

# CARING FOR OUR ENVIRONMENT

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## FOREWORD

The Integrity of Creation Task Force of the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) composed this booklet to be used by Small Christian Communities, Bible study groups, adult and youth discussion groups, catechetical programmes, or other groups.

The group leader need not be an expert in the topics covered in the booklet, but should be skilled in scheduling group meetings and in helping each member to contribute to the reflection and discussion. Ideally, each member will read the subject matter chosen for the next meeting before the meeting.

There is no need to rush through the booklet. Take the time necessary to prayerfully absorb the message of each session and to discuss its meaning and implication for you and for the world in which you live.

As you gather for prayerful reflection on the messages contained in genuine Christian faith and authentic African traditions, you will find inspiration to guide your lives on earth today.

It would be excellent if some concrete actions carried out by your group would come from your work on this booklet. The members of the JCTR Integrity of Creation Task Force who worked on this booklet include:

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## INTRODUCTION

When we refer to the environment, we mean the 'natural' environment which includes our whole universe. It is the same as what we mean by 'creation'. However, we normally speak of our environment in the more restricted sense of the earth on which we live. We are not always aware of the extent to which our lives depend on the natural environment which is, indeed, our life support system. For instance, just as fish cannot live outside of water in which they are enveloped, we cannot live without the **air** that we continually breathe and which surrounds us. Our bodies are comprised of more than 70% of **water**, therefore water is absolutely necessary for our survival. **Food** is also necessary for our survival and this food comes from the fruits and vegetables that come from the **soil** or the **trees**, or from **animal** flesh or fish. **Fire** is also one of the great elements of nature on which we have come to depend so much.

As we look at the natural world surrounding us, whether in the rural or urban area, it is easy to see how we humans are having a large impact on the environment. Living in the city, we see the garbage as we walk outside our homes, we cough from the black fumes of passing buses and lorries, we carefully hop from stone to stone to avoid streams of smelly rainwater. Living in the village, we see the large trees around our homes cut down and turned into charcoal, we notice how our fields need more fertiliser each year or are infested with more and more insects, we become angry with our streams for flooding and drying up and forgetting how to flow steadily the year round. These changes to the environment have become very visible and serious only in more recent times. Has our human relationship with the natural world changed somehow?

Up to relatively recent times, we have appreciated the natural environment in which we live although we were unaware of the full extent to which it nourishes us. But now, we know better. As a result of our global abuse of the natural environment, we have begun to put at risk our own survival. By our irresponsible burning of fossil fuels (coal, gas and oil), exhaust from vehicles, deforestation, etc., we are contributing to the warming of the earth (greenhouse effect) which in turn is bringing harmful changes in weather patterns. The point is that we human beings are failing to respect and care for our natural environment, a mandate given to us by our God: "Yahweh God took the man [humans] and settled him in the garden of Eden to cultivate and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15). However, instead of being responsible stewards of creation, we abuse our natural environment in a way that harms ourselves.

If we could only recall the wisdom of our ancestors, for they somehow lived in greater harmony with nature, using only what they needed to survive. Their farming methods were simpler and surely didn't depend upon the chief of the day handing out seeds or chemicals to ensure that farmers grew fields and gardens of cassava, millet, *chibwabwa* or *impwa*. The traditional religion of our ancestors inspired people to respect their natural surroundings on which they depended while acknowledging God as the Maker of all. The teachings of the Bible build on our traditional beliefs and contain a powerful call for us Christians today to respect and nurture the environment.

It is time, then, that we look deeper into our traditional stories and our Bibles to remember our human interconnectedness (relationship) with nature and rediscover an environmental consciousness. It is not too late for us to change our values once again, to return to an ethic of respect and care for the environment, and to ensure that it continues to sustain us today and for generations to come.

The purpose of this booklet is to invite Christian and other communities in Zambia to think about ways in which they may or may not be contributing to the care and nurture of the natural environment, whether knowingly or unknowingly. This does not mean, of course, that people in the rural or urban areas of Zambia are harming the natural environment in any way to the same extent as are the people of industrialised countries. Nevertheless, let us uphold the care for the environment that our Zambian cultures have handed down to us. What is important is the attitude we take or fail to take to the natural environment in the way we **behave**. We may say that the little harm we do to the environment is of little importance. Yes, this may be so at present, but the consequences for future generations may be very significant. The **attitude** we develop towards our environment now will have a cumulative effect on the attitude of our children for the future. Is it one in which we feel that the natural environment is just there for us to use or abuse as we wish? Or is it one in which we feel a responsibility to be careful about the ways in which we treat our environment?

This little booklet is structured as follows. The first three sessions encourage reflection on Christian and traditional African attitudes to the environment. These sessions are followed by eight further sessions in each of which there is a focus on a specific attitude of care for our environment. When proceeding through each of these sessions, it is important to reflect on our relationship with nature and on the messages that nature is giving to us on a daily, monthly and seasonal basis. In particular, what messages of respect and care is nature giving to us and how could we best respond to such messages in our daily behaviors? It is hoped that, through community shared reflection, a greater awareness may develop of our need to look after rather than to destroy the natural environment that is our home.

**PSALM 103 (104)**  
**In Praise of God the Creator**

Bless the Lord, my soul!  
Lord God, how great you are,  
clothed in majesty and glory,  
wrapped in light as in a robe!  
You stretch out the heavens like a tent.

Above the rains you build your dwelling.  
You make the clouds your chariot,  
you walk on the wings of the wind;  
you make the winds your messengers  
and flashing fire your servants.

You founded the earth on its base,  
to stand firm from age to age.  
You wrapped it with the ocean like a  
cloak; the waters stood higher than the  
mountains.

At your threat they took to flight;  
at the voice of your thunder they fled.  
They rose over the mountains and flowed  
down to the place which you had  
appointed. You set limits they might not  
pass lest they return to cover the earth.

You make springs gush forth in the  
valleys; they flow in between the hills.  
They give drink to all the beasts of the  
field; the wild asses quench their thirst.  
On their banks dwell the birds of heaven;  
from the branches they sing their song.

From your dwelling you water the hills;  
earth drinks its fill of your gift.  
You make the grass grow for the cattle  
and the plants to serve our needs,  
that we may bring forth bread from the  
earth and wine to cheer our hearts;  
oil, to make our faces shine  
and bread to strengthen our hearts.

The trees of the Lord drink their fill,  
the cedars God planted on Lebanon;  
there the birds build their nests;  
on the treetop the stork has her home.  
The goats find a home on the  
mountains and rabbits hide in the rocks.

You made the moon to mark the  
months; the sun knows the time for its  
setting. When you spread the darkness it  
is night and all the beasts of the forest  
creep forth. The young lions roar for  
their prey, and ask their food from God.

At the rising of the sun they steal away  
and go to rest in their dens. People go  
out to their work, to labour till evening  
falls. How many are your works,  
O Lord! In wisdom you have made them  
all. The earth is full of your riches.

There is the sea, vast and wide,  
with its moving swarms past counting,  
living things great and small.  
The ships are moving there and the  
monsters you made to play with.

All of these look to you to give them  
their food in due season.  
You give it, they gather it up; you open  
your hand, they have their fill.

You hide your face, they are dismayed;  
you take back your spirit, they die,  
returning to the dust from which they  
came. You send forth your spirit,  
they are created; and you renew the  
face of the earth.

May the glory of the Lord last for ever!  
May the Lord rejoice in creation!  
God looks on the earth and it trembles;  
at God's touch, the mountains send  
forth smoke.

## SESSION 1

### GOD AND CREATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

#### **A. First Creation Story in Genesis**

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was a formless void, there was darkness over the deep, and God’s spirit hovered over the water. ...

God said, ‘Let the waters under heaven come together into a single mass, and let dry land appear’. And so it was. God called the dry land ‘earth’ and the mass of waters ‘seas’, and God saw that it was good. ...

God said, ‘Let the earth produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants, and fruit trees bearing fruit with their seed inside, on the earth’. God saw that it was good. ...

God said, ‘Let the waters teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth within the vault of heaven’. And so it was. God created great sea serpents and every kind of living creature with which the waters teem, and every kind of winged creature. God saw that it was good. ...

God said. ‘Let the earth produce every kind of living creature: cattle, reptiles, and every kind of wild beast’. And so it was. God made every kind of wild beast, every kind of cattle, and every kind of land reptile. God saw that it was good. ...

God said, ‘Let us make man [humans] in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves’ ... God blessed them saying to them, ‘Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and conquer it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all living animals on the earth.’ God said, ‘See, I give you all the seed-bearing plants that are upon the whole earth, and all the trees with seed-bearing fruit; this shall be your food. To all wild beasts, all birds of heaven and all living reptiles on the earth I give all the foliage of plants for food. And so it was. God saw all he had made, and indeed it was very good” (Genesis 1: 1-31).

#### **Commentary**

Notice in the first creation story how many times God pronounces a creature to be good or very good. The emphasis helps us to see and to appreciate the value of each creature on earth. Also note that God does not state that the various other creatures are good for us humans, but simply good in themselves.

Notice again that humans are said to be created “in the image of God.” This powerful statement tells us that we are like God and that we are most true to ourselves when we act the way God does. But how does God relate to creatures? God sees them as good in themselves, God appreciates them the way they are, and allows them to exist and to live in their own way, with their own powers. Consequently, the reference to God making humans the “masters” of all the creatures on earth does not mean that we can do anything we please with the other creatures, even to the extent of abusing them. It means rather that we must act as God does by respecting and caring for the goodness of creation.

## **B. Second Creation Story in Genesis**

“At the time when Yahweh God made earth and heaven, there was as yet no wild bush on the earth nor had any wild plant yet sprung up, for Yahweh God had not sent rain on the earth, nor was there any man to till the soil. However, a flood was rising from the earth and watering all the surface of the soil.

Yahweh God fashioned man of dust from the soil. Then he breathed into his nostrils a breath of life, and thus man became a living being. Yahweh God planted a garden in Eden which is in the east, and there he put the man he had fashioned. Yahweh God caused to spring up from the soil every kind of tree, enticing to look at and good to eat, with the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the middle of the garden. A river flowed from Eden to water the garden, and from there it divided to make four streams. ...

Yahweh God took the man and settled him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and take care of it. ... So from the soil Yahweh God fashioned all the wild beasts and all the birds of heaven. These he brought to the man to see what he would call them; each one was to bear the name the man would give it. The man gave names to all the cattle, all the birds of heaven and all the wild beasts” (Genesis2:5-10, 15, 19-20).

### **Commentary**

Notice in the second creation story that the first human is made from the soil, indicating how humans belong to the earth and are bound to it and to all the other creatures that share the earth with us.

Notice also how the second story clarifies the understanding of the use of the term “masters” in the first story by saying that Yahweh God took humans and settled them in the Garden of Eden “to cultivate and take care of it”. The emphasis here is clearly on stewardship rather than domination.

Notice finally the limitations imposed on human beings. We do not have absolute power; there are limits to our use of the natural world, and we are not to abuse or misuse other creatures or dispose of them as we please. Many natural resources are limited, and using them with absolute dominion as if they were inexhaustible seriously endangers their availability not only for the present generation but, above all, for future generations to come.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. What does the Scriptural message about our being created in the image of God tell us about how we should relate to other creatures here on earth?
2. How do you understand human dominion over creation with humans as “masters” or “caretakers” of nature?
3. How does human dominion allow for the responsible intervention of humans in creation? Created as thinking and moral beings, how are we to use God's gift of science and technology for the benefit of nature and ourselves?

### **Closing Prayer**

Invite members to make personal intercessory prayers and conclude with the following prayer:

Loving God, enlarge within us a sense of fellowship with all living things,  
our brothers and sisters the animals and plants to whom you gave the earth  
as their home in common with us.

We remember with shame that in the past  
we have exercised high dominion with ruthless cruelty,  
so that the voice of the earth, which should have gone up to you in song,  
has been a groan of travail.

May we realise that they live not for us alone but for themselves and for you,  
and that they love the sweetness of life.

*(Prayer attributed to St. Basil,  
Bishop and Doctor of the Church  
in 4<sup>th</sup> century)*

## SESSION 2

### GOD AND CREATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Central to our Christian belief is the fact that our God is One. Yet Christ has revealed to us that the unity of God involves a set of relationships similar to those in a family so that Jesus as the Son of God (or Word of God) has an essential loving relationship to the Father as well as to the Holy Spirit. This is a mystery of our faith which we refer to as our belief in God as Trinity. It is important to note, however, that this belief is about relationships and not about numbers.

God's creation is not something that just came into being once and for all. It is rather an on-going creation in which the Spirit of God and Christ continue to be actively involved. In deciding to create, our God has entered into creation as Creator (the Father), as the Spirit who continues to hover over creation right from the beginning "renewing the face of the earth" (*Psalm 104:30*), and as the Word in whom creation has its very existence. As we read in Scripture:

- "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was a formless void, there was darkness over the deep, and God's spirit hovered over the water" (*Genesis 1:1*).
- "He [*Christ, the Word of God*] is the image of the unseen God and the first-born of all creation, for in Him were created all things in heaven and on earth . . . All things were created through Him and for Him... and He holds all things in unity" (*Colossians 1:15-17*).

But St. John tells us that the Word of God, through whom everything has been created (*John 1:2*), has also entered into our human world in a very special way by becoming human as we are. "The Word was made flesh and lived among us" (*John 1: 14*).

The Word of God has become flesh in the person of Jesus, the Christ. Jesus is the full expression of our God in human form; He is the full expression of God's love for us and for the whole of creation. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus has reconciled both ourselves and the whole of creation to the Father. Indeed, God's plan is that all of creation will finally be brought together in Christ. In the words of St. Paul:

- "God wanted all perfection to be found in Him [*Christ*] and all things to be reconciled through Him and for Him, everything in heaven and everything on earth, when He made peace by his death on the cross" (*Colossians 1: 20*).
- "[*God*] has let us know the mystery of His purpose, the hidden plan he so kindly made in Christ from the beginning, to act upon when the times had run their course to the end: that He would bring everything together under Christ, as head, everything in the heavens and everything on earth" (*Ephesians 1: 9-10*).

However, in becoming human, Christ accepted the limitations of being human and stripped Himself of his divine qualities: "His state was divine, yet He did not cling to His equality with God but emptied Himself to assume the condition of a slave and became as human beings are" (*Philippians 2: 6-7*).

Throughout His life on earth, Jesus was very respectful of the natural world, both animate and inanimate. It is clear how closely He related with the natural world by his frequent references to plants, birds, animals, the soil, trees, water, etc., as can be seen from the following sample of references from Scripture:

- “He also said, 'This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man throws **seed** on the land’” (*Mark 4: 26*).
- “A sound **tree** cannot bear bad **fruit**, nor a rotten tree bear good fruit” (*Matthew 7:19*).
- “Look at the **birds** in the sky. ... Think of the **flowers** growing in the fields” (*Matthew 6: 26-28*).
- “Tell me. Suppose a man has a hundred **sheep** and one of them strays ...” (*Matthew 18: 12*).

Christ has called each of us to cooperate with Him in bringing about the “new creation” which He will bring to completion at the end of time. Until then, it is our Christian calling not only to respect God's creation but to play our part responsibly in looking after its development. For it is not only we human beings who will be involved in Christ's redeeming work but the whole of creation. As St. Paul says:

- “Creation still retains the hope of being freed, like us, from its slavery to decadence, to enjoy the same freedom and glory as the children of God” (*Romans 8: 21*).

### **Commentary**

It is not easy, nor indeed possible, to separate the activity of the Word of God and the Spirit of God in creation. One of the early Church Fathers used a very interesting image to express this. He said that God the Father created with two arms, i.e., the Word and the Spirit. Another image was used by Meister Eckhard, a medieval theologian, who said that God lies on a maternity bed giving birth continually. This image of God as a Mother giving birth to all of creation was a common one with many Christian writers and it expresses very powerfully the presence of the Spirit of God as the life that is continually poured into us and into the whole of creation. In the words of St. Paul: “From the beginning until now, the entire creation, as we know, has been groaning in one great act of giving birth” (*Romans 8:22*).

Every little creature is in some way an image of God. St. Anthony, a hermit who lived in the Egyptian desert in the 3rd and 4th centuries, when asked what he would do if he could no longer read Sacred Scripture, replied: “My book is the nature of created things, and it is always on hand when I want to read it.’ The point is that to eliminate any species is to destroy a mode of divine presence and a way of God communicating with us.

Perhaps the Christian saints who most clearly expressed an awareness of God's presence in nature were St. Francis of Assisi, St. Ignatius of Loyola and St. Bonaventure. St. Francis spoke of the sun and moon as “Brother Sun” and “Sister Moon” and he was well known for his familiarity with animals, birds and flowers. St. Ignatius spoke of “finding God in all things” and of how God is continually at work in creation for our sakes. St. Bonaventure expressed in the following words his astonishment at the failure of so many to perceive the presence of the Creator in every creature:

Whoever is not enlightened by such great splendour in created things is blind; whoever remains unheedful of such great outcries is deaf; whoever does not praise God in all these effects is dumb; whoever does not turn to the First Principle after so many signs is a fool. Open your eyes, therefore; alert the ears of your spirit, unblock your lips, and apply your heart that you may see, hear, praise, love and adore, magnify and honour your God in every creature, lest perchance, the entire universe rise up against you.

Our traditional African religious heritage has been very conscious of the presence of life in the natural world through the awareness of "spirit". Let us not lose this precious heritage which is the God-given basis for our Christian conviction of the Holy Spirit of God, the Spirit of the Risen Lord, at work in the whole of creation which has been entrusted to our care.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. From a Christian point of view as outlined above, what helps you in particular to appreciate your relation to the natural environment?
2. Have you ever thought about how holy, how sacred, everything is since God dwells in everything and God's creating love flames in everything? How does this thought affect your relation to all creatures of the Earth?
3. Jesus was very respectful of the natural world. Recall some other passages in which Jesus uses nature images to express his thoughts. How can we, as followers of Jesus, demonstrate respect to God's creation?

### **Concluding Prayer**

Invite members to make personal intercessory prayers and conclude with the following Canticle (based on Daniel 3:74-81):

O let the earth bless the Lord.  
To him be highest glory and praise for ever.  
And you, mountains and hills, O bless the Lord.  
And you, all plants of the earth, O bless the Lord.  
And you, fountains and springs, O bless the Lord.  
To him be highest glory and praise for ever.

And you, rivers and seas, O bless the Lord.  
And you, creatures of the sea, O bless the Lord.  
And you, every bird in the sky, O bless the Lord.  
And you, wild beasts and tame, O bless the Lord.  
To him be highest glory and praise for ever.

Let us praise the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit.  
To you be highest glory and praise for ever.  
May you be blessed, O Lord, in the heavens.  
To him be highest glory and praise for ever.

### SESSION 3

#### AFRICAN TRADITIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON CREATION

There are numerous African stories involving creation. Most African stories of creation begin by stating the presence of God in the world without stating the 'precise' manner in which the world was created. The following story is one example to illustrate the point:

Long ago, Nzambi slid down to earth on a rainbow. He landed on the bank of the Katumba'ony River, not far from Mwaciamvu's village, in the Kato-bush. He found the place a pleasant spot. To add to the beauty of the scene, Nzambi created trees, animals, birds and many other things. But he was not satisfied with what he had done, and so, to crown his work, he created the first man and the first woman.

*(Nzambi is the God and Creator of the Alunda people living in Mwinilunga district of North-Western Province in Zambia.)*

#### **Commentary**

The traditional African view of the world is profoundly religious, and it forms the basic attitudes that characterise most, if not all, spheres of life. Many things on earth are held in great esteem for religious reasons, especially where they are thought to be dwelling places for spirits. These may include such things as mountains, waterfalls, rocks, trees and some areas of the forests, animals, birds and insects.

The belief that the world was created is something that was perhaps taken for granted. After all, it was thought impossible, if not incomprehensible, that the world could have just come into existence on its own and for no apparent reason.

The awareness of God as the Supreme Being in African societies is very much tied to the notion of God being the "Maker" (Creator) of everything that cannot be attributed to human beings.

The name for God often implies the "Creator". Even where there is another name, God is often also referred to as the "Creator". For example, names used for God among Zambian peoples are: *Kabumba, Mulengi, Chiuta, Lesa* (Leza), *Mulungu, Nyambe, Nzambi*.

Notice in the story how humans were created as the fulfillment of Nzambi's creation. Also, notice how God closely relates to the natural world by His association with a rainbow, river, bush, trees, animals, and birds.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. Can you identify one or more traditional African stories concerning God and creation?
2. How would you relate any African story of creation that you have heard of to the Genesis accounts in the Bible?
3. Do our traditional African creation stories remain important today? Have we passed them on to our children, either through story-telling or song?
4. What is the meaning behind any of the above African names for God?
5. Can you add to the list of names given above for God? If so, explain what they mean.
6. What do you think the story is telling us humans, as the highest form of Nzambi's creation, concerning the environment?

### **Closing Prayer**

Invite members to make personal intercessory prayers and conclude with the following prayer:

God of our ancestors,  
You whose Spirit hovered over creation at its beginning,  
help us to recover our traditional awareness of your Presence in our world,  
and to respect the good things you have given us.  
We make this prayer through Christ our Lord, Amen.

**SESSION 4**  
**“NATURE WARNS US!”**

**Traditional Wisdom**

A man went out hunting in the forest with his faithful dog. When he tried to shoot an animal, he heard his dog say "stop it"! He became angry because his dog had always been very obedient and had never spoken. In his anger, he reached for the nearest branch so that he could break it and use it to hit his dog to discipline it. At that moment, he heard the branch say "don't do it"! He was shocked, and so he left the dog and the branch alone.

But he needed some food for his household, so he tried to catch some fish. Again the fish talked back to him warning him to stop. Now scared and confused that nature was talking to him, the man ran back to his village to report to the chief what had happened to him.

The chief dismissed the stories as rubbish and warned the man not to waste his time again. At that point, the stool on which the chief was seated spoke to the chief telling him that he too would be frightened if his dog spoke to him. The chief jumped from the stool and ran away from his palace.

**Moral**

The moral of the story is that nature is giving us many warnings about how we are damaging it in many direct and indirect ways.

**Commentary**

Nothing survives by itself in nature, for everything is interconnected and inter-dependent. By the messages that nature gives us, we can evaluate the effects of our actions on the earth's ability to support life. We should listen to nature, which does not speak to us in words but in signs that we can see, such as drought, the disappearance of fish from the streams, floods, the increasing difficulty to find or afford fuel, the contamination of water, etc.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. How do you interpret the story above?
2. How is nature speaking to you? Mention some ways.
3. In what ways can we relate the story to the present situation in our households, our community, the nation and the earth at large?
4. What signs is nature giving to us on a daily basis, and what signs manifest themselves seasonally?
5. Who has ultimate responsibility for the environment?
6. To what extent should local people have responsibility to take care of the environment?

### **African Traditional Proverbs**

- *Zidze Pano N'za Tonse (Cicewa)*  
“Good and bad in a village affects everybody”
- *The African Principle of Ubuntu*  
“We only exist in relation to others”  
We human beings are not separate from or above nature, but part of an inter-connected community of plants, animals, rivers, forests, mountains, etc.

### **Biblical Reference**

- “By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return” (*Genesis 3:19*).  
We humans are created as natural beings who live, work and die in relation to all of nature.

### **Closing Prayer**

Invite members to make personal intercessory prayers and conclude with the following prayer:

Loving Creator, Your Son Jesus said,  
“Happy are your eyes because they see, your ears because they hear.”  
Open our eyes and ears to the signs nature is giving us,  
signs that we are living on a damaged earth, on a planet in peril at our own hands.  
Open our minds and our hearts to respond wisely and generously  
to the warnings nature is giving us.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

## SESSION 5

### “PROTECT YOUR HEALTH!”

#### **Modern Scenario (1)**

Mrs. Mulenga and her family of six stay in a small house outside a big town. The house has no electricity and no running water so Mrs. Mulenga depends on firewood for cooking meals and warming water for the family early in the morning and in the evening.

Since the house in which Mrs. Mulenga and her family live is small, Mr. Mulenga constructed a kitchen for his wife behind the main house. As the kitchen is also used as a storeroom, Mr. Mulenga had made it strong and closed with mud bricks that he molded himself, and with a thatched roof using grass he collected from the bush himself. Now, with all the cooking that has to be done, Mrs. Mulenga spends most of her day keeping the fire going and cooking in this closed kitchen.

Mrs. Mulenga's household work starts very early and ends after dark in order for her to do all the work that needs to be done. Sometimes her children help her but, as the mother, she still ends up doing a lot of the work herself to ensure that it is done properly and in good time.

At the end of the day, Mrs. Mulenga is usually very tired, and of late she has been coughing a lot. They gave her medicine for her cough at the clinic, and she has been soaking some roots in water and drinking the water daily. These remedies make her feel a bit better but she is still always coughing no matter how much medicine she takes. Recently, she was tested for TB but the results came out negative.

#### **Moral**

Some problems that we face are brought about by simple causes. Tackling the effects without removing the root causes will only bring about a temporary cure. It is better to solve the root or cause of the problem rather than the effects.

#### **Questions for Discussion**

1. In your opinion, why do you think Mrs. Mulenga is always coughing?
2. What practical steps would you suggest to be taken to help resolve Mrs. Mulenga's problem?
3. In your own homes, can you think of sicknesses that result from the dirtiness of our environment?

#### **Modern Scenario (2)**

One day, Mrs. Banda returned from work to find her baby's face swollen! She asked if the baby had eaten anything unusual or if she had been stung by insects or something but no such thing had happened. Mrs. Banda was very worried about her baby because she did not know what was causing the swelling.

In the middle of the night, the baby was rushed to the clinic, but even there the clinical officer could not say what had caused the baby's face to swell until he had carried out some tests at the big hospital in town. That would take a few days or even weeks. So the clinical officer asked Mrs. Banda to take note of all the foods that were given to her baby in order to check whether the swelling of the face was a result of any food that the baby was eating.

In case the cause of the swelling was from elsewhere, Mrs. Banda was also asked to take note of the soap that the baby was using. However, after one week, the baby's face was still swollen and Mrs. Banda still did not understand what was the cause. One day, when Mrs. Banda's older school-going daughter, Deliwe, came home after attending a meeting at school, she explained to her mother what the cause of the problem might be. At that meeting, a visitor from the Environmental Council of Zambia had told the gathered pupils that some chemicals found in some types of normal household products like soap and insecticides are very harmful to human health and the environment.

### **Moral**

Care should be taken in the use of some household products like soap and body oils, which may have negative effects on our health and on the environment.

### **Commentary**

Some chemicals, for example, in some types of soap and body creams that make the skin lighter, contain mercury. Mercury damages the skin, and when it goes into the environment, it poisons water and animals and may even affect human beings. These soaps that contain hazardous substances are in fact banned by the Government and should not even be on sale. People who bring these products from other countries are breaking the law, and people who use them, knowingly or unknowingly, are damaging their own health and contributing to the degradation of the environment.

There are many types of insect sprays that people are selling on the streets. Again, some of these sprays contain dangerous chemicals that are not even allowed in the countries where they are made. You can buy these chemicals on the streets cheaply, but in fact some of them are very dangerous. All sprays should have clear instructions for how they should be used but often we do not take the time to read these instructions. Although many of these chemicals take long to have an effect on our bodies, some of them can quickly cause effects such as coughing, itching eyes and swelling of the face. Some of them may also cause cancer.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. Can you identify allergies that are caused by harmful chemicals?
2. Does the economic situation of people determine the kind of chemicals they use to improve their appearance?
3. Are people given enough information about the products they use? If not, how can they be given more information?
4. Do you check the expiry date on any medicines or foods you buy?
5. Can you think of other ways in which we are harming ourselves by our use of natural resources?

### **Closing Prayer**

Invite members to make personal intercessory prayers and conclude with the following prayer:

Lord God, our Saviour and our Healer,  
help us to recognise your healing power in all of creation.  
Give us the knowledge to know what is harming us,  
and the wisdom to protect what is good for our health.  
We make this prayer through Christ our Lord, Amen.

## SESSION 6

### “VALUE ANIMALS!”

#### **Traditional Wisdom**

Human beings have always hunted wild animals and collected food and other materials from the forest including medicine and materials for building shelters. A long time ago, people used to collect these natural products from the wild mainly for subsistence.

In every village, there used to be special people who were experienced hunters because they came from families of hunters. Only these special hunters were allowed to own guns. They did not kill any female animals during the breeding season because they knew that this would affect future populations of animals. Furthermore, they did not kill certain animals because they had special meaning, or because they had been told by their grandfathers not to hunt them. Other animals could only be hunted with special permission from the chief.

The traditional career hunters are known by many names in different languages. Some of them are *fundi* or *chibinda*. To be one of them, you also had to know how to survive in the bush and how to hunt dangerous animals. You had to be brave and strong to walk long distances in dangerous places with many wild animals. These people did not hunt only for themselves or for their families. They hunted mainly for the community.

After a successful hunt, word was sent back to the village for people to go and collect the meat. Special parts of the animals were reserved for the hunters and the chief. In the early days, most of the meat was shared and eaten within the village. There were also rules that some products from the bush could only be collected at a certain time of the year.

This was a form of controlled hunting which allowed people to harvest from the wild only what they needed. This was also a form of taking care of natural resources so that the animals would be available to future generations.

#### **Moral**

Some traditional practices and beliefs are important and contribute to our well-being. We should keep those traditions that are helpful and do away with those that are not.

#### **Commentary**

In recent times, people have lost respect and regard even for good traditions. Many places that had abundant natural resources do not have them anymore. It is only where groups of people or individuals take direct responsibility for them that they survive. Indeed, some animals like the rhino, have been wiped out by people almost completely in places where they used to be found. When all individual animals of a kind are killed, it is known as extinction of a species. It should be noted that every species has unique properties which are lost forever once a species becomes extinct.

Human beings have always collected food, medicine and other materials from the wild. However, animals also depend on these natural resources. If they are used up due to over exploitation or lack of protection, or because of our changed attitude to them, we reduce the number of living creatures and deprive future generations of the opportunity to see them and use them to improve their lives.

One of the main environmental problems all over the world today is the loss of animal species through over-harvesting and damaging of those places or habitats where the animal species are found. Some small animals or insects or even plants live and survive only in some forests, and sometimes depend on very specific types of trees. When these trees are removed, the different animals and plants that depend on them cannot survive.

There are times, however, when responsible human intervention in nature is called for. For example, when foot and mouth disease breaks out and livestock begin to die, human intervention is needed in the form of vaccination and disinfection, or when wild species such as elephants or trees begin to die mysteriously, scientific research is used to prevent total destruction of a species.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. Why are people involved in practices such as poaching, deforestation and other human activities in Zambia that are leading to the extinction of living species?
2. What is your reaction to hunting practices by which not one animal of a certain kind is left alive?
3. What can you as individuals and communities do to prevent extinction of species?
4. Are there laws to protect the environment and, if so, are they being implemented?
5. Are there any ceremonies or rituals or songs sung before hunting that may have acted as a deterrent to poaching, deforestation, etc.?
6. What was it in these rituals or ceremonies that made humans conscious of “spirit” in nature and what was the impact of these on society?

### **Biblical References**

- “God said, 'Let the earth produce every kind of living creature: cattle, reptiles, and every kind of wild beast. And so it was. God made every kind of wild beast, every kind of cattle, and every kind of land reptile. God saw that it was good.'” (Genesis 1:24)
- Notice also that, in the first creation story of Genesis, God tells the humans to eat only “the seed-bearing plants and the trees with seed-bearing fruit” and that God also gives “to all wild beasts, all birds of heaven and all living reptiles on the earth the foliage of plants for food” (Genesis 1: 29-30).

Natural products are intended by God not just for humans but for animals also.

- “[God said to Noah:] Of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of reptile on the ground, two must go with you so that their lives may be saved. For your part, provide yourself with eatables of all kinds, and lay in a store of them, to serve as food for yourself and them” (Genesis 6: 20-21).
- The Noah story sheds more light on the way in which we are to understand that we humans are “masters” of all the creatures on earth. Human mastery is to ensure that other creatures stay alive!
- “When that day comes, I will make a treaty on her [my people's] behalf with the wild animals, with the birds of heaven, and the creeping things of the earth” (Hosea, 2:18).
- “For I own all the beasts of the forest, beasts in their thousands on my hills. I know all the birds in the sky, all that moves on the field belongs to me” (Psalms (49) 50: 10-11).
- “Let earth praise the Lord, sea monsters and all the deeps ...wild animals and farm animals, snakes and birds” (Psalm 148:7,10).

### **Closing Prayer**

Invite members to make personal intercessory prayers and conclude with the following prayer:

|  |                 |
|--|-----------------|
| Africa,                                      | bless the Lord. |
| Ye hippos, giraffes, and elephants,          | bless the Lord. |
| Busy black ants and wriggling tadpoles,      | bless the Lord. |
| Praise and extol Him forever and ever.       |                 |
| <br>   |                 |
| Hunting leopards and scared antelopes,       | bless the Lord. |
| Curious chameleons and grass munching sheep, | bless the Lord. |
| Praise and extol Him forever and ever.       |                 |
| <br>   |                 |
| Land snails and crawling turtles,            | bless the Lord. |
| Curious zebras and old bony cows,            | bless the Lord. |
| Praise and extol Him forever and ever.       |                 |

*(From the African Canticle; based on Daniel 3:52-90)*

Loving God, like St. Basil and St. Francis of Assisi,  
 may we come to appreciate the animals and plants as our brothers and sisters.  
 We ask this through Christ our Lord.

## SESSION 7

### “USE FIRE WISELY!”

#### **Traditional Wisdom**

With the discovery of fire, humans changed their way of life. They used fire in many positive ways, but some uses of fire were very destructive to creation. This was most obvious when humans burned the forests and the grasslands to clear the land for agriculture, and to drive animals to where they could easily be hunted. At first, this did not seem to be a problem. But as time went on, and as more people learned to use the new discovery called fire, more and more of the different creatures on the land were driven away or killed. In some places, the land became very bare and soil was washed away making it difficult for any crops to grow.

When humans realised what had happened, it was too late, for vast areas of the land had been destroyed. Fortunately, in some far away lands, where only a few people lived, and where they had learned to care for the land and respect it, they used fire with care. Nobody was allowed to start fire in any way or time that they wanted. Fire could only be used when the elders allowed it. So, in that far away land, not all the land was destroyed.

Now, when people from the place where the land had been destroyed by the un-controlled use of fire saw this, they realised that they had been foolish and unwise in their use of fire.

#### **Moral**

Fire is good, but it can be very destructive if not used wisely.

#### **Modern Scenario**

In many rural areas in Zambia today, people collect wild honey for food. In order to collect honey, a bunch of grass is lit to calm the bees with smoke so that they do not sting the person collecting the honey. After calming the bees and collecting the honey, however, some people do not put out the fire which causes bush fires that burn large parts of the bush every year during the dry season. Late fires in the dry season are usually hot and move fast. Such fires kill many big and small animals. They also leave the soil bare. Furthermore, people and property are known to have been lost during fires.

#### **Commentary**

Fire is a natural element that humans have come to depend upon for many daily uses. In Zambia, fire is used for cooking, for boiling drinking water, for heating bath water, for providing lighting in the house, for calming bees in order to collect their honey, for clearing the bush in order to develop a piece of land, etc. Fire is something good, but it can be said that fire is something dangerous and destructive if not used carefully and responsibly.

As mentioned in the traditional wisdom and in the scenario, uncontrolled and late bush fires cause extensive damage to nature all across Zambia, especially during the dry season. Some of these bush fires are started by accident, but more often small fires that are left unattended grow into these large, destructive bush fires. Bush fires leave the soil bare of

vegetation and young tree seedlings, and they even destroy both the seen and unseen living creatures that make their homes in the soil and help to improve its fertility. Fire is an example of something in nature that is very useful to humans if used responsibly, but it is also something that is very destructive to humans and all living beings if it is used uncontrollably.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. What can we learn from the traditional wisdom about fire?
2. In what ways is fire a good thing and in what ways is it a bad thing? Give examples from the story and from your own experience to explain your answer.
3. Why do you think that there are many uncontrolled bush fires today?
4. Too many bush fires are said to be causing pollution of the air. How can bush fires be controlled?
5. How do you control fire in your own home?
6. List various causes of destructive fires in many urban areas of Zambia today and discuss how best we could avoid such fires.
7. Comment on the purpose of any traditional prayers or rituals performed before lighting a fire that you are aware of.

### **Biblical Reference**

- “When a fire spreads, setting light to thorn bushes and destroying stacked or standing corn or the field itself, the man responsible for the fire must make full restitution” (*Exodus 22:6*).

### **Closing Prayer**

Invite members to make personal intercessory prayers and conclude with the following prayer:

Lord God, who made your presence felt to Moses in the burning bush,  
and whose Holy Spirit appeared as tongues of fire at Pentecost,  
help us to respect fire as a sign of your presence among us.  
Give us the wisdom to use fire for our benefit, and to avoid its destructive power.  
We make this prayer through Christ our Lord, Amen.

## SESSION 8

### “PREVENT SOIL EROSION!”

#### **Modern Scenario (1)**

Mubiana had always wondered why it was that, in the rainy season, the river that had nice, clear water suddenly turned brown and flowed with much more force than it usually did in the dry season.

At first she thought that the change of colour had something to do with the rains cleaning up all the dirt that people had left lying around all over the place. She also thought that people had been throwing brown things into it as it passed through different places on its long journey from its source in the mountains to its mouth where it joined the ocean. So Mubiana decided to ask her teacher.

The teacher told her that her first thought was correct, that is, that rains do help clean up all the dirt that people leave all over. Then the teacher told her that the water also washes away the top soil and that changes the colour of the water to brown. The layer of top soil is good for growing crops. It contains the organic matter that makes the soil fertile. It is also in this top soil that many small animals, some of them too small to be seen with the naked eye, live. Without top soil, it is not possible to grow crops.

#### **Modern Scenario (2)**

Mr. Zulu has been farming his land with the aid of a large amount of purchased inputs (e.g., compound D) and, after every rainy season, he has burned what was left over. However, for the past two growing seasons, he has noticed that there has been less rain than usual with the result that his harvest has been poor. He begins to wonder as to whether this might be due to global warming. Indeed, there is some evidence that global warming has already reduced the rainfall over Zambia, and it is likely that this reduction of rain will continue. In the other extreme, unusual floods might take place in some areas of Zambia due to global warming.

Mr. Zulu discusses this with his friends and they raise the question as to whether the farming methods he has been using might not be good for the soil upon which his crops depend. Indeed, some traditional farming methods might actually be better than the ones he has been using in recent years for he has noticed that soil erosion has severely impoverished some of his land. Part of the problem is that the rain runs off the land too quickly due to the poor condition of the soil.

In view of this, Mr. Zulu begins to think about what he could do responsibly next year to harvest some of the rain by improving the fertility and water-holding capacity of the soil.

#### **Moral**

It is very important to protect the fertility of the soil because soil is one of the most important natural resources for plants, animals and humans.

### **Commentary**

It was largely because of soil erosion (i.e., the removal of top soil) that the water had turned brown. Soil erosion is caused by the removal of vegetation which leaves the soil bare and unprotected from wind and water. Soil erosion also results from overgrazing by animals and human clearing of land for agriculture without protecting the soil. When there is no vegetation to cover the soil, the water flows fast towards the lowest point and carries all the top soil with it. The more it rains, the more serious this becomes and the faster the water flows instead of being stopped by vegetation to sink into the ground. Soil is essential to the healthy functioning of communities of plants, bacteria, fungi, animals, etc.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. What does soil erosion suggest to you?
2. Can you give concrete examples of how soil erosion affects your well-being?
3. In what ways do you contribute to soil erosion?
4. Do you feel that there is a relationship between using fertilizers in farming or road building and soil erosion?
5. Can you pinpoint anything in the farming methods that has allowed erosion to occur?
6. What can you do now to be more responsible in preventing further soil erosion?

### **Biblical Reference**

“And some seeds fell into rich soil and, growing tall and strong, produced crop; and yielded thirty, sixty, even a hundredfold” (*Mark 4: 8*).

### **Closing Prayers**

Invite members to make personal intercessory prayers and conclude with the following prayer:

We confess, dear Creator, that we have abused your Earth, especially its soil, upon which we and your other creatures living on the land depend for life. Forgive us and help us to become better stewards of your dear Earth. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

## SESSION 9

### “CARE FOR TREES!”

#### Traditional Wisdom

Once upon a time, there was land surrounded by hills and washed with clear flowing streams of fresh and clear water full of fish. There were forests with tall trees teeming with animals and birds of all kinds. People needed special permission to cut down trees, and among all the trees, one tree was the most respected. This is the *mukuyu* or fig tree, the home of spirits!

One day, a group of herd boys from the village took their cattle and goats to graze on the sweet and fresh grass that grew in the plains. Suddenly, the weather changed and a strong wind descended from the hills and swept through the valleys. Soon the rains came in big and heavy drops that struck the earth and vegetation with force. The boys and the animals quickly found shelter under the big trees.

Fortunately for the boys, they found a big *mukuyu* tree with a hole large enough to give them shelter from the rain. Unknown to the herd boys, the hole had been created in the tree by a fire that nearly killed the tree when it was young and, since that time, the tree had remained very upset. So when the small group of herd boys entered the hole in the *mukuyu* tree to shelter from the rainstorm, the tree quickly grew and closed the hole with the herd boys inside. This was punishment for whoever had burned the *mukuyu* tree many many seasons ago.

After the rainstorm, the cattle and goats found their way home without the herd boys. Everyone in the village thought that the boys were dead for, after many days and nights of searching, they did not find them. They searched everywhere including the place where the big *mukuyu* tree stood without knowing that the herd boys were inside.

One day, an old woman heard some singing and wondered where the singing was coming from, not knowing that it was coming from the *mukuyu* tree. The voices sang: *Tell our mothers that we are trapped but that we are being cared for.* But when the elders of the village heard what had happened, they didn't believe her.

Nevertheless, one day, the elders sent some men who followed her at a safe distance where she could not see them. They then also realised that the singing was coming from the big *mukuyu* tree! So they started to cut the tree gently and carefully so as not to harm it and the children inside. They managed to open the trunk of the tree and found the herd boys with very long hair since it had not been cut for more than a year.

The men took the herd boys to the village. A big celebration was held and special offerings were made under the big *mukuyu* tree. Everyone in the village was reminded not to cut down trees without permission but to look after trees, especially the big *mukuyu* tree, the home of the spirits, that had kept the boys and taken good care of them.

#### Moral

We need to respect and care for trees that play such an important part in a healthy environment. We are the ones who suffer if we fail to have this attitude.

### **Commentary**

Lack of trees leads to lack of fuel wood needed for cooking by so many people. This also affects those who earn their livelihood from forest products – charcoal burning, transport, etc. You will have noticed that the cost of charcoal and firewood is increasing: it either costs more to purchase charcoal, or it costs more time to carry firewood to your home. You will also have noticed that many areas of Zambia, especially around towns and cities, are now bare, though not long ago they were covered with trees.

Zambians today are clearing forests at a tremendous rate, which may leave future generations without access to the gifts of the forests, including adequate rainfall, energy, animal habitats, traditional medicines, etc.

Trees help to keep moisture both in the soil and in the atmosphere. When trees are cut, the rain run-off causes soil erosion and less soil moisture content. Cutting of forests also contributes to declining rainfall and drought in a particular area. Proper care of trees can provide many benefits for farmers, such as firewood, building and fencing poles, soil protection, leaves for fodder, nitrogen fixing in the soil, fruit, honey, nuts and mushrooms. Consequently, new trees should be planted, especially when existing trees are cut down.

The consequences of clearing forests to produce charcoal are many: more erosion of topsoil and more droughts; more flooding and drying of rivers; fish and animal populations declining; difficulties growing crops and raising livestock; etc.

The crucial importance of protecting and replanting trees needs to be more clearly recognized than it has been.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. How would you go about trying to solve the problem of cutting down trees?
2. Is the planting of trees an adequate solution to the problem?
3. Are you aware of other, more energy-saving methods for cooking food, such as the use of fuel-saving stoves that use either wood or charcoal?
4. Do you use such an improved stove and, if so, do you think it has reduced on your fuel costs?
5. Do you know about other, alternative energy sources? If so, have you used any?
6. Can you think of any causes of deforestation other than cutting down trees for charcoal and firewood?

### **Closing Prayer**

Invite members to make personal intercessory prayers and conclude with the following prayer:

Lord God, you are the Tree of Life, filling all of creation with your loving care.  
Help us to appreciate the beauty and value of your gift of trees,  
and the indispensable part they play in our life-support system.  
We make this prayer through Christ our Lord, Amen.

## SESSION 10

### “APPRECIATE WATER!”

#### **Modern Scenario**

Once upon a time, there were only a few people living in most villages, and towns were very small. Many people grew all the things they needed to eat at home, and they stored enough for the dry season. There was also enough food for families to exchange for products which they needed, or simply to sell in the market. There were also plenty of wild animals for people to hunt for meat. Families lived closer together and helped each other in times of need.

In those days in many parts of Zambia, streams flowed throughout the year. They provided a source of water for irrigating the gardens during the dry season, for drinking, and for supplying fish for food.

In recent times, however, things are no longer the same. Ever since new industries have been built and more people have come to settle in these areas, many streams flow only during the rainy season and remain dry for the whole dry season. There are far fewer animals in the area and there are definitely more people living there.

The water in the river is no longer safe for drinking. Furthermore, there are very few fish in it, and these are also much smaller in size than they were previously.

#### **Moral**

Be aware of the importance of water for health and life. Water is absolutely essential for life. It is not just a question of keeping water clean but of saving water.

#### **Commentary**

Caring for the environment does not mean that development should not take place. On the other hand, while we are developing our communities and countries, we should ensure that in the process, we do not damage nature on which we rely for our survival. In other words, decisions on the type of development to be brought to an area should consider the positive and negative effects on people and on the environment.

In order to protect the environment, the laws of Zambia now require that a particular form of development should go ahead only when the impacts of that development are well understood, and when the people are well informed. We should plan, then, for ways in which the negative aspects of development can be minimised. For example, if such development involves an industry, it should be clear where the waste products will be taken when the industry starts to operate. If new buildings or roads are to be built in an area of forest, it should be emphasised that it is not the whole forest that should be cleared. If it is a forest that has water sources, or a forest that has populations of some rare animals or plants, or one that the community depends on, then the road or the building should be put somewhere else.

Very often, the importance of protecting the environment is overlooked, and sometimes we do not even foresee the effects of destroying it at that particular time. With particular reference to water, we should remember that water does not just become bad by itself. It is only when something bad enters into it, or when someone dumps something into it that pollutes it, that it becomes bad and unhealthy for use.

In view of the critical importance of water for life, there is an urgent need to find ways of saving water and avoiding unnecessary waste.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. In the scenario above, what do you think happened to the water and where did all those people come from?
2. In the scenario above, why is it that the condition of most people and of the environment seems to have worsened when certain kinds of development have taken place?
3. What measures do you think government, private companies and communities should take to prevent the pollution of water?
4. What do you think about laws to protect our sources of water?
5. Many communities in Zambia experience problems with water in one way or the other. What problems are these and how can they be resolved? What is the cause of these problems?
6. There are special organisations that are responsible for protecting the environment. Do you know them? How can you help them do their work?
7. In what ways do you think water can be damaging to your health?
8. As individuals and as a group, what role can you play to help protect our water supplies in a healthy state?
9. Can you identify ways in which water is needlessly wasted?

### **Biblical References**

- “God said, 'Let the waters under heaven come together into a single mass, and let dry land appear'. And so it was. God called the dry land 'earth' and the mass of waters 'seas', and God saw that it was good” (*Genesis* 1: 9-10).
- “You visit the earth and water it; you load it with riches. God's rivers brim with water to provide their grain” (*Psalms* 65:9).
- “God covers the heavens with clouds and prepares the rain for the earth, making mountains sprout with grass and with plants to serve our needs” (*Psalms* 147:8).

### **Closing Prayer**

Invite members to make personal intercessory prayers and conclude with the following prayer:

Loving Creator, we thank you for the gift of water,  
without which we could not exist or live.  
Help us to realise how precious this gift is,  
and to work together with others to conserve water and keep it pure.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

## SESSION 11

### “BE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR ENVIRONMENT!”

#### **Traditional Wisdom**

Once upon a time, people lived in harmony among themselves and with nature. People were healthy and tall and happy. At that time, the sky was low and near enough for people to reach it.

In fact, at that time, the sky also provided all the food that humans needed. All they had to do was reach out, pluck a piece from the sky and eat.

Unfortunately, as time went by, people became careless with this abundant food supply. They took more from the sky than they needed. They threw away what they could not eat and created a lot of waste around them. People had become wasteful and lost all consideration for the sky that provided all their needs.

God saw this and was very upset. Consequently, God withdrew with the sky and went high up where people could not reach it anymore.

#### **Moral**

The moral of the story is that we should take care of our surroundings. We should not be wasteful. We should be prudent, especially in times of plenty.

#### **Commentary**

We humans are totally dependent upon the natural world for sustenance, from the air we breathe to the fruits we eat. Wastefulness is always a sign of failure to appreciate what God has given us in nature. It also reflects a failure to recognise the need to share from our excess with those who have less. In other words, we ought to live simply so that others may simply live – and this includes plants, animals and humans both of today and in the future.

We ought to appreciate our role as stewards of God's creation, to strive to eliminate actions that destroy the integrity of creation, and to promote those actions that protect plants, animals and non-living nature.

#### **Questions for Discussion**

1. Do you think that Western values or attitudes are influencing the way that people relate to the natural environment (e.g., consumption patterns, dependency on oil, etc.)?
2. Can you think of any small or large ways in which households are being wasteful in the way they live? How can families become less wasteful?
3. Recalling the title of Session 11 “Be Responsible for your Environment,” what simple actions might be done to better care for our surroundings, whether in urban or rural areas?

4. Having now completed the sessions on caring for our environment, what do group members resolve to do in order to become better stewards of God's creation (e.g., explore more environmentally friendly farming methods, purchase an energy-efficient stove, etc.)?
5. What additional information or help do you require in order to take care of the environment around you? Where do you think you can get such information or help?

### **African Traditional Proverbs**

- *Alendo akanyera m'nyumba mawa agona kuti* (Cicewa).  
When visitors relieve themselves in the house, where shall they sleep tomorrow?  
We have spoiled things for ourselves by irresponsible actions.
- *Akacila ka mbushi kasengula epo kekele* (Bemba).  
The tail of a goat brushes where it lies.  
Every person must take care of his or her surroundings
- *Ndidyeretu chire anasowa mbeu* (Cicewa).  
You must not eat everything, but keep seeds for sowing the next crop. Use only what you need; don't be wasteful.

### **Biblical References**

- “God saw all that God had made, and saw that it was very good” (*Genesis 1:31*).
- Yahweh God planted a garden ...and settled the man [humans] in the garden to cultivate and take care of it” (*Genesis 2: 8*).
- “A field that has been well watered by frequent rain, and gives the crops that are wanted by the owners who grew them, is given God's blessing; but one that grows brambles and thistles is abandoned, and practically cursed” (*Hebrews 6:7-8*).

### **Closing Prayers**

Invite members to make personal intercessory prayers and conclude with the following prayer:

Lord God, you who created all things for your glory and our benefit,  
help us to recognise the goodness of all of creation.  
Let your Holy Spirit guide us in our use of the environment,  
and help us to co-operate with you in its development.  
We make this prayer through Christ our Lord, Amen.

## CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

This booklet has had a limited purpose, namely, to help to alert people to the manner and extent to which, knowingly or unknowingly, they may be contributing to the degradation of our natural environment. In attempting to do this, eleven sessions have focused on the basic elements of nature, i.e. **soil, air, fire and water**, in addition to more general considerations concerning **nature** itself, **trees, animals** and our own **health**. While these topics have been considered in separate sessions, they are clearly not operating separately but are essentially interconnected with one another. Damage to one natural element has a damaging effect on the others.

The limited coverage, however, has unfortunately had to omit consideration of many dimensions that would warrant detailed discussion in a longer work. Among the areas that should be mentioned in particular are the following: the spread of HIV/AIDS, the inequitable burdens placed on women, the injustices rooted in poverty, the growing division between the rich and the poor, and the use of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs). In addition to these, internationally there is the impact of unjust economic pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) with its unequal trade opportunities. Locally, there is the widespread extent of petty and large scale corruption both within the government and outside, which is having serious detrimental effects on the natural environment. Furthermore, business companies that cause pollution with their dumping of dangerous waste products act to a large extent with impunity. These are all linked in special ways to the harm that is being done to the natural environment.

All these factors may seem to reduce ordinary people to helplessness in the face of uncontrollable problems. And yet, it is ordinary people who make the difference in the long run. Reflecting, as we have done, on the destruction being caused to the environment in various ways may seem to be lacking in the kind of activity that is required to change the situation. However, a first and necessary step in leading to action is consciousness raising among individuals and communities. Unless people are aware of what is happening, and unless they are adequately informed about the ways in which their activity or lack of activity is contributing to environmental problems, appropriate action is stifled. Governments, indeed, have a particular responsibility to care for the natural environment, but individual citizens and communities also have a responsibility to put pressure on their government and to look to their own irresponsible behaviour as well.

The key to action is motivation. This motivation can come partly from a realisation of the dangers to our health, to the health of our children, and to the health of the country's future children from a polluted and uncared for environment. But an even greater source of motivation is rooted in **our traditional moral and religious beliefs** which undergird our **Christian values** to act as stewards and caretakers of the natural environment given to us by our Creator. Created in the image of God, and mandated as Christians with the responsibility of respecting the plant and animal world which reflects in its own way the glory of God, we are called upon to take whatever little steps we can to protect God's gift to us. Let us make a beginning!