

*Just* ~~Just~~ FAITH  
MATTERS



## **Faith Encounters the Ecological Crisis**

### **Sample Material**

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# *Just* **MATTERS** *Just* FAITH

## **Faith Encounters the Ecological Crisis**

### Session One

**Theme:** *We place ourselves within the natural world around us as we encounter the ecological crisis that threatens the web of life.*

### Session Two

**Theme:** *Humans have engineered and reshaped the Earth through industrialization, altering some of the planet's basic ecosystems, often with disastrous results. We contrast this with the gift of Creation and examine what this says about our attitude toward it.*

### Session Three

**Theme:** *Industrialization has been fueled by the exploitation of coal, oil, and natural gas at the cost of great environmental devastation. The previous era of cheap sources of energy is now coming to a rapid end. We examine here our carbon footprint, the damage caused by our use of fossil fuels, and how Catholic social teaching reflects on the crisis.*

### Session Four

**Theme:** *Human beings are living beyond the means of the Earth to support our consumption and waste. We examine the extent to which we are depleting the planet's ecosystems and stealing from future generations. We now calculate our ecological footprint and ask the question, "Who is my neighbor and must I love them as myself?"*

### Session Five

**Theme:** *Growing scarcities of water, food, and energy will increase the threat of violent conflict, including war. We examine this problem in light of the gospels and Catholic social teaching.*

### Session Six

**Theme:** *The "American Dream" of affluence and ever-increasing standards of living is proving to be unsustainable and impossible to continue. In this session, we examine the consumer society and the values that support it. We then reflect on this in the light of faith. We begin to envision a new American Dream.*

### Session Seven

**Theme:** *What are the elements of a spirituality for encountering and living through the ecological crisis?*

### Session Eight

**Theme:** *Thomas Berry calls us to the Great Work of our generation. How might this community contribute towards it?*



## Note from the Author

Dear Friends,

It was a privilege to be invited by JustFaith Ministries to create a module around my book, *Living Beyond the 'End of the World: A Spirituality of Hope*. Writing the book over the course of two years was an extraordinary and difficult journey, digging deep into the realities of our ecological crisis, into the research and the narratives that reveal a rather grim prognosis for the Earth community of which we are a part.

Over and over again I reminded myself that, despite everything, no matter how stark the news, our faith challenges us to continue to give reason for hope. I believe we were created for a different story than that of ecological destruction, that the meaning of the human is not to create conditions for the tragic end of a species that made the mistake of destroying its own habitat, its own home. We are only now beginning to realize the damage that has been done; it is time now to begin the healing.

Our faith traditions, our gospel narratives, have so much to offer on this journey. That's where my book ends – with those narratives, broken open once more to address the crises of a new age, a new moment in history. They resonate as never before.

So first of all, I thank you for participating in this *JustMatters* program. I thank you for your earnest effort in wrestling with some difficult input. Most of all, I thank you for taking this time, for making this commitment to challenge and enrich your faith. We have a great project ahead of us, a new mission for the human, no less than reinventing how we live on this beautiful planet so that vibrant life is ensured for all who come after us.

In peace,  
Margaret Swedish

*Spirituality and Ecological Hope*  
A Project of the Center for New Creation



## Session One Faith Encounters the Ecological Crisis

### Session One Outline and Notes

#### Opening Prayer

L: Yahweh's are the earth and its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it. (Ps. 24:1)

**R: Yahweh's are the earth and its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it.**

L: For it was God that founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers (24:2).

**R: Yahweh's are the earth and its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it.**

L: Woe to you who join house to house, who connect field to field, till no room remains and you are left to dwell alone in the midst of the land (Is. 5:8)

**R: Yahweh's are the earth and its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it.**

L: I set before you life and prosperity, death and doom... If you keep my commands...God will bless you in the land you are entering...if however you turn away your hearts and will not listen, but are led astray and serve other gods, I tell you now you will certainly perish... (Dt. 30:15, 16b-17)

**R: Yahweh's are the earth and its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it.**

L: Choose life then, that your descendents may live... (Dt. 30:19b)

**R: Yahweh's are the earth and its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it.**

L: Woe to you who are rich now, those who have their fill; but blessed are the poor who shall inherit the earth. (adpt. from Lk. 6:24, 25, 20)

**R: Yahweh's are the earth and its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it.**

L: How manifold your works, in wisdom you have created them all – the earth is full of your creatures. Send forth your spirit and renew the face of the earth. (adpt Ps 104:24, 30)

**R: Yahweh's are the earth and its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it.**

Leader: What is clear from our scripture and tradition is that the Earth is gift, and we a part of it. It belongs not to us but to the one who created it. We do not own it and are not allowed to do with it what we want to serve our own pleasures and desires; rather, we are to ensure that it remains a gift, abundant life and prosperity for the generations that come after us. And so we say:

**R: Send forth your spirit through us that we may serve the work of creation, helping to renew the face of our precious, damaged earth. For wisdom, humility and courage in this task, we pray. Amen.**

### **Group Guidelines (10 minutes)**

The group will go over the discussion guidelines that are provided to get consensus on using them throughout the program. If there is much discussion of the guidelines, the facilitator will take notes, retype them and give everyone a revised version at the start of Session Two.

### **Introductions (30 minutes)**

In this culture, we tend to identify by the address at which we reside, our jobs or professions, the number of children and where they go to school, what church we belong to, etc. We have tended to separate our sense of self from one of the most important sources of our identities – our geography, our place within ecosystems, our earth community. Surely someone who is born and lives in a desert has a different orientation to the world than someone who is born and lives in a rainforest.

Wendell Berry once wrote: “You cannot know who you are until you know where you are.” Recovering these connections is an essential aspect of how we can heal the broken earth community, challenged now by overuse and abuse of earth’s gifts.

### **Break**

### **Business and Announcements**

### **Film and Brief Discussion**

Participants will watch a film, read a bible passage and briefly share a few thoughts or feelings elicited in themselves by the juxtaposition of the film and the bible passage. Participants will also be asked to continue their reflections in their journaling during the week.

### **Closing Prayer**

L: Today, we have brought our faith to an encounter with the ecological crisis of our times. Many church teachings offer a strong challenge to the community of faith in regard to how we have treated the earth and what we are called to do and to be in this time of crisis. Let’s us beginning with a reading from a statement by the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales:

“The Church recognises that care for the environment is part of care for the common good - the environment is one of the "common goods" which are the shared responsibility of the human race. We have to reject some of the easy assumptions of an earlier stage of industrialisation, such as that the human race, because God had given it dominion over the world, had an unlimited freedom to despoil the natural environment for its own purposes. Those who feel moved to a loving care for the internal balances of nature are responding to a deep religious instinct implanted within them by God. Their intuition tells them that the human race takes its place on this planet as a gift and privilege, and needs to cultivate what the new Catechism of the Catholic Church calls a "religious respect for the integrity of creation."

*Participants take turns reading the following ...*

And God said of this creation that it is good. God made the world as goodness, rich and overflowing, abundance for all in a shared community of life.

**R: Yahweh's are the earth and its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it.**

We pray in sorrow for the human condition. We pray in mourning for the damage we have done. We commit to becoming healers within the broken fabric of life.

**R: Yahweh's are the earth and its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it.**

We pray in hope that we represent here in this community the spirit of creation at work in the world. We pray that we might respond to this “deep religious instinct implanted within [us] by God.”

**R: Yahweh's are the earth and its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it.**

We go in peace, to rest, to reflect, to ponder how we want to live in this world, and what kind of world we want to pass on to our children, and their children's children, on to the next generation, and the next.

**R: Yahweh's are the earth and its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it.**

Let the community say: **Amen.**