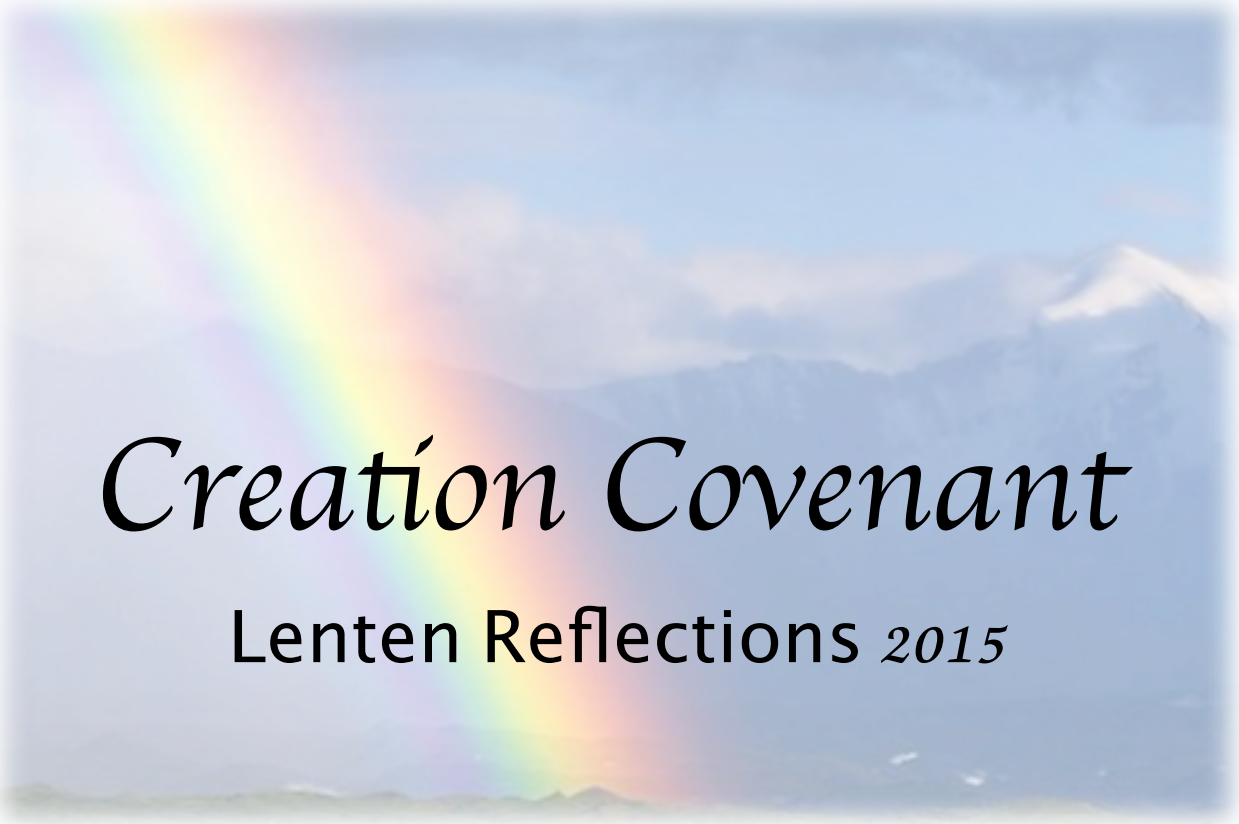


Creation Covenant

Lenten Reflections *2015*

All praise be yours, my Lord, through all that you have made.

Saint Francis of Assisi

The whole universe together participates in divine goodness more perfectly, and represents it better, than any single creature whatever.

Saint Thomas Aquinas

Creation Covenant: Lenten Reflections 2015

The interconnection of the entire Universe due to God's presence and our common beginnings c. 13.8 billion years ago make it fitting to add reflections on ecosystems and their species to our focus on Jesus' story during Lent. God is revealed both in Scripture and in the entire Cosmos. As people of faith we want to respond not only to Jesus' passion, but to the sufferings of Earth. Pope Francis: *God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel . . . the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement. Let us not leave in our wake a swath of destruction and death which will affect our own lives and those of future generations.*

Suggestions for Convener:

Be sure all participants know when and where to meet, and that each has made a five-week commitment. Make copies on sustainable paper using both sides. Have name cards for each participant. When anyone is absent, put names in the center to include them in the group's prayerful energy. Find out if participants want refreshments and if so, how food will be provided.

Be creative with this material! Adapt it in any way that facilitates your group's prayerful reflection, faith sharing, community building, and commitment to action. Before the Scripture reading, allow time for participants to pause quietly or with music* to recall the divine presence within themselves and others, and to focus their attention.

Take turns reading. Answer questions as they come or save till the end. Stop in time to complete the closing and to socialize. **Plan how to show the suggested videos.** Provide small paper and pens or pencils for Week Five.

*Music

Consider using the same piece each week so that participants will remember this experience whenever they hear it. Possibilities include

"How Great Thou Art,"

"What a Wonderful World," c. 3 min.: www.youtube.com/watch?v=KTwOYo0GKeg or http://www.care2.com/send/pickup/411/118/900/214/406/178

Suggested Centerpiece:

Place a small globe or picture of Earth in the center each week. Add a beeswax candle or vigil, and light it during the Scripture readings. If you wish, add small artifacts depicting people, fish, birds, insects, mammals, plants or other species.

Scripture quotations are from Eugene H. Peterson's *The Message: the Bible in Contemporary Language*.

Week One: God's Covenant with Every Living Being

I. Introduction

Welcome, intros as needed, share why each chose this group. Look through booklet.

Allow time for silence or music to prepare for Week One. Then read excerpts from Sunday's liturgy:

Genesis 9: 8 - 19: ***Then God spoke to Noah and his sons: "I'm setting up my covenant with you including your children who will come after you, along with everything alive around you – birds, farm animals, wild animals — that came out of the ship with you. I'm setting up my covenant with you that never again will everything living be destroyed by floodwaters . . . This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and everything living around you and everyone living after you. I'm putting my rainbow in the clouds, a sign of the covenant between me and the Earth . . . This is the sign of the covenant."***



Reflect on the reading. Remember that some truth is not literal; no one was taking notes during this week's stories. What does it mean to you that God keeps covenant with us and all that has evolved?

II. Information

About terms: **Covenant** in Scripture usually means an agreement bringing about a relationship of commitment between God and the Jewish, and then Christian, communities. Yet Scripture says that in Noah's time, God made it with everything that existed!

Rainbows — as we know today but early believers couldn't have guessed — result when the Sun's light is refracted by rain or other water droplets: truly a bow caused by rain!

We know things that Noah and Scripture writers couldn't have guessed: that **Creation** began c. 13.8 billion years ago with the first Flaring Forth; that about 4.5 billion years ago, stardust coalesced and eventually became our planet and every earthly being; that early fish evolved into amphibians and birds and mammals in ecosystems that evolved interdependently over millions of years. These species are our ancestors, all the way back to stardust; in the womb we reprise these major stages. Creation includes the entire interconnected Cosmos. Thomas Berry reminded us that *Nothing is itself without everything else.*

"Nature" is sometimes thought of as outside humans, something "out there" that we can enjoy and protect (or dominate and misuse). But "human nature" reminds us that we, too, are an integral part of nature, and completely dependent on it. Nothing can be excised from the rest of creation. God lives and acts in all of it. We are kin, as St. Francis and other saints intuited.

"**Animals"** includes insects, fish, birds, and mammals. "**Mammals"** includes humans. Although Lent 2015 will focus on animals, keep in mind the flowers, trees, water, soil and everything else that forms their interconnected ecosystems.

For centuries humans have thought in either/or patterns, and this often led to judging one part of the pair as superior to the other. A hierarchical pyramid developed that placed God at the pinnacle, man (yes, males) below "him," then women, then animals, etc. Modern scholarship is moving to a both/and pattern. We can image life in a circle embedded in, and dependent upon, its ecosystem. Our loving Creator enlivens it all. Each creature has its own abilities and responsibilities. Humans retain everything that makes us special, yet every single other creature has its own dignity and rights within this communion of subjects.

The 2011 United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) estimated the total species (plants and animals) at about 8,700,000. 25% dwell in the oceans. Animals that lack backbones (e.g., insects, mollusks, sponges) compose an estimated 97% of animal species. The remaining 3% include amphibians, reptiles, birds, fish, and mammals. A handful of forest soil can contain up to 10 billion bacteria, about a million plump yeasts and fungi, and tens of thousands of other creatures! Awesome!

The dove in this Sunday's Gospel belonged to one of c. 9000 - 10,000 bird species. The wild animals Jesus lived with were among the nearly 5,000 species of mammals. Fish, the earliest symbol used for Christ, include c. 28,000 - 32,000 different species. Butterflies, a common resurrection symbol, total c. 15,000 - 28,000 species.

What Sacred Scripture stories (besides the ones above) do you remember that feature or mention animals? Imagine Jesus with animals. If you love or have loved a pet of any kind, briefly tell the group about your pet.

III. What is God saying to us?

What can we learn about God's activity in our world from the animals we love as pets?

IV. This Week (and this Lent):

Find a picture/ symbol/ artifact of an animal Jesus might have loved. Place it somewhere that will remind you of the wonder, sacredness, and interconnection of all creation.

V. Closing

Watch the 3 min. clip of Christian the lion: www.oprah.com/oprahshow/Christian-the-Lion-Reunites- All: **We thank you, Loving Creator, for the wonders of creation, the development of ecosystems over millions of years, and for species that grow in loving relationships.**

Socialize.

Week Two: Being Kicked Around

I. Introduction

Share anything you learned, felt, or experienced about/ with animals/their ecosystems this past week.

Allow time for silence or music to prepare for Week Two. Then read excerpts from Sunday's liturgy:

Psalm 22: 23 - 24: ***God has never let you down, never looked the other way when you were being kicked around. God has never wandered off; God has been right there, listening.***

Mark 8: 34 - 37: ***Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how . . . What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you?***

How might we connect these readings with thinking about biodiversity and extinctions?

II. Information

Extinction indicates total elimination from creation. It is irreversible (unless scientists make new discoveries and have access to DNA). Millions of species have gone extinct in the course of evolution (often after evolving into a new species). This is usually gradual, a few going extinct each year. However, five *major* extinctions have occurred with a single event or brief time span, the last being 66 million years ago when a meteor hit Earth and dinosaurs went extinct. Today a Sixth Great Extinction has begun, and it is human-caused.



Camilo Mora, lead author of the 2011 United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) study, says: *The question of how many species exist . . . is particularly important now because a host of human activities and influences are accelerating the rate of extinctions. Many species may vanish before we even know of their existence, of their unique niche and function in ecosystems, and of their potential contribution to improved human wellbeing.* Anyone who understands our interconnection with all being is concerned, even pained, by these losses (cf. Pope's quote on p.2).

Species that have taken billions of years to develop, and that play a unique role in ecosystems, are disappearing and will never return. For those who believe that all life is sacred, it is a desecration to eliminate species because of carelessness, greed, or any human selfishness. In addition, extinctions deprive present and future humans of the beauty, diversity, and wonder of creation. We, too, developed in ecosystems and are deprived when they are damaged. Rights must be balanced, but destroying species "to get everything you want" is not acceptable.

Endangered species. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) classifies 19,625 species as threatened in their recently-updated Red List of endangered species. The Red List monitors only a fraction of the world's species.

You might be surprised to know that the first purpose of the **Endangered Species Act** (in the U.S.) is *not* to save species! That goal follows from the first: "The purposes of this Act are *to provide a means whereby the ecosystems upon which endangered species and threatened species depend may be conserved*, [italics mine], to provide a program for the conservation of such endangered species and threatened species, and to take such steps as may be appropriate to achieve the purposes of the treaties and conventions set forth in subsection (a) of this section."

The "eco" in ecosystems, ecology, ecojustice, ecospirituality, and Ecozoic era (when humans live in harmony with the natural world) comes from the Greek *oikos*, meaning house. Used in ecosystems, house refers to the community that interacting organisms consider home, each microlevel an integral part of ever-larger related communities. Discuss your body's ecosystem.

Alteration of ecosystems (the primary reason for extinctions) is caused by climate change, deforestation, land development, pollution (especially from plastics), pesticide use, war and resulting atmospheric fall-out, disease, invasive species., overconsumption, illegal wildlife and animal parts trade, and bush meat hunting. Plastic trash comprises as much as 40% of Earth's ocean surface. This "plastic footprint" rivals carbon footprints in killing life. What plastic consumption could you reduce?



Since God has made a covenant with creation and God never wanders off or looks away, as the Scripture assures us, what has gone awry? How can it be that we have extinctions? For that matter, how can it be that there is destruction from floodwaters?

III. What is God saying to us?

Think of an animal (fish, bird, mammal) that has characteristics you share, for better or for worse. What is the animal, and why did you choose it? What might the Divine Spirit within want us to learn through these insights?

IV. This Week

Think of an ecosystem in which Jesus spent significant time. Can you think of ways that being in this region influenced him, or ways that he influenced the ecosystem?
Extra: Read David Wagoner's poem, "The Author of *American Ornithology* Sketches a Bird, Now Extinct." What was the cause of this bird's death? How do you react?

V. Closing

Watch the 4½ min. clip showing how wolves changed the ecosystem at Yellowstone Park in the U.S.: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bh_fdfIPvDg. All: **Help us, Holy Spirit, to value creation so much that we will gladly make sacrifices to protect it and help all Earth thrive.**

Socialize.

Week Three: Unjust Commerce

I. Introduction

Share any insights about significant ecosystems in your life. If anyone read David Wagoner's poem, please comment.

Allow time for silence or music to prepare for Week Three. Then read this excerpt from Sunday's liturgy:

John 2: 13 - 17: ***[Jesus] found the Temple teeming with people selling cattle and sheep and doves . . . Jesus put together a whip of strips of leather and chased them out of the Temple, stampeding the sheep and cattle, upending the tables of the loan sharks, spilling coins left and right. He told the dove merchants, "Get your things out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a shopping mall!***

Apply the Gospel story to God's larger house: local, regional, national, and global ecosystems.



II. Information

Jesus knew that people engaged in commerce. It only riled him when it was done inappropriately, without respect for God or creatures. This week we'll consider a few ways that species and their homes are misused leading to their endangerment or extinction. **Remember that each creature reflects divinity, each is interconnected with the whole, and each is part of the continuing evolution of creation.** Just as aborting humans deprives us of precious life and what each individual could contribute, so killing other species deprives us and them of a richer future. Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ, writes in *Ask the Beasts: . . . the ongoing destruction of life on Earth by human action, intended or not, has the character of deep moral failure. To speak theologically, it is profoundly sinful.*

Cows, pigs, poultry, and domestic animals on factory farms and places like puppy mills are kept in very close quarters and, for cows, fed with food their systems have not evolved to consume. They stand in their excrement, deprived of their natural habitats. This also threatens biodiversity, so needed for thriving ecosystems.



Honey bees pollinate 90 kinds of crops. Their wax is required for the Easter candle and those used at Mass. They have been disappearing in the U.S. since 1995. Among the causes of their decline are use of pesticides and insecticides for industrial agriculture making their habitats poisonous.

Fish of many types are becoming extinct and threatened by over-fishing, by destruction of coral reefs, and by plastics. Oceans have absorbed about 20% of our carbon dioxide emissions, forming carbonic acid. The increased acidity makes it difficult for shellfish and coral to form shells. Corals are animals that provide habitat for algae that do the photosynthesis that makes food. Coral bleaching causes algae to die, eliminating habitat for fish dependent on them. Warming oceans force fish to leave accustomed habitats; they cannot

always adapt to new conditions. Fish and ocean-feeding birds die of consuming indigestible pieces of plastic and other trash that accumulates in their stomachs (or traps body parts). Pope Francis writes: *Who has turned the wonderworld of the seas into underwater cemeteries bereft of color and life?*

Dolphins, whales, porpoises, and turtles are threatened or endangered by climate change; illegal dynamite fishing; being caught in fishing nets or deliberately captured; collisions with boats or propellers; oil, chemical, and heavy metal pollution; beaching due to sonar interference; invasion of tourists. Over 95% of deaths, illness and high infant mortality rates for these species are caused by humans.



Gorillas are intelligent and peaceful unless attacked; 98% of their DNA is identical to humans' DNA. Half or more of the world's primate species and subspecies are threatened with extinction by loss of forest habitat (for agriculture, mining, and logging), trade in bushmeat, war, disease, and illegal poaching and sale as pets and for body parts (e.g., hands, that are sometimes sold as ash-trays!).

Coastal waterbirds, such as brown pelicans, suffered a major kill-off in 2010 by the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill. A new study estimates that between 600,000 - 800,000 birds were killed in the first three months, plus the deaths that have followed from the devastation of this ecosystem.

Elephants, a species that is intelligent and relational, are killed and mutilated solely for their ivory tusks. Watch this 2 min. clip in an Antiques Roadshow format that tells about elephant poachers: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdfe6v6qOTU

III. What is God saying to us?

Remember that our Creator lives and acts in all life. Choose an endangered fish, bird, or mammal and, using your imagination, listen to its fears and hopes for itself and its progeny. It is unable to speak for itself; how might Jesus want us to speak for it? After a few minutes, try sharing in a format like this: I am speaking for [your choice]. This is what I think Jesus wants us to hear:

IV. This week

Consider reducing your intake of industrially-raised beef. (Avoiding meat on Fridays had eco-benefits, even if they weren't known then; in Scripture Jesus eats only fish.) Food from animals that have had space and appropriate food might be more expensive, but buyers get better quality, support farmers who provide just animal conditions, and help protect Earth's air, water, and soil.

V. Closing

Climate change is the primary cause of ruined ecosystems that cause extinction of species.
Read silently pp. 9-10. If you belong to another group that has made a statement about protecting Earth, please share next week. When most have finished, s**ocialize.**

Excerpts from a 17 page **Report by the Working Group Commissioned by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences (glaciologists, climate scientists, meteorologists, hydrologists, physicists, chemists, mountaineers, and lawyers), Vatican, April 2011:**

Declaration:
We call on all people and nations to recognize the serious and potentially irreversible impacts of global warming caused by the anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases and other pollutants, and by changes in forests, wetlands, grasslands, and other land uses. We appeal to all nations to develop and implement, without delay, effective and fair policies to reduce the causes and impacts of climate change on communities and ecosystems, including mountain glaciers and their watersheds, aware that we all live in the same home. By acting now, in the spirit of common but differentiated responsibility, we accept our duty to one another and to the stewardship of a planet blessed with the gift of life.

We are committed to ensuring that all inhabitants of this planet receive their daily bread, fresh air to breathe and clean water to drink as we are aware that, if we want justice and peace, we must protect the habitat that sustains is. The believers among us ask God to grant us this wish.

Anthropocene: Aggressive exploitation of fossil fuels and other natural resources has damaged the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the land we inhabit. To give one example, some 1000 billion tons of carbon dioxide and other climatically important "greenhouse" gases have been pumped into the atmosphere. As a result, the concentration of carbon dioxide in the air now exceeds the highest levels of the last 800,000 years. The climatic and ecological impacts of this human interference with the Earth System are expected to last for many millennia, warranting a new name, **The Anthropocene**, for the new "man-made" geologic epoch we are living in. **Perspective on Past Changes:** In response to the argument that "since the Earth has experienced alternating cold periods (ice ages or glacials) and warm periods (inter-glacials) during the past, today's climate and ice cover changes are entirely natural events", we state:

> *The primary triggers for ice ages and inter-glacials are well understood to be changes in the astronomical parameters related to the motion of our planet within the solar system and natural feedback processes in the climate system. The time scales between these triggers are in the range of 10,000 years or longer. By contrast, the observed human-induced changes in carbon dioxide, other greenhouse gases, and soot concentrations are taking place on 10-100 year timescales –at least a hundred times as fast. It is particularly worrying that this release of global warming agents is occurring during an interglacial period when the Earth was already at a natural temperature maximum.*

Three Recommended Measures: Human-caused changes in the composition of the air and air quality result in more than 2 million premature deaths worldwide every year and threaten water and food security —especially among those "bottom 3 billion" people who are too poor to avail of the protections made possible by fossil fuel use and industrialization. Since a sustainable

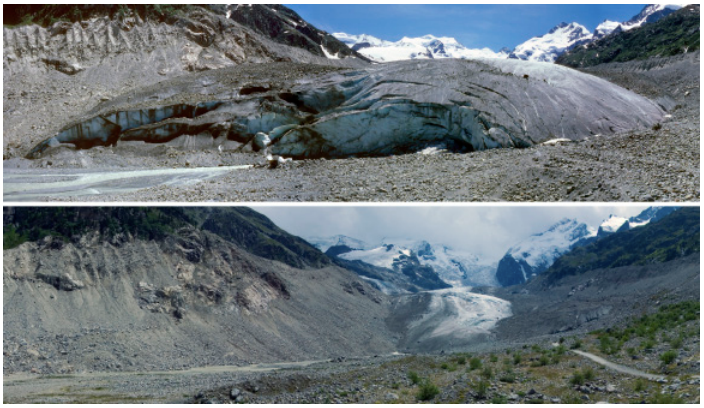
future based on the continued extraction of coal, oil and gas in the "business-as-usual mode" will not be possible because of both resource depletion and environmental damages (as caused, e.g., by dangerous sea level rise) we urge our societies to:

I. Reduce worldwide carbon dioxide emissions without delay, using all means possible to meet ambitious international global warming targets and ensure the long-term stability of the climate system. All nations must focus on a rapid transition to renewable energy sources and other strategies to reduce CO2 emissions. Nations should also avoid removal of carbon sinks by stopping deforestation, and should strengthen carbon sinks by reforestation of degraded lands. They also need to develop and deploy technologies that draw down excess carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. These actions must be accomplished within a few decades. *A Report by the Working Group Commissioned by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences* - Page 5

II. Reduce the concentrations of warming air pollutants (dark soot, methane, lower atmosphere ozone, and hydrofluorocarbons) by as much as 50%, to slow down climate change during this century while preventing millions of premature deaths from respiratory disease and millions of tons of crop damages every year.

III. Prepare to adapt to the climatic changes, both chronic and abrupt, that society will be unable to mitigate. In particular, we call for a global capacity-building initiative to assess the natural and social impacts of climate change in mountain systems and related watersheds.

The cost of the three recommended measures pales in comparison to the price the world will pay if we fail to act now.



Morteratsch Glacier (Alps) 1985 - 2007

On May 12, 2014, this Working Group published **Sustainable Humanity, Sustainable Nature: Our Responsibility** detailing unprecedented climate change and ecosystem destruction due to human activity.

Week Four: Take These Away

I. Introduction

Share your reaction to the report by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences.

Allow time for silence or music to prepare for Week Four. Then read this excerpt from Sunday's liturgy:

Numbers 21: 6- 7: ***So God sent poisonous snakes among the people; they bit them and many in Israel died . . . . Pray to God; ask him to take these snakes from us.***

Describe how the Israelites, thousands of years ago, pictured God in this story. How do you picture God? How do you answer people who think that God is responsible for the extinction of species?

II. Input

Not all species are cuddly! 1200 species of fish are venomous. Gypsy moths can damage millions of acres of forests and urban landscapes by rapidly defoliating trees, leaving them vulnerable to disease. Invasive species are responsible for the extinction of other species and cause havoc to ecosystems by their aggressive growth, biological pollution, and catastrophic impact on global habitats. Do we expect the Transcendent Mystery to take problems from us?

Centuries ago St. Teresa of Avila wrote: *Christ has no body but yours, no hands, no feet on Earth but yours. Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this world, yours are the feet with which he walks to do good . . . .* In out time, Pope Francis writes: "*Small yet strong in the love of God, like St. Francis of Assisi, all of us, as Christians, are called to watch over and protect the fragile world in which we live, and all its people."*

People *are* acting to protect ecosystems and their flora and fauna. Groups have created statements and laws; TV programs alert us to the marvel of species and what threatens them; profit and non-profit groups are active in many ways; individuals use lobbying and lifestyle changes to reduce climate change and live with other species in a mutually beneficial manner. Here are some examples:

- Some Statements and Meetings

* Pope Francis' encyclical on Human Ecology (due 2015);
* the Vatican's Pontifical Academies of Science and Social Science statements (esp. 2011, 2014);
* UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, culminating 12/15;
* United Nations Environment program (UNEP)
* Earth Charter;
* Endangered Species Act in U.S. (99% success rate since 1974);
* Statement by the Bishops of the Philippines;
* the Church of England's review of fossil fuel investments

- National and international Groups

World Animal Protection, World Wildlife Fund, Friends of the Earth, World Society for the Pro-

tection of Animals, Wildlife Conservation Society, Earthjustice, Sierra Club, World Conservation Union, the Nature Conservancy, the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and on and on . . . .
Share anything you know about, or have experience with, these or other groups.

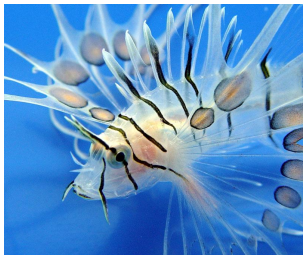
- **Some Victories**



* Increased interest, better laws, and efforts of organizations are helping. Several species have been removed from the IUCN Red List of threatened primates because of improved status.
* In March 2014, Indonesia's top Muslim clerical body issued a fatwa, or edict, against illegal wildlife trafficking.
* In April 2014, the European Parliament committed to sustainable fishing by approving the financial mechanism for implementing the comprehensive reform of the Common Fisheries Policy.
* In May 2014, all uses of antibiotics in U.S. organic apples and pears were banned.
* World Animal Day, celebrated on St. Francis' feast October 4th, calls everyone to celebrate animals and to care for them. If your church or group celebrates, share.
* Institutions are divesting in fossil fuels and reinvesting in renewable energy sources.

- Individual Actions
Share actions you and others have taken to protect ecosystems and their inhabitants.

III. What is God saying to us?



How might God be asking us to help fulfill the divine covenant with Creation this Lent? How did Jesus do it? Why is it important to stay informed about all the positive things happening in the world?

IV. This Week

If possible, transition to renewable energy sources to reduce use of fossil fuels.
Contact legislators to increase renewable energy production. Click these sites that provide benefits to species at no cost to you: therainforestsite.greatergood.com/ and theanimalrescuesite.greatergood.com/. Consider joining a conservation group to support their work and participate in their campaigns. Reduce purchase of food that ruins ecosystems or that adds to climate change. Learn more about any statement or group above.

V. Closing

Watch one of these videos showing individual responses:
- 4 min. videos telling of eco-activists who won the 2014 Goldman prize. 2014 Goldman Prizes Bestowed on 'Fearless' Eco-Activists
- 11 minute video about Helen Slottje's work to stop fracking: http://earthjustice.org/fracking

Socialize.

Week Five: Ritual

Liturgically, we are approaching Palm Sunday and Holy Week, when our focus will be on Jesus. But Jesus, too, was not himself without everything else; Jesus, too, is part of the whole. Keep this awareness in heart and mind as we conclude these Creation Covenant reflections.

The following prayer service replaces the format used in Weeks 1 - 4. The Scripture excerpts are from Sunday's readings. Divide into sections A and B, distribute paper and pencils, and keep the candle or vigil lit until the end.

~

Call to Prayer: From Pope Francis: *Openness to the transcendent can bring about a new political and economic mindset which would help to break down the wall of separation between the economy and the common good* . . . . Let us pray for that openness to the transcendent so we can break down walls, and for the common good of every being on Earth.

Silent reflection.

Consider ways we have participated, no doubt unconsciously, in the damage to ecosystems when our purchases, lifestyle, apathy, or willful ignorance contributed to habitat loss and climate change. Discuss this together. Then write at least one way you now realize you have contributed to species' decline. Keep the paper. When everyone has written something, respond alternately with excerpts from Psalm 51:

A.	**B.**
Generous in love, . . .	***God, give grace!***
Huge in mercy, . . .	***wipe out my bad record.***
Scrub away my guilt . .	***soak out my sins in your laundry.***
I know how bad I've been, . .	***my sins are staring me down.***
You're the One I've violated . .	***and you've seen it all,***
You have all the facts, . .	***whatever you decide about me is fair.***
You're after truth from the inside out. .	***Enter me, then; conceive a new, true life.***
God, make a fresh start in me, .	***shape a Genesis week from the chaos of my heart.***

Quiet reflection. Then share: How can it be that God is "the One I've violated" by what is written on our papers?

Reader from Group A. **Hebrews 5: 7-10:** ***While he lived on Earth, anticipating death, Jesus cried out in pain and wept in sorrow as he offered up priestly prayers to God. Because he honored God, God answered him. Though he was God's Son, he learned trusting obedience by what he suffered, just as we do.***
How did God answer Jesus' prayers?

Briefly share your attitude towards ecosystems and animals from childhood till now.
Why does — or doesn't — habitat destruction involve you?

Reader from Group B. **John 12: 24-25:** ***Listen carefully: Unless a grain of wheat is buried in the ground, dead to the world, it is never any more than a grain of wheat. But if it is buried, it sprouts and reproduces itself many times over. In the same way, anyone who holds on to life just as it is, destroys that life. But if you let it go, reckless in your love, you'll have it forever, real and eternal.***

All respond: ***Help us to be reckless in our love:***
A. Jesus, you loved us till death on the cross, ***help us to be reckless in our love.***
B. Mary, you gave of yourself in total love, ***help us . . . .***
A. For the gift of joy as we praise the Creator living and acting among us**,** ***help us . . . .***
B. For the wisdom to realize our interconnection with fish, birds, insects, and mammals, ***help us . . . .***
A. For the compassion to make sacrifices for our interconnected well-being, ***help us . . . .***
B. For deeper awareness of our role in God's Covenant with Creation, ***help us . . . .***



Write one thing you can do this Holy Week to protect animals, their habitats, and their place in the on-going evolution of Mother Earth. When everyone has written something, pray together:

May the Spirit acting in our world and in each of us empower us to fulfill these promises. May we remember our role in fulfilling God's covenant with all Creation. May we be blessed with tears for species that are threatened and extinguished. May God bless us with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation so that we may work for justice, equity, and peace. And may God bless us with the foolishness to think that we can make a difference in this world, so we will do the things which others say cannot be done. Amen! **(Adapted from a traditional Franciscan Meditation)**

Extinguish candle or vigil.

Share one word that summarizes for you the experience of this Lenten group.

Share the gift of Christ's peace (or another of Christ's gifts) with one another, and then socialize.

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