

Applying the “Alverna Covenant” to Our Lives

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So how can Disciples today apply the Alverna Covenant to their lives? Within the text of the Covenant below, I've included some ideas for you and your congregation as you begin to live in to the covenant.

Whereas:

- * *God has created the world with finite resources;*
- * *God has given to us the stewardship of the earth;*
- * *God has established order through many natural cycles.*

And it is evident that:

- * *We are consuming resources at a rate that cannot be maintained;*
- * *We are interrupting many natural cycles;*
- * *We are irresponsibly modifying the environment through consumption and pollution;*
- * *We are populating the earth at a rate that cannot be maintained;*

While God “has established order through many natural cycles,” we are unraveling that order through all of the extra greenhouse gases that we are emitting into the atmosphere resulting in global climate change. Scientists around the world say greenhouse gases are natural but within the last 200 years, since the beginning of the industrial revolution, the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere has increased, thus trapping heat from the sun close to the Earth's surface.

As a member of the human family and a follower of Jesus Christ, I hereby covenant that:

- * *I will change my lifestyle to reduce my contribution to pollution;*

Lots of ideas for action: everything from unplugging items not in use; buying food from local sources (less packaging and fewer transportation miles—the average meal travels 1,500 miles, we can do better!); using rechargeable batteries—consider solar-powered batteries; using washable dishware instead of disposables; turning down the heat and turning up the air conditioner; retrofitting your building for energy efficiency; parking the car by substituting car miles with bike, foot, or bus miles; commuting to work with your neighbor—you'll save money and get to know your neighbor better; and minimizing use of your dryer by hanging laundry out to dry.

- * *I will support recycling efforts;*

Ideas include starting a recycling program in your church or workplace if you haven't already; recycling batteries; saving egg cartons for local egg producers; reusing grocery store bags as trash bags in your home; carrying cloth bags to the store every chance you can.

- * *I will search for sustainable lifestyles;*

By moving toward a sustainable lifestyle, not only will you contribute to the health of creation, but you also will improve your own health! How? If you bike instead of drive, you're emitting fewer carbons and you're getting exercise. If you consume water from reusable bottles, not only are you drinking a healthier beverage, you won't have to worry about cans and bottles to recycle. If you like tea and coffee, consider buying these products from Equal Exchange's Disciples of Christ Coffee Project. If you eat locally produced fresh food, you're supporting area farmers, contributing to local food security, and eating higher quality food. If you avoid commercial cleaners, you'll improve the air

quality in your home. Many substitutes exist, indeed, talk with an elderly person in your congregation, they just might be able to suggest at least five uses for baking soda alone!

** I will work for public policies which lead to a just and sustainable society;*

They say all politics are local ... so are environmental efforts! If you see a need for bicycle and pedestrian lanes in your community, partner with like-minded people and businesses (bike and running shops) and lobby local policy makers. If your public transportation system is not adequate, now is the time to look for grants through the federal government.

** I will share these concerns with others and urge them to make this Covenant.*

Just as nothing in nature happens in a vacuum, making the Alverna Covenant with the support of friends, neighbors, and fellow congregants just makes sense. No one can do this alone. Model what's possible. Mohandas Gandhi once said, "You must be the change you want to see in the world." If you don't do it, who will?

While I've provided some tangible ideas, ecological and carbon calculators are available online to help you measure how many Earth's would be required to sustain your current level of consumption. I see myself as a modestly frugal person who eats local when possible, seldom drives to work (I bike and ride with my neighbors), and keeps the thermostat turned down in the winter and up in the summer, and yet, my current level of consumption still requires 4.5 Earths if everyone consumed as I do. So, I'm looking for additional ways to reduce my consumption in the interest of next generations. If you have ideas to share, feel free to contact Angela Herrmann at 317-713-2683 or aherrmann@dhm.disciples.org.

RESOURCES sidebar

Web site for ecological calculator
<http://sustainability.publicradio.org/consumerconsequences/>

Disciples Home Missions
<http://www.discipleshomemissions.org/PublicWitness/Environment.htm>
(Make the Alverna Covenant online or by mail.)

Church Extension
<http://www.churchextension.org/>
(Contact John Davidson at 317-713-2517 for information on retrofitting your building for energy efficiency.)

General Assembly
<http://www.disciples.org/ga/>

Disciples of Christ Coffee Project
<http://www.equalexchange.coop/doc/>

National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Program
<http://www.nccecojustice.org/>
(Lots of resources and a carbon calculator.)

Church World Service

<http://www.churchworldservice.org/>

(Look for the new climate change resource *Enough*.)

Ecological footprint

<http://www.answers.com/main/ntquery?s=ecological+footprint&gwp=13>

Carbon footprint

<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/carbon%20footprint>

Angela Herrmann serves as DHM's director of Web site development and coordinator for environmental education and advocacy.