

Covid-19—an opportunity for creation care?

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In what ways has Covid-19 affected the LCA/NZ from an ecological perspective and what does this mean for the future church?

While we can easily see the adverse impact of Covid-19 on the social and communal gathering of the church, and the economic hit to the bottom-line of many congregations who rely on the weekly offering on the plate, the impact on the church from an ecological perspective may not be as obvious. However, there are some similarities between action on Covid-19 and action to reduce the impact of climate change. In a recent presentation, earth systems scientist [Will Steffen](#) named three similarities: the need to respect the science; to act before the real crisis hits, reinforcing the message to ‘flatten the curve’; and to ensure we meet the crisis by it taking precedence over other aspects of society such as economy, sport, and education. Steffen concluded his presentation with the following words:

The World says: there’s no way we can shut everything down in order to lower emissions, slow climate change and protect the environment.

Mother Nature responds: here’s a virus. Have a practice.

Politicians and many others have said it is not possible to slow the world’s economies in order to lower carbon emissions and limit global warming to 1.5 C. Through Covid-19, we have shown that it can be done. At the peak of the global Covid-19 shutdown, [reductions in carbon emissions were calculated to be 17% less per day globally](#). In addition, the reduction in air pollution that had occurred at the same time had a major impact on improving air quality in many countries. Ethically, it is NOT OK to go back to business as usual.

Do we need these large spaces that also require systems and energy to heat and cool to comfortable temperatures? Can we find less polluting ways of providing energy for our church activities? With a move to online worship, people are viewing worship from home and not only on Sunday. Staff and volunteers have been working from home, and leadership and small group meetings are also using online technology and the internet. This physical distancing has reduced vehicle and fuel costs and provides less air pollution and congestion on roads. For the future church, there is both an opportunity and a challenge to continue to provide these options which may lower the collective use of energy and resources across the church. Some facilities have solar panels on the roof and may have seen an increase in the energy exported to the electricity grid for use in the wider community.

But church buildings are not just places of worship, they are places of service and caring. In my home congregation, members share home-grown produce and provide regular meals for the community. The ability to provide food for others in need at this time has been impacted by government restrictions and an increased emphasis on careful handling of food to ensure pathogens are not transferred in the community. Does that mean that more food is potentially being wasted? Ethically, how can we still share excess produce with those who need it most?

How can Lutheran ethics inform approaches to the environment, especially in light of the current pandemic?

Lutherans, together with all Christians, are called to be light and salt in their communities. There is a role for the church to assist and sometimes lead in the work of caring for creation. In this way, the church shows its commitment to God, the creator of all good things and his call for us, his people, to be wise stewards of all that he has made. *'We are to trust in God alone, look to him alone, and expect only good things from him. For he is the one who gives us our body, life, food, drink, health, protection, peace, and whatever we need in this life or the next.'*¹ So we are called to acknowledge that all we have comes from God, and we use these gifts, including our time, our talents and our treasure, to glorify his name. We should take care that what we do with and to the land, the water, the air, and all that dwells therein, is reverent to God and his purpose.

What we consume should be only what we need and should be produced ethically without exploiting people, the land, the water or the air. We often *talk* about the benefits of buying local, reducing waste, reusing items, recycling materials, and of not flying or travelling unless for essential purposes. How many of us are willing to actually *walk the talk* and make the choices to care more for the environment. The current pandemic has shown us that change is possible. Our Lutheran ethics inform us that we must trust in God for strength to make the choices to meet these challenges.

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¹ *Luther's Large Catechism*, Anniversary translation and introductory essay by Friedemann Herbart (Adelaide, SA: Lutheran Publishing House, 1983), 23.