Art, banners and other objects in the sanctuary and elsewhere can be wonderful reminders of the inextricable way in which humans are woven into the fabric of creation. They reveal and conceal the mystery of our Creation in our midst. Here are some ideas to help make the care of the earth an integral part of congregational life.

Include creation and nature in all the banners and decorations for the liturgical year. Liturgical Seasons:

- Advent anticipates the coming of Jesus to restore all of creation
- Advent is a time to repent in preparation for a new age
- Epiphany manifests the glory of God in nature
- Lent is an opportunity to grieve the loss of our environment
- Lent is an opportunity to sacrifice a lifestyle that harms the earth
- Easter is a chance to celebrate and envision the regeneration of all of life
- Pentecost lifts up the transformation of human life to live in new ways
- Pentecost season offers the chance to examine our lives and to change

- In all of these seasons, there is the opportunity to include all of God's creation in our observances and celebrations of the seasons. The decoration, banners, sayings, and sanctuary appointments can keep this message before the congregation all year round.
Banners:

Banners can include symbols as well as quotations from scripture and other words that emphasize our care for the earth. For example:

- Care for creation
- Let all creation praise the Lord
- And the leaves of the trees were a healing for the nations
- Special Days: The church year has special days that lend themselves to the celebration of all of life and our human responsibility for it. These may include St. Francis Day, Rogation Day, as well as secular holidays such as Thanksgiving and Earth Day. Decorating for these days can be very important in keeping "care of the earth" before us.

Symbols from Nature:

- The tree of life
- The animal symbols for the four evangelists
- The Rose of Sharon as a symbol for Christ
- The water of life
- The Jordan River
- The cedars of Lebanon
Theological statements: It is also appropriate to celebrate the role of God in creation and the role of humans as co-creators with depictions of:

- God in creation
- The cosmic Christ
- The spirit (breath) of life
- Humans naming the animals

*From Christmas to Easter--Nature used in Worship*

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Shreveport, Louisiana has a long-standing tradition which takes them from Advent through Easter. During Advent and Christmas, a *live evergreen tree* sits in the sanctuary, decorated with white lights and chrismons. On Epiphany the *tree branches are burned*. (This was at one point done as part of a bonfire to which church members also brought branches from home, but the bonfire was deemed too dangerous to continue.) The ashes are collected and used for Ash Wednesday and the trunk is sawn in two and *formed into a rugged cross*, which stands in the sanctuary during Lent. On Easter morning, members arrive to find the cross covered copiously with fresh green ivy. During a "*flowering of the cross*" ceremony, members bring flowers from home and tuck them into the ivy (which is secured with rubber bands). In the end, the cross is a lush, fragrant, colorful symbol of renewal and life abundant.

**Art work:**

- Many churches incorporate religious and other art in their buildings and grounds. Why not include scenes from nature or scenes depicting biblical experiences with nature, i.e. the calming of the storm and John the Baptist in the desert. Some churches display the work of local artists. Consider these possibilities:
- A photographic display of endangered species
- A display of photographs depicting environmental degradation in your city or region
- A display of photographs of wondrous scenes of God's creation throughout the earth
- Display a large photograph of earth shot from space
- Display a large photograph of the solar system or of galaxies
- Show paintings or photographs of local sites showing the beauty and wonder of creation
- Plants: Plants in the sanctuary and other places of the building can greatly enhance the beauty of a church and also connect us more closely with nature.

**Other Resources:**


Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, [http://www.good-shep.org](http://www.good-shep.org)
1111 North Elmhurst Road
Prospect Heights, IL 60070
phone: 847/537-4353

*ELCA Art Loan Program*

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