego, Rosemary Ruether, a well-known writer and speaker on Christianity and Ecology, stated that LSTC was doing more to address environmental issues than any other seminary of which she was aware. An evening reception on the same day gave further public acknowledgment of the leadership of LSTC in this endeavor.

LSTC as Green Zone.

For twenty years, LSTC has functioned as a *Green Zone*—“a place dedicated to practicing care for Earth in its geographical space and its communal life.”

- **Green Zone Committee.** This subcommittee of the Community Life Committee meets regularly to plan and carry out projects for the whole seminary. The committee has two student workers, paid by the seminary, who support the work of the committee. In addition, the group receives a grant from the LSTC CORE student group to support its activities. David Rhoads, Professor of New Testament, has served as advisor to this group.
- **Goals.** The committee has had as its goal to incorporate care for creation into every aspect of seminary life, working with a model of five areas:
 - (1) To promote transformation through worship
 - (2) To promote transformation through education
 - (3) To maintain buildings and grounds as an earth-keeping practice and model
 - (4) To foster earth-keeping disciplines among LSTC members in their personal lives.
 - (5) To exercise responsible public ministry in church and society

- **Grants.** Through the last two decades, LSTC has received over \$160,000.00 in grant money from various sources to support these activities. LSTC itself has also contributed significant amounts in funds and in-kind support for these same activities. Over the years, our benefactors have included the ELCA Office of Hunger and Environmental Education, The National Council of Churches, The Presbyterian Church USA, Theological Education to Meet the Environmental Challenge, and the Tithing Foundation.
- **Environmental ministry preparation.** Through the activities generated by the faculty, students, and staff of the LSTC community, the seminary has graduated many students who know that care for creation is an integral part of their Christian commitments, who know that the church is called to be responsible partners in earth-keeping, and who have training and resources to give leadership in parish settings and in society.

What follows is a list of the ways in which LSTC has given environmental leadership and training in the five areas of its model.

(1) Worship at LSTC: Care for creation has become an integral part of our worship experiences.

- **Service of “Covenant with Creation.”** This is held in the fall of each year, offering an opportunity for members of the seminary community to devote themselves to earth-friendly practices in their lifestyle.
- **Blessing of the animals.** In October, on or near St. Francis Day, LSTC offers a “Blessing of the Animals” service for members of the community and their pets.
- **Earth Week.** Annual celebration of worship throughout Earth Week led by a team of students, faculty, and staff. Often involves special liturgies and guest preachers.
- **Weekly worship.** Incorporation of care for creation in weekly worship: litanies of creation, confessions of our sins against creation, prayers for earth, hymns celebrating creation, care for creation sermons. A policy has been developed to foster the use of these materials.
- **Tree-Planting rituals.** Green Zone has developed and supported worship services in which a tree was planted and/or dedicated to a deceased member of the LSTC community.
- **Chapel design.** The chapel was designed in part with a relationship with nature in mind. The large floor-to-ceiling windows connect those worshipping inside with the plants and animals “worshipping” outside. The baptismal font also projects a relationship between the interior chapel and nature outside.
- **Greening the Chapel.** In a cooperative effort between Green Zone and the Chapel Committee, a generous gift from the Class of 2006 underwrote the cost of greening the chapel and its entrance with a variety of plants and small trees.
- **Baptismal Font.** The running/living water of the baptismal font is powered by solar energy.

(2) Education at LSTC: Care for creation is an integral part of the educational program.

- **Environmental Ministry Emphasis.** LSTC is the only seminary in the country to have an Environmental Ministry Emphasis. There are regularly seven to ten students pursuing this program. Requirements for the Emphasis are outlined in the LSTC Catalogue.
- **Required Courses:** Over the years, many LSTC faculty have incorporated environmental concerns into their classes: “Unity and Diversity;” “Systematic Theology;” “Public Ministry;” “New Testament;” “Christian Ethics;” “Leadership in the Church,” among others.
- **Special Elective Courses:**
 - (a) “Nature in the Bible” (taught regularly by Barbara Rossing and Ted Hiebert of MTS).

(b) “Greening Your Congregation” Taught three times, team-taught once by Dave Rhoads and Tom Gilbert, once by Dave Rhoads and Heidi Hadsell of MTS, and once with Patricia Novick, this course gives hands-on training for parish transformation.

(c) “The Future of Creation,” an innovative course incorporating science, ethics, and theology, designed to teach environmental leadership. First taught in 2001 by David Rhoads and Andrea Orcutt and led by Phil Hefner, Ron Engel (Professor of Ethics at Meadville Lombard), and Paul Heltne (former director of the Chicago Academy of Sciences), this course will be repeated in spring 2008, led by Davis Rhoads and Gayle Woloschak (Director of the Zygon Center). LSTC and other local faculty will participate.

(d) LSTC promotes the many ecologically-related courses taught throughout the ACTS schools—theology, ethics, ministry leadership, spirituality, biblical studies, among others.

- **Field Education.** LSTC has placed students in agencies for fieldwork courses or for employment training. Connie Kleingartner has served as a hands-on supervisor for much of this fieldwork. LSTC has worked closely with Barbara Sheehan to place students in environmental agencies as part of the ACTS CPE Program. Some students do projects on care for creation as part of their MIC training and their internship.
- **Public lectures.** In 2005, the Green Zone instituted a series of two public lectures each year. That year, the lectures included Dr. Ray Pierrehumbert of the University of Chicago GeoPhysical Department Lecture on “Global Warming and What We Can Do About It” and Dr. Dwight Hopkins of the U of C Divinity School speaking on “Ecological Justice/ Environmental Racism.” In the fall of 2007, Barbara Rossing gave her inaugural lecture as full professor on “The Ecological Crisis and II Peter.” Other public presentations have included the showing of films, such as *The Inconvenient Truth*.
- **Senior Night.** In the spring of each year, the Green Zone group has a special meeting in which seniors are given a special invitation for a meal and a program. At that time, they receive extensive “care for creation” resources for use in the parish and a demonstration of websites that will assist them in giving environmental leadership.
- **Fall Eco-Justice Workshops for Seminarians:** For about six or seven years in the mid and late 1990’s, LSTC sponsored a workshop for seminarians to address various aspects of eco-justice ministry. Speakers included Rosemary Ruether, John Cobb, Phil Hefner, Steve Bevans, Richard Perry, among others. Customarily, about fifty seminarians attended from the ACTS schools, mostly LSTC students.
- **Sponsoring Students:** Over the years, Green Zone has sponsored about 30 students to attend Ecological Conferences in Chicago and around the mid-west for practicum credit.
- **Faculty Development:** LSTC has a large number of faculty through the years who have published books and papers, presented sermons, or given lectures on the subject of the environment: Joseph Sittler, Phil Hefner, Vitor Westhelle, Jay Rochelle, Reinhard Hutter, Barbara Rossing, Richard Perry, Audrey West, Tom Gilbert, Antje Jackelen, Kurt Hendel, Monica Coleman, Dave Rhoads. Many of these are collected in *Creation and the Future of Humanity: LSTC Writings on the Environment*.
- **Environmentalists-in-Residence.** LSTC has sponsored two environmentalists in residence, Patricia Novick and Andrea Orcutt, who met with students, did research, and participated in faculty meetings during their time with us.

(3) Building and Grounds as a Green Zone. There is a commitment to make earth-friendly decisions about the maintenance and practices of the seminary properties.

- **Leadership.** LSTC has been a leader among seminaries in incorporating environmental concerns into decisions about building and grounds. Joe Rodrick and Bob Berridge have been the leaders in this field.
- **Lighting Retrofit.** In the early 90s, LSTC received a large grant from Commonwealth Edison and the ELCA to retrofit the lights in the main building.
- **Recycling in the main building.** LSTC has a comprehensive recycling program in the main building, including receptacles throughout the building for different grades of paper, aluminum cans, plastic, and glass.
- **Recycling in LSTC housing.** LSTC has a comprehensive recycling program in the main building and in the living units covering newspaper, cardboard, plastic containers, three colors of glass, along with tin and aluminum cans. Instructions for the recycling are placed inside the back door of each apartment, available in a number of different languages.
- **Recycling Center.** In the fall of 2007, the Green Zone established a small recycling center outside the mailroom to provide for recycling of household batteries, cell phones, printer cartridges, and plastic bags.
- **Lawn Care.** LSTC no longer uses herbicides on the lawns.
- **Recycled furniture.** We purchase furniture made from recycled material for the living units.
- **CFL replacements.** In all public spaces, including the landings of the apartment buildings, the seminary has replaced energy-consuming incandescent lights with energy-conserving Compact Fluorescent Lights. Now a project is underway to replace all the lights within the living units.
- **Major Grant.** In 2007, LSTC received a grant of \$135,000.00 for the remodeling of the main building, the HVAC system, and the library. The grant is designed to enable LSTC work to attain the gold level of the LEED certification set by the Green Building Council.

(4) Lifestyle of LSTC community. Students, faculty, and staff are encouraged to adopt earth-friendly practices in their living space and personal life.

- **Orientation.** During orientation LSTC introduces students to aspects of LSTC practices of earth-keeping and invites them to participate in this endeavor.
- **“Covenant with Creation”** Each fall, the members of LSTC are invited to make a covenant with creation in which they choose from a list of earth-friendly practices and pledge to keep these through the year as part of their Christian discipline. A worship service gives people an opportunity to offer these covenants to God as part of their commitment.
- **Brochure.** In the spring of 2007, Ben Sheets developed a brochure for LSTC students: *Greening Your LSTC Apartment*. The brochure offers suggestions room by room for earth-friendly products and practices with information about local resources.
- **Green Zone Meetings.** The Committee for LSTC as a Green Zone holds regular meetings each semester. These meetings include shared meals and an educational component designed to support and encourage participants in their commitment to the environment and to plan together to strengthen LSTC as a green seminary.
- **Devotional Booklet.** In spring 2006, students Sara Olson and Brooke Petersen prepared devotional materials: *Stewardship of Creation: A Thirty Day Discipline*, designed to foster care for creation as a spiritual discipline. These have been reproduced and distributed widely.
- **Simple Living Groups.** Several times, students have offered an informal series of meetings following a course on living a green lifestyle. In spring, 2008, Jon Halvorson will offer such

an experience in *Simple Living, Compassionate Living*. Together, the Green Zone group and the CORE student group have sought to make concern for the environment an integral part of community life—in workshops and conferences and in community forums.

- **Stewardship Workshops.** Each year, LSTC, in cooperation with the Tithing Foundation, offers a stewardship workshop for seniors that includes a significant component on the stewardship of creation. In spring 2008, LSTC will offer a Green Congregation Training Workshop for students from LSTC and other ACTS schools.

Public Ministry. LSTC has taken seriously its responsibility to the wider church and to society through publications, workshops and conferences, website offerings, and liaisons with environmental agencies in Chicago.

- **Books.** LSTC has produced five books.
 - (a) *Care of the Earth: A Manual for Church Leaders*, edited by Tina Krause, former director of the EPRC in the JKM Library. This contains articles from people around the country giving suggestions for parish leaders on how to incorporate care for creation into parish life.
 - (b) *Creation and the Future of Humanity: LSTC Writings on the Environment*. This book (spiral-bound) is a collection of sermons, papers, lectures, and published articles by LSTC faculty and others who have lectured or preached at LSTC on the environment.
 - (c) *The Green Congregation Training Manual*. This book (spiral-bound) has what a congregation needs to begin greening their parish and developing and carrying out an action plan. More than 500 copies have been distributed to parishes.
 - (d) *Environmental Guide for Churches, Their Buildings and Grounds*. This book contains practical advice on energy, water, green cleaning products, land use and maintenance, practices at coffee hour and church meals, and much more. More than 300 have been distributed.
 - (e) *Earth and Word: Classic Sermons on Saving the Planet*, edited by David Rhoads (New York: Continuum Press, 2007). The Web of Creation was responsible for the preparation of this book for production by a major religious press. All royalties go to the Web of Creation.
- **Conferences.** During the 1990s, LSTC has sponsored four conferences on eco-justice and care for creation. The effort that went into the planning and carrying out of these conferences by LSTC faculty, staff, and students was considerable.
 - (a) The Professional Leadership Conference at LSTC, “Care of the Earth”
 - (b) A National Council of Churches’ conference for parishes and seminarians in the Chicagoland area, “Making Your Church a Creation-Awareness Center”
 - (c) The Mission Conference put on at LSTC by the Center for Global Ministries.
 - (d) “Sustainable Maintenance Practices for Building Managers” was a two day conference for seminaries co-sponsored by LSTC and the ELCA Office of Environmental Justice.
- **Web of Creation Website.** www.webofcreation.org Since 1995, LSTC has hosted the “Web of Creation,” a leading website on the church and the environment in the United States. With over 1,000 pages of material to date, its purpose is to provide eco-justice resources for faith-based communities so that parishes may find resources to incorporate care for creation into every aspect of parish life. It is also the home page for the Lutheran Environmental Network

of the Synods, the Earth Bible, and other organizations. The site employs two directors, David Rhoads and Andrea Orcutt, and three students who service and maintain the site. LSTC provides office space, payroll services, and technical support for the site. We receive several hundred visitors to the site each day.

- ***The Green Congregation Program.*** The Web of Creation established the Green Congregation Program to foster hands-on training for congregations to integrate care for creation into the full life and mission of the parish. The Racine (WI) program has been existence since 2004. In 2006, the program sponsored a training event in the ELCA Greater Milwaukee Synod for 90 people from 37 congregations. This led to the commitment of the synod to become the first Green Synod. In 2007, a similar workshop was held in the ELCA Metro-Chicago Synod for 150 people from 55 congregations. Plans are in the works for training workshops in the Northern Illinois Synod and the Quad Cities area of Iowa.
- ***The Green Seminary Initiative.*** David Rhoads, along with Laurel Kearns of Drew Theological School and Beth Norcross of Wesley Seminary, began the Green Seminary Initiative, which was inaugurated at the national convention of the American Academy of Religion in San Diego in the fall of 2007. A major event featuring outstanding leaders in this field drew over 300 people. This was followed by a reception with over 100 people in attendance. A brochure outlining the goals for greening seminaries of all denominations and faiths was distributed, and people signed on to be representatives for their seminary. The Web of Creation serves as the host for the web page and is working to develop the network across seminaries and to gather resources for this program.
- ***Lutheran Environmental Network of the Synods.*** The Web of Creation hosts the website and offers active support of this movement, designed to establish a network of synodical leaders, present a model for greening synods and congregations, and offer resources for this work.
- ***Interfaith Resources on the Environment.*** In fall 2007, the Web of Creation received a grant to provide links and resources online for people from many faiths, particularly Islam. We are in process of hiring students to carry out these plans.

Organizations working with LSTC in issues of the environment. LSTC works closely with organizations on issues of the environment. In some cases, LSTC personnel were instrumental in founding these organizations.

- ***Chicago Theological Initiative for Eco-Justice Ministry.*** Faculty from LSTC were part of the driving force to establish the CTI, a group of about thirty-five faculty from the ACTS schools along with staff of some Chicago environmental agencies, who gathered three or four times a year in the 1990's to become informed about some dimension of the church's concern for the environment. They also sponsored an interest group of faculty who read and discussed key books on the environment. LSTC provided two of the first four faculty facilitators of this groups (Dave Rhoads and Barbara Rossing, the others being Ted Hiebert of MTS, Steve Bevans of CTU, Carol Hepokoski of Meadville/Lombard, and Dawn Nothwehr of CTU), and granted them a one course equivalency for the position. LSTC members of this group included Connie Kleingartner, Richard Perry, Barbara Rossing, Philip Hefner, Harold Vogelaar, Stacy Kitahata, Tom Gilbert, among others. This organization flourished for about 8 years and has since become defunct.
- ***ACTS for Eco-Justice.*** A cross-seminary eco-justice student group. The LSTC Green Zone group was the driving force behind the formation of this group comprised of student representatives, mainly from LSTC, Meadville-Lombard, MTS, and the Divinity School of

the University of Chicago. The group meets monthly during the year to learn about eco-justice ministry, to give mutual support, and to plan cooperative activities, such as the fall eco-justice workshop for seminarians. This group no longer meets, but its mission has been assumed by the *Religion and Environment Initiative* at the University of Chicago.

- ***Zygon Center for Science and Religion.*** Part of the mission of this center is to deal with issues of science and religion in relation to environmental matters. The center presently hosts the Epic of Creation course and is one of the organizing sponsors for the LSTC course on the environment, “The Future of Creation.” They have collaborated with LSTC in sponsoring public lectures.
- ***The Center for Global Ministries.*** This center has as part of its purpose a commitment to “the integrity of creation.” This center was the primary sponsor of the mission conference on the Environment and has underwritten the cost for several fall eco-justice workshops for seminarians.
- ***Theological Education to Meet the Environmental Challenge.*** LSTC has worked closely with TEMEC and its director Dieter Hessel, as a means to get guidance and funding for major projects. This national organization has designated LSTC as one of the lead institutions in the efforts to green the seminaries. This organization has gone out of operation due to lack of funds.

Serving many dimensions of LSTC’s goals.

- ***Ecumenical and Interfaith Commitments.*** Environmental commitments have been among the major ways in which LSTC has carried out its ecumenical commitments: in the Chicago Theological Institute for Eco-Justice Ministry, through ACTS for Eco-Justice, and by team-teaching around environmental issues. In the 2000-2001 year, the student Green Zone group decided to merge formally with the McCormick Green Zone group to form one organization. The Web of Creation is an ecumenical/interfaith site.
- ***Urban Commitments.*** Environmental commitments have led to significant cooperation with agencies in the Chicago urban area. Speakers at our conferences and courses have been from the Center for Neighborhood technology, the Nature Conservancy, People for Community Recovery, the American Planning Association, American Academy of Sciences, among others. LSTC faculty members have participated actively in the inter-faith initiative of the Chicago-based “Faith in Place.”
- ***Relationship with the ELCA.*** The Office of Hunger Education and Environmental Justice, under the early leadership of Job Ebenezer, was the main source of moral and financial support for care for creation activities and projects at LSTC. We had Job Ebenezer as speaker and resource person on many occasions. We have since worked closely with other Directors of the ELCA Office of Environmental Education and Advocacy—Danielle Welliever, Matthew Anderson-Stembridge, and Mary Minette.
- ***Lutheran Earth-keeping Network of the Synods.*** The Web of Creation serves as the host for the LENS web site. Our workers have attended conferences and workshops of LENS and actively developed the network across synods as the means to foster care for creation across the ELCA.
- ***Admissions and Recruitment.*** Through brochures and publicity, we have attracted students to LSTC because of our environmental programs and activities. Each year, there are a handful of prospective students who inquire specifically about the environmental commitments and activities at LSTC and for whom this program is a decisive reason for their choice of LSTC.

LSTC will continue to express our commitment to ecology and justice in many ways. And as new students, staff, and new faculty join the LSTC community, these commitments will take on new and exciting directions.

Respectfully Submitted
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