



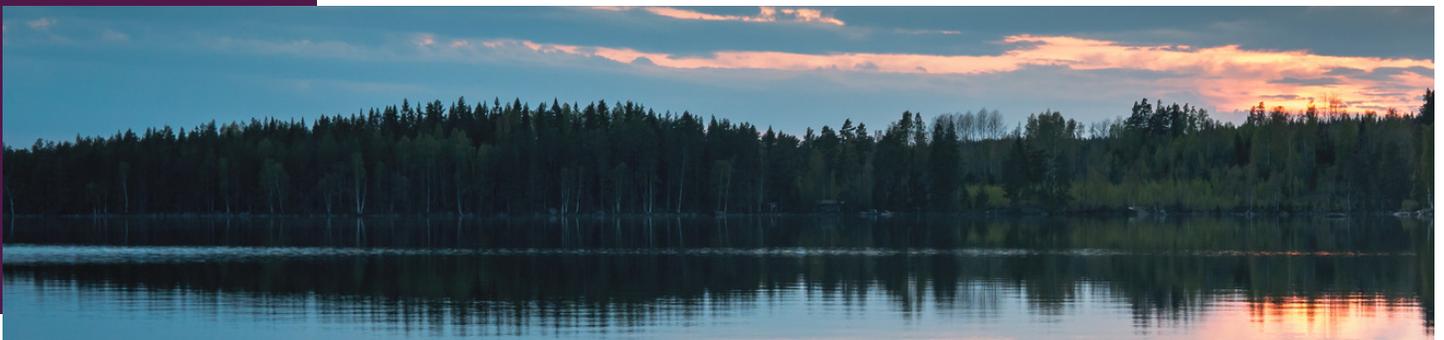
Connecting with God in Nature

Our earliest testament of God comes from nature and throughout history followers of Christ have looked to creation as a vital resource for spiritual formation and renewal.

From Jesus' own persistent use of natural imagery in his teachings to Paul's proclamation of creation as clear evidence of God, from the emergence of monastic communities of spiritual growth in the deserts of Egypt to the rich interweaving of land-based spirituality and Christian theology in Celtic practice, nature has been a firm and formative thread for the Christian Church. While nature's role in Christian practice has unfortunately waned, the reality of climate chaos, persistent calls for creation care, our yearning for a direct and personal relationship with Spirit, and our insistent pursuit of justice direct us back to relationship with Nature as a space for collaboration, healing, and new growth.



This fact was affirmed on the final day of the 80th General Convention of the Episcopal Church as the House of Bishops issued a statement proclaiming, "We are only fully human and fully alive when we are in right relationship with the whole created order. Apart from each other and nature, we are not our whole selves." This statement, offered as a call towards environmental action and responsibility, affirms the essential truth of our interdependent relationship with all of creation. But it does more. It invites us to right relationship with nature, a kinship rooted in mutuality, in caring, and in the sharing of gifts. To live fully and authentically into the call of our faith and blessing of our creation, nature beckons.





Scripture & Spirituality in Nature

In a time of division, distrust and distress, nature offers us the gift of peace and an invitation to contemplation, inspiration, and wise action. Scripture consistently acknowledges this blessing:

Genesis 1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth... God looked at everything he had made, and found it *altogether* good.

Psalms 19:1-4 The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork... There is no speech, nor are there words... yet their voice goes out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world.

Psalms 24:1 For every wild animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the air, and all that moves in the field is mine.

Daniel 3 Let the earth bless the Lord, praise and exalt him above all forever. Mountains and hills, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever. Everything growing on earth, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever... Give thanks to the Lord, who is good, whose mercy endures forever.

Matthew 6:26-30 Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap... yet your heavenly Father feeds them... Learn from the way the wild flowers grow. They do not work or spin. But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was clothed like one of them. If God so clothes the grass of the field... will he not much more provide for you?

Romans 1:20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

Colossians 1: 15-16 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth... all things have been created through him and for him.



The Call of Our Baptismal Covenant



The Baptismal Covenant defines what it means to follow Christ. How does its call relate to nature?

The catechism making up our baptismal covenant asks initiates of the Episcopal Church to affirm eight statements of belief. These statements broadly explore the Anglican understanding of God's being, God's trinitarian composition, Jesus' sacred sacrifice, the apostles' essential teaching, and the contemporary Church's responsibility for upholding the principles of repentance, service, and justice. The commitments affirmed in this covenant broadly encapsulate the call of the Christian life - they must be embraced in action.

In the context of these carefully composed statements, it's easy to forget Jesus' own baptism occurred under an open sky split by the voice of God in the muddy currents of the Jordan ushered with the dusty hand of a wilderness prophet. Yet, Episcopal priest Margaret Bullitt-Jonas reminds us that every time we uphold our baptismal commitments, "...we step back into the river – not into the Jordan River this time, but into the river of grace... At every moment, day or night, wherever we go, whatever we're doing, whether we are sitting or standing, whether we are walking or lying down, whether we are speaking or silent, we can step again into that shining river."

"The river of grace is always here and always now. It flows only in the present moment, and the trick is to stay alert to it. The trick is to stay awake."

Spirituality in nature helps Christians stay awake to that river of grace. It inspires us to be fully immersed in the present moment and attentive to the rich and vibrant world around us that can only be wholly realized when we are an active and conscious part of it - a world that even now cries out for the same healing and justice referenced in our baptismal vow.

Maybe, for Christians, to be “in the flow” is to live in the river of grace – to be so united with Christ in his baptism, so attuned to our baptismal promises, so immersed in the present moment – that, without any trace of self-consciousness...

”

| Margaret Bullitt-Jonas
Missioner for Creation Care, Episcopal
Diocese of Western Massachusetts



The Call of Our Baptismal Covenant (Cont.)

Our baptismal vows trace the responsibilities of Christian living. How does spirituality in nature equip Episcopalians to live into those commitments?

Spirituality in nature represents a key and formative outlet for reflection and examination of what is required to live faithfully into our baptismal covenant. It offers opportunity for expansive and more holistic practice of the principles of repentance, service, and justice.

Humility | Mindful time in nature allows us to witness and appreciate the scope and breadth of *all creation* - human and non-human. This practice reminds us of the interdependent threads of our ecological systems and invites us to intentional, empathetic relationships rooted in mutually life-giving behaviors.



...today, activism tells the truth about what is and imagines what should be. This imagination for justice requires contemplation... It can only make our journey toward justice more robust, more beautiful, when we offer a diversity of paths, a more expansive vision of action.



| **COLE ARTHUR RILEY**
Cornell University's Office of
Spirituality and Meaning Making

Service | Spirituality in nature provides a space for peace and healing. We cannot serve from an empty cup and nature can be a generous source of rest as well as a powerful well of inspiration to renew us as we serve. When we are attentive to our local ecosystem, we also see firsthand the ways we have failed to thoughtfully steward and lovingly preserve God's creation. We see ways we have neglected the non-human other and we can renew our commitment to service - for all.

Justice | The Episcopal Church is noted for its deep commitment to justice. As a means of rest and renewal, spirituality in nature equips Episcopalians for the work of justice-seeking but it also invites us to a more holistic, healthy, and enriching cycle of justice. Nature offers an essential space for quiet, meditative spiritual formation. As Richard Rohr reminds us, "The effect of contemplation is authentic action." As we seek justice, a balance between active reflection and thoughtful action is crucial.



Contemplative Practice & Social Action

As Christians we are called to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God...

Mystics and contemplatives throughout Christian history have examined and embodied the sacred and complementary interplay between contemplation and action. Jesus' own ministry demonstrated this essential balance as Scripture documents intentional moments of prayer and reflection interspersed among accounts of healing, advocacy, and teaching. Following the example of Christ, time in nature - alone or with friends - invites us to a deeper connection with God and a clearer perception of God's call in our lives.

Action without reflection can easily become barren and even bitter. Without the space for self-examination and the capacity for rejuvenation, the danger of exhaustion and despair is too great.... Contemplation confronts us with the questions of our identity and power. Who are we? To whom do we belong? Is there a power that is greater than ours?... Our drivenness must give way to peacefulness and our anxiety to joy.... Strategy grows into trust, success into obedience, planning into prayer.

| Jim Wallis

Founder & Editor, Sojourners Magazine



So pressing is the call of justice, it can be easy to focus all effort, strength, and conviction into action: organizing feeding programs for the hungry, arranging mutual aid for impoverished communities, marching in solidarity with those whose rights, dignity, and humanity are threatened, preparing spaces of sanctuary for those who desperately require it. Such efforts are admirable and necessary. So too is the work of contemplative practice as a source of renewal, guidance, nourishment, healing, energy, and inspiration. All too often we can neglect this essential aspect of our faith lives and, in doing so, we can miss the fullness and incredible breadth of God's movement in our lives and in this world God has created. Spirituality in nature calls us to immerse ourselves in that richness and allow it to move us in action.



Spirituality in Nature & Climate Action

"You cannot love what you do not know..." | Fyodor Dostoevsky

In the House of Bishops' statement to the 80th General convention, our Episcopal leaders wrote, "Climate change and environmental degradation are manifestations of our turning away from God. The effects of this willful separation from God resonate across our collective lives: All areas of justice are either worsened or made better depending on the health of the planet." They paired this proclamation with a call to action. As has been outlined above, spirituality in nature plays a crucial role as the Episcopal Church lives into this call.

Even as we explore the various ways the Church can respond to climate chaos, through emergency preparedness, resiliency efforts, sustainable energy solutions, conservation advocacy, and active solidarity with the communities most markedly affected by climate change - primarily indigenous communities and that of people of color - Spirituality in Nature groups (SINGs) and nature-centered spiritual practice offer us deeper understanding of why climate activism and creation care are so essential. More pointedly, they equip us with the courage and clarity to act. Through SINGs, we can:

- Be reminded of our love for and relationship with nature
- See the devastating effects of climate change in our local ecosystem
- Share in lament for the loss caused by climate chaos and environmental degradation
- Be encouraged and inspired by the resilience demonstrated in nature

In stirring the Episcopal Church to action in responding to climate chaos, The House of Bishops has prayed, "Give us new eyes to see the beauty all around and to protect the wonders of creation." They have prayed for new ears and new hearts to better hear and appreciate this world we all share. Through spirituality in nature, we are well placed to see God answer those prayers.





Spirituality in Nature & Evangelism

With declining church attendance and more people identifying as spiritual "Nones," new and renewed ways of engaging our communities is needed.

Outdoor activity is the common ground for spiritual fulfilment

TOP THREE BY RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION:

Which of the following activities do you personally find the most spiritually fulfilling?

Catholic	Mainline Protestant	Other Protestant	Other Christian	Other religion	Not religious
Being outdoors	Being outdoors	Prayer	Prayer	Being outdoors	Being outdoors
Prayer	Prayer	Attending religious worship	Attending religious worship	Prayer	Giving to charity
Giving to charity	Giving to charity	Being outdoors	Being outdoors	Giving to charity	Listening to or participating in music or singing

*Table and polling data from: www.episcopalchurch.org/jesus-in-america

Jesus constantly presented people with probing questions, invitations into curiosity, and images of an alternative, God-shaped community of Love. We can help each other to cultivate that holy curiosity and imagine new ways of being, too.

| Stephanie Spellers
Canon for Evangelism & Reconciliation
The Church Cracked Open



In March of 2022, The Episcopal Church released the results of its "Jesus in America" national study which was undertaken with Ipsos. The polling data demonstrated that Jesus remains an overwhelmingly revered figure for most Americans. The Christian religion, though, is less favorably viewed.

The information emerging in this study matched the trends outlined by similar studies in recent years. There is a clear decline in interest in associating with Christianity and - broadly- organized religion. Yet, looking closely at the data, it is clear that there are opportunities for connection that we can and should explore. Most relevant to the discussion of spirituality in nature is the fact that **45% of Americans consider time in nature to be the most spiritually fulfilling activity** - more than prayer (42%) and giving to charity (28%)! More striking still, **57% of those who don't identify with a religion recognized time in nature as most fulfilling.**

If we are going to serve our communities, spirituality in nature allows us to meet them where they are.



Resources from Our Tradition

The Episcopal Church has created and curated meaningful resources and partnerships to equip leaders engaging care of creation and contemplative practice.

The Episcopal Church Creation Care Ministry

www.episcopalchurch.org/ministries/creation-care

Led by Rev. Melanie Mullen and Phoebe Chatfield, this program of the national Episcopal Church distributes a useful newsletter outlining creation care initiatives and opportunities and also hosts a number of ministry-specific resources on its webpage.

Interfaith Power & Light (IPL)

www.interfaithpowerandlight.org

IPL is a national network that guides and engages faith communities in environmental stewardship and climate action. The organization has 40 state affiliates and supports congregations and dioceses in putting faith into action for creation care, justice, and environmental advocacy.

Green Faith

www.greenfaith.org

Directed by Episcopal priest, Rev. Fletcher Harper, Green Faith is an interfaith organization building a worldwide climate and environmental movement powered by people and communities of faith.

Creation Justice Ministries (CJM)

www.creationjustice.org

Alongside Karyn Bigelow, co-run by Center for Spirituality in Nature board member, Avery Davis, CJM shares resources and leads trainings to educate and equip Christian individuals, congregations, denominations, and communions to connect, protect, and restore creation.

The Center for Spirituality in Nature (CSN)

www.centerforspiritualityinnature.org

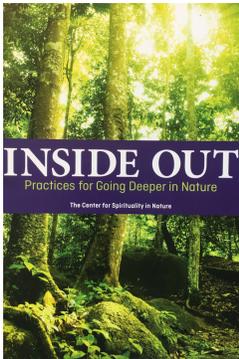
Through spiritual re-awakening, re-grounding and re-orientation, the Center provides opportunities for deepening spirituality and nurturing loving relationships through nature.





Spirituality in Nature Resources

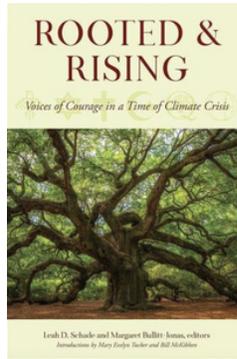
Noteworthy books on spirituality and nature to guide and inspire:



Inside Out

Beth Norcross

"... a wide range of activities and exercises designed specifically to reconnect individuals and groups with the natural world and Spirit.."



Rooted & Rising

Leah D. Schade (ed.)
Margaret Bulitt-Jonas (ed.)

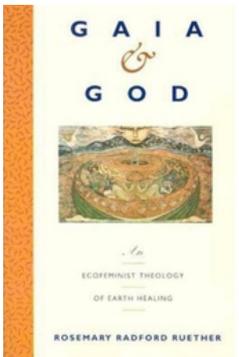
"... for everyone who worries about the climate crisis and seeks to renew their capacity for compassionate, purposeful, joyful action."



Eco-Reformation

Leah D. Schade (ed.)
Margaret Bulitt-Jonas (ed.)

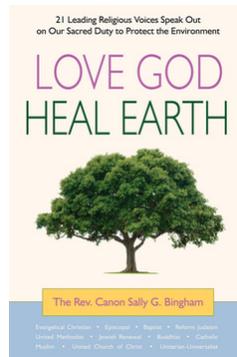
"... a critical and an expansive Lutheran voice for the urgent care of creation and the common good.."



Gaia & God

Rosemary Radford Ruether

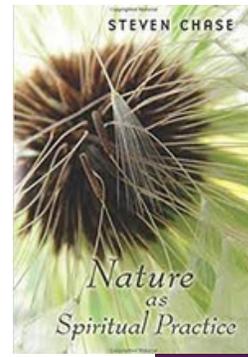
"... a sweeping ecofeminist theology that illuminates a path toward "earth-healing."



Love God, Heal Earth

Sally Bingham (ed.)

"... makes the case for environmental stewardship that cuts across old divisions of faith and politics..."



Nature as Spiritual Practice

Steven Chase

"... lends theological, scriptural, historical, and cultural discussions to reclaim the role of nature..."

*All descriptions pulled from publisher overviews.



Anglican Saints & Episcopal Prophets

Saints of Church history and contemporary prophets of the Anglican tradition offer important insights that can enrich and inform as we engage spirituality in nature.

Rev. Sally Bingham

Canon for the Environment in the Episcopal Diocese of California and founder of The Regeneration Project in partnership with Interfaith Power & Light. Bingham was one of the first faith leaders to fully recognize global warming as a core moral issue and has mobilized thousands of religious people to put their faith into action through energy stewardship.

Rev. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas

Missioner for Creation Care for the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts and Creation Care Advisor for the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts. She seeks to inspire and support a wave of religious activism to address the climate crisis, deepen reverence for God's creation, and create a more just and sustainable society.

Rev. Justin Cannon

Rector of All Saints Episcopal Church in San Leandro, California, Cannon is the founder and director of Holy Hikes, a nationwide eco-ministry helping individuals be renewed in their love-relationship with the earth, the universal church, and with their Creator.

Rev. Fletcher Harper

Episcopal priest and Executive Director at Green Faith, a national, interfaith environmental organization that conducts education and advocacy, and provides sustainability services, to faith-based groups. Under his leadership, Green Faith has developed innovative programs linking religious belief and practice to the environment.

*All descriptions adapted from online bios





Anglican Saints & Episcopal Prophets (Cont.)

Sallie McFague

A member of the Anglican Church of Canada, McFague explored feminism, language, and ecology in her theological scholarship. In her work, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*, she outlined an understanding of creation as the "self-expression" of God. She advocated for creation care and mindful attention to nature in order to, "turn of the eyes of theologians away from heaven and towards the earth." McFague was a long-time professor at Vanderbilt University before her death in 2019.

Rev. Melanie Mullen

Episcopal Church Director of Reconciliation, Justice, and Creation Care, Rev. Mullen leads the Episcopal Church's intersectional efforts relating to racial reconciliation, social justice, and stewardship of creation. She sits on the board of directors of Creation Justice Ministries and is a leading voice in weaving ecology, theology, and commitment to justice.

Rosemary Radford Ruether

Raised by an Episcopalian father and Catholic mother, Ruether is one of the leading voices in ecofeminist theology. She authored *God & Gaia* and *Women Healing Earth*, seminal works connecting faith, justice, and creation care. Ruether was a long-time professor and a pioneering figure in contemporary theology and left a rich legacy of scholarship and advocacy prior to her death in 2022.

Rev. Rachel K. Taber-Hamilton

Member of the Shackan Indian Band, Taber-Hamilton was the first known Indigenous person ordained in the Diocese of Washington and presently serves as rector of Trinity Episcopal Church in Everett, Washington. She is an environmental advocate and writes regularly through her blog: *Greening Spirit: Spiritual Greening for a Sustainable Creation*.



Anglican Saints & Episcopal Prophets (Cont.)

St. Francis of Assisi

Often considered the patron saint of ecology, St. Francis was a powerful speaker and a bold advocate against poverty. He is particularly remembered for renouncing the wealth to which he was born and choosing a life of simple means. He spoke out against the abuse of power and modeled radical kinship with all inhabitants of Earth - human and non-human.

St. Kateri Takakwitha

The first Indigenous American saint, St. Kateri was the daughter of a captured Algonquin mother and a Mohawk father. She was raised in the Iroquois Nation. Her remarkable faith was formed in quiet woods and she is often recognized as a "Child of Nature" and a patron saint of ecology and the environment.

St. Hildegard of Bingen

An influential Benedictine mystic, St. Hildegard was noted for her vast intellect and spiritual vision. She wrote extensively on science and medicine and was an avid gardener. In her exploration of *Viriditas*, greening power, she asserted that the vitality of the natural world is a key component of all health and healing.

St. Antony of Egypt

Widely considered the father of desert spirituality and monasticism, St. Antony gave away a sizable inheritance and dedicated his life to spiritual inquiry. He spent much of his life in small rocky cells in the wilderness where he became a revered figure around which ascetic Christian community formed.

St. Therese of Lisieux

Though she died at a very early age, St. Therese's writings document a mature and striking faith. From surviving texts, it is clear that her love for and dedication to God was profoundly colored and enlivened by her observation of and interactions with nature.





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Spirituality in Nature: An Episcopal Tradition

Payton Hoegh, MDiv
ed. Beth Norcross, DMin

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