



INTERFAITH
RAINFOREST
INITIATIVE

A PROTESTANT TOOLKIT ON FOREST PROTECTION

RESOURCES FOR RELIGIOUS
LEADERS AND FAITH COMMUNITIES

ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit is part of a series developed by the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative meant to inform and inspire faith communities to action to help safeguard tropical forests and their inhabitants. The Initiative believes the time has come for a worldwide movement for the care of tropical forests, one that is grounded in the inherent value of forests, and inspired by the values, ethics, and moral guidance of indigenous peoples and faith communities.

This Protestant Toolkit presents a series of reflections, meditations, prayers, talking points, and lesson plans aimed at Protestant practitioners, and assembled with the help of Rev. Dr. Neddy Astudillo. It is not meant to be exhaustive or final, but represents a living document that can evolve over time with the help and for the benefit of faith communities.

INTERFAITH RAINFOREST INITIATIVE

The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative is an international, multi-faith alliance that is working to bring moral urgency and faith-based leadership to efforts to end tropical deforestation. It is a platform for religious leaders and faith communities to work hand-in-hand with indigenous peoples, governments, NGOs and businesses on actions that protect rainforest and the rights of those that serve as their guardians.

QUESTIONS?

The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative is eager to work with you to protect tropical forests and the rights of indigenous peoples. Contact us at info@interfaithrainforest.org.

PARTNERS

The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative welcomes engagement by all organizations, institutions and individuals of good faith and conscience that are committed to the protection, restoration and sustainable management of rainforests.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Opening Reflection	5
When the Will of God is Done in the Rainforest	
Talking Points	8
The Prophet Ezequiel's Vision	
The Sacred Vocation of Rainforests	
Gifts of the Rainforest	
Connecting with God's Vision for the Rainforests	
Respecting Indigenous Peoples and Their Spirituality	
Deforestation and the Climate Crisis	
The Need to Engage in Rainforest Protection	
Prayers and Meditations	9
Intercessory Prayer	
Lesson Plan	10
Workshop 1: On Tropical Forests	
Workshop 2: Tropical Forests and Climate Change	
Workshop 3: The Leadership of Indigenous Peoples	

OPENING REFLECTION

WHEN THE WILL OF GOD IS DONE IN THE RAINFOREST

By Rev. Dr. Neddy Astudillo

The Prophet

The Book of Ezekiel chapter 47, shares a vision of the prophet Ezequiel in which he observes water flowing from below the Temple of God and moving in all directions. As God leads him along the path of the water, which quickly becomes a deep river, Ezequiel observes what happens to the land and to the sea. As they come in contact with the sacred waters of God's Temple, the stagnant waters of the sea become fresh. Wherever the river flows by, life is restored and flourishes, and a great many trees begin to grow alongside the banks of the river.

The vision of the prophet Ezequiel illustrates what happens to Earth when God's will is done, as it is in Heaven: stagnant waters become fresh, life is restored and flourishes, and a great many trees grow in a deserted land.

Alongside the modern reality of deforestation and the loss of wildlife; of waters polluted by the oil, mining, and logging industries; and of violence against the caretakers of forests, the Christian vision of abundant life moves us to utter a loud and plaintive prayer—a prayer clamoring for God's justice.

The prophet Ezequiel announces: "On the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing." (47:12, NRSV)

In the face of the tragic destruction of tropical rainforests worldwide, our religious imagination can easily help us to recognize the sacred vocation of rainforests, as healers of the land and of God's people (Rev. 22:2).

The Rainforests

Rainforests make life possible on the land and in the seas for myriad human and non-human creatures. They bring rains that shower and fill rivers. Rainforests help deliver water and nutrients, even thousands of miles away. They are indeed the lungs of the world, providing oxygen to our atmosphere.

And today we recognize their healing properties, not just through the medicines they provide, but through their capacity to sequester our excess carbon from the atmosphere and regulate regional and global weather patterns in a way that can sustain life on planet Earth.

The Challenge

Unfortunately, the human family has not embraced the wisdom of Ezequiel's vision seriously enough. Now we face the real challenge of the climate crisis, and the urgent need to protect life on Earth. This challenge calls us to live out Christ's vision of abundant life for the world, flushing through from God's own heavenly Temple, in all directions. As Jesus' own disciples understood it, the promise of abundant life is not a future promise but is present when the People of God share and act from God's vision.

Just as God walked the prophet Ezequiel from the Temple to the banks of the river, showing him how everything works when God's will is done on Earth—the power of sacred waters flowing throughout the land, trees growing abundantly as the water flows—the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative leads us to see God's vision for the rainforests of the world. Today, we can also grasp this vision by listening to the voices of other inhabitants of the land: indigenous peoples, climate and forest scientists, environmental activists, eco-theologians, NGOs, rainforest communities, people of diverse faith and leaders, and God's wisdom in nature.

This interdisciplinary dialogue is possible among us because we all share a global vision of human well-being.

But this dialogue is also unavoidable because the rainforests of the world hold a key to solving the urgency of the climate crisis, which, while affecting everyone in the world, will hit the most vulnerable the hardest. Worse still, these victims and victims-to-be are least responsible for the crisis. We are talking about millions of people awaiting justice now and in future generations.

Indeed, the destruction of the planet as a whole through climate change and in the microcosm of rainforests is part of the groaning of creation that Christ's resurrection redeems.

The Connection

In a stroke of divine fortune, this climate crisis can lead us to recognize our interdependence—and the lie of independence and supremacy that fuels our unsustainable world. Together, we need to recognize our common stories: one planet, one Earth body, one climate, one genesis, one common future. We must create new principles to govern our lives:

1. Respect our differences and worldviews, and
2. Recognize our particular gifts as people of faith to find solutions to the climate crisis.

In most parts of the world, this dialogue begins with recognition of the violence perpetrated against indigenous peoples and nature for over 500 years. The mentality of supremacy, racism and exploitation cannot be part of the renewed creation story flowing from God's own temple. As we heal and protect the rainforests of the world, we need to heal our broken relationships, just as the water heals the land and the trees. We must repent where confession is due, allowing creative love to lead our journey among the community of beings who also depend on the trees and the rains, and who live along the banks of the river.

As the Rev. Ramón Castillo has said: "It is time to become aware that indigenous peoples help us to rethink our identity, question our vision of the world, and re-examine our relationship with nature. They help us to properly value our contribution to the construction of the Realm of God and show us the path of freedom. We must treat indigenous spirituality with respect, not as a religious expression contrary to the Christian faith, but as a legitimate means through which indigenous peoples have received the revelation of God and embrace the divine call to care for God's creation." (Interview, Rev. Ramón Castillo, Bishop of the Venezuelan Pentecostal Evangelical Church).

The Command

Whenever we respond to God's call to care for creation, we are also responding to the call to share the good news of God.

Before Christ ascended into heaven, He told his disciples, "... Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation." (Mk 16:15, NRSV)

The rainforests of the world wait to hear Christ's good news, told in a new way. As expressed in the vision of prophet Ezequiel, this good news is powerful, capable of nothing less than refreshing stagnant waters and restoring life across its path.

As Christians, we can be guided by God's desire of abundant life for all creation (John 3:16, 10:10) and "to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross." (Colossians 1:20b). It is Christ himself who calls us to protect and reconcile with all that God has created.

The Act

While holding this great mystery in our hearts, we walk along the banks of the rainforests and rivers with indigenous peoples and forests creatures, scientists, and environmental activists. We listen to the cry of the Earth and discern the good news rainforests are waiting to hear from the children of God. (Romans 8:19). What do they need liberation from? (v21)

The report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), published in 2018, said we only have 12 years to reverse the course of the climate crisis. Not 12 years to begin, but 12 years to cut carbon emissions radically. Tropical deforestation is a major contributor to climate change and is responsible for more greenhouse gas emissions than all the cars, trucks, trains, planes and ships in the world. The carbon dioxide that trees absorb from the atmosphere is released again when they are felled or burned.

As people of faith, we are not strangers to stories of paradise gone wrong, nor are we stranger to times when the people of God do not follow the wisdom given to them to help guide their lives on the land. The destruction of the Earth is not good news to anyone, not to people in the Bible, nor to anyone in the present time. Environmental destruction is always the result of human sin. We are better off hearing the warnings recorded in Scripture, and in nature herself.

What is the role of our church in providing this liberation for creation?

Recent research suggests that the protection, restoration and sustainable management of forests could produce up to one third of the emission reductions needed to meet our Paris Agreement climate goals. The need for a stable climate and for well-being of future generations demands that we become engaged in all efforts to protect rainforests and forest protectors.

The time to act is now, to do everything in our power to protect tropical rainforests. For a moment like this we have been called children of God, to do the will of God on Earth as it is in Heaven. Amen.

TALKING POINTS

- 1. The prophet Ezequiel's vision.** The vision of the prophet Ezequiel (Eze 47) and Christ' teachings of abundant life stand in stark contrast to the modern reality of deforestation, loss of wildlife, and violence against the caretakers of forests. This disconnect moves us to utter a loud prayer clamoring for God's justice. As Jesus' own disciples understood, the promise of abundant life is not a future promise but is present when the People of God share and act from God's vision.
- 2. The sacred vocation of rainforests.** In the face of the tragic destruction of tropical rainforests worldwide, our religious imagination can easily help us to recognize the sacred vocation of rainforests, as healers of the land and of God's people (Rev. 22:2).
- 3. Gifts of the rainforest.** Rainforests make life possible on the land and in the seas for myriad human and non-human creatures. They bring rains that shower and fill rivers, delivering water and nutrients, even thousands of miles away. They are indeed the lungs of the world, providing oxygen to our atmosphere. And today we recognize their healing properties, not just through the medicines they provide, but through their capacity to sequester our excess carbon from the atmosphere and regulate regional and global weather patterns. In this way rainforests help to sustain life on planet Earth.
- 4. Connecting with God's vision for the rainforests.** The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative leads us to see God's vision for the rainforests of the world through the voices of other inhabitants of the land: indigenous peoples, climate and forest scientists, environmental activists, eco-theologians, NGOs, rainforest communities, people of diverse faiths, and faith leaders.
- 5. Respecting indigenous peoples and their spirituality.** Indigenous peoples help us to rethink our identity, question our vision of the world and reassess our relationship with nature. They help us to properly value our contribution to the construction of the Realm of God and show us the path of freedom. We must treat indigenous spirituality with respect, not as a religious expression contrary to the Christian faith, but as a legitimate means through which our indigenous peoples receive the revelation of God and embrace the divine call to care for God's creation. (Interview, Rev. Ramón Castillo, Bishop of the Venezuelan Pentecostal Evangelical Church).
- 6. Deforestation and the climate crisis.** The recent report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2018), says we only have 12 years (by 2030) to reverse the course of the climate crisis. Tropical deforestation is a major contributor to climate change and is responsible for more greenhouse gas emissions than all the cars, trucks, trains, planes and ships in the world. The carbon dioxide that trees absorb from the atmosphere is released when they are felled or burned.
- 7. The need to engage in rainforest protection.** Recent research suggests that the protection, restoration and sustainable management of forests could provide up to one third of the emission reductions needed to meet our Paris agreement climate goals. The need for a stable climate and for well-being of future generations demands that we become engaged in all efforts to protect rainforests and their guardians.

PRAYERS AND MEDITATIONS

INTERCESSORY PRAYER

By Rev. Dr. Neddy Astudillo, based on Genesis 1

In the beginning when you created the world,

You said everything you created was very good.

You created humanity in your image,

Woman and man you created them, to live in community among a myriad of creatures,

You called forth all kinds of animals to live in the land, and animals to live in the sea,

and they filled each place, as you willed it.

You blessed humanity and said:

“Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” (Gen 1:28)

To eat, you gave us every seed-bearing plant, and every tree that has fruit.

To the beasts of the earth and for all the birds in the sky, you gave every green plant for food. And you called it all very good.

When we look at your Creation, we wonder what we have failed to understand.

Our actions are endangering the beasts and future human generations from enjoying the goodness of your creation.

At one time tropical forests occupied 12% of the Earth’s land area,

but today they cover only 5%, and each day much less.

Deforestation is driving species to extinction at a rate 100 times faster than the natural trends.

Our global consumption patterns—especially of soy, meat, and palm oil—are to blame.

Meanwhile tropical forests provide steady supplies of freshwater, control disease, and protect against natural disasters.

Today, tropical forests also propose a natural solution to climate change.

Come, Holy Spirit, Renew your whole Creation!

Come Prince of Peace, renew our hearts to see your will,

May we act as one made in God’s Image.

Three in One, working united.

Humans, nature and Godself, working together

to sustain the good of your creation.

For us, all living creatures, for tropical forests and their protectors we pray, in Jesus’ name.

Amen.

LESSON PLAN

By Rev. Dr. Neddy Astudillo

Instruction to facilitator: In these lesson plans you will find material to support the development of three related 60-minute workshops on Tropical Rainforests, Climate Change, and Indigenous Peoples. Each workshop can last more than 60 minutes, depending on whether you incorporate additional activities, such as ice-breakers, songs, videos, group dynamics, etc.

Here we provide you with a basic format for each workshop, a set of resources, and guiding questions. Background information for the workshops can be found in the Issue Primers on Tropical Rainforests, Climate Change, and Indigenous Peoples published by the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative (IRI). Additional information can be found in IRI's Resource Guide on Tropical Deforestation, and country-specific information can be found in IRI's Country Primers. Prior to facilitating each workshop, it is important that you become familiar with this information. If possible, share the Issue Primers on Tropical Rainforests, Climate Change and Indigenous Peoples with your audience prior to attending your workshop. Blessings!

WORKSHOP I: ON TROPICAL FORESTS (60 MINUTES)

Supporting materials for facilitators:

- IRI Issue Primer on "Tropical Forests: A Resource Under Threat"
- IRI Country Primers. Familiarize yourself with key facts about the state of Tropical Forests in your region of the world.
- Bible
- Easel paper and markers, or chalk board and chalk
- Photocopies or power point with key forest facts, guiding questions and closing prayer
- Sign-up sheet to keep track of participants for future gatherings and actions

Opening Prayer

Creator God, since the genesis of humanity, you call us to till and keep your creation. You invite us to be curious (Job 12:7-11) and to acquire nature's wisdom (Prov 6:6-8), so we might live with contentment on the Earth (Mt 6:25-34). Today we gather as your children, to understand our role in protecting the tropical forests of the world: why you created them, how they support our lives, and how they are affected when we turn our backs on them.

Practicing discernment as your apostle Paul invited us to do (1 The 5:21), we prepare ourselves to listen to what indigenous peoples, scientists and environmental activists are telling us today. We ask the support of your Holy Spirit to hold on to what is good and love your creation as you love us. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Introductions

Depending on your group size, invite participants to introduce themselves by saying their first name and to give themselves as lastname the name of their favorite tree. If time and group size allows, ask people to briefly share why they chose such tree, with all present or the person next to them.

“Tropical Forests: A Resource Under Threat” (10 minutes):

Note to facilitator: Unless everyone in your group has had a chance to read the IRI Issue Primer titled “Tropical Forests: A Resource Under Threat” in advance, choose 4 different readers to read aloud different sections of the document. Prior to this, write on a visible board or a large easel paper the 4 key forest facts below, to support the discussion that will follow:

1. “At one time tropical forests occupied 12% of the Earth’s land area, but today they cover only 5%... Every year forest area the size of Austria—about 13 million hectares—is felled... Tropical forests are home to more species than any other land-based ecosystem on Earth and new species are being discovered all the time. Many tropical forest species are found nowhere else on Earth. Deforestation is driving species extinct at 100 times faster than the natural rate.”
2. “Commercial agriculture is by far the biggest driver of deforestation – it caused nearly three-quarters of all tropical deforestation between 2000 and 2012, and about half of that forest loss took place illegally... Soy (most of which is fed to livestock) and beef production are the leading contributors to deforestation, especially in Latin America. Palm oil production is another significant driver, particularly in Indonesia and Malaysia, and increasingly in Latin America and Central Africa.”
3. “Tropical forests are essential to meeting sustainable development goals. Tropical forests contribute to agricultural productivity and food security, provide steady supplies of freshwater, control disease, and provide protection against natural disasters.”
4. “Forests are a natural solution to climate change, absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and storing it safely in tree trunks, leaves and roots. But when forests are burned or felled, this carbon is released back into the atmosphere. Tropical deforestation is a major contributor to climate change, generating nearly 50% more greenhouse gases than the entire global transportation sector.”

Discussion (25 minutes)

Note to facilitator: Depending on time and space, divide people in groups of 3–5 to answer the following questions. Make sure the Key Forest Facts are visible to all people (or make copies of these facts to share with small groups). Ask each group to select a note taker, a time keeper, and a speaker. The speaker will share the notes with the larger group when all come together again.

Guiding Questions for Collective Reflection on Tropical Forests

Note to facilitator: Select 3–4 from among these questions, the ones that make more sense to your goals for this session and context. Ask note takers in each small group to first read each question, separately, and give everyone a minute to consider their answer. This methodology increases people’s participation. After the minute has passed, everyone can share their thoughts on the one question.

- What surprised you about the role of tropical forests for human and environmental sustainability? Where you live are you aware of how tropical forests provide for your basic needs? Is your relationship with forests obvious? Make a list of the goods and services forests provide to you.
- How are your lifestyle, values, and culture affecting the health of tropical forests? Think about the way your culture speaks about forests and those who live in it.
- What does your faith tradition say about forests, nature and/or our responsibility to protect and care for them? Can you recall any relevant Scriptural passage? From where do you draw wisdom to lead your creation care efforts?
- What work on forests has been carried out by your religious community at the local or national level? If none, can you envision how your faith community should be engaged?
- What practices and cultural values does your culture provide that can support efforts to protect tropical forests?

Plenary (25 minutes)

Note to facilitator: Bring your group back together to share their reflections with each other. Ask members of each small group to stand up together as their speaker shares their answers with the larger group.

Closing Prayer

Note to facilitator: Make enough copies of this prayer for everyone to join in. Choose a reader to be the first voice. Everyone else joins in responsive reading. If it is not possible for everyone to have access to the prayer, choose two people of diverse voices to read aloud each part.

In the beginning when you created the world,

You said everything you created was very good.

You created humanity in your image,

Woman and man you created them, to live in community among a myriad of creatures,

You called forth all kinds of animals to live on the land, and animals to live in the sea,

and they filled each place, as you willed it.

You blessed humanity and said:

“Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” (Gen 1:28)

To eat, you gave us every seed-bearing plant, and every tree that has fruit.

To the beasts of the earth and for all the birds in the sky, you gave every green plant for food. And you called it all, very good.

When we look at your Creation, we wonder what we failed to understand ...

Our actions are endangering the beasts and future human generations and preventing them from enjoying the goodness of your creation.

At one time tropical forests occupied 12% of the Earth’s land area,

but today they cover only 5%, and each day much less...

Deforestation is driving species extinction at 100 times the natural rate.

Our global consumption patterns—especially of, soy, meat, and palm oil—is partly to blame.

Meanwhile tropical forests provide steady supplies of freshwater, control disease, and protection against natural disasters.

Today, tropical forests also offer a natural solution to climate change.

Come, Holy Spirit, Renew your whole Creation!

Come Holy Spirit, renew our hearts to see your will,

May we act as one made in your Image.

Three in One, working united,

Humans, nature and Yourself, working together

to sustain the good of your creation.

For us, all living creatures, for tropical forests and their protectors we pray, in Jesus' name.

Amen.

WORKSHOP II: TROPICAL FORESTS AND CLIMATE CHANGE (60 MINUTES)

Supporting materials for facilitators:

- IRI Issue Primer on “Tropical Forests and Climate Change”
- IRI Country Primers. Familiarize yourself with key facts about the state of Tropical Forests in your region of the world.
- Bible
- Easel paper & markers, chalk board and chalk
- Photocopies or power point with key facts on tropical forests and climate change, guiding questions and prayers
- Sign-up sheet to keep track of participants for future gatherings and actions

Opening Scripture: Job 38

Note to facilitator: Assign one or two readers to read Job 38 aloud to the group to start your time together.

Opening Prayer

Creator God, humbled we come to you to understand your creation and recognize how we are destroying its harmony. We were certainly not there when you created the foundations of the earth, when you determined its limits and how it would work for the good of all your creatures.

Even when we illuminate the world with light bulbs, no light resembles yours above the sky. Ours pollute the air with CO₂, yours make life possible on the planet. Even when we control the flow of water, we do it for the good of some against others. Meanwhile, the cycle of your waters can sustain every creature's life. If we lose the rain, we can't find it. If we contaminate the water, we do not know how to clean it. Only you can, only you know everything, Creator God. Fill us with your Wisdom, to heal and care for your wonderful world, the tropical forests, its waters and creatures. We trust that your love still accompanies us. The goodness of your creation was manifested in Christ. To Him today we ask for help, to be holy and redeem ourselves from our sins. Guide our reflection today, in the name of Christ, we ask you. Amen.

Activity (5 minutes)

Note to facilitator: Ask your group the following question. Give people a few seconds to think, and then give an opportunity for people to share openly.

“What do we know about climate change? What is causing it? How are you experiencing it where you live?”

Key Facts on Tropical Forests and Climate Change (5 minutes)

Note to facilitator: Before reading out loud to participants the key facts about tropical forests and climate change below, when possible, write them on a black board or an easel paper, or prepare them in advance in a power point or as photocopied pages. Also, review the IRI Country Primer of your region to seek any remaining key facts to highlight at this time.

As you read these facts to the participants, pause and leave space between each fact so that participants hear the gravity of each fact.

- Greenhouse gas emissions caused by human activity, such as the burning of fossil fuels and destruction of forests, are causing the Earth’s atmosphere to warm, driving dangerous climate change.
- Together, agriculture, forests and land-use change account for almost a quarter of human-caused greenhouse gas emissions.
- Forests regulate our climate by absorbing and storing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, where it would otherwise contribute to climate change.
- When forests are burned, cut down or degraded, their carbon is released back to the atmosphere, where it accumulates and contributes to climate change.
- We can’t solve climate change without halting and reversing deforestation. Halting and reversing deforestation have the potential to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions by up to 30%.
- Carbon capture and storage will be necessary to achieve global climate goals. Forests are the only safe, natural and cost-effective carbon capture and storage mechanism available to us at a large scale.

Guiding Questions for Collective Reflection on Tropical Forests and Climate Change (20 minutes)

Note to facilitator: Depending on time and space, divide people into groups of 3-5 to answer the following questions. Ask each group to select a note taker, a time keeper, and a speaker. The speaker will share the notes with the larger group when all come together again.

Ask note takers in each small group to first read each question aloud and give everyone a minute to think about his or her response. This methodology increases people’s participation. After the minute has passed, everyone can share thoughts in their small group.

- Of the problems and conflicts that accelerate deforestation and climate change in your country, which ones do you think can be addressed, mediated or transformed by people of faith? Give examples, think of creative ideas, narratives, ongoing actions, etc.
- Understanding the determinants that generate climate change and in particular deforestation, what type of environmental education can be taught in your faith community? Is there any practice or value that needs to change or be added to your community life to reduce the threat of climate change and deforestation? Is there anything your church can do to protect forests? What are the obstacles to change?

Plenary (25 minutes)

Note to facilitator: Bring your group back together to share their reflections with each other. Ask members of each group to stand up together as their speaker shares their answers with the larger group. Gather and/or write on a board what the groups discover as possible actions, innovative ideas and practical means for their congregation/faith tradition to protect tropical forests and reduce climate change. Make sure to share these with your national IRI coordinator to provide follow up and receive support.

Closing Prayer

(Adapted with permission from: *Estamos a Tiempo, Justicia Climática y Agua, Guía Educativa Justicia Climática y Agua para Iglesias, Organismos Ecueménicos y Sociales*, Editora Pendão Real, San Pablo, Brasil, August 2016, pg. 49)

Note to facilitator: Choose a reader to be the first voice. Everyone else joins in responsive reading, indicated by the bold. If it is not possible for everyone to have access to the prayer, choose two people of diverse voices to read aloud each part.

“God the Redeemer, we know that we are unconscious when we abuse the gifts of Nature. Our irrationality leads us to consume energy reserves without thinking about the next generations.

We have contaminated everything: the soil, the water, the atmosphere and the sky. We recognize that our carelessness and silence also provoke the climate crisis and the suffering of many forest creatures. With the certainty of your forgiveness, we commit ourselves to do what we can to reduce pollution and the irrational use of the resources of your Creation and fight against those who want to destroy this House of all which you have generously given to us.

God of love, we ask for your forgiveness because we have often thought and even taught that natural disasters are a punishment that comes from you, when in reality nature complains about the evils that we, and especially the powerful have done.

In the security of your love, which forgives us, we want to bear witness that you are a God of love who calls us daily to be in solidarity with the most vulnerable people.

God the Savior, we ask for forgiveness when our attitudes in our shared House are not built in the Firm Rock of your Word, but in the sands of profit, consumption and individual interest before the common good.

Help us to strengthen the common good and the unity of the community, which are the responsibility of each and every one of us.

Do not let us fall into the temptation of profit and consumption without meaning. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.”

WORKSHOP III: THE LEADERSHIP OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES (60 MINUTES)

Supporting materials for facilitators:

- IRI Issue Primer on “Indigenous Peoples: Guardians of the Forests”
- Video: Why the Amazon is So Important (9 minutes)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RGZtYhJJN0M> (English)
- Bible
- Easel paper and markers, chalk board and chalk
- Photocopies or power point with opening and closing prayers and guiding questions
- Sign-up sheet to keep track of participants for future gatherings and actions

Scripture Reading: Psalm 104: 1-35

Note: Assign a reader or two, and begin your time together reading this passage.

Opening Prayer

Spirit of Life, Loving God, Giver of Life (Ps 104:30). All creation manifests your glory (Isa 6:3). You fill the Earth with grace and breathe life into all that exists (Job 34:14-15). Sustained in the mysteries we share with many people of faith around the world, we ask that you guide our reflection today. Open our eyes, minds and hearts to the plea of your creation (Rom 8:22); especially that of indigenous peoples who follow your calling to be stewards of your Creation (Gen 2:15), but are suffering for doing what is good in your sight.

Through the Earth you make us all inhabitants of a common home (Gen 2:15), and in Christ, you seek to reconcile us with one another, and yourself (Col 1:20). Come Holy Spirit, renew your whole Creation. Come and help us understand our role in protecting tropical forests, and the rights of indigenous peoples. Amen.

Watch Video:

“Why the Amazon is So Important” (9 minutes)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RGZtYhJJN0M>

Note to facilitator: You may also find a larger list of helpful videos in: <https://www.youtube.com/user/gaiaamazonas/videos>

Group activity (25 minutes)

Note to facilitator: Depending on time and space, divide people in groups of 3-5 to answer the following questions. Ask each group to select a note taker, a time keeper, and a speaker. The speaker will share the notes with the larger group when all come together again.

Guiding Questions for Collective Reflection on the Leadership of Indigenous Peoples

Note to facilitator: Ask note takers in each small group to read each question aloud and give everyone a minute to formulate a response. This methodology increases people’s participation. After the minute has passed, everyone shares their thoughts. If each group has 5 minutes and 5 questions to respond to, each person has less than a minute to share his or her answer. Ask the time keeper to make sure everyone has a chance to share.

- What can we learn from indigenous peoples and forest communities about the connection between spirituality and forest protection?
- What are some of the current obstacles or barriers to involving our faith community in the protection of tropical forests and the rights of indigenous peoples?
- How can these obstacles be overcome?
- In what way are we already protecting tropical forests, and the rights of indigenous peoples, their self-determination and their cultural vitality?
- What kind of actions and innovative ideas do you see are needed at the level of your congregation and/or faith tradition to engage more people in the protection of forests and the rights of indigenous peoples? What opportunities for learning, partnerships and collaboration are the most strategic for the involvement of your faith community?

Plenary (25 minutes)

Note to facilitator: Bring your group back together to share their reflections with each other. Ask members of each group to stand up together as their speaker shares their answers with the larger group. Gather and/or write on a board what the groups discover as possible actions, innovative ideas and ways their congregation/faith tradition might engage with the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative (IRI). Make sure to share these ideas with your national IRI coordinator. Invite people to stay connected with IRI and form a local/congregational IRI group when possible. Inform IRI's coordinator to provide follow up and receive support.

Closing prayer

God of all creation, as you walked with prophet Ezekiel showing him what happens across the land when the waters of your Temple shower the Earth (Eze 47), bringing forth life, and restoring your creation;

we pray and dream today that your will be done across the tropical forests of (choose your country name or region).

We give you thanks for the great wildlife that inhabits them,

and the many indigenous peoples who have kept these precious forests for millennia.

As the climate crisis threatens the world, and each of us considers our responsibility,

we admire how your ancient wisdom has supported indigenous peoples, protecting forests and making life possible now for future generations.

Dear Lord,

Allow us to be faithful in your calling to serve together your good creation.

Give us courage, solidarity and love, to join Forest Protectors to reverse the harm we are doing to the climate.

Move our hearts to fall in love with the beauty of your creation,

Earth's peoples, creatures, and landscapes.

We are grateful for living in this world at this historic moment.

We commit to finding ways to be good stewards of your Creation.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.



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