This detail from the St. Andrew Cathedral in Patras, Greece (built in 1979) shows the hand of God blessing the water, a symbol of creation. We read in Genesis 1:2 that the “Spirit of God swept over the face of the waters.” A pomegranate plant, heavy with fruit, grows in a basket below, sending its branches upward, which creates the border of the image. In Christian symbolism, pomegranates have many meanings, most of which relate to Paradise. The many seeds in the fruit symbolize life. The red color and red juice of the fruit symbolize the blood of Christ and, by extension, His passion. By connecting the image of the water to the pomegranate plant, the icon makes the statement that the blessing of the Lord brings abundant life. As Christ states, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).
WISDOM, ANCIENT AND MODERN

Our of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. . . .

*Genesis 2:19–20*

The Church must introduce environmental teaching into her preaching, Sunday schools, and other religious forms of education from the lowest to the highest level. The Church cannot be faithful to her mission without a serious involvement in the protection of God’s creation from the damage inflicted on it by human greed and selfishness.

*Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon*

What is required is an act of repentance on our part and a renewed attempt to view ourselves, one another, and the world around us within the perspective of the divine design for creation.

*Common Declaration of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope John Paul II*

O Lord, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all.

*Psalm 104*

O Loving One, safeguard the earth unharmed and all its encompassing elements, in which, by Your will, we dwell, live, move and exist, that we, your unworthy supplicants, may be delivered from ruin and destruction.

*From the Vespers for the Protection of the Environment*

By His Spirit He adorned the heavens;
   His hand pierced the fleeing serpent.
Indeed these are the mere edges of His ways,
   And how small a whisper we hear of Him!
   But the thunder of His power who can understand?

*Job 26:13–14*

For You have made him a little lower than the angels,
   And You have crowned him with glory and honor.
You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands;
   You have put all things under his feet,
All sheep and oxen—
   Even the beasts of the field. . . .

*Psalm 8:5–7*

But now ask the beasts, and they will teach you;
   And the birds of the air, and they will tell you;
Or speak to the earth, and it will teach you;
   And the fish of the sea will explain to you.
Who among all these does not know
   That the hand of the Lord has done this,
In whose hand is the life of every living thing,
   And the breath of all mankind?

*Job 12:7–10*
The topic for this issue of PRAXIS definitely is one of importance: “The Environment.” The term “environment” is a clear reference to our natural world, God’s Creation. Though there are significant political, social and economic factors to consider whenever we discuss the state of our natural environment, the concern of our Holy Orthodox Church for the protection of the natural environment is not to be understood as a political position or as a strictly social stance that the Church advocates. Rather, the concern of our Church is theological in character; it is best understood as a mindset or “ethos” that is rooted foremost in love. This ethos is one that we human beings feel and experience as overseers and stewards of the natural environment. It is also one that we feel and experience through our active engagement with the liturgical life of the Church and through our participation in the Holy Sacraments.

It is in this context and in this ethos that we may best appreciate and give thanks to God for the leadership of our Ecumenical Patriarch, His All Holiness Bartholomew, in the arena of the protection of the natural environment. This leadership has been seen time and again in the many seafaring symposia that have been organized by His All Holiness to study regions of our planet that are showing the calamitous effects of humankind’s disregard or abuse of the natural environment entrusted to human beings. By including representatives of governments and prominent social figures at each port of call, in addition to the scientists and theologians from a spectrum of the world’s religions on board the vessel, our Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew is providing a much-needed forum for genuine dialogue. This forum is meaningful because it elevates concern for the environment above its traditionally constrained spheres of social movements and political activism, and toward a closer consideration by all people of thinking about our natural environment in moral and ethical dimensions, consistent with understanding our planet as a precious gift that has been created for us by God out of His love for humankind.

In addition to some excerpts from previously published works by His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on this important topic, this issue of PRAXIS includes an interview that highlights fellowships that are forming to promote the teachings of our Church concerning our responsibility as human beings toward God’s Creation. It also includes articles that address practical ways in which some of our own parishes are promoting recycling and the responsible use of energy.

All of these articles on the important issue of the environment are, of course, offered along with the regular columns and features that all of us as religious educators and faithful have come to appreciate with every new issue of PRAXIS. As always, I commend the editorial staff of PRAXIS and our Department of Religious Education for producing this helpful educational resource, and particularly for bringing to the reader’s attention the important topic of the environment, which continues to grow in urgency as an issue that commands the attention and moral consideration of every human being on our planet.

† DEMETRIOS
Archbishop of America
Threats and scourges and destruction hang over us, Lord, because of the multitude of our transgressions; for we have sinned and transgressed and gone far from you, and we are affected and afflicted by dire perils.

From the Litia of the Vespers for the Preservation of Creation

Beloved in the Lord,

In the heart of the Old Testament stands a story that speaks to the world’s environmental crisis. There was in the land of Israel a famine, a covenantal sign of disobedience on the part of God’s people (2 Kings 4:38–41, Leviticus 26:14–20). Elisha the prophet commanded his disciples to prepare a meal from whatever they could glean from the fields. Unwittingly, one of the sons of the prophets gathered fruit from a poisonous plant and put this into the stew; only during the meal did his companions realize that their food was tainted with a deadly toxin. They cried out to Elisha, “O man of God, there is death in the pot!” Elisha called for flour and added it to the stew. He then commanded the men to partake again of the pottage. Through the actions of the prophet tragedy was averted and salvation was accomplished.

How fitting are their words in our own time: “There is death in the pot!” This death is present in the form of pollutants leached into drinking water, hazardous waste spread into the soil, noxious gases spewed into the air and harmful chemicals propagated by factory farming methods. Increasingly, the world’s food is compromised by thoughtless acts of pollution, overconsumption and mismanagement of resources. Like the servants in the story, we have sinned in ignorance—but our errors are no less deadly for that. Also like them, we live in a time when God’s covenant is transgressed and ignored, and so we too suffer a famine of hearing of the Word of the Lord (cf. Amos 8:11).

Yet we too have a man of God to whom we may turn. We fervently thank the Lord for the diakonia of our Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and his labors on behalf of the environment—as an intercessor, an advocate, an educator, indeed, as a prophet. Like a modern-day Elisha, the Green Patriarch stands before the people and calls upon God to bring life out of death for all the inhabitants of the earth. Just as Elisha offered remedy in the form of ground wheat, so too does our Ecumenical Patriarch hold forth the Bread of Life through the Eucharistic ministry of the Church. Through our union with Christ Jesus, ecological catastrophe may be averted and salvation accomplished.

But it falls to us as the sons of the prophets to partake of the Heavenly Bread in true faith and praxis. Orthodox ecological stewardship is not practiced simply by reading a magazine and endorsing ideas, but by a life of awareness and responsibility, receiving all things as gifts from God for the advancement of His Kingdom.

May God grant many years of continued prophetic ministry to our spiritual father and leader, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew; and may He enlighten our hearts and lives to follow the example of His All Holiness in labors of love for God’s good creation.

In the Service of Our Lord,

+Nicholas
Metropolitan of Detroit
SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Submissions should be 1,000–2,000 words in length and directly discuss education in the theology and tradition of the Orthodox Christian churches. Lesson aids or graphic enhancements may accompany the articles submitted. We also encourage the submission of photographs relevant to parish life (praxis). Please also provide a biographical sketch of the author not exceeding fifty words.

PRAXIS Magazine is seeking submissions of lesson plans based on articles from previous or current issues of PRAXIS. Submissions should use the article as the text/background of the lesson plan. Lesson plans are welcome for any or several age groups. Please send submissions in a Word document with a length of 1,000–2,000 words to tvrame@goarch.org.

Material previously published or under consideration for publication elsewhere will not be considered without prior consent of the editor. We reserve the right to edit for usage and style; all accepted manuscripts are subject to editorial modification. Articles sent by mail should be accompanied by an electronic version on CD-ROM in Microsoft Word for Windows or for Macintosh. Articles in Microsoft Word may also be e-mailed as an attachment to tvrame@goarch.org.

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Orthodox Perspectives on Creation

A group of Orthodox theologians representing twelve Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox member churches of the World Council of Churches met in Sofia, Bulgaria, in fall 1987. At the end of the consultation, a report on “Orthodox Perspectives on Creation” was made available with a special request that it be taken into consideration for the preparation of the WCC Conference on the Integrity of Creation to be held in Oslo in March 1988. The report was specially commended to the Orthodox member churches of the WCC for study, prayer and action. The complete report was published as a chapter in Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation: Insights from Orthodoxy, edited by Gennadios Limouris (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990); this article is excerpted from that chapter. Many topics are covered in the original publication, such as poverty, racism, human dignity, economics and military arms, but we have limited ourselves to reprint here only the sections that directly relate to the environment. As such, it presents a concise overview of Orthodox theology on this topic.

Creation “Out of Nothing”

“'In the beginning' the Holy Trinity created the world (heaven and earth) “out of nothing” (ex nihilo) and not out of preexistent matter. The world is a production of God’s free will, goodness, wisdom, love and omnipotence. God did not create the world in order to satisfy some need of His. Rather He created it without compulsion and without force in order that it might enjoy His blessings and share in His goodness. God then brought all things into being out of nothing, creating both the visible (oratôs) and the invisible (aôratos).

“Out of nothing” (ex nihilo) finds its first expression in the Bible (cf. Genesis 1; John 1:3; Isaiah 42:5; Psalm 33:6). “Beholding the heavens and the earth, and seeing all that is there, you will understand that God has created it all from nothing” (2 Maccabees 7:28). Thus, the creation springs into being or passes into being out of nonbeing. As St. Gregory of Nyssa affirms, “It begins to be, and the very substance of the creation owes its beginning to change” (St. Gregory of Nyssa, Homily 29, PG 31:89–91). This transition from nonexistence to existence is a change brought about by God’s creative Word, “who has established the world so that it shall not be moved” (Psalm 93:1).

Creation of the Cosmos – Integrity of the World

God is the Creator of the world. The world as cosmos, i.e., a created order with its own integrity, is a positive reality. It is the good work of the good God (Genesis 1), made by God for the blessed existence of humanity. The Cappadocian Fathers teach that God first creates the world and beautifies it like a palace, and then leads humanity into it. The genesis of the cosmos, being in becoming, is a mystery (mysterion) for the human mind, a genesis produced by the Word of God. As such, the world is a revelation of God (Romans 1:19–20). Thus when its intelligent inhabitants see it as cosmos, they come to learn about the Divine wisdom and the Divine energies. The cosmos is a coherent whole, a created synthesis, because all its elements are united and interrelated in time and space. A serious study of
the mystery of creation, through faith, prayer, meditation and science, will make a positive contribution to the recognition of the integrity of the creation. The daily office of the Church (vespers) begins with a psalm that exalts the beauty of this mystery (Psalm 104, LXX 103), while the Fathers of the Church often comment on the various biblical passages that describe the integrity of creation.

VALUE OF THE CREATION

The value of the creation is seen not only in the fact that it is intrinsically good, but also in the fact that it is appointed by God to be the home for living beings. The value of the natural creation is revealed in the fact that it was made for God (something that is beautifully expressed in Orthodox iconography), i.e., to be the context for God’s Incarnation and humankind’s deification, and as such, the beginning of the actualization of the Kingdom of God. We may say that the cosmos provides the stage on which humankind moves from creation to deification. Ultimately, however, the whole of creation is destined to become a transfigured world, since the salvation of humankind necessarily involves the salvation of its natural home, the cosmos.

THE HUMAN FALL AND THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE CREATION

Before their fall the first human beings experienced the creation as one harmonious whole. It was like a beautiful garden (paradiseos, Genesis 2:8) that they tended with care and love. The human fall, however, which was essentially a sinful exercising of human freedom, introduced forces of disintegration into the body of creation. Enmity between the natural world and human beings replaced the relationship of harmony and care. Domination and exploitation of the creation for selfish ends by greedy human beings became the order of history. Thus, manifold forms of disintegration set in that converged in the fact of death and corruption. Fear of death instilled anxiety, acquisitiveness, greed, hatred and despair in human beings. Modern forms of economic exploitation, racial oppression, social inequalities, war, genocide, etc. are all consequences of the fear of death and collective signs of death.

Creation was given to humanity as a gift that they may share it in a Eucharistic sense, so that the sustenance and fulfillment of life might be achieved. The divine plan assumes that there is a material give-and-take relationship between human beings and the natural world.

Sin obscured the glorious image of God in the human person, but it did not efface it completely, as St. Athanasius and the whole of patristic tradition affirmed. St. Gregory the Theologian teaches that through the fall, humanity lost only its condition of well-being, but not its possibility of being. Through the Incarnation of the Word of God, the door of salvation was opened to humanity, through which human beings can enter again into a relation with their Creator, which restores them in the divine image and enables them both to secure the being and to regain the lost condition of their well-being. It is in this context of the salvation that is offered by God in Christ—not only for human beings but also for the whole of the creation—that human beings have a special responsibility to exercise their freedom in a way that serves God’s gracious activity for the reintegration and transfiguration of all reality.

HUMAN SIN AND FORMS OF INJUSTICE

Several issues, which bear the stamp of human sin, should be identified and underlined because they exemplify some of the glaring forms of injustice and disintegration that we experience today (cf. Habakkuk 1:3, James 5:4). They should be given serious and immediate attention by the Church and all people of goodwill. They call for the urgent exercise of Chris-
tian responsibility toward the creation and for the practical manifestation of the Christian concern for the human person and the human community; recognizing their shortcomings in the past in this respect, Christians have now also to show their solidarity with all people of goodwill in fostering the forces of justice for manifestation of the kingdom of God in humankind and in the whole creation.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

Environmental issues like air and water pollution, depletion of nonrenewable resources, destruction of the ozone layer, increasing nuclear radiation, deforestation and desertification of vast areas, etc. threaten the life itself on this planet. The gifts of science and technology are being misused by human beings to the extent of abusing nature and turning today’s life on earth into a hell, not only for the many millions of existing people but also for the generations to come. The voice of those who call for a just development, equal distribution of resources and ecological lifestyles is being systematically suppressed. Advances in biotechnology and genetic engineering need to be seen in the light of the Holy Spirit because without adequate knowledge of the transcendent (divine) vocation and spiritual nature of humanity, these new techniques run the risk of initiating biological disruption leading to disastrous mutations that are extremely dangerous for the true life on earth. While human creativity and freedom can be affirmed as supreme gifts of God, it should also be emphasized that they should be rooted in divine wisdom and in human spiritual maturity.

JESUS CHRIST SAVIOR AND REDEEMER

The terrible consequences of sin in all of its manifestations in humanity, in society and in the environment make it imperative for all human beings to search for ways and means to do away with the evil that has accumulated in the world at the present time.

Christians confess that, “left to itself,” humanity is unable to rid itself of the power of sin and its consequences of corruption and death. Humanity is incapable of saving itself (Romans 3:10–20). Salvation can only come from Almighty God, the Holy Trinity. Sin was perpetrated by humanity through its exercising of free will. On the other hand, the redemption from sin is a perfect act of God’s will “who is love” (1 John 4:8). Thus, salvation is a divine answer to the evil, through His Resurrection, “so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we (human beings) too may walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

CONCLUSION

We confess that God is the creator of all that exists, beautifully and wonderfully made, a fitting manifestation of his glory (cf. Psalm 103). But we stand today before a wounded creation that suffers under distorted conditions that are the result of the sin of humanity. In our selfishness and greed, we have used our otherwise-good technological abilities to exploit God’s creation, to destroy the balance of nature and to deform what God originally made to be in wholesome communion with us and with Him. Creation is no longer integrated with humanity, nor is it in harmony with God. In fact, it stands in danger of conflagration, in the face of nuclear war.

[Reintegration] can happen only as it is brought once again into communion with the Lord, so that it may find its fullness of purpose and its transfiguration. Humanity can no longer ignore its responsibility to protect and preserve it. In order to do this, however, humanity must learn to treat the creation as a sacred offering to God, an oblation, a vehicle of grace, an incarnation of our most noble aspirations and prayers.

Just as bread and wine are offered for the sanctification of the world and all people in the Eucharist, a sacramental approach to the creation is needed for its reintegration.

The Lord God created His universe and all that is in it as an integrated whole. Today, we have brought about disintegration in what God intended to be integrated. We call on individuals, nations and churches to give effect to a vision of the rightful harmony between the human dimension and the mineral, plant and animal dimensions of the creation. In spirit and in body, we are called to offer the whole of God’s creation back to Him as a sacrament and as an offering cleansed, purified, restored for His sanctification of it.

O God, “the things that are Yours, we offer them to You according to all things and for all things. Amen.” May this be our prayer for the integrity of God’s creation.

Founded in 1948, the World Council of Churches is now a fellowship of more than 340 Christian churches confessing together “the Lord Jesus Christ according to the scriptures; and seeking “to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit”. Tracing its origins to international movements dedicated to world mission and evangelism, life and work, faith and order, Christian education and church unity, the World Council is made up primarily of Protestant and Orthodox churches. The Roman Catholic Church is not a member church but participates with the World Council of Churches and its member communions in a variety of activities and dialogues.
Tell us how you got involved with the environment as an Orthodox priest.

I have had a keen interest in Orthodox Christian social thought since my college days. My focus turned to ecological matters as I grew to understand the gravity of the environmental crisis facing our world. At the same time, the leadership of our Ecumenical Patriarchs brought to the forefront elements of our Orthodox theological tradition that compel an active and assertive prophetic response to the problem. I attended a number of conferences about the specific Orthodox response over the years, including a 1995 “Orthodox Summit on the Environment” and the 1997 symposium on the environment in Santa Barbara, CA, that was organized at the request of His All Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew. I also served for more ten years as the Archdiocese’s representative to a committee of the National Council of Churches that deals with these issues, the Eco-Justice Working Group, and as chairman of the Steering Committee of the Orthodox Fellowship of the Transfiguration since its inception.

The Orthodox Church has a well-developed theology on our place in creation. How does it fit into our tradition? A good example...can be seen clearly in the remarkable “Story of a Certain Monk” (for more information, see page 27). It describes the experience of Elder Aimilianos as he was granted the vision of the uncreated light for the first time and acquired the prayer of the heart. As a result, the true nature of this created world was revealed to him: although not divine itself, it is a place of profound holiness and infinite value because God’s Holy Spirit is everywhere present in it, filling all things with God’s light (grace). This is the same light that shone from within our Lord at the Transfiguration. People so rarely perceive this, however, because of our sinful nature. We separate the creation from the Creator, forgetting that “the earth is the Lord’s” (Psalm 22:1), and then we feel entitled to do with it whatever we please.

Elder Aimilianos did not arrive at this experience totally out of the blue, however. As a monk, he dedicated his life to attaining union with God, by renouncing the passions and temptations of the flesh (the fallen world). At the center of his life was the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, where he received the Eucharist (communion with God) together with his brother monks (in community with others). The bread and wine of the Eucharistic sacrifice, which become Christ’s very body and blood, symbolize the entire created world, which is offered back to the Father in gratitude during the Divine Liturgy. This world is redeemed and sanctified through Christ, who began the transformation of the earth into the kingdom of God through His glorious Resurrection. We are granted a fore-
taste of what it means to become inheritors of this kingdom, when we participate in the life of the Church (Christ’s mystical body). This experience informs everything else we do—including how we treat each other, other living things and, indeed, the whole world.

**But Father Aimilianos is a monk from a traditionally Orthodox country. What about the rest of us? After all, our modern lives here in the United States are so different.**

First, where and when we live should have no bearing on our salvation. God is the same after all, regardless of where we find ourselves. Second, we do not all have the calling to become monks or nuns, but all of us are called to a life of holiness. Who is most important in our lives: God, or something else (e.g., power, wealth, pleasure, entertainment)? Do we live Christ-centered, or self-centered lives?

Our Lord said, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33). To become “seekers of God’s kingdom” (i.e., Jesus’s disciples) cannot be reduced simply to regular church attendance, fasting, prayer, etc. These are all-important and necessary, but they lose their value if they have no effect on how we live the rest of our lives. Our behavior expresses our faith, so it matters, too! We are called, in fact, to become “the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14), reflecting the light of Christ that exists inside us through God’s Holy Spirit. We demonstrate this most effectively by the love (agape) that we express to others. Sometimes, this requires acts of self-sacrifice. In our time, that might mean that we choose to live simpler lives that are less wasteful and energy-dependent, for the sake of those who are suffering today because of environmental degradation, and especially for the sake of generations yet unborn.

This does not mean, of course, that we will somehow usher in God’s kingdom by our own efforts. The redemption of the world will only be completed with the second coming of Christ. But in the meantime we can bear witness to it. We declare our fidelity either to God’s kingdom or to the prince of this world by the choices we make in this life. When we work to preserve and foster life, we glorify the Lord of life. When we abuse and destroy this world, which God created to be so full of life, on the other hand, it is a clear violation of God’s will.

**But surely the average person is not engaged in “abusing and destroying this world”!**

Certainly not, at least not deliberately. Most of us are just trying to get ahead in life, provide for our families, and mind our own business. What we don’t realize is the degree to which our modern civilization is harming the earth. Whether it be the depletion of the oceans, the pollution of the air, water and soil, or the wholesale destruction of forests, wetlands, mountains and other wilderness areas—the list could go on and on—these developments sicken our children, shorten our lives and threaten our future. What we must accept is that being created in God’s image and likeness does not exempt human beings from the need to eat and drink and breathe. We are part of a larger whole, and we depend on the health of the entire world for our survival—for our food, drink and air. So, if doing “business as usual” endangers “life as we know it,” then perhaps it is time to change how we do business.

**How are we addressing this as a Church? What is the mission of the Orthodox Fellowship of the Transfiguration?**

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, and Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios before him, took the lead worldwide in calling attention to the environmental crisis. They were joined in this by the vast majority of our patriarchs, primates and bishops. The Orthodox Fellowship of the Transfiguration is the humble attempt of some committed Orthodox Christians to draw attention in this country to the ecological crisis and to offer some leadership on what we can do as Orthodox Christians. Our organization was endorsed by SCOBA in 2006. We have published two newsletters so far, and set up a Web site (www.orth-transfiguration.org). Our volunteer director, Fred Krueger, has published a number of reference works on the witness of the scriptures and the Fathers regarding creation, as well a collection of pronouncements by contemporary hierarchs. The biggest impediment to our work so far has been financial: much more could be accomplished if we had sufficient funds to hire full-time staff.

**Some people say that talk of a looming environmental crisis is exaggerated—that global warming is not real, or that it has nothing to do with human activity, and that this is just an agenda being pushed by those who seek to profit from it politically or economically. What is your response?**

First of all, the primary focus of the Fellowship has been on the traditional Orthodox themes of repentance, asceticism, the Eucharistic community, putting others ahead of ourselves out of love for Christ and simpler living—and how these influence our attitude toward ecological issues. Those who read the writings of His All Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew will find the same thing. If enough folks were to take these ba-
sic Christian principles seriously, we would be a lot closer to solving our environmental woes.

Second, there are far more threats facing us than just changes in the climate. Toxic substances fill the air, water and ground. Most of the world’s remaining forests are being chopped or burned down. Species are going extinct. Much of the world’s oceans are depleted of fish; coral reefs are dying; and “dead zones” comprise many thousands of square miles of ocean where nothing lives. All these issues and more demand attention.

Third, although I am not a scientist, I have much to learn from them. Most scientists are men and women of integrity. They spend their lives trying to learn more about the world we live in, how it is made, and how we can go on living here safely and in good health for generations to come—in harmony, as much as possible, with the many other forms of life that sustain us. Whether they realize it or not, they also teach us about the glorious beauty of God’s creation, what it is made of, and how it works. This also tells us something about the nature of the One who made it. Now, the vast majority of climate scientists the world over have been warning us for years about the threat from global climate change. Some of what they predicted has already come true, sometimes much sooner than they thought! I believe that it is reasonable—no, necessary—to take them seriously. Consider the following:

What is the worst that can happen, if we listen to the climate scientists, and change how we live? We will have learned how to live simpler lives that use less energy and derive it from renewable sources (wind, water, solar, etc.). Some people will lose their jobs, but other jobs will be created. It will cost a great deal of money up front to make the necessary changes, but we will save trillions of dollars in the end because oil, natural gas and even coal can only get more expensive as they are depleted over time. It will end our dependence on foreign oil, which is mostly imported from countries that are hostile to us. Best of all, though, our children will inherit an earth that can still sustain them and provide them with the many blessings that we currently enjoy.

What is the worst that can happen, however, if we do nothing...? Well, if the predictions are correct, then the climate will grow hotter and hotter. As a consequence, more and more of the world’s plants and animals will die off because they are able to survive only within a very narrow temperature range. This includes many of our basic food crops, such as grains. Today’s fertile prairies will become deserts. More and more of the world’s population will face starvation. Furthermore, tropical diseases will extend their range. As the glaciers and ice caps melt, the world’s coastlines will be inundated. Some island nations will disappear completely. Where will all these people go? Who will take them in?

It seems to me that the choice is clear.
In every public endeavor, there are winners and losers. Whether or not the transition to a renewable energy economy will be done justly depends, to a large part, on the vigilance of the American people, in holding their leaders accountable for what they do. Regardless, it must be done. Too much is at stake.

What can Orthodox parishes do beyond recycling office paper and bulletins?
You would be surprised how many parishes are not even there yet! There are so many ways to “green” a church. Begin by conducting an energy audit to see what an expert recommends (the local electric or gas company might be able to direct you toward a reliable source). My previous parish in Morgantown, WV, did exactly that, and when the time came to renovate their building, they upgraded with the most efficient and green options available to them, such as high-quality insulated windows, new insulation in the attic, and a high-efficiency furnace. In this way, they realized considerable savings on their utility bills. Naturally, such efforts are limited by the age and condition of the buildings. Finances should not be a factor, however, because inexpensive loans are usually available, which easily pay for themselves within a few years. The best part is that our parishioners may be inspired to repeat this process in their homes, thus multiplying the effect many times over!

Please visit our Web site for further suggestions and information, including an exciting new opportunity: the installation of solar panels for generating electricity! You can also join the Fellowship, if you wish, or make a donation. We are also grateful for correspondence and want to encourage the sharing of ideas. Thank you.

Fr. Christopher Bender is Chairman of the Orthodox Fellowship of the Transfiguration and serves at his parish, Kimisis Tis Theotokou, in Aliquippa, PA.
Heaven and earth meet in the Church through the Divine Liturgy. The newest full-color zine from the Department of Religious Education begins with a brief history of worship in the Orthodox Church and then details each section of the Divine Liturgy.

Special features include a “visual dictionary” of liturgical items, a look at Church architecture, and an exploration of the Creed’s scriptural foundations. Develop active understanding and engagement with prayers, hymns, readings and the Eucharist by combining the student text with the comprehensive unit in the Teacher Guide.

Suitable for ages 10 and up—for use in the classroom, during retreats or at home.

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50+ $2.95 each

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$9.95 each  
1 unit with 5 lesson plans

Available October 1. Please call (800) 566-1088 to order.

Also new! Of Your Mystical Supper: The Eucharist  
Available October 15.  
High School Student Zine and Teacher Guide
The festival at St. Demetrios had a new feature this year: recycling bins. Spearheaded by the Matzorkis family, and with support from Lee Zapis and John Asimou, the program featured ten new recycling bins paid for by anonymous parishioners, as well as fifteen bins loaned to the church by University Schools and Rocky River High. The public was extremely respectful of the bins, making the program a great success, despite some initial concerns. “People were worried we’d get lots of food waste and Styrofoam,” said James Matzorkis, a leader in the effort, “but that wasn’t a problem this weekend. People read the signs and put just about everything where it belonged, which really made the program run smoothly.”

Matzorkis and John Kopasakis covered the grounds together. Over the four-day weekend, they filled sixteen 64-cubic-foot containers with cardboard, aluminum foil, plastic and glass bottles, and aluminum cans. Not only did the program keep the waste from going into already crowded landfills, it sent it back to the community as usable material, which in turn lowered the community’s demand for that material to be pumped out of the earth. In the case of recycled cardboard, that spells a lower demand for cutting down trees. In the case of recycled aluminum, it spells a lower demand for potentially dangerous mining operations, and in the case of recycled plastic, it spells a lower demand for crude oil, which, we all know, we’re running out of as a planet. Matzorkis and Kopasakis hope to introduce the idea to other Orthodox church festivals in the Cleveland area, including St. Paul’s and Sts. Constantine and Helen. “It just feels good to do a service to the church and to the Earth,” said Matzorkis, “I really feel like we’re making a positive impact.”

Our parish is blessed to own fifteen acres of land in a growing neighborhood. Rather than allowing this acreage to lie fallow, we thought it would be good stewardship to create some outdoor uses for this parcel. Our chapel and church office occupy a couple of small, old buildings that were recycled and resurrected from “trash” buildings and even added onto as our congregation grew! We are developing plans to have a walking trail, which will include icon stands and an overlook point.

Last year, we replanted our living Christmas tree onto the grounds, hopefully starting a yearly tradition. We plan to establish a variety of gardens (memorial, serenity and organic vegetables and herbs), thanks to a master gardener who has started attending our parish and is willing to help us with this endeavor.

In 2007, parishioner and church accountant Mark Kolas instituted an interoffice ink cartridge recycling program through a local print shop. Through our monthly newsletter, we encouraged parishioners to support this project, and the response was impressive. Since then, we have collected dozens and dozens of various sizes of ink cartridges for reuse rather than refuse from homes and places of work. Later that same year, with the help
of another parishioner, Elaine Campbell, we installed a paper recycling bin in a corner of the church parking lot.

This bin is used not only by the church office to recycle extra meeting handouts, bulletins and school papers, but also by the community at large. St. Demetrios Church is situated on the border of two Cleveland suburbs, Westlake and Rocky River, and residents of both towns can use this bin.

—Eleni Jenks, St. Demetrios Church, Rocky River, OH

Because our Patriarch supports the environment, in 2008 we began an Earth Day celebration for the children of Holy Trinity, New Orleans. We printed out coloring sheets for the children in addition to bookmarks with Earth Day information on them. Our theme colors for the event are of course, green mixed with brown, etc. to mimic the earth. We have a small tree set up that we made ornaments for and which we used again in 2009. Along with all of the activities, we have a standing sign with information dedicated to showing how our Patriarch supports this celebration. On all of the materials we used, we included “please recycle.”

This year, we were able to contact our local Whole Foods grocery store, which donated enough reusable shopping bags for each child to get one. This year, we contacted a club called Mothers of Organic (a subsidiary of Organic Valley Foods), and they sent us tattoos and activity books for the children, in addition to copies of their MOO Rootstock magazine for the adults. We stuffed the bags and once again put a few crayons in for the children. We planned an appropriate snack menu with fruit skewers for the children, nuts, water and 100% juice. We had also found two recycling factory kits in which you can create your own recycled paper and raffled those off for the children. The event for its second year in a row was a SUCCESS!

—Angeliki Gervais and Fr. Anthony Stratis, Holy Trinity Cathedral, New Orleans, LA

An eight-acre parcel on the line between Tijuana and Rosarito, Mexico, was transformed through volunteer labor from a horse ranch into a home for orphaned and abandoned boys when St. Innocent Orphanage opened in 1996. The ranch served as a base for Project Mexico’s home-building ministry (founded in 1988) to some of Mexico’s poorest families, and continues to do so to this day.

While it wasn’t yet the vogue to be “green,” the founders and early volunteers knew something that we’ve all since realized: in the long haul, being green is simpler, makes more sense and saves costs, in addition to being the right thing to do as stewards of God’s creation. Project Mexico Founder and Executive Director Greg Yova, an engineer by training, took the long view from the very beginning. As the orphanage facilities have expanded over the past fifteen years, sustainability has been at the forefront.

An irrigation system utilizes “gray” water from the laundry, showers and sinks, along with captured rain water, and leads it to the plants that stabilize the sandy hillside on which some of the buildings sit. Eco-friendly detergents and cleaning solvents are used whenever possible. Recycling is not well-developed yet in Mexico, but the orphanage does recycle metal and glass. The septic system for the orphanage employs a French drain, or leach field, which is used to remove contaminants and impurities from the liquid that emerges from the septic tank. Table scraps provide food for the pigs that are part of the menagerie of livestock that provide food for the orphanage. This summer a solar system is being installed to meet 80 percent of the hot water need. Even more significant, with volunteer labor and donated materials, the ministry will install a solar energy system designed by Greg Yova that will provide nearly 100 percent of the electricity at the orphanage. The system will save the orphanage nearly $30,000 per year and eliminate the burning of thousands of gallons of fuel.

Being “green” is totally consistent with the mission and values of St. Innocent Orphanage; a belief that we are all each others’ keepers, and the earth and all that is in it has been entrusted to us, including the children who have been abandoned or forgotten. At the orphanage, laundry water is saved and transformed into food for plants; table scraps are saved and transformed into food for livestock; soon sunlight will be saved and transformed into energy, and the once hopeless lives of abandoned and abused Mexican boys are being saved and transformed into the fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy and peace. Once angry and frightened, these boys are being transformed into lovers of God and stewards of His creation.

—Valerie Yova, Project Mexico
Our lives on Earth hang in a delicate balance, between God’s Kingdom and His Creation… As humans we are inextricably bound to His Creation in our lifetime, yet we often lose sight of this in our worldly pursuits… There are such rich blessings in simply acknowledging the awesomeness of God’s Creation… I should not neglect this gift, in fact I should foster profound love and respect for nature in my family and community…

SNAP! My heart thumps as my theological musings are cut short by the sound of a twig breaking. “What blessed encounter are we about to be graced with?” I wonder. My eyes narrow, my body stills as I scan the leafy lacework of the lush forest. My hand is poised behind me as I grip my young son’s hand. “Shhh,” I whisper, “Look!” Through a small clearing in the trees we spy a doe bathed in dappled sunlight. A few steps back, by her hindquarters, wobbles a tiny fawn, speckled with snowy white, a newcomer. A wee gasp escapes the lips behind me. I smile and squeeze my son’s hand. Just like us, I think, mother and child in the woods. We are vulnerable, yet empowered by His Grace. I am filled with awe at the impeccable timing of this encounter. My son’s eyes are wide with wonder at seeing not one, but two deer.

I have spent most of my life in close contact with nature. I have always found myself in deep contemplation of God’s Creation and my place in it. In nature, the vast gulf between God and me feels just a little smaller.

I believe that we can have no success in environmental stewardship without first experiencing deep love and reverence for God’s Creation. That means a sense of awe, wonder, joy and devotion. We can create opportunities for our children to experience these things simply by spending quality time in nature, but we must also experience them ourselves. A child will imitate and emulate others around him. We must model our devotion, and if we strive, if we are authentic, they will feel it. This is a good place for real stewardship to begin.

Awe
While standing at the base of a mountain, the awe we experience shows on our faces.

Wonder
“Wow! I wonder how in the world all of these salmon are going to get up that waterfall to lay their eggs?” I might say to no one in particular. If I’m sincere, my children will hear wonder.

Joy
When I am simply moved to skip and sing a song in a field of wildflowers, my children might even join in celebrating my joy and experience their own.

Devotion
If given the opportunity, children will discover new things for themselves. Self-discovery goes to the heart and this leads to
devotion. Devotion coupled with our God-given gifts, which were sealed for us in baptism, will lead us to stewardship. If we are truly devoted to God’s Creation, we will engage our gifts and talents in the care and concern for it.

But how can we truly foster love and stewardship of nature in our family and community?

**Remember Your Childhood**

Remember back to your childhood. Where did you play? Did you climb trees? Hide in the grass? Dig for worms? Build sandcastles? Our memories provide rich clues to the things we may enjoy in nature today.

You may want to start with a container garden on the patio or walks in a small neighborhood park. There is much to be gained by observing one small natural area through the seasons. Take guided walks on a nature trail. A naturalist can point out many interesting details of the local flora and fauna. Education and research is helpful if you are not an experienced outdoors person. Your local naturalists and nature centers are great resources.

Ask questions when in nature and carry them with you. Some will have concrete answers, some may not. Do not feel compelled to answer all of your children’s questions. It may be best if you don’t, especially with the very young child. Oftentimes, responses like “I’m not sure; what do you think?” or “We’ll have to find out” are sufficient. This type of response will help your child carry his wonder with him a bit and give him some opportunity to contemplate, which leads to bigger questions. By the same token, detailed scientific explanations are not needed when cultivating wonder.

**Share Nature with Others**

Invest time, lots of time, in nature with your family and friends. Our family loves to be outdoors together. With five teenagers and a six-year-old, the only place we can find harmony is outside, away from worldly pressures. We love the rolling surf and sand beneath our toes. Poking around in tidal pools and turning over rocks is endless entertainment. It is our family tradition to build driftwood houses and huts whenever possible, and my daughter has to be buried up to her neck in wet cool sand every time we hit the shore!

Start a communal garden. Our community has an organic garden to provide food for all families and students who wish to share it. I cannot convey the joy and peace I have found in it! As a result, we have also provided food for birds, bunnies and chipmunks, and they have provided sustenance for the new batch of hawks born this year!

One parish, the Nativity of the Virgin Mary in Cohasset, MA, recently created a new youth program, “God’s Green Earth.” This includes things like hikes, bike rides and travels to the beach after Sunday services. Arthur Anastos, co-founder of the program, says,
The premise of the program is actually quite simple. It’s about finding time for beauty, contemplation and community. It’s an opportunity to stop and explore together the places we drive past every day but never acknowledge. It’s about the opportunity to see the tides converge or the under-rock crabs scatter, to see the gallery of ferns or the first yellow sunflower in a field of green, and to see other species coexisting with one another. It can help us draw closer to what is important. And we’ve found it’s as enriching for the adults as it is for the children.

Why not start a family hiking club for nature walks in your own parish? You can download a free starter kit from the Children & Nature Network (www.childrenandnature.org).

Be Prepared!
It is important that responsible outdoor activities begin with thoughtful planning and preparation. Proper clothing, water and high-energy food are just a few things to consider. A well-planned activity will bring a positive experience for both learners and leaders. For this, you can find many resources online or at the local library.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, “The happiest man is he who learns from nature the lesson of worship.” Is it possible that by allowing our childhoods to be filled with wonder, we might also be offering ourselves a priceless spiritual gift? Besides, how else are we supposed to approach the sacraments of the Church but with awe and wonder? Without these, it is questionable whether we really have the ability to genuinely experience the fullness of our Orthodox faith.

Kirsten Smyrni was raised in California and Alaska and now lives in Brookline, MA, where her husband is studying at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology. They are blessed with six children ages 6–21. She is Lifeways certified and has taught at a Waldorf kindergarten. Kirsten is pursuing a degree in early childhood education and is developing an outdoor nature preschool program for a local organic farm, where she will begin teaching this fall.
Beating the Drum

Excerpts from *Cosmic Grace, Humble Prayer*

Since 1989, Ecumenical Patriarchs Demetrios and Bartholomew have issued many statements on the environment. Through them, we can begin to see the formation of a distinctive Orthodox “theology of the environment,” drawing on classic themes from patristic and liturgical sources, and connecting them to the environmental issues facing our planet. The full texts can be found in *Cosmic Grace, Humble Prayer: The Ecological Vision of the Green Patriarch Bartholomew* (Eerdmans, 2003), edited by John Chryssavgis, for closer study and reflection.

**MESSAGES FROM ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH DEMETRIOS (1972–1991)**

**September 1, 1989**

The abuse by contemporary humanity of its privileged position within creation and of the Creator’s order “to have dominion” over the earth (Genesis 1:28) has already led the world to the edge of apocalyptic self-destruction. This is occurring either in the form of natural pollution, which is dangerous for all living beings, or in the form of extinction for many species of the animal and plant world, or else again in various other forms. Scientists and other scholars warn us now of the danger and speak of the phenomena threatening the life of our planet.

... The Church of Christ cannot remain unmoved. ... According to the great Fathers of the Church, the human person is the prince of creation, endowed with the privilege of freedom. Being a partaker simultaneously of the material and the spiritual world, humanity was created in order to refer creation back to the Creator, in order that the world may be saved from decay and death.

... Humanity has lost the sense of sacredness of creation and acts as its arbitrary ruler and rude violator. Instead of the eucharistic and ascetic spirit ... we observe today a violation of nature for the satisfaction, not of basic human needs, but of humanity’s endless and constantly increasing desire and lust, encouraged by the prevailing philosophy of the consumer society.

Yet “the whole creation has been groaning in travail” (Romans 8:22) and is now beginning to protest at its treatment by human beings. Humanity cannot infinitely and whimsically exploit the natural sources of energy.

Accordingly, we declare the first day of September of each year, ... namely, the first day of the ecclesiastical year, the day of the protection of the environment.
September 1, 1990
Beloved brothers and spiritual children, use the natural environment as its stewards and not as its owners. Acquire an ascetic ethos bearing in mind that everything in the natural world, whether great or small, has its importance for the life of the world, and nothing is useless or contemptible. Regard yourselves as being responsible before God for every creature and treat everything with love and care. Only in this way shall we be able to prevent the threatening destruction of our planet and secure a physical environment where life for the coming generations of humankind will be healthy and happy.

September 1, 1994
It is the destiny of humankind to restore the proper relationship between God and the world, just as it was in the Garden of Eden. . . . Repentance must be accompanied by three soundly focused principles that manifest the ethos of the Orthodox Church.

There is first the eucharistic ethos, which, above all else, means using the earth’s natural resources with thankfulness, offering
them back to God; indeed, not only them, but also ourselves. In the Eucharist, we return to God what is His own: namely, the bread and the wine. Representing the fruits of creation, the bread and wine are no longer imprisoned by a fallen state, and are capable of receiving the divine presence within themselves. At the same time, we pray for ourselves to be sanctified, because through sin we have fallen away and have betrayed our baptismal promise.

Second, we have the ascetic ethos of Orthodoxy that involves fasting and other spiritual works. These make us recognize that all of the things we take for granted in fact comprise God’s gifts, provided in order to satisfy our needs. They are not ours to abuse and waste simply because we have the ability to pay for them.

Third, the liturgical ethos emphasizes community concern and sharing. We stand before God together; and we hold in common the earthly blessings that He has given to all creatures. Not to share our own wealth with the poor is theft from the poor and deprivation of their means of life; we possess not our own wealth but theirs, as one of the holy Fathers of the Church reminds us. We stand before the Creator as the Church of God, which . . . is the continued incarnate presence of the Lord Jesus Christ on earth; His presence looks to the salvation of the world, not just of humanity but also of the entire creation.

1994: The Least Person Can Make the Greatest Difference
We do not place much trust in the strong and the mighty, or in people of authority. We believe, rather, in those willing and patient individuals, in those who do not lose sight of their objective, namely the objective for good. Do not forget the acknowledgment of the ancient Greeks that “drops of water can make even rocks hollow.” Many simple people, in various small corners of the earth, with nominal but continuous daily concerns, are able to change the world, even if only slightly, for the better.

1995: Communication and Conservation
Two fundamental consequences emerge from the teachings of our traditions.

The first consequence is that the world is not meant to be used by humans for their own purpose, but it is the means whereby humans come into relationship with God. If humans change this use into egocentric, greedy exploitation, into oppression and destruction of nature, then humanity’s own vital relationship with God is denied and refuted, a relationship predestined to continue into eternity.

The second consequence is this: the world as a creation of God is not a neutral object for our use. The world incarnates the word of the Creator, just as every work of art incarnates the word of the artist. The objects of physical natural reality bear the seal of the wisdom and love of their Creator. They are words of God calling human beings to come into dialogue with Him.

1997: Creation and Icons
Icons are a necessary expression of the world’s sacredness. “Standing inside the Church, we think that we are in heaven,” as one hymn states, because the Church is the embodiment and sanctification of the whole world, while the created world is called to become the Church. Icons break down the wall of separation between the sacred and the profane, between this world and the next, between earth and heaven.

We are called today to rediscover this iconic dimension of creation. And this is what distinguishes us as Christians and awesome responsibility for the survival of our environment. In the Church, then, “through heaven and earth and sea, through
wood and stone, through relics and Church buildings and the Cross, through angels and people, through all of creation, both visible and invisible, we offer veneration and honor to the Creator and Master and Maker of all things, and to him alone.”

1999: Liturgy and Life

The spiritual heritage of Orthodoxy has had a profound effect over the centuries on the public and spiritual life of the Orthodox peoples, defining in an impressive way their particular ethos. This is the case not only with respect to the liturgical experience of the faith, but also with respect to the extension of this experience to the secular realm. In the Orthodox tradition and understanding, the world was initially very good but subsequently became rebellious; within this fallen creation humanity is called to achieve, through divine grace and personal willingness and endeavor, assimilation to God and deification by grace. Through the Orthodox Church, the sanctifying and restoring divine grace of God is extended to the entire cosmos. This is the grace that springs from the Holy Altar, on which the mystery of the divine economy in Christ is constantly celebrated and the sacredness of the divine creation is praised through unceasing thanksgiving and doxology to the all-wise Creator.

2002: All-Embracing Love

Our prayer and purpose join the priest who chants these words in the Divine Liturgy: “In offering to You, Your own of Your own, on behalf of all and for the sake of all—we praise You, we bless You, we give thanks to You, O Lord, and we pray to You, our God.” Then we are able to embrace all—not with fear or out of necessity, but with love and joy. Then we care for the plants and for the animals, for the trees and for the rivers, for the mountains and for the seas, for all human beings and for the whole natural environment. Then we discover joy, rather than inflicting sorrow, in our life and in our world. Then we are creating instruments of life and not tools of death. Then creation and humanity—the one that encompasses and the one that is encompassed—cooperate and correspond; they are no longer in contradiction or in conflict. Then, just as humanity offers creation in an act of priestly service and sacrifice to God, so also does creation offer itself in return as a gift to humanity. Then everything becomes an exchange, an abundance, and a fulfillment of love.

September 1, 2004

It is always the easier approach to lay blame on Western development and technological progress for the ills that we confront in our world. And it is always a temptation to believe that we hold the solution to problems that we all face today or else to ignore the imminent danger that we face globally. What is more difficult—and yet at the same time more noble—is discern the degree to which we constitute part of the problem itself. Just how many of us examine the foods that we consume, the goods that we purchase, the energy that we waste, or the consequences of our privileged living? How often do we take the time to scrutinize the choices that we make on a daily basis, whether as individuals, as institutions, as parishes, as communities, as societies and even as nations?

In an age when the information is readily available to us, there is surely no excuse for ignorance or indifference. To overlook is to shut our eyes to a reality that is ever present and ever increasing. Former generations and cultures may have been unaware of the implications of their actions. Nevertheless, today, more perhaps than any other time or age, we are in a unique position. Today, we stand at a crossroads, namely at a point of choosing the cross that we have to bear. For, today, we know fully well the ecological and global impact of our decisions and actions, irrespective of how minimal or insignificant these may be.
Living 2000 years after Christ’s death and resurrection poses some problems for the twenty-first-century believer. We have come so far from that ancient world of Christ in terms of both time and lifestyle, and are surrounded by so many distractions in today’s world, that mere belief in God can be a daily struggle.

A few constants in my life counteract the disbelief that is bred by this distance: The miracle of life. Connecting with loved ones. The mysteries of the Orthodox Church. And the remarkable, ineffable beauty in God’s created world.

God’s earth is a wellspring of spiritual inspiration. It is a place that reveals, in the vastness of the heavens and the tiniest butterfly eggs, His infinite wisdom and grandeur. God’s created world offers His children glimpses into the Other World. He has given us this earth, beautiful with fruits that inspire and nourish us. These gifts are to be cherished, yet, more often than not, we view them as booty to be pillaged. When I think of this world and the resources being depleted and corrupted by human greed, first and foremost my own, it crushes my spirit.

Because of this, becoming an “environmentalist”—a steward of the earth’s resources—was an easy decision. But like many self-proclaimed environmentalists in America today, I didn’t really know at first how to take that superficial identity and turn it into a mystical act of stewardship and self-sacrifice that would bring me closer to the Lord.

The way I ultimately began the circular process of engaging in that mystical act could be summarized in the following way. It occurred, and is occurring, one tiny step at a time.

Step One
I plant the seeds of change in my heart and ask God to grow them, producing abundant fruits. This begins with a prayerful appreciation of the earth. When I walk through the places my life takes me and I observe the natural world, I try to notice the details, and thank God for them. I find that the more I attempt to see God in every beautiful thing—from the fascinating intricacies of the insect world to the shapes of tree leaves—the more naturally prayers come. Often, the words of Psalm 104 spring to my mind. “Oh Lord, you are very great. You are clothed with honor and majesty,” or “Lord, how manifold are your works. In wisdom you have made them all” are simple prayers I say, many times with tears, when I stop to admire something God made.

There is another dimension to this as well—a dark side, but a side that is illuminating in its own way. It is a kind of inspiration that comes from imagining a world in which these beautiful fruits are dried up, dead, and gone. This sad imagery inspires prayers that God will grant me the strength to nur-
ture what He has given our world so that I can selflessly grow these fruits rather than selfishly deplete them.

Step Two
In the spirit of that aforementioned selflessness, I try to reduce consumption of resources. This is at its core a spiritual act because it involves examining my own gluttony, my hedonism, my waste, and determining how I can take less from the world and give more. For our family of five living in an old bungalow in suburban Milwaukee, that means many things:

We try to be aware of how much water we run and how many lights we leave burning needlessly. And then we try to use less.

We reuse resources by collecting rainwater in barrels to use on our gardens, by composting some of the waste we generate in both an outdoor compost bin and two “vermicompost” bins that use red wiggler worms to turn our kitchen scraps into super-rich compost to feed our plants.

We take advantage of our city’s excellent recycling program to cut down on what we send to the landfill.

We don’t eat meat, and, as of late, have been trying to avoid eating out, reducing how much money we spend on food.

We use canvas tote bags for grocery shopping instead of plastic ones, and we use washable cloths for kitchen clean-up instead of paper towels.

We try not to spend hundreds of dollars each week buying things we don’t really need, and instead look to antique and thrift stores first when we need new household items.

We drive less and bike and walk more.

We try to support the local economy. We are fortunate to have a number of locally-owned businesses within walking distance. Supporting local businesses means less fuel is used to truck in goods from far-off lands.

We keep the heat on the low side in the winter and don’t run our A/C in the summer.

We limit the amount of electric products we buy and go for hand-powered options. For example, we use a carpet sweeper to clean daily lint and dirt off our carpets, instead of an energy-sucking vacuum. We try to use an old-fashioned, hand coffee bean grinder instead of an electric one, and we brew our coffee with a kettle of hot water and a French press, instead of the high-energy cappuccino maker we used to use.

We hand-wash and air-dry our dishes. We use a manual “reel mower” instead of a gas lawn mower. We use hand-crank LED flashlights and a hand-crank paper shredder.

I admit, sometimes the above items seem more like a “to-do list” than a list of accomplishments. We fail—sometimes a lot. I drive to the school three blocks away when it rains, and cave to the temptation to buy a cartload of cute unnecessaries from the department store. Instead of line-drying my clothes, I frequently throw them in the dryer. I don’t let
These weaknesses stop me, though. Just like theosis itself, this is an ongoing process that may take years of slow self-denial to become firmly set. I find that this is most practical way to make changes—slowly, over time, and with a mindset that accepts error as a way of being humbled. This humility is critical, because real positive change cannot be made in a prideful heart.

**Step Three**
I become a part of God's creative process by thinking of my own ways to protect and nurture the earth. That means growing as much of my own fruit, vegetables and herbs as possible on my ¼-acre urban lot. It also means growing plants for their beauty and arranging a landscape that is naturally pleasing to the eye and inspirational to those seeking respite from the dreary world of fallen human nature. For others, it might mean tending to gardens planted in public spaces, planting a balcony or rooftop garden in an apartment or renting garden space at a community garden.

But it means more than growing gardens. It also means creating—creating beautiful art inspired by nature, crafting words that draw attention to the wonders of the created world. And it means innovating: conjuring up ideas to better use our earth’s natural resources.

We were made in the image and likeness of God. As God is the creator, then, so are we creative beings. And when we choose to sit and watch TV all night when we could be contributing by creating gardens, art, or ideas, we are behaving selfishly rather than selflessly. Creative work requires a degree of self-sacrifice, but the beauty of this is that there are few things more restorative to a bored, anxious soul than the creative process.

**Step Four**
I have become an evangelist. I hesitate to use the word because, for me, it conjures images of the downtrodden passing out poorly written fliers while yelling into megaphones on street corners. My brand of evangelism, or rather the one I strive to emulate, is the one spoken of by St. Francis of Assisi, who said words to this effect: “Preach the Gospel. Use words if necessary.” I do use words, because in this day and age they are often necessary—especially when it comes to the stewardship of the earth bit. We have become such a lost people—lost in our egoism, lost in our drive to fill the “God-shaped hole” in our hearts with anything that instantly gratifies us. We are so lost that we can’t listen anymore to the quiet actions of the Holy Spirit. So sometimes we need to be hit over the head with words.

Well, I don’t exactly hit people over the head. Rather, I try to speak gently, sharing the truth about what I’ve learned, about my own successes and failures. I use my skills as a writer to blog, share on Facebook, and “tweet” on twitter. But there are other ways to share, like teaching friends about the practical things that can be done to be a better steward of the earth. Or sharing a bountiful harvest with neighbors. Or helping a church to take the above steps as a community.

**Step Five**
I pray more. This process is circular and recursive. You take all steps in order, at the same time, and in reverse. And all the steps lead back to step one: prayer. Pray in thanksgiving. Pray to glorify the goodness of our Lord as He helps us accomplish these beautiful things. Pray for the ongoing strength to be thoughtful, giving, nurturing and humble, just as our Lord is all of these things.

It’s a slow process, and again I must emphasize that one’s steps should be tiny and consistent, rather than large and difficult to maintain. Otherwise, the whole process falls apart quite easily.

There is a temptation, of course, to so lose oneself in the actions of living in an environmentally-responsible way that the higher motivation of knowing God through self-sacrifice and service is easily forgotten. For me it comes down to prayer. Thankfully, every time I look at the beautiful fruits of the earth, prayer leaps into my mind as I thank God for His mercy, for the richness of His creation, and for His goodness, evident in the way He so cares for us that He provides us with simple, beautiful resources to nourish and protect us. Looking at the start of a broccoli floret appearing in the center of giant green leaves, or the rich red hue of a June strawberry, or the delicate, fragrant white flowers on an apple tree is such a blessing—not only because it reminds me that God feeds my body, but also that He has created gorgeous, artful packaging in the foods He gives to nourish me, thereby feeding my body and my soul.

Yes, the Lord is good. He is clothed with honor and majesty.

*Heather Zydek is a novelist, blogger and urban homesteader in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin. You can learn more about her work at www.heatherzydek.com.*
Tomorrow is Here
Making a Difference Today
While Building for the Future

Christ J. Kamages, AIA

The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for God has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers.

—Psalm 24:1–2

His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, in his address to the 20th World Energy Congress, observes that the Earth is “a gift received from above, which it is in turn our obligation to respect and return to future generations.” As Christians, we are called to be good stewards given the inheritance and the resources God has provided. Failing to do this in the past has lead to a polluted world where energy is scarce and the threat of global warming is increasing. Patriarch Bartholomew, in his 2008 World Environment Day message charges, “Let us understand, beloved brothers, sisters and children in the Lord, that each of us from our own position must make every effort to confront the environmental crisis.”

In responding to His All Holiness’s challenge, we must become sustainable in all our ways. According to the U.S. Green Building Council, to be sustainable simply means to have minimal negative impact to the environment in all our actions and to repair, wherever possible, damage that has been done.

How we create and operate our building is a vital component to this challenge. The National Resource Defense Council points out that construction and operation of buildings consumes more than 40 percent of all the energy resources on the earth; therefore, producing sustainable buildings and making them more efficient will deliver big paybacks in terms of reduced operating costs and overall benefit to the environment.

Our parish buildings, from the worship space to the support buildings, are good places to look for sustainable opportunities. Whether you are constructing new buildings or dealing with existing ones, we offer some strategies for creating a place that is whole, as a beautiful and lasting icon of your parish’s commitment to preserving the resources given to us by God for the generations to come.

KEY STEPS TO CREATE A SUSTAINABLE VISION & REALITY

Getting Smart
The number one thing you can do to improve your building project is to take time to explore the holistic approach to green building. One way to do this is to review the many articles and recommendations by the U.S. Green Building Council or the U.S. Department of Energy. Another step is to know where you are with your facilities and practices by conducting an energy audit (often freely provided by your local utility company) and what your goals are for reducing your parish’s impact on the environment. Once you know your starting point, you have a way to track progress and to prioritize different technical options.
**Gaining “In-site”**

When it comes to new construction, many sustainability and energy efficiency concerns are exacerbated or alleviated through the proper selection of a site. Choosing the correct site and building placement will lead to substantial savings down the road while creating a more accessible and friendly building. According to the U.S. Green Building Council, the best sites utilize existing infrastructure, protect greenfields (previously undeveloped land) and preserve habitat and natural resources while encouraging alternative transportation and pedestrian access. Building placement on the site affects things like solar gain, energy efficiency, melting snow, flooding problems, wind and air circulation, and water reuse.

In addition to positioning and site selection, thoughtful and well-placed landscaping can make your parish greener. Trees planted close to the building cut cooling costs with their shade, but be sure to use species that are native to the site. In desert and semiarid locations, this often means xeriscaping—using dry-climate species vs. those accustomed to more plentiful rainfall. Limiting the amount of water needed by the plants around your parish is vital to sustainability. Landscapers can offer many alternatives to water- and pesticide-guzzling lawns. Wise landscaping reduces the need for mowing and trimming, saving maintenance costs and reducing emissions.

**Putting Energy Where It Counts**

We cannot decide what the weather will be, but we can create a building envelope (the walls, roof and floor) that is energy efficient while controlling the weather’s impact on human beings. This means that it does not allow the heat to escape in the winter or excess heat to infiltrate in the summer.

The most cost-effective step you can take is weatherizing your buildings. This involves insulating accessible attics and uninsulated or unfinished walls, basements and crawlspace. Ensure that the skin of the building (stucco, brick stone, etc.) is intact, and repair cracks. Wet insulation is not effective, so be sure to fix any leaks in your roof or walls. If building new, ensuring tighter construction with fewer gaps will help to ward off uncontrolled air movement.

Leaky openings like windows and doors are a major source of infiltration of heat. Seal and weather-strip these or, better yet, replace old windows with operable, low emissivity (low-e) dual-paned windows (see Fig. 1). This step will reduce heat gain/loss and will be a great investment in thermal comfort and performance. It is important to note that employing day lighting can be tricky because incorrectly placed and sized windows tend to add heat to the space while creating uncomfortable glare. Use window shades and shading devices affixed to the exterior of the building to control direct sunlight and glare through windows, thereby reducing heating and cooling costs. Properly employed day lighting will save energy while enhancing the liturgical environment (Fig. 2).

Another step in creating a more efficient building envelope is to install an appropriately colored roof (sometimes called a cool roof) that will save thousands of dollars a year in heating and cooling costs. It does this by reflecting unwanted energy from the sun and reducing the heat gain/loss through better materials.

These are not new ideas. In the past it was quite common to use thick walls and pale colors to ward off the heat of the day (Fig. 3). We can and should still do the same thing—especially now that we have the advantage of modeling the total proposed system using modern computer programs to judge overall energy efficiency.

**Choosing, Using and Recycling Materials**

Using rapidly renewable materials (such as bamboo, linoleum or cork) for furniture, cabinets, countertops and flooring and recycled materials (such as cotton batting, various recycled engineered lumber, or reclaimed timber) for insulation and framing will perform as well as traditional materials, with the added benefit of preserving our natural resources.

Low-VOC (volatile organic compound) paints and sealants contribute to a healthier environment for the users of the building (reducing the new paint smell means less fumes and...
toxins to inhale). They also reduce the amount of toxic chemicals that end up in the landfill. Purchase resource-efficient, nontoxic cleaning products and supplies. Using and reusing low-impact materials that can be recycled at the end of their lifecycle is often overlooked but will enhance our stewardship of the earth. Lastly, a lifecycle audit of all the planned materials will tell you if your selections are helping or harming our environment and contributing to a lower bottom line in your construction budget.

**Systems Savvy**

Whether part of a new building project or a renovation project, thoughtful systems planning is key. Another major area of concern is the heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system. Like most buildings, church buildings can use zoning to minimize energy consumption in the worship space, with proper controls and thoughtful design/redesign of the delivery of the tempered air into the space. Because of the complexity of a church, these systems are often poorly planned or implemented. Adjusting these components will add greater efficiency and performance to the system.

Maintenance is also important for efficiency, so clean the filters on furnaces and air conditioners and replace them when needed. Look for filters labeled “MERV 13” for improved air quality. While it can be an expensive undertaking, consider replacing your old, inefficient HVAC system with a new ultra-efficient zoned heating and cooling system to reduce long-term costs and boost performance. Zoning allows you to reduce unnecessary heating and cooling by turning off supply to unused areas. You may also be able to install an economizer on your existing system that could lower operating costs by thousands every year. Finally, install programmable, setback thermostats that automatically reduce heating and cooling when areas are unoccupied, and set your thermostat for optimal HVAC efficiency for your region (Fig. 4).

Lighting is another area that has functional and theological implications. The incorporation of natural light has key benefits of savings and enhanced aesthetics (Fig. 5). Using high-efficiency LED lighting, dimming ballasts or compact fluorescent bulbs, and integrating infrared occupancy sensor lighting are ef-

For More Information

Resources on the Orthodox Church’s environmental status and information about how you can make a difference:

- **Web Sites**
  - Greek Orthodox Archdiocese articles on the environment and the Orthodox Christian Church (www.goarch.org/ourfaith/environment)
  - U.S. Green Building Council (www.usgbc.org): click on “Learn about green building” for general information
  - U.S. Department of Energy (www.energy.gov/forconsumers.htm): lots of research and facts about sustainability
  - Green Seal (www.greenseal.org): information on certified green products and environmental standards
  - American Chemistry Council’s GreenBuildingSolutions (www.greenbuildingsolutions.org): clearinghouse of strategies and general information related to sustainable building

- **DVDs**
  - Orthodox Marketplace (www.orthodoxmarketplace.com/dvd-and-video/#2): several DVDs for sale documenting the Ecumenical Patriarch and his environmental advocacy
    - The Green Patriarch
    - The Arctic: The Consequences of Human Folly
    - The Amazon: The End of Infinity

- **Books**
  - Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, *Through the Creation to the Creator* (Friends of the Center, 1996)
  - Fr. John Chryssavgis, *Beyond the Shattered Image* (Light and Life, 1999)
  - Elizabeth Theokritoff, *Living in God’s Creation: Orthodox Perspectives on Ecology* (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2009)
Effective options that can reduce operating costs while increasing visual appeal. Reduce the operating time of your lights: Turn them off when not in use and utilize available natural lighting. Make sure outdoor light timers are adjusted for daylight savings time. Attention to these details helps reduce energy use. Providing Energy Star qualified exit signs can save $10 per sign annually in electricity costs while preventing up to 500 pounds of greenhouse gas emissions. Unplug any electronic device that is not in use, and use smart power strips to prevent “phantom” power usage by electronics in standby mode.

Central hot water heaters can use a tremendous amount of energy. Be sure to insulate hot water pipes and tanks. For normal hot water usage, set hot water to 130°F. Consider tankless or on-demand water heaters to avoid constantly keeping water hot for added savings and better performance.

There are other systems you may want to consider. While there is always an opportunity to use solar power or photovoltaic (PV) panels, the use of solar power is something that should be considered on a case–by-case basis. One of our clients developed an entire solar field that produces enough energy for the parish and kicks back additional energy to the grid (Fig. 6). Solar hot water is another option, but in our experience, the costs often outweigh the benefits when compared to instantaneous heaters. Thermal mass systems (storing heat in the day to use at night) will reduce overall operating expenses and add to the sustainability of the buildings. Every parish should consider its budget and allocate resources into measures that will produce the greatest return on investment.

These are all some steps you can take today to help make your parish building a model of good stewardship for the environment and the future. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, congregations that practice environmental responsibility can save up to 30 percent on utility bills while reducing their carbon footprint. We hope that you will consider the many ways you and your parish can make a difference by practicing sustainable, environment-friendly habits every day, with benefits for now and the ages to come.

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Children (and adults) are naturally curious. They have questions about God, the Church, and the world around them. They also want to know what the answers to their questions mean for their lives. One major task as teachers in the Sunday Church school is to create a learning environment that encourages questions to be asked and answered, opens up the sources of our Faith for study, and makes connections to the lives of the learners. A well-planned lesson is a key component in that task and includes the following:

Objectives. Each lesson you create should have objectives for the student. The best learning objectives are “behavioral,” that is, the student will demonstrate knowledge through some action that he or she performs. That means the objective should include an active verb, such as “name,” “list,” or “compare.” Too often, objectives include passive verbs such as “learn” or “understand,” which are too vague. One way to check your learning objectives is to include the statement, “The student should be able to . . .” before the rest of the objective. Another way is to ask yourself, “How will I know that the student has learned this idea? What will the student do to show me?”

For example, how would you determine whether or not the students have learned the Creed? By their ability to recite it from memory—the same way they will apply their knowledge during worship and life. So, the learning objective would be “Recite the Creed from memory.” And with something as lengthy as the Creed, you may need to be even more precise, dividing the Creed into parts, so that the learning objective for successive weeks would be “Recite part one, part two, etc., from memory,” until at the end of the unit the student is able to recite the entire Creed.

Teaching the Lesson. There are many methods of instruction that we can use in our lessons. Try to vary them as much as possible. This will increase student interest in the class. Repeating the exact same lesson format, week after week, can be deadly dull, prompting a student to “tune out” before a lesson has even begun. Since all of us learn in different styles—some through watching or reading, others through listening, and most of us through doing—we need to be able to engage the different learning styles of our students. Remember, we learn the most by doing and the least through passive activities, such as reading or listening. As in cooking, reading the recipe can teach us something, but actually cooking the meal will teach us far more.

One week do a Bible study; on another week have the students role-play the same Bible story. Have students work in small groups on a poster project about a topic from history. Then hang the posters in the church hall and have students explain their work during the parish coffee hour.

Activities. While Sunday Church school is not meant to be a weekly arts and crafts fair or game show, students enjoy activities in class. Games and art projects should reinforce concepts being taught and not just fill the time. So, for example, making a quiz show out of the facts being taught is fun for the students, but it can also become a way for you to determine how much students are retaining from lessons.

Music. The Orthodox Church is a musical church, filled with hymns and melodies that have come down to us through the centuries. Teaching the hymns of the Church should be a regular part of Sunday Church school. Songs that fit the concepts being taught should also be included. Linking words to a melody is a time-honored way of increasing recall. How many of us could recite all fifty states without relying on the melody to the folk song, “Fifty Nifty United States”? Singing together helps build community, uniting people in song. One of the most powerful moments in the life of the Church is at the Resurrection service, when an entire congregation bursts into “Christ is Risen” as soon as the priest sings the first notes.

There are other elements that you will also include in your written lesson plan, such as the prayer you will use to open and close the session, new terms and ideas being introduced, announcements for the class, and the like.

Even a well-planned lesson will not always go as expected. Perhaps someone will ask a challenging question that takes the lesson in an unexpected but meaningful direction. When these teachable moments happen, be ready to put aside the plan. Sometimes, things will move more quickly than planned, so you should always have a few backup activities that you can use to review previous material or expand on a new topic. A good planning tip is to have more material than you can possibly use in one class session.

Do you have a lesson plan that worked really well? Why not share it with us and possibly other PRAXIS readers? E-mail us at tvrame@goarch.org or bethborch@goarch.org. Also, to share ideas and information, join our “Orthodox Christian Religious Educators” group on Facebook.
In 1994, Dr. Christal Chaney, a professor of education and recent convert to Orthodoxy, together with her spiritual father, Fr. John Chakos, shared a dream of a school that provided more; they envisioned an academic environment that was thoroughly rooted in the Orthodox Christian tradition and faith while recognizing the individuality and uniqueness of each child, as well as fostering academic excellence. Three Hierarchs Eastern Orthodox School (THEOS) was born, and the dedication and faith of its founding members made the dream a realization in 1998.

It began with preschool, and added an additional grade each year. Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Church in Mount Lebanon, PA, provided accommodations in their Sunday School classrooms. Only one year later, a branch campus was opened in nearby Aliquippa, PA. This facility still serves as the preschool and kindergarten location.

By the end of the 2006 school year, the Mount Lebanon students had outgrown the facilities at Holy Cross, and THEOS purchased a building that had once served as an elementary school. THEOS moved into its present home in Heidelberg, PA, in September 2007. The current facility has seven individual classrooms, a library, gymnasium/auditorium, kitchen, administrative offices, meeting room and access to a fenced-in playground.

The educational philosophy and ultimate goal is for students, teachers, and families to participate more fully in the daily and liturgical life of the Church and celebrating the unique traditions of our diverse, pan-Orthodox population. Our curricula respect the independence and individuality of each student, while promoting the development of social skills based on Orthodox Christian values. We use a wide range of materials to increase learning through exploration, self-expression and social interaction, and we introduce the children to the joy of learning through creative and expressive activities. As an adjunct to regular classroom activities, our elementary students choose from intelligence clubs on a variety of topics and activities that are based on Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences. Each “club” meets each Friday, and topics are explored over a six-week period. Additionally, students learn two languages: Spanish, and either Modern Greek or Serbian. As a testament to the school’s commitment to Orthodoxy, the entire student body and all faculty members of THEOS begin each day with morning prayers. Liturgy is also offered regularly, with the children participating as chanters and altar servers. In 2002, Dr. Chaney presented on the topic of “How to Start an Orthodox School” at the National Clergy-Laity Congress. Archbishop Demetrios then issued special commendation to THEOS for its many unique achievements and encouraged parishes across the country to implement similar programs.
Currently, THEOS has five alumni, one of whom was a charter member of the program when it began in 1998. All alumni have thrived in their current educational environments; many of them have achieved academic honors and are enrolled in multiple Advanced Placement (AP) courses. One alumnus has recently been awarded a Scholar Athlete award at his school, a distinction given to the student athlete with the highest grade point average.

Throughout its history, one thing has been abundantly clear to those who are close to the school: God’s grace has always provided when a need has arisen. Currently, the greatest needs are financial, since the recent purchase of our school building has added new financial constraints. Our current goals are to defray the mortgage and to provide much-needed repairs to the school. The dream is still alive, to continue to grow and prosper as a school, repairing and updating our facilities and even building an on-site chapel. It is still our fervent prayer that through God’s tremendous grace and mercy, He will continue to place individuals in THEOS’s path who have a love in their heart for this unique “mission,” and who will help ensure that THEOS will be here for many years to come, continuing the noble cause to “Educate the whole child for a holy life.”
The Greek Orthodox world has faced many hardships in its 1700-year history, from plagues, internal conflicts, Crusades, war and four centuries of Ottoman occupation. In the aftermath of World War I, that world was changed dramatically and forever with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the creation of the modern nation of Turkey, as well as events in Greece. Two events in the 1920s—the forced expulsions of the Greek Orthodox population from the newly-created state of Turkey and the destruction of the city of Smyrna (today's Izmir)—were particularly dramatic. Those painful events have profoundly influenced the lives of Greeks, Turks, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and the Orthodox Church to this day. In the last few years, there has been renewed interest in the events of those years, and the following two recently published books explore them quite well.

Bruce Clark’s *Twice a Stranger* retells the story of the population exchange between Greece and Turkey that the two nations agreed to in the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923. The Greek Orthodox population in Turkey of about 1.5 million was forced to relocate to Greece, while the Muslim population in Greece of about 500,000 was forced to relocate to Turkey. The book tells about both groups, their lives in their native homes, the feeling of loss upon having to relocate, and the difficulties of adjusting to life in a new country. Clark explains the rationale given at the time for the exchange, the politics of Greece and Turkey in those years, and the international climate and response to the events. The treaty also outlined the status of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Greek Orthodox population in Constantinople, and the Muslim population in western Thrace, all of which were allowed to remain in place. The effects of the decisions about who was forced to leave and who was allowed to stay still reverberate today.

The Smyrna catastrophe was another especially dramatic event affecting the Greek Orthodox people. Giles Milton’s book, *Paradise Lost*, documents the life of Smyrna from the perspective of the families in the city, in particular the British families who had prospered there since the eighteenth century. Milton’s focus, though, is on the prosperous and tolerant life in Smyrna, which began to dissipate in the years surrounding World War I, but fell into a precipitous decline as the Ottoman Empire collapsed and the Young Turks began to create modern Turkey in the aftermath of the war. Milton retells the story the Greek military expedition into Anatolia and the Turkish army’s response, the discussions between the allies of the Paris Peace Conference, and Greek and Turkish politics, all of which ultimately led to the burning of the Smyrna and the expulsion of the Greek population from the city in September 1922.

Both books are balanced in their approach, neither victimizing nor demonizing the characters. While informative, neither book bogs down in the details—they are not “academic” in that sense. Rather, the reader will be moved by the tragedy of the human story and the impact it still has on the lives of the descendants of both populations, the politics of the Greco-Turkish relationship, and the challenges facing the Ecumenical Patriarchate.


**Dr. Anton C. Vrame** is the Director of Religious Education of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.
Even faithful, literate adults can be intimidated by the prospect of reading the Bible—Which translation? Where to begin? Do I have to read every word of every book, or can I just skim over the hard, obscure parts? The mission of the American Bible Society (ABS) is “to make the Bible available to every person in a language and format each can understand and afford, so all people may experience its life-changing message.”

For children, this means making God’s word available to them through their normal activities (learning to read, and then reading only short texts) and contemporary interests (the “strange but true,” the gross, and the extreme). Format is also key: eye-catching illustrations, photography and designs, on par with other media available in the marketplace, help ease children into the serious “life-changing message.”

Toward this goal, the ABS has partnered with Scholastic to publish several books for beginning readers, ages 4–7. The Read and Learn Bible was published in 2005. The Read and Learn Life of Jesus (2007) presents a manageable section of the Bible in a classroom-length book. An interactive DVD has also joined the Read and Learn series.

The three animated stories from the life of Jesus on the Read and Learn Bible DVD Game will, like most cartoons, keep kids hooked to the screen for their short running time (about five minutes each). The “pop up lessons” option breaks into the animated segments with short segments on topics ranging from angels to methods of transportation. Activities and games, including the opportunity for a bit of creative expression with “design a star” and “compose a prayer,” are available either during the story or afterward.

Yet “Read and Learn” is somewhat of a misnomer for the DVD because the narrative and dialogue do not directly correlate with a text, and no text is shown onscreen. The games and activities do have some educational value for problem solving and listening comprehension, and they may encourage repeat viewing, but they do not have any overt literacy components.

Another new ABS project, The Amazing Bible Factbook for Kids, is intended for more advanced readers. Published by Time for Kids, the Factbook has an in-the-now look and feel. Its accessible historical information will draw in not only older elementary schoolers, but also teens and even adults. Each topic, from the mundane (such as “Weights and Measures”) to the gripping (“Satan and Demons”) is presented as news bites and trivia on a frenetic page or two. Most of the facts and statements are accompanied by scriptural references—which might not send a casual reader running for his or her Bible, but which would be convenient for Church school or home school activities. Reading up on a topic in the Factbook would not replace a lesson, but it could make an excellent supplement.

Like other ABS publications, the Factbook is intended for a general Christian audience. Nevertheless, the focus remains on Western traditions. For example, “Famous Prayers Inspired by the Bible” (pages 200–201) nods toward several traditions, with entries from St. Patrick, St. Francis of Assisi, Billy Graham, and Reinhold Niebuhr. In general, however, the Factbook takes the broadest and least divisive path in distilling and examining the cultures, politics, and religions of ancient Palestine and the first-century Roman Empire.

Read and Learn Bible DVD Game. ABS, SnapTV Games, and Scholastic, 2007.


Aimee Cox Ehrs is a curriculum specialist with the Department of Religious Education, as well as the managing editor of Holy Cross Orthodox Press.
The Tree of Jesse
A Traditional Lesson Plan for Home, Groups, or Church School

Our spiritual family tree is named after Jesse, the father of King David. “The royal line of David is like a tree that has been cut down; but just as new branches sprout from the stump, so a new king (Christ) will arise from David’s descendants.” The name “Jesse” is found in the Old Testament:

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. (Isaiah 11:1–3)

According to the Bible, Jesse had as many as eight sons, the youngest of whom was David, who became the second king of Israel after Saul.

From the eleventh century, the Tree of Jesse has been portrayed in religious illuminations, manuscripts, wall paintings, woodcarvings and stone, including tombstones, stained-glass windows, floor tiles and embroidery. Jesse is usually portrayed lying down with a tree rising from his body. The ancestors of Christ are portrayed in the tree’s branches, with the prophets and Christ at the top.

Materials

- Large craft paper, colored decorative papers, glue, scissors, paints
- Trimmed branches from dormant trees anchored in a container with rocks (or quick-setting concrete)
- Colored decorative paper, paints, scissors and string
- Icon of Christ or the Nativity of the Lord
- For more images and ornament ideas for an Advent Jesse Tree, including files of images that can be printed on shrink plastic, check out Festal Celebrations (http://festalcelebrations.wordpress.com/category/jesse-tree-project/)

Instructions

During each of the four weeks before Christmas (i.e., Advent), study one Old Testament sign of Jesus and two ancestors of Jesus; see the chart on page 35 for the progression.

- Create a tree display, either from craft paper to hang on a wall, or three dimensionally with branches anchored in a container with rocks.
- Have students create “leaves” from their own handprints.
- Create symbolic ornaments each week to decorate the tree.
- Have students develop and create ornaments with personal symbols, such as their names, descriptive words, or collages—however they feel led to express Christ in their own lives—and add these to the tree.
- During the last session (or on the Feast of the Nativity of the Lord itself), add an icon of Christ to the tree trunk.

Submitted by Fr. Andrew George, Annunciation Church, Cranston, RI.
The Ancestry of Jesus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ancestor</th>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Scripture</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam &amp; Eve</td>
<td>Apple</td>
<td>Genesis 2:15–22</td>
<td>The happy fault that brought Jesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Key</td>
<td>Isaiah 62:3, 11–12; Isaiah 22:22; 1 Samuel 16:23; Numbers 24:17</td>
<td>Royal ancestry of Jesus; authority, power to open heaven's door, joys of heaven, hope, God's leading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>Ladder/Angel</td>
<td>Genesis 28:12–17</td>
<td>Link between heaven and earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesse</td>
<td>Root/Flower</td>
<td>Isaiah 11:1–19</td>
<td>Jesus is culmination of Jesse's line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noah</td>
<td>Ark/Rainbow</td>
<td>Genesis 6:8, 9:14–17</td>
<td>Jesus, our ark of safety, promise, hope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachael</td>
<td>Water jug</td>
<td>Genesis 29:15–20</td>
<td>Working on God's promises, faithfulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>Wheat sheaf</td>
<td>Ruth 1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>Faithful ancestor by choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judah</td>
<td>Lion, scepter</td>
<td>Genesis 49:9–10</td>
<td>Kingship, courage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Old Testament Signs (“Typos”) of Jesus

<table>
<thead>
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I Am Athenagoras

Fr. Nicholas L. Vieron

In November 1948, Archbishop Athenagoras (Spyrou) of North and South America was elected Ecumenical Patriarch, the highest see and holiest center of the Orthodox Christian Church throughout the world. Enthroned in 1949, Patriarch Athenagoras was a dynamic leader and admired Patriarch. He fell asleep in the Lord in July 1972. This essay by Fr. Vieron is written from the perspective of Patriarch Athenagoras.

I came to this country a long time ago, before most of you were even born. I came, or rather, I was sent by the Mother Church, as your archbishop. The year was 1931. My name is Athenagoras.

Some of you may remember me as your Ecumenical Patriarch—an honor indeed—but I enjoy recalling my years in America as your Archbishop. Even now, in the bosom of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, near my Lord and His Blessed Mother, surrounded by ministering angels, I cherish the memory of serving the Church in America.

I was born in Epirus on March 25—never mind the year—“I am an old man,” I loved saying, just as my father, Dr. Matthew Spyrou, used to say. My mother, Eleni, died when I was young, so my sister was like a mother to us.

Always near the Church, I was enrolled at Halki at the age of sixteen! Don’t ask me why so young. I guess I felt I always belonged to the Church. I was a good student, because I was blessed with total recall memory, truly a gift from above which served me well all my life. I loved languages and by the time I graduated from Halki, I spoke several languages fluently. That, too, served me well.

I was ordained into the priesthood and served the Church of Greece. After I became Bishop of Kerkyra (Corfu), the Church directed me to come to America as archbishop.

When I arrived on these shores in 1931, I found a community divided into two political camps, the Royalists and the Venizelists. Royalists supported the King in Greece; Venizelists supported the efforts of Eletherios Venizelos, who promoted a democratic form of government. For more than a decade, these two groups controlled the government in Greece. Many Greeks in America followed these events very closely and their political interests spilled into the Archdiocese. I immediately set forth to travel across this vast country preaching one thing—that we all belong to one Lord! He is our King and only ruler in our lives. The ancient Orthodox teaching was resurrected in the minds and hearts of the young immigrants. I preached that theme over and over again. The truth, if preached often and well is in due time believed. I want you young people—both priests and laypersons—to remember that.

My first mission in America was to establish a center of operations. You may take the archdiocese and these dioceses (metropolises) for granted, but they did not automatically happen. Yet, my higher mission was not only to organize an archdiocese, but also to let the faithful know that I came to America for one main purpose, to serve.

I recall as a young boy in my village hearing a man say caustically to the village priest, “Remember, Father, you are an employee here.” His response? I shall never forget it. “No, my son, I am less than an employee. I am your servant!” If ever I become a clergyman, I thought, I would want to be exactly like that old village priest. After all, that is what our Lord came to this earth to be: a servant to all and to give His life a ransom for many!

However, as tall as I was (over six feet four inches, especially tall for a person of Greek ethnic background), I had to be much taller in my scope and in extension. Let me tell you what I mean by “extension.” I needed priests who would fit into the mold of the American landscape. Of course, clergymen from the old
country were welcomed and needed. They served the Church well and they still do. But I foresaw the need for a school to train American born men to study and prepare for the priesthood.

In 1932, I made my first attempt to organize some sort of school for preparation toward the priesthood. Without belaboring the point, I'll simply confess that my first effort did not succeed, but, I did not give up. I want all priests and laypersons who serve the Church to hear this. You don't always succeed the first time you propose or attempt what you consider something of value. If you believe in your cause, you never stop trying either!

My second attempt to establish a School was in 1937. This time I found just the right man to organize and lead the School. His name was Fr. Athenagoras Cavadas, from that beautiful island of Kerkýra where I had served as metropolitan just prior to my coming to America. We found a beautiful piece of property in Connecticut near a small town called Pomfret, and Holy Cross was born. Its beginnings were not easy, but despite the challenges, it took root and flourished. The school/seminary was there for ten years; some oldtimers refer to it as "The Golden Decade"! You can't blame these old priests for being nostalgic about their seminary. In 1947, we moved the school to Brookline, a town just outside of Boston. The same school, the same concept: to prepare young men (women now, too, I understand) to serve!

My dreams were thus becoming a reality. First, an administrative center and then a school, a seminary, known today as Hellenic College – Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology. I look down from my Heaven and I smile. I like what I see. The school is exactly seventy-two years old now.

There were so many other needs: the need to protect the orphans, to house the homeless, or better still, those from broken homes and to prepare young ladies to teach spoken Greek, the language of the New Testament. Thus, on the banks of the Hudson River, right across from West Point Academy, we founded in 1944 St. Basil's Academy—again, with the mission to serve.

One of my favorite passages from Scripture is from the Gospel of St. Matthew. As a priest I used to look forward to that reading each year as Great Lent was approaching. These words, "I was hungry and you gave me food to eat," are part of the essence of our faith. But this sacred message must always be implemented. I had organized both men and women in this cause while serving in Corfu.

However, the men in America, those hard-working immigrants, were busy with their little restaurants and coffee shops, with putting down railroad tracks—working literally night and day—not only to provide for their families but also to educate their children! Do you know that the Greek-Americans can humbly boast of having some of the most educated children in this country? Because the men were too busy, I thought, I will call upon the ladies! I recalled how my sister and grandmother always helped the poor; therefore, as soon as I came to America, I knew I had to do something similar here to get the faithful women involved in charitable works. Therefore, one of my first efforts was to establish the Ladies Philoptochos Society. That was November 1931.

They say I was a good “diplomat.” If by that they mean that I was always trying to bring people together, I take that as a compliment. I traveled from city to city, from parish to parish, trying to do just that. Some of you oldtimers can remember that—when you had two factions—one pitted against the other to the detriment of the Church. I embraced both sides, and eventually they embraced each other. I loved that. The Greek Orthodox faith came first, but I also loved trying to bring all Orthodox churches closer to each other as well as fostering closer relationships with our Protestant and Roman Catholic brothers and sisters. I remembered that in her history, the Christian Church was strongest when it was most united. I am pleased that we have established good relations with other Christians after centuries of isolation.

In spite of all the efforts of the Archdiocese, it remains for the local parish, for the local church and community to function as an extension of the archbishop, of the bishop, of the metropolitan (as you now have it) toward the fulfillment of my dream to serve God and His people. And who has the greater responsibility here? None other than the parish priest, the pastor, the proistamenos—you can go by any name as long as it is in the name of Him whom we all serve! Allow yourselves, dear fathers, to be guided by your hierarchy. You take encyclical letters for granted. I understand that some of you don't even read them. I always believed that my clergy needed to be guided, encouraged and remembered by their archpastor. Listen to one such letter I mailed to my priests:

I realize how great your problems are, how great your responsibility, to the Church, and to the coming generations. All this makes me the more mindful of you, of your work, of your efforts and the determination to perform your sacred duties. You are mine, and I, yours. We have the same thoughts, the same feelings, the same struggles, the same hopes and fears. We are brothers—you and I—therefore, confide in me your thoughts, your pain and sorrows and let us work together for the Glory of God.

Does that sound familiar? Like a letter you recently received from your Hierarch!

In 1948, the time came for me to leave America. I was elected Ecumenical Patriarch—an honor, indeed, but I was also sad because I was leaving my beloved "child," the Church in America. I had to place this loving child in the right hands. If I did anything right, give me credit for that, for choosing the right person as my successor: Michael!
Archbishop Michael’s personality was different from mine. I was considered a diplomat/churchman, whereas Michael was an intellectual/mystic. I placed emphasis on matters of administration, public relations and organizational structures. Michael focused on piety, religious awakening, discipline and sacramental life. What I had been unable to do, Michael initiated and advanced with great success. Another reason I share this with you, beside the historical overview, is that you priests often find yourselves in parishes where a clergyman very different from you served previously. That does not mean that one was right and the other wrong; there is a need for both. Many different personalities and talents make up the body of the Church. Michael and I were different, just as you and your predecessor may be different. The important thing is that both of you serve the same Lord. Remember that Archbishop Michael’s greatest contribution was the founding of the youth organization GOYA. It was this concern for the young people that gained him the recognition as a beloved friend of the youth.

Michael’s death on July 13, 1958, necessitated my choosing another spiritual leader for my beloved “child.” This time I chose Iakavos Coucouzis—that dynamic churchman who directed your church to its present heights. His thirty-seven years as your shepherd, until his retirement on July 30, 1996, were some of the most glorious decades of the Church in the Americas. After Iakovos, you had for a short time a young man by the name of Spyridon. He was your first American-born archbishop.

Now you have a new spiritual leader—His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios. He is a man of God filled with humility, piety and deep religious convictions. He was a teacher many of you had as a professor at Holy Cross and a man whose didactic beautiful expressions capture the spirit and the essence of Him whom we all serve. I leave you now in his hands and in the hands of your beloved metropolitans.

**Three Exhortations**

1. Do not try to go it alone. Priests need their hierarchy, and both of you need your faithful parishioners. Only together can you possibly continue to accomplish much greater things.

2. Continue to grow spiritually. This is very important. There was once an artist who in painting the Last Supper sought models for each person depicted. He found a model for his outgoing Andrew, one for the doubting Thomas, and, for his Christ, a youth with features of a sensitive nobility and a compassionate face filled with hope. However, he could not find one suitable for Judas. As a result, the painting was left undone. Years went by, and in a cheap café sat a sullen, weak-looking, cynical person who was just right for Judas. For the price of a cheap bottle of wine, he would pose. “You don’t remember me?” he asked. “No, I am afraid I don’t. Should I?” asked the painter without missing a stroke. “I am the man who once sat for your Christ!” God pity the soul who, once having achieved a noble hour, thinks that he has “arrived”—that he can enjoy his talents and laurels. We must either continue to grow spiritually or we will die while still breathing on this earth.

3. Do not fall into the sin of indifference (adiaphoria). It is one of the worst things that can happen to a soul. As a priest, and later as archbishop, I preferred to face a polemic, one who was against what I advocated rather than one who did not care, one who was indifferent. I had a friend in England, G. A. Studdert Kennedy, who died in 1929, two years before I came to America. In one of his poems, he imagines Christ coming back to earth and suffering again, not another crucifixion, but the “Cross of Indifference.”

Fr. Nicholas L. Vieron, Holy Cross, Class of 1947, is Pastor Emeritus of the Annunciation Church in Memphis, TN. Fr. Vieron, age 83, has been serving as editor of The Epistle, the monthly newsletter of the Retired Clergy Association, since 1992.
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DEAR READER,

For two decades the Ecumenical Patriarch and other Orthodox Church leaders and thinkers have “talked the talk” on the environment, raising important issues and making many very easy links between Orthodox Christian theology and our developing ecological consciousness. There is no need to repeat the theological underpinnings. The real challenge that our theology points us to is the challenge of “walking the walk,” putting the “green theology” of the Orthodox Church into practice.

In a number of statements from the Ecumenical Patriarch on this matter, he has emphasized that we can no longer claim that we didn’t know that the planet was being threatened by our actions. With two decades of statements, encyclicals and symposia from the Ecumenical Patriarch, we should ask ourselves, “Have we been listening?” and “What have we been doing about it?”

When this issue of PRAXIS was being prepared, we put out a call looking for projects and efforts in parishes that reflect our strong theology on the environment. The response was underwhelming. Just a few parishes responded that they were doing something that was helping the planet. We have included in this issue every response we received, although a few more did trickle in after our deadline.

With some thought and action, all Greek Orthodox parishes can become green Orthodox parishes. Recycle everything that can be recycled. Use renewable and sustainable resources. Stop using mailings unless absolutely necessary—communicate with the parish electronically instead. Landscape wisely. Conduct energy audits and follow the recommendations. Install solar panels to generate electricity. In communities that are looking to build new or renovate existing facilities, be as green as possible. Naturally, we can also apply these ideas and practices to our homes and businesses. Service projects caring for the environment in parishes can make important connections between theology and practice. For many years, I’ve advocated that parishes plant gardens with flowers and plants that can be used in the liturgical life of the parish. Young people can grow and harvest the sweet basil and flowers used on September 14, instead of sending someone to the grocery store or florist to purchase them. Lessons for the feast day can revolve around the story of St. Helen finding the cross, the Orthodox vision of creation, and how the material world fills Orthodox Christian worship. Then, these lessons are “topped off” with students seeing the flowers and basil that they have cared for being used in the life of the parish.

One of the important aspects of the Religion, Science, and the Environment Symposia hosted by the Ecumenical Patriarchate has been their ability to shine a spotlight onto successful environmental programs but also areas where work still needs to be done. Perhaps the 2009 Symposium, traveling down the Mississippi River in the heart of the United States, will shine a much needed light on the Orthodox Christian communities in America, leading us to greater action and activism in protecting our natural world.

Anton C. Vrame, PhD
Director