



## **An Introduction to the *SERVICE OF REPENTANCE***

(This Introduction and the Service Notes are posted at [www.easternsynod.org](http://www.easternsynod.org).

Click on Resources, scroll down to Stewardship of Creation, download Service of Repentance)

The Service of Repentance is primarily provided to assist Eastern Synod congregations as a launching service in the process of [The Greening Congregation Accreditation Program](#) of The ELCIC. However, the service, and any of its parts, can be used whenever a congregation celebrates a Sunday of Creation or wants to highlight the negative human impact on the environment.

The service is not meant to be a liturgical island apart from the normal Sunday worship service, but can be combined with all the settings in any of the Lutheran worship books. In some cases there are references to an alternative resource in the ELW. Some of the material originates from other Lutheran Churches – a reminder that the whole Church is in this together.

The theological starting point of the service is that God has a connection to all creation and all creation is of value in itself, apart from the values it gives to human beings. Everything God made was good, even before human beings were created. Therefore, the fact that God has given us permission to use all that creation provides is not a self-evident truth but an act of mercy.

The amount of the earth's natural resources we are using as well as the speed with which we are consuming them is increasing and reflects our recklessness with the gifts given to us. Our lifestyle clearly reveals our sinfulness and greening is not a fight against climate change, pollution or the over harvesting of natural resources. It is a fight against our extravagance, gluttony and greed – our (old) self. As a Church and Christian individuals, we should know better – since God has spoken to us through the word of the Bible. Yet, we have been drawn into the world of over-consumption along with everyone else.

God's call to us to act for creation did not begin only now that disaster is at hand. God gave this call at the dawn of creation when human beings were created to *till and to keep*<sup>1</sup> paradise. Even if the environmental threats would suddenly disappear or appear to be a false alarm, we must continue to renew our relationship with creation.

To till and to keep is both a promise and a call. God has promised us the use of natural resources almost without limitations. The land, forests, vegetation, waters, animals, fish, birds, etc. are all available for us.<sup>2</sup> But God also calls human beings to keep the creation, the same way as God keeps us. We are called to imitate God in our

---

<sup>1</sup> Gen. 2:15, Hebr. עבד = till, work, labour, serve. שמר = keep, guard, look after

<sup>2</sup> According to the book of Genesis human were created as vegetarians (Gen. 1:29) After the flood God gave Noah permission to eat also flesh. (Gen. 9:3)

relationship to creation – to be the kind of stewards who are ready even to make sacrifices for its well-being. This is a call to be God’s image for creation.<sup>3</sup>

We are promised access to the whole of creation and the mission, in fact our mission, is to be the “crown” of it! But, our sin has led us to a perverted governing relationship with the rest of the creation. Nature is seen – if not in words, definitely in deeds – merely as a source for human well-being.

Repentance is often interpreted as something that involves expressions of great negative feelings and remorse. It is seen more as a feeling that comes from the heart and self-judging. But the word repentance as used in the New Testament offers a wider range of interpretation – of the feelings, attitudes and actions that can be involved. Variations in translation of the word<sup>4</sup> “repent” give us some hints of this. The verb can be translated as ‘to change one’s ways’, ‘to change one’s mind’ ‘to change one’s heart’, ‘to turn away from one’s sins’. The noun can be translated also as ‘later knowledge’

During the past years, we have come to ‘later knowledge’ concerning our lifestyle’s impact on the environment. We need to change our ways. Repentance at this point is a natural action. It also has deep roots in our Christian tradition. The point of repentance is not the tears and sobbing, but the seriousness of the need for a change.

(Rev.) Olavi Hepomäki  
Eastern Synod Representative,  
ELCIC Stewardship of Creation

February 2009 – Service of Repentance – Stewardship of Creation

---

<sup>3</sup> God created humans in his image and likeness. (Gen. 1:26-27) There are many interpretations about what this means. Functional way to understand it is that God intended humans to govern the creation on His behalf as mentioned in Gen. 1:26.

<sup>4</sup> (μετανο-ία, -έω = repentance, to repent)