

Religious Campaign for Forest Conservation

*“The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof;
the world and all that dwell in it.” (Psalm 24:1)*

Responsibility for God’s Forests

A Christian Call for
(1) the Immediate End to All
Cutting of Ancient and Old Growth Forests,
(2) the End of Commercial Logging on Public Land,
(3) the Redirection of Taxpayer Industry Subsidies
into Forest Restoration and Restoration Jobs, and
(4) Prayer and a Search for Wisdom by Churches
on the Spiritual Value of Forests

❖ A National Appeal based upon ❖
a Biblical Theology of Creation

* 887 Sebastopol Road, Suite A * Santa Rosa, California 95407 * (707) 573-3161 *

Responsibility for God’s Forests

A Prayer of Thanksgiving and Confession

*“The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof;
the world and all that dwell in it.” (Psalm 24:1)*

For the marvelous grace of Your Creation,
We pour out our thanks to You, our God,
for sun and moon and stars,
for rain and dew and winds,
for winter cold and summer heat.

We pour forth our praise to You
for mountains and hills, for springs and valleys,
for rivers and seas.

We praise You, O Lord,
for plants growing in earth and water,
for life inhabiting lakes and seas,
for life creeping in soils and land,
for creatures living in wetlands and waters,
for life flying above earth and sea,
for beasts dwelling in forests and fields. [ref. Psalm 104]

How many and wonderful are Your works, our God!
In wisdom You have made them all! [ref. Psalm 147-148, 104:24]

But we confess, O Lord,
as creatures charged with the care and keeping of Your Creation,
we are desecrating Your Creation. [ref. Isaiah 24]
We especially confess our ravaging of Your forests and the life they sustain.

We confess risking permanent damage to Your handiwork.
We confess impoverishing Creation’s ability to bring You praise.
We confess that we are often unaware of how deeply we have hurt
Your good earth and its marvelous gifts. [ref. Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:23]
We confess that we are often unaware of how our abuse of Creation
has also been an abuse of ourselves.
These are grievous offenses against You.
For our wrongs, Lord, we ask Your forgiveness.

[ref. Gen. 50:17; Psalm 25:18; 103:3; Luke 6:37; 17:3; 1 John 1:9]

Out of your love, you made the forests bursting with ecstatic life.

You commanded them to flourish
and made them witnesses of Your glory. [ref. Isaiah 55:12-13]

We thank You for the forests' reflection of Your infinite wisdom. [ref: Rom. 1:20]
Intact forest ecosystems illustrate God's design of interdependence,
Communities of life, giving and receiving life, in profound witness to You.
You gave life to us and life to the forests. (Ref: Genesis 1:31; 2:8-9)
We are a part of their community, and they are a part of ours.

And yet, in our human sin, we degrade this community.
In pride, selfishness, possessiveness and ignorance,
we have lived in greed, [ref. Galatians 5:19-21]
far in excess of our need. [ref: 1 Timothy 6:6-9; Proverbs 15:27]
Forgive us, Lord, for we have not lived according to Your will. [ref: Matt. 6:10; Luke 16:13]

Your Word calls us to preserve Creation's fruitfulness, to practice '*shalom*,'
and to serve and to keep Creation. [ref: Colossians 1:19-20]

Help us, Lord, to be protectors, restorers, replenishers, healers,
servants and lovers of Your forests. [ref: Genesis 2:15; John 15:5-15]
Help us to make the standard for our decisions a love for you,
a love of our neighbor, and a love for all Creation. [ref: Psalm 24:1]
Help us to care for the forests
so they may continue to stand in praise to You and sustain Your creatures.
Help us to love as You love, and to be obedient to You.

We look to You, O God, for healing for the forests and ourselves. [ref. II Chron. 7:14]

Thank You for the life You have given us in Jesus Christ, [ref. Ephesians 2:5]
Who is in all things, before all things,
and in whom all things hold together. [ref. Romans 11:36; Colossians 1:17]
For it is in Christ's Name that we pray these things.

Amen.

Responsibility for God's Forests

Section Two

God, Creation and the Forests

God has a unique relationship with Creation and with forests.
God alone is their Creator.
God gives life to everything which lives and breathes.
God enjoys Creation, including the forests, and calls them "good."

God's relationship to Creation and the forests is for now and forever.

[ref. 1 Chron 29:11; Neh. 9:6; Gen. 1:11-12; Rom. 1:20; Psalm 146:6;
Eccl. 3:11; Lev. 25:23; Rom. 11:56; Isaiah 41:18-20; Psalm 19:1]

When we describe forests, we mean a natural ecosystem,
whether healthy or damaged.
This includes trees and the plants and animals that depend upon them.
It does not mean tree farms.

Our Relationship to God

We are children of God. We are created in the image of God.
We are to praise, worship and serve our God,
as taught by the example of Jesus Christ. [ref. Deut. 11:11-13; Matt. 11:29]
We are to be humble and seek God's plan for us. [ref. John 10:3-5; James 1:5; 4:6]
God's plan is evident in His Word,
in the rich tradition of the Church, [ref. II Peter 2:3; II Timothy 2:2]
in the person and example of Christ,
and in the abundance, unity and harmony of Creation itself. [ref. Psalm 19:1]

Our Human Relationship to Creation

We are part of God's Creation.
God has given us a role of responsibility.
We are charged to care for His oceans, lakes, rivers, forests and all living things therein.
We are to stand in awe of God's abundance in Creation.
We are tenants. We are caretakers.
God has called us to exercise righteous dominion over all of His wondrous handiwork.
[ref. Psalm 104:16-18; Psalm 24:1; Genesis 1:27-28; Psalm 50:7,10-11; Genesis 2:15]

The Exercise of Dominion

Because humankind is made in the image of God, we are given dominion
and empowered with a capacity to create and destroy. [ref. Gen. 1:26; 2 Cor. 4:4; Col 3:10]
Although finite, this power transcends that of other creatures on Earth.
Humankind is required to acknowledge our unique ability
to affect the Earth for good or evil, and
to accept the moral responsibility that goes with it, [ref. Num. 35:29,33-34]
God's judgement over human dominion.

Dominion comes from the Latin word, "*dominus*," which means God or Lord.
Being created in God's image, this means that we are to rule over all things,
as Jesus taught us by His example,
with love, caring and servanthood.

We are to “serve and keep” the land (Genesis 2:15).

Scripture is clear.

We must exercise our God-given dominion

in a manner that reflects all of the love, sacrifice, humility, and responsibility for
“*servicing and keeping*” that characterizes our Lord’s dominion over us.

We must relate to God’s forests on God’s terms

by striving to preserve the integrity of the forest ecosystems He has created,
by rejoicing in the forests as God’s creations,
by acting with prudence and caution toward them,
by reflecting a humble understanding
of both our power and our limitations as human beings.

Furthermore, the rich tradition of the Early Church

teaches clear lessons of respect for all life;
lifestyles in balance with God’s economy — eating the fruits of Creation
while protecting the integrity of Creation itself;
and practices of preserving, communing with and
delighting in God’s glorious gift of Creation.

Similarly, Christ’s example teaches us our correct role as servant:

living in harmony and ruling with righteousness, compassion and love.

Creation itself mirrors the majesty, beauty and wisdom of God.

Creation desires nothing more than singing the Lord’s praise.

Dominion implies that we live in harmony with God’s plan,
and within its economy.

Unless we seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness,
our exercise of dominion will be vain.

And God’s Creation will suffer.

We cannot exercise dominion on our own.

God’s grace and power must work through us.

[ref: Zech. 4:6; Matt. 6:33; Psalm 127:1]

Have We practiced Correct Dominion of Creation and Forests?

We have failed. We have failed miserably.

We have ruled with greed, ignorance, pride and arrogance.

We have turned our face from God and are out of relationship with Him
and the gift of the forests.

We have become prodigal children of our Father.

Like the “Prodigal Son” in Christ’s parable,

we are consuming our inheritance instead of the fruits of our inheritance.

We live in sin.

We are separated from our Father's plan and His grace. [cf. Luke 15:11-32]
We have created unprecedented worldwide deforestation.

The causes of deforestation include
our loss of relationship with God and the Earth;
an attitude of obliviousness to the spiritual value of forests
as we increasingly adhere to a utilitarian view of nature;
unchecked greed and obsession with consumption,
fueled by economic structures that cultivate artificial demand.

Responsibility for the Spiritual Values of Forests

Trees, and the ecosystems that depend upon them, have value distinct from,
and transcending, their economic value.
They are living creations of God, breathing so that we may also breathe.
Our relationship to trees is not arbitrary:
It is fixed by God, and we are dependent on trees for the very air we breathe.
As fellow creations of God,
they are elders of the living world from whom we may garner wisdom;
voices in the choir of praises that Creation raises to God;
and sanctuaries in which we, like Jesus and the heroes of the Bible,
may encounter God apart from the distractions of the world.

We are called to love all of our neighbors,
whether within our communities or outside them,
whether now living or in generations to come.
Loving these neighbors requires that we care for their physical health
by protecting the Earth's forests
that cleanse the water they drink and restore the air they breathe.

These values require that we care for their spiritual health by preserving God's forests,
so that our children and our neighbors' children may enjoy and benefit
from the forests' power to heal and to draw us close to our Creator.

Revelation 11:18 persuasively warns us
that we shall surely be held accountable
for destroying His Creation.

What is the Solution?

We must identify and acknowledge our sin.
We must acknowledge that we are destroying the forests of God's earth,
that we are over consuming, overusing, exploiting, and otherwise ignoring God's
plan and our correct relationship to His forests.

We are destroying the ancient forests
which serve and keep the ecosystems of the planet.
We are devastating our public lands and clearing entire areas of trees.
We are eliminating the ability of fish, birds
and many living creatures to fulfill their purposes.

We need to mourn for the destruction of God's Creation that we have wrought:

*Wail, O pine tree, for the cedar has fallen;
the stately trees are ruined!*

*Wail, oaks of Bashan;
the dense forest has been cut down!*

*Listen to the wail of the shepherds;
their rich pastures are destroyed!*

*Listen to the roar of the lions;
the lush thicket of the Jordan is ruined!* (Zechariah 11:2-3)

We need to repent and return to God's plan for us.

A Need for National Repentance

Our consumption as a society clearly goes beyond God's economy.
The forests are no longer allowed to replenish themselves
according to His original design.

We must repent because we are hardened to the destruction around us.
We must repent because we lack love and are separated from our Maker,
from each other, and from the forests themselves.

We have created and worshiped other gods before God.
We have trusted in our ingenuity, our technologies and our sciences.
We have sought our answers and help from these idols,
instead of seeking wisdom in Scripture, in tradition and in His forests.

Our response must be to re-establish the Covenant, [ref. Genesis 9:1-15]
to heed Scripture's call to be content with what God provides, [ref. 1 Timothy 6:6-8]
rather than striving to obtain ever more material possessions,
and by laying up treasures in heaven rather than on Earth;
to accept with gratitude and humility the fruits of Creation
as they were intended — not for prodigal living,
but for living within the bounds of God's plan and grace.

God's forests, being His own handiwork, have a right to live —
a right not intrinsically linked to man.

God derives pleasure from Creation,
and the forests forever praise and glorify Him.

We call upon the children of God to unite in confessing our abuse
of God's forests and Creation itself.

Let us repent of our sin.

Let us, with God's grace and forgiveness, covenant, and in a spirit of Christian justice,
stop our prodigal ways; stop our excessive consumption of forest products;
stop our disrespect for the health of God's forests;
stop our exploitation of His forests at the imminent peril to
all God's creatures and plants,
both in, around and far removed from God's wondrous forests.

Responsibility for God's Forests

Section Three

A Call to Christians and People of Faith

THEREFORE, in a spirit of Christian justice,

- I. We call for the immediate cessation of logging
of all ancient and old growth forests;

AND THEREFORE,

- II. We call for the immediate cessation of commercial logging
on all public lands;

AND THEREFORE,

- III. We call for the redirection of all timber industry taxpayer subsidies
into forest restoration, including worker retraining and
forest restoration jobs that lead to
healthy rural economies and communities.

AND THEREFORE FURTHER,

- IV. We call upon all religious people, upon all Christians, churches and communities
to pray and seek wisdom concerning the spiritual value of forests,
and our duty to care for them;
to encourage dialogue concerning these issues; and based upon
wisdom gained through contemplation and discussion,
to formulate and act upon specific measures to preserve the forests
that God has created,
to promote and extend this Call to all surrounding churches and
Christian associations, and
to encourage our lawmakers to enact such measures where appropriate.

We pray this in Jesus' name. (Luke 16:13; Galatians 5:17-21]