

Program Description for the Development of Awareness and Action for Faith and the Environment

April 11, 2018

Introduction to the Proposal

The initiative of this program is to raise awareness of “faith and the environment” within Winnipeg congregations and enable these same congregations to mobilize for action that continues education within those congregations and promotes active responses toward environmental care and sustainability within the broader community.

This program requests seed money to cover operational expenses for meetings, travel and resources. No money is requested for staff compensation; time is being given voluntarily for research, development, administration and facilitation.

The investment of time and energy in matters of faith and the environment – its theology, education and practice – varies greatly. This project will research materials and resources; begin to network human resources from a variety of disciplines (faith, science, economics, politics, and the social sciences); and facilitate conversations and planning for congregational involvement. Ecumenical, Inter-faith and Indigenous perspectives and resources will be sought. We seek to strengthen our theology of faith and the environment, broaden educational initiatives and involve our congregations in additional action strategies.

Training will include conversations with pastors and lay leaders to determine needs and approaches; planning meetings with congregational leadership at the Council and committee levels; support for local educational and active initiatives; and occasional promotional events, such as worship services and regional workshops.

The scope of this project has already begun with research in the summer of 2017 and will be completed in December of 2018.

Description of the Project

As summarized in the Introduction, this project seeks to raise awareness of “faith and the environment” as a critical issue in our time, a matter requiring understanding, theological reflection and community action.

Rationale for the Project

Research indicates few pastors regularly preach on environmental themes. A recent Bishop’s Table Talk confirmed that, of those present, most preach occasionally, maybe annually, perhaps on Earth Day. The ELCA has included emphases on eco-reformation for a couple of years but the concept is rare among ELCIC pastors and congregations.

While there is increasing acceptance that climate change is indeed a real phenomenon, there are still leaders in society that are skeptical, even resistant.

The ELCIC had a “greening” emphasis established by the church in convention, but that program encouraging congregations to become “green” has had limited success and virtually no promotion in recent years.

Any conversations about climate change seem to focus on global issues that appear impossible to manage or local behaviors that appear too minor to be effective. Truly effective change requires a multi-disciplinary approach involving both global action and local action. Global change is more than a scientific crisis; this is a matter of justice among people everywhere and includes all living creatures. The efforts required involve social, political, economic, educational, and faith commitments, as well as scientific.

We have celebrated 500 years of Reformation, mostly with an emphasis on the past. What about the future? If the question of Luther's day was 'how do I find a merciful God?' the question before the church today might be – "how, as stewards of God's creation, do we care for a planet in peril?"

This project seeks to raise awareness at the congregational level. Congregations then are asked to take action among their own families, within their own congregation, and reaching out to the local community and beyond. It is hoped that congregations will contribute to community awareness and the multidisciplinary response by inviting conversations with people of varying skills and backgrounds to sit together, plan together and act together. Local needs for stewardship of the land, the water, the air, sustainable energy, sustainable access to quality food, and the like, will vary – as will the local resources and responses.

This project has a scope of one year. But the required horizon extends well into the future.

Objectives for the Project

Stage One – determining what material resources are available, from many sectors including Lutherans, ecumenical partners, inter-faith possibilities, and indigenous sources - determining what human resources can be approached and recruited to contribute to awareness and action. It is anticipated that the material and human resources will continue to be acquired throughout the program implementation.

Stage Two – Fourteen congregations within the Winnipeg area will be approached individually to determine what has been done, what needs to be done, and whether there is an interest in participating through the year. Where there is a willingness to continue, meetings will be set with Councils and committee leaders to explore options for programming through the year.

Stage Three – As plans are made and events scheduled, support will be given to apply available material and human resources and invite appropriate participants to the table.

Stage Four – Evaluation – Records will be kept of contacts, meetings, plans and accomplishments. A report will be made to Synod Council, and perhaps to the church beyond our synod. It is hoped we will have developed a resource base of materials and people and a network that can be expanded beyond the scope of the project.

Target Audience for the Project

Financial and time constraints limit the project to the metro Winnipeg area. However, as resources are gathered and perspectives take shape, it would be unjust to withhold them from the rest of our synod; the other synods; ecumenical and inter-faith partners; and indigenous brothers and sisters.

Administration of the Project

Research and Planning – This has already begun and will continue through the efforts of the program designer, Pastor David Saude. Pastor Saude has experience in program design, research, facilitation and evaluation. He is retired and willing to offer his time and energy to the program as outlined.

Facilitation – Pastor Saude will make the initial contacts with congregations and involve congregational leadership and community networks as they emerge or can be developed.

Reporting – Pastor Saude will make written reports to Synod Council through the MNO Bishop as each stage is completed, with a final report in January 2019. Reports will include summaries of action taken, accomplishments made, and recommendations suggested.

Budget

The budget requested is for recovery of operational expenses: materials, mileage, registrations, and hospitality. The cost of staff time is donated. The budget approved for January to December, 2018 is \$2,000.

Timeline

Fall and Winter of 2017 – initial research and gathering of material resources, initiating networking of human resources

January-February, 2018 – Meetings with pastors and leadership to determine needs and possibilities and develop commitment to proceed

March-May, 2018 – Meetings with congregational leadership, Councils and committees to raise awareness, develop commitment and begin planning

September-December, 2018 – Support committee initiatives for education and action

Evaluation

The following criteria will indicate satisfactory meeting of objectives:

1. A list of material resources, including books, articles, websites and media resources will be gathered.
2. A list of human resources with contact information, representing a variety of disciplines, will be gathered.
3. A list of participating congregations will be determined.
4. A description of congregational involvement in addressing faith and the environment prior to the project will be determined as a base.
5. A journal will be kept of contacts made, meetings held, and outcomes determined.
6. A record of action taken by the congregations and leaders during the project will be maintained.
7. Recommendations for future action will be proposed.

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