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# Sustainability in the Sanctuary: An Analysis of the Relationship Between Christian Churches and the Environment

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SUSTAINABILITY IN THE SANCTUARY: AN ANALYSIS OF THE  
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHRISTIAN CHURCHES AND THE ENVIRONMENT

by  
Katelyn Ruth Campbell

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

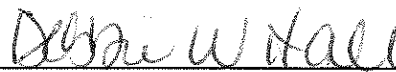
Oxford  
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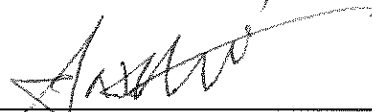
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Advisor: Professor Chris Sparks



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Reader: Professor Debbie Hall



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Reader: Professor Scott Fiene

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“Our very contact with nature has a deep restorative power; contemplation of its  
magnificence imparts peace and serenity.”

Saint John Paul II on World Day of Peace, January 1, 1990

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Thank you to the School of Journalism and New Media for introducing me to countless opportunities through the Integrated Marketing Communications program.

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ABSTRACT  
SUSTAINABILITY IN THE SANCTUARY: AN ANALYSIS OF THE  
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHRISTIAN CHURCHES AND THE ENVIRONMENT  
(Under the direction of Chris Sparks)

Paper bulletins, weekly customized song sheets, disposable coffee cups—all parts of a regular communal church gathering on Sunday mornings. Where do these products go after the service is over and the pews are empty? Combining the topics of environmental sustainability and organized religion, this thesis explores how local churches view the intersection of environmental sustainability and faith practices in Oxford, Mississippi. Preliminary research has shown that while many global denominations publically issue statements supporting environmental practices and encouraging sustainable behavior, often these statements are not effective in directly influencing a local church’s behavior as it relates to implementing environmentally sustainable practices.

This thesis will explore the philosophy that as stewards of creation and leaders in society, churches have a responsibility to promote environmental conservation and implement sustainability practices such as recycling. This thesis will consist of five sections. Chapter one will explore current trends surrounding the practice of recycling on a national, small town, and religious level. The second chapter will include a review of relevant literature regarding the church’s relationship to influencing behavior, sustainability, and environmentalism in terms of “caring for creation.” The third chapter will examine churches and their local leaders’ views on the responsibility to participate in sustainable practices, specifically recycling. Chapter four reports the corresponding congregations’ current expectations and aims to determine if there exists a desire to

implement practices such as recycling in the respective churches. Finally, in chapter five, research results will be analyzed to explore if there exists a gap between what is expected and what is delivered.

To gain necessary insight into the attitudes and opinions of four local churches in the Oxford, Mississippi, community, secondary and primary research was conducted. Six separate interviews were conducted on authoritative figures such as priests, preachers, clergy, and other leaders in prominent Oxford churches. The interviewees were asked to describe their denominations' views on sustainable activity such as recycling and furthermore how they address the topic at an institutional, local level. To augment interviews, a survey was conducted and distributed to members of participating congregations to determine level of awareness on their respective church's involvement in recycling and to gauge interest on the issue of addressing sustainability in churches. The goal of the survey was to determine the congregation's expectations of service as far as becoming involved with sustainable practices like recycling.

This thesis will contribute to the understanding of how churches can best communicate messages to most effectively influence behavior. It will also make recommendations to churches, if desired, as to how they can address the topic of sustainability in terms of faith.

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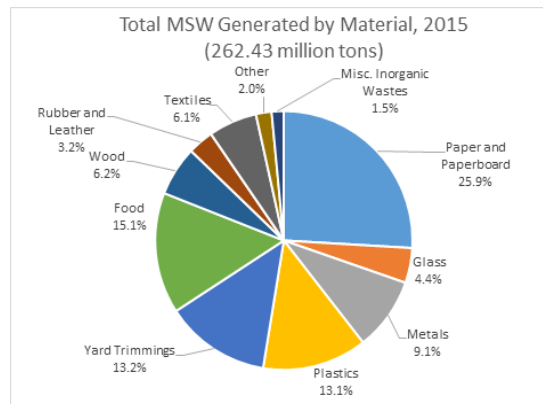
## **CHAPTER I: CURRENT RECYCLING TRENDS**

The 1970s signaled the beginning of an American environmentalism trend with the passage of the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act, the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency, and the creation of the nation's first Earth Day, observed on April 20, 1970. A study conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2017 outlined several key findings regarding the public's views on the environment. Overall, Americans support environmental protection with survey reports revealing "almost three-quarters of U.S. adults (74%) said 'the country should do whatever it takes to protect the environment,'" while 23% said "the country has gone too far in its efforts to protect the environment" (Pew Research Center, 2017). The study indicated more than half of Americans (55%) view environmental protection as a top priority, but other policy issues like "defending the country from future terrorist attacks (76%) and strengthening the economy (73%) were at the top of the public's priority list" (Pew Research Center, 2017). Environmental prioritization varies according to political affiliation and age. Individuals identifying as Democrats are about twice as likely as Republicans to identify environmental protection as a top priority. Pew Research Center indicates adults under the age of 30 are "more likely than those 65 and older to say that protecting the environment should be a top priority (64% vs. 48%)" (Pew Research Center, 2017).

Another key finding from the 2016 Pew Research Center survey report reveals that while 75% of Americans are concerned about helping the environment, only one in five Americans make efforts to live in ways that help protect the environment "all the

time.” Individuals “65 and older are three times as likely as those ages 18 to 29 to say they make this effort all the time (36% vs. 12%). Millennials (currently 18 to 36 years old) are also somewhat less likely than older generations to view themselves as environmentalists, with 32% saying this, versus at least four-in-ten among older generations, the Center found in a 2014 survey” (Pew Research Center).

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, the United States generated approximately 262.4 million tons of municipal solid waste in 2015. Municipal solid waste refers to products and materials collected from “residential, commercial, and institutional sources before recycling, composting, combustion, or landfilling takes place” (“National Overview,” 2016).



(Figure 1)

The largest material category, almost 26 percent of the total waste generated, was paper and paperboard (cardboard), amounting to about 68.1 million tons (Paper and Paperboard: Material Specific Data). This paper product category includes items such as office paper, newspaper, boxes, paper plates, and cups.

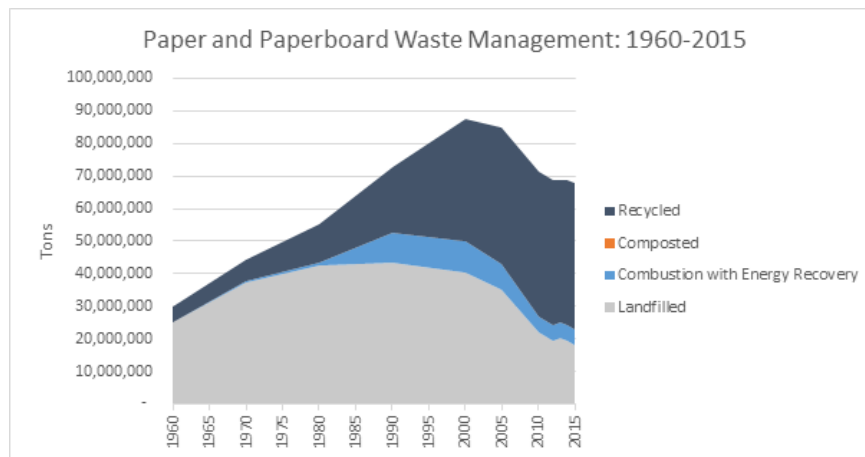
1960–2015 Data on Paper and Paperboard in MSW by Weight (in thousands of U.S. tons)

Management Pathway	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2005	2010	2014	2015
Generated	29,990	44,310	55,160	72,730	87,740	84,840	71,310	68,610	68,050
Recycled	5,080	6,770	11,740	20,230	37,560	41,960	44,570	44,400	45,320
Composted	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Combustion with Energy Recovery	-	150	860	8,930	9,730	7,800	4,740	4,740	4,450
Landfilled	24,910	37,390	42,560	43,570	40,450	35,080	22,000	19,470	18,280

Source: American Forest and Paper Association

A dash in the table means that data is not available.

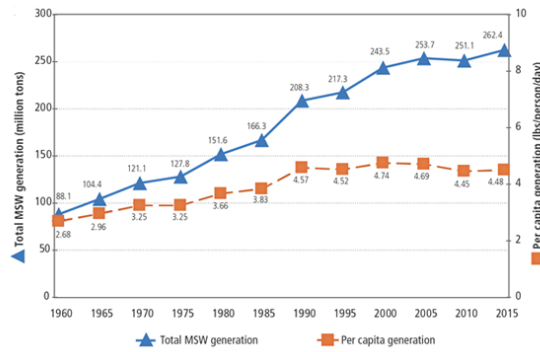
(Figure 2)



(Figure 3)

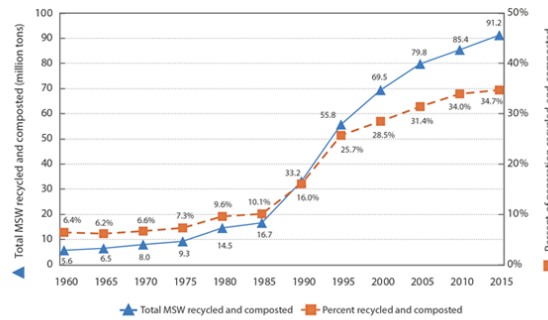
Over the last few decades, municipal solid waste generation has fluctuated from year to year. Overall generation has generally increased, from 88.1 million tons in 1960 to 262.4 million tons in 2015. In this same time, recycling rates have increased, from “6 percent of municipal solid waste generated in 1960, to about 10 percent in 1980, 16 percent in 1990, to about 29 percent in 2000, and to over 34 percent in 2015” (Figures 4 and 5).

### MSW Generation Rates, 1960-2015



(Figure 4)

### MSW Recycling & Composting Rates, 1960-2015



(Figure 5)

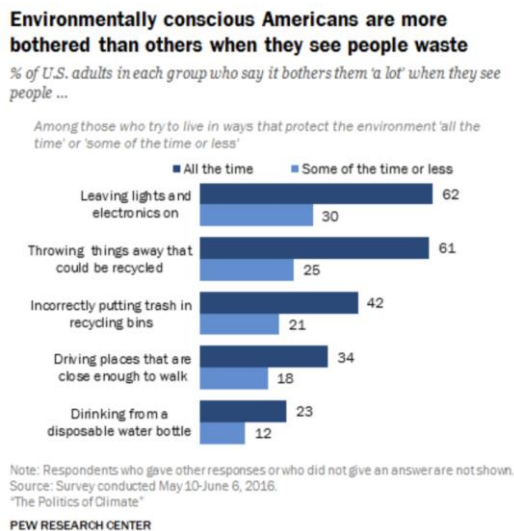
Conversely, “the disposal of waste to landfills has decreased from 94 percent of the amount generated in 1960 to under 53 percent of the amount generated in 2015” (National Overview Facts and Figures).

The paper product category is the leader in terms of materials recycled with the highest recycle rate of all municipal solid waste categories. In 2015, over 92 percent of all corrugated boxes were recycled, and newspapers had a recycle rate of about 71 percent. In total, “approximately 45.3 million tons of post-consumer paper and

paperboard were recycled in 2015 for a recycling rate of 68.6 percent” (Material Specific Data).

According to information provided by the American Forest and Paper Association, the amount of paper products generated in the U.S. has declined for the past 19 years, and the amount of materials recycled as a percentage of generation has increased. In the year 2000, the U.S. recycled 42.8 percent of its generated paper products. This percentage grew to 49.45 in 2005. In another five years, the amount of recycled paper and paperboard materials was up to 62.5 percent, and still climbing in 2014, it was estimated at a recycled rate of 64.71 percent. Figures 2 and 3 represent this data on the amount of recycled material in comparison to those paper products that were combusted or landfilled (National Overview).

Concerning the U.S. population’s attitudes and expectations of recycling, “overall, 32% of U.S. adults say they are bothered by people throwing away things that could be recycled” according to a study conducted by Pew Research Center in 2016.



(Figure 6: Pew Research Center)

The study concluded, “People who are environmentally conscious are also twice as likely as others to say that seeing someone incorrectly putting trash in recycling bins bothers them a lot (42% vs. 21%).”

A majority of Americans do recycle. Close to half of U.S. adults (46%) said in 2014 that they recycle or reduce waste to protect the environment “whenever possible,” while 30% said they do so “most of the time” and 19% reported doing so “occasionally.” Just 4% of the public said they “never” recycle or reduce waste to protect the environment. Older Americans are modestly more inclined than their younger counterparts to say they recycle and reduce waste “whenever possible” (Pew Research Center, 2016).

When it comes to recycling opportunities, small town and rural areas are at a slight disadvantage compared to larger U.S. cities where the option to recycle is made much more convenient. Last year, China implemented a policy change that denies acceptance of certain recyclable materials and tightens its standards for contaminated waste present in imported scrap bales. For years, China was the world’s largest importer of waste paper, used plastic, and scrap metal for recycling purposes. Some cities with larger populations have decided to absorb the cost, wary that passing on a financial burden to citizens would discourage recycling, but small towns in the U.S. are most heavily impacted by the policy change. Some areas have completely stopped accepting certain plastics altogether or have begun charging an annual fee to drop off recyclables at a center. “The result is a growing disparity between the recycling services available to city dwellers and those for rural and small-town residents” (Trashed).



Many U.S. citizens have access to single-stream recycling, which means they are able to drop off or leave out recyclable materials for curbside pick-up without sorting or separating specific materials prior. Single-stream recycling is significantly more difficult for Chinese processors. Recycling Coordinator for the Recycling Center in Oxford, Mississippi, Michelle Robinson commented so far the policy changes in China have not greatly affected Oxford stating that because Oxford's recycle collection "is clean, we do not have issues with selling our material." Oxford residents are required to separate materials between bins for each recyclable: aluminum and steel cans, mixed paper, newspapers, cardboard, and plastic (City of Oxford).

According to a survey conducted by Pew Research Center in 2016, perceptions and realities of recycling vary widely depending on location in the U.S. Most Americans have access to recycling programs.

"A recent study conducted for the Sustainable Packaging Coalition, an industry group, estimated that 94% of the U.S. population has some type of recycling program available to them: About 30% have curbside collection only, 43% have both curbside service and drop-off centers and 21% have drop-off programs only. (This generally aligns with findings from the EPA, which has estimated that in 2011, there were more than 9,800 curbside recycling programs throughout the U.S., covering more than 70% of the population.)

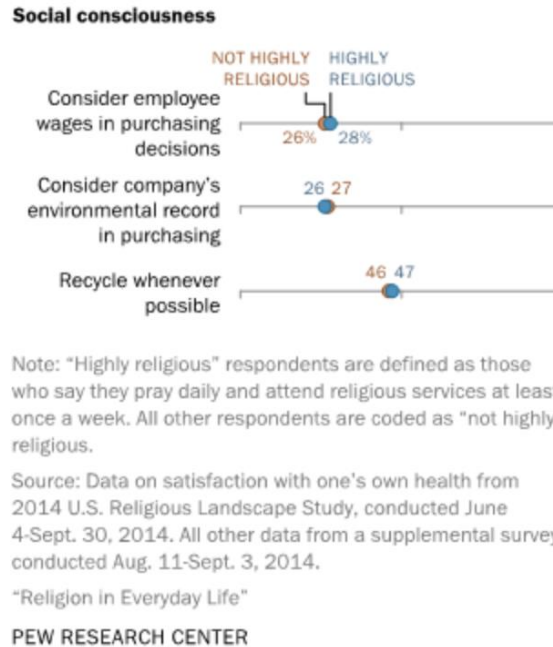
Curbside collection is more common in larger cities and towns: 93% of the communities in the SPC study with populations greater than 125,000 provided single-family curbside recycling, as opposed to 65% of communities with populations below 50,000. (The Pew Research Center survey, interestingly, found

a similar pattern but with lower rates: About seven-in-ten people living in urban and suburban communities said they had curbside recycling, compared with just four-in-ten rural residents, or 40%.)” (Pew Research Center).

However, access to a recycling program does not necessarily indicate participation in the available program. The Pew Research Center determined from data in 2011 that the states with the highest recycling and composting rates are California (53.4%), Maine (51.5%) and Washington state (50.1%) while Oklahoma (3.7%), Alaska (4.5%) and Mississippi (4.8%) had the lowest rates. There is a lack of knowledge regarding which materials are accepted by certain recycling centers and which types of material are able to be recycled.

Residential addresses in Oxford, Mississippi, are given access to several recycling drop off locations for residential use in the town. Residents are also able to sign up for Oxford’s curbside recycling program. Businesses, however, are required to bring their recyclables to the Recycling Center at the Landfill on County Road 321 (City of Oxford). Michelle Robinson, Recycling Coordinator at the Recycling Department in Oxford, Mississippi, reported that churches are technically considered businesses, but the city of Oxford will pick up recycling from the square on Tuesdays. She added they “will pick up from most addresses as long as they are in the city limits.”

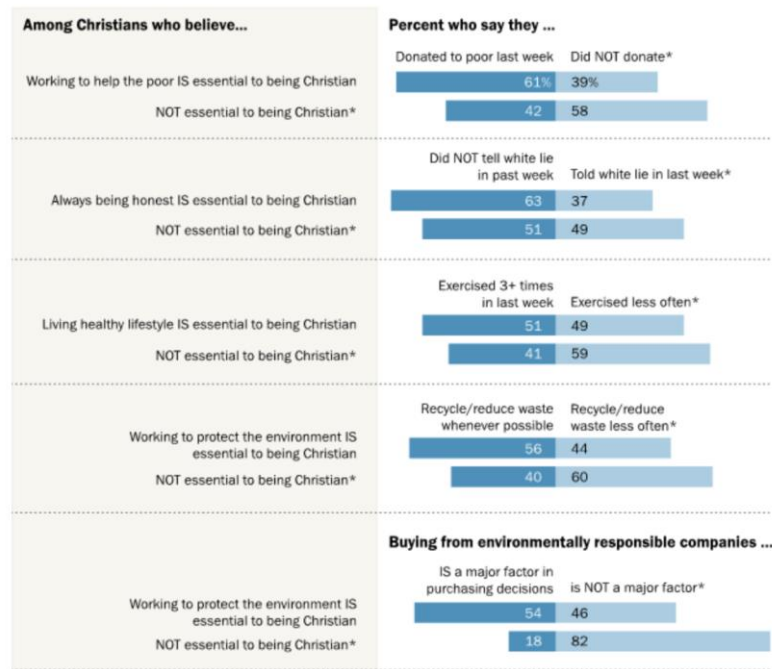
A study conducted in 2014 on how religion affects everyday life decisions, including social consciousness, found “highly religious people are no more likely than other Americans to recycle their household waste” (Pew Research Center, 2016).



*(Figure 7: Pew Research Center)*

However, the survey data revealed a clear link between “what people see as essential to their faith and their self-reported day-to-day behavior” (Pew Research Center, 2016). Those who believe in behaving in a certain way as a key element of faith are much more likely to say they actual perform specific actions on a regular basis. The survey found “relatively few Christians see...protecting the environment as a key element of their faith. But those who do see these things as essential to what it means to be a Christian are more likely than others to say they...consider...the environment when making purchasing decisions, or attempt to recycle or reduce waste as much as possible” (Pew Research Center, 2016). The data suggest “Christians are more likely to...behave in environmentally conscious ways if they consider these things essential to what it means to be a Christian” (Pew Research Center, 2016).

**Beliefs are strongly linked with actions**



*(Figure 8: Pew Research Center)*

It is a generally held perception that younger, metropolitan people are more sensitive to recycling and sustainability issues. Younger members of society are automatically assumed to be associated with environmentalism efforts because “as they age, today’s young people will inevitably become national and global leaders with responsibility for environmental stewardship and sustainability” (Examining Trends). Young people, like religious institutions, have capability to influence behavior and instigate social change; there is potential to become active agents in increasing awareness in protecting the environment. Churches may implement programs to participate in recycling efforts to attract and align with that mindset.

## CHAPTER II: CHURCH VIEW OF SUSTAINABILITY

Numerous books, articles, essays, and documents identify churches as a place of influence and describe faith leaders' ability to shape ideas among people of faith. The following sources of literature range from examining the earliest practices of religion as habitual harvesters of attention, dissecting denomination communication resources, reporting specific biblical texts, and analyzing theologian commentary surrounding the topic of environmental sustainability within the framework of "creation care."

Tim Wu's book *The Attention Merchants: The Epic Scramble to Get Inside Our Heads* follows the chronological timeline of various entities designed to capture, hold, and harvest attention. With a general focus on the advertising industry and emphasis on specific advertising techniques, the book examines a range of categories from early practices in newspapers to current mobile trends. Tracing the concept of attention back to the origins of its harvesting, Wu observed the Church was the first institution dependent upon capturing attention. Long before political and commercial influences entered the scene, organized religion had established a dominance on galvanizing attention "with its combination of moral injunctions as well as daily and weekly rituals" and "demands for a strict adherence to the one true God, naturally promoting an ideal of undivided attention" (page 26). Christian churches occupy a unique space in the mind of those individuals who attend and are involved in practice because they hold an audience's collective attention captive for often one hour a week during the traditional sense of a church service. Therefore, the messages shared and ideas spread during the one hour of attention capture

carry great weight. Organized religions, and specifically monotheistic Christian denominations, have potential to use their role in society to influence a congregation's behavior during habitual attention harvests.

Published by The Episcopal Church, "ecoAmerica," and "Blessed Tomorrow" organizations, a document titled "Let's Talk Faith & Climate: Communication Guidance for Faith Leaders" serves to translate findings from scientific academic research into a practical resource for initiating conversations on the intersection of climate change and faith. The guide defines climate change as "a moral and spiritual issue that is causing unprecedented harm to God's creation and people" and "offers context on how climate change is connected to the core values of many faith traditions" (Guide p. 6). It lists the many possible motivations for acting on climate issues:

"If your religious experience is strongly connected to the sanctity of God's creation, you will likely feel compelled to defend the natural world from the destruction that results from climate damage. If peacemaking is a primary expression of your faith, you may be alarmed at the various ways in which climate change is sowing conflict over scarce resources. If the alleviation of poverty is central to your faith, you may be concerned about how the poor are being hit the hardest by pollution and severe weather, yet have the fewest resources to cope with such obstacles. If overcoming racism is a core aspect of your faith journey, you need not look far to witness climate injustice, such as racial disparities in childhood asthma rates or the inequitable response to disaster that often occurs when communities of color are the primary victims. If your faith

is driven by a passion to care for the next generation, nothing threatens our children's wellbeing more than an unstable climate.”

The guide asserts addressing the issue of climate change is a shared responsibility as a collective people of faith, no matter the differing motivations, calling for overall good stewardship and action. Solutions for climate change require involvement from faith community leaders because they “are the backbone of American communities and are often charged with offering guidance in times of moral dilemma” (Guide, p. 7).

Faith leadership has potential to make a measurable impact among people of faith and their awareness, attitudes, and behaviors towards the climate (Guide, p. 9). “40% of Americans believe that religious leaders should take a stand on climate issues” (Moore, 2015). Within the guide, there is a section dedicated to the analyzation of research reports on awareness, attitudes, and motivations of people of faith regarding climate change issues. According to a study conducted by Pew Research Center in 2015, roughly 70 percent of Americans continue to identify with some branch of the Christian faith. (Wormald, 2017). For many Americans, faith influences decision-making and guides opinions on issues such as climate change.

Rush Limbaugh, outspoken conservative radio talk show host and adamant denier of climate change made a bold statement in 2013, “If you believe in God, then intellectually you cannot believe in man-made global warming.” His comment was made in response to then Secretary of State John Kerry's speech at the launch of the State Department's Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives. Kerry's speech claimed protecting the planet is an inherent responsibility of the guardians, a challenge to take on as the “safeguards of God's creation.” Limbaugh remained confident in his stance that

man cannot control something he did not create. The commentary on Limbaugh's show revealed the stark presence of opposition to the intersection of climate change and Christian teaching due to disbelief in man-made global warming and its harmful effects on the environment. Evangelical climate change skeptics might "dismiss the issue in one of three ways: A liberal hoax, a hypothesis based on flawed science, or an affront to the concept of human existence based on God's intelligence design" (Sacks, 2018).

One flaw in the attempt to explain climate change to evangelicals is the overall lack of understanding from the scientific community on how to approach people of faith. Martin Palmer, secretary general of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation and an environmentalist of faith, offers, "The way climate change has been presented is monumentally boring and monumentally irrelevant to most people." Scientists have dismissed biblical beliefs and relied instead on statistics and abstract concepts to illustrate their points of view. Another hurdle for evangelicals' acceptance of the science of climate change is the difficulty of reconciling small changes in the atmosphere as having a large impact on the planet. Dr. E. Calvin Beisner of the Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation references the biblical teaching "that an infinitely wise God designed, an infinitely powerful God created, and an infinitely faithful God upholds the earth and everything in it, including its climate system" (Sacks, 2018).

Climate change and environmental sustainability does not have to be an issue limited to politics, however. "Nobody, left or right, really wants to live in a dirtier, more poisonous, uglier place," claims Beisner. "If we focus on shared ends—like enhancing the fruitfulness, the beauty, and the safety of the Earth, to the glory of God and the benefit of our neighbors—we should be able to negotiate means that can be embraced



across the political spectrum” (Sacks, 2018). When framed in the context of biblical texts and reflections of renowned theologians, there is an argument for environmental sustainability to be considered through a theological lens, a conversation which includes the church and its members who prescribe to faith teachings.

The very first book in the Christian Bible, Genesis, says God gave man “dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Genesis 1:26, English Standard Version). Adam was assigned to be a gardener, the tender of the Earth. This is one possible passage from which the idea of Christians as stewards responsible for creation is derived. Inversely, some people interpret this same verse to mean Adam was given authoritative dominion to treat the earth and use its resources how he best saw fit. Numbers 35:33 explicitly states, “You shall not pollute the land in which you live...” There is a general consensus within the scientific community in which scientists have proven climate change is a real and present threat to our planet; moreover, human inhabitants are partially to blame, as “ninety-seven percent of climate scientists agree that climate-warming trends over the past century are very likely due to human activities, and most of the leading scientific organizations worldwide have issued public statements endorsing this position” (Evidence NASA). The verse in the book of Numbers commands that readers of the bible and followers of Christ respect the earth’s resources by not polluting the land. Yet another biblical passage, this one found in the concluding book of the Christian bible, Revelation, gives a fateful warning of the potentially harmful effects of neglecting to care for the earth, “The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants,

the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth” (Revelation 11:18, ESV). These verses along with several others in the Bible are used as justification or reasoning for Christians to implement environmentally sustainable practices or to participate in the conversation surrounding the environment and the climate.

“Making the Biblical case for environmental ‘stewardship,’ now known as ‘creation care,’ long before it became a buzzword” (Stephenson, 2011), *Christianity and The Survival of Creation* by Wendell Berry confronts two clichés of the conservation movement: “the culpability of Christianity in the destruction of the natural world and the uselessness of Christianity in any effort to correct that destruction” (Berry, 1992). The essayist, poet, and farmer establishes justification for these claims as evidenced by the complacent nature of Christian priests, preachers, and other leaders who “remain largely indifferent to the rape and plunder of the world.” Berry encourages critical anti-Christian environmentalists to first read and understand the Bible in light of Creation, clarifying that there is not a lack of biblical instruction on respect, stewardship, and love for the earth, but rather “catastrophic discrepancies between biblical instruction and Christian behavior” (Berry, 1992, p. 95).

Examining biblical texts through the frameworks of Christianity and Creation, Berry determines “that we humans do not own the world or any part of it” (Berry, 1992, p. 96) because God made all of Creation, found it to be good, and “He continues to love it and to find it worthy, despite its reduction and corruption by us” (Berry, 1992, p. 97). Considering John 3:16, God’s love for the world persists for the world as it was and is, not for Heaven or for the world as it might be. Quoting Greek Orthodox theologian Philip

Sherrard, “Creation is nothing less than the manifestation of God’s hidden Being” (Berry, 1992, p. 98), Berry concludes Creation is not independent of the Creator. Therefore, “our destruction of nature is not just bad stewardship...it is the most horrid blasphemy. We have the right to use the gifts of nature but not to ruin or waste them.” Addressing the complacency of modern Christianity, Berry questions how can the faith “have so solemnly folded its hands while so much of the work of God was and is being destroyed?” (Berry, 1992, p. 99).

The importance of Creation and its works in regard to God’s revelation of Himself (Berry, 1992, p. 103) remains prominent throughout various passages in the Bible, an outdoor book, where “encounters did not take place in temples, but in sheep pastures, in the desert, in the wilderness, on mountains, on the shores of rivers and the sea, in the middle of the sea, in prisons. Religion...is less to be celebrated in rituals than practiced in the world” (Berry, 1992, p. 102). Several biblical scriptures speak of nature in terms of poetry, awe, and reverence, not contempt or hatred (Berry, 1992, p. 105). Therefore, the dualism that Berry writes manifests itself as a discontinuity between religion and nature is “the most destructive disease that afflicts us.”

Exploring the spiritual importance of economic life, Berry explains “that by our work we reveal what we think of the works of God. How well we use the materials we use, and what we do with them after we have used them—all these are questions of the highest and gravest religious significance. In answering them, we practice, or do not practice, our religion” (Berry, 1992, p. 109). Regarding the significant impact of human interaction on self, others, and the world, he writes “any life, by working or not working, by working well or poorly, inescapably changes other lives and so changes the

world...and bad art in any trade dishonors and damages Creation” (Berry, 1992, p. 110). Further, “to use gifts less than well is to dishonor them and their Giver” (Berry, 1992, p. 113). The main point of Berry’s essay is Christianity “should survive and renew itself so that it may become as largely and truly instructive as we need it to be” (Berry, 1992, p. 96). *Christianity and the Survival of Creation* is a challenging critique for Christians to examine how they interact with Creation. Berry’s thoughts, ideas, and words expressed in the literature are still regarded as an important bridge for connecting environmentalism and religion.

Although profound theological reflections such as Wendell Berry’s essay, *Christianity and the Survival of Creation* remain widely regarded by many denominations, more recent explanations of “creation care” integrate into the fundamental practices of certain religious organizations. Evangelical pastor Chris Moerman and his wife Jessica are committed to teaching their church, Grace Capital City in Washington D.C., about the science behind global warming. Jessica, a climate scientist, commented in an interview for the Today Show, “There’s a feeling that to be a scientist, you have to leave your faith at the door. I was really lucky to have key leaders within my church really show me that I didn’t have to choose.” For Jessica, studying science is studying Creation. Chris explained that while science answers questions about what and where and when, “our faith answers questions about who and why,” the key to connecting the two is simply starting the discussion and listening. The couple remains motivated by faith to teach the members of their church about the global impacts of climate change. Katharine Hayhoe, an atmospheric scientist and also a pastor’s wife summarized, “As a Christian, if we truly believe what it says in the Bible, then we’d be

on the front line demanding action on climate. We are told in the first book of the Bible that we humans are given responsibility for every living thing on this planet.”

## **CHAPTER III: LOCAL DOCTRINE AND BELIEFS**

### **Oxford, Mississippi Study**

To investigate the relationship between faith expressions and practices of environmental stewardship, a study regarding environmentally sustainable practices, specifically recycling, was conducted in four prominent churches in Oxford, Mississippi. Primary research was carried out in the form of interviewing priests, pastors, clergy, and other leaders to determine views of local churches and surveying members of corresponding churches to gather attitudes, opinions, and expectations. Participating churches include: First Presbyterian Church, Oxford-University United Methodist Church, Saint Peter's Episcopal Church, and Saint John the Evangelist Catholic Church. From the four churches, a common theme emerged: church leaders expressed some level of desire for their individual church's participation in recycling. All leaders recognize the need for recycling and the positive effects recycling yields in the community and for parishioners. However, variations exist in how the motivations behind recycling are determined, how a message of sustainability is spread, and how the goals to participate in a recycling initiative are executed.

Oxford is a small town in the northern part of Mississippi. It is home to the state's flagship university, Ole Miss. According to Claritas Database Zip Code Lookup, the population of Oxford is 44,345, the median age is 32, and the median income is \$49,504. Claritas divides the town into five different categories of the types of people who reside there. One main group is labeled "Small-Town Collegiates" described as full or part-time

students who are focused on building a better life for themselves or their young families. “Young and Rustic” is another segmentation residing in rural areas outside the city limits of Oxford. Those who are in the “Young and Rustic” category are labeled as “low income, middle age, mostly without kids.” They enjoy the outdoors, ATVs, playing video games, and following NASCAR and monster trucks. “Big Sky Families” are another segmentation group for Oxford’s zip code. They are described as “upscale, middle age, mostly with kids.” Claritas reports that “Big Sky Families” are scattered in towns throughout the American heartland, high school educations and blue-collar jobs turned to busy, upper-middle-class lifestyles. Members of this category enjoy country music, hunting and other outdoor activities. They are entertained by team sports and are frequent purchasers of sporting equipment. Claritas identifies another segmentation of the Oxford area as “Country Strong.” These residents are part of lower middle class families in rural areas, content with embracing the day-to-day lifestyle. “Country Strong” subscribes to the Middle America social group and the Mainstream Families life stage group. The fifth segmentation of Oxford is labeled “White Picket Fences” described as “midscale, younger family mix.” These residents “look a lot like the stereotypical American household of a generation ago: upper-middle-class and married with children. But the current version reflects changing patterns with some parents just beginning to start families while others approach the empty-nest stage as their children age.” Those who belong to this category enjoy reading, following sports, and DIY projects.

According to a 2017 Gallup report, about three-quarters of the American population identify with the Christian faith. Protestants made up the largest religious group in America with 49% of U.S. adults interviewed, and Catholics make up 23% of

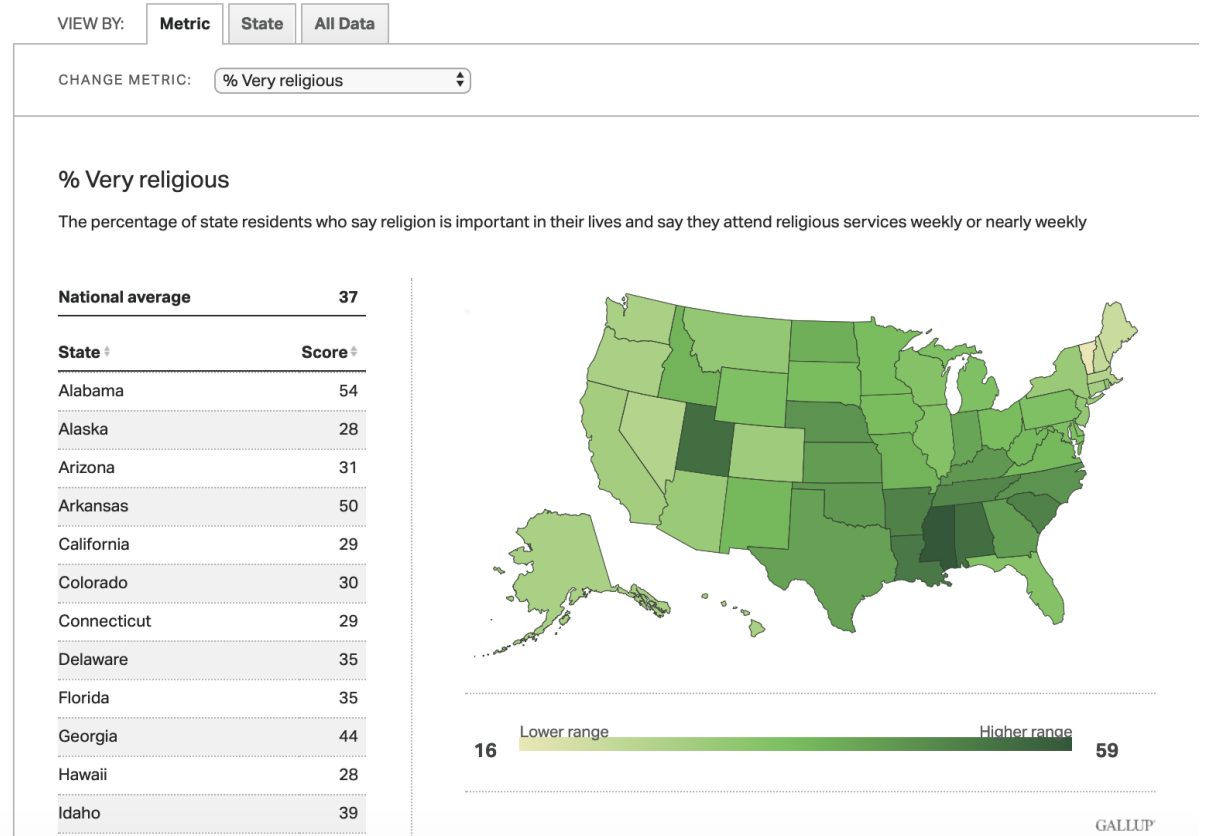
the population as the next-largest group. The report also indicated that 37% percent of “Americans can be classified as highly religious based on their self-reports of church attendance and the importance of religion in their lives” (Gallup, 2017). Geographically, the United States is divided into several regions based on unique characteristics that set specific areas apart from the country as a whole. One of these regions is identified as “the Bible Belt, a stretch in the South where religion plays an outsized role in the region’s culture and politics” (Business Insider). According to Shayanne Gal at Business Insider, evangelical Protestantism is heavily influential to churchgoers’ societal ideals, cultural practices, and political beliefs in the Southeastern United States. In a 2011 report, Gallup found that Mississippi was the most religious state in the United States with 59% of Mississippians identifying as “very religious” and only 11% as “nonreligious.”

Mississippi is one of the ten most religious states in 2011, eight of which are in the South (Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Arkansas, South Carolina, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Georgia) (Gallup, 2012). These findings from 2011 are consistent with more recent numbers. Based on 2017 results, 59% of Mississippians identify as “very religious” (Gallup, 2017).



# State of the States

Map and sort state data from 2017 across measures. Well-being metrics data come from 2016. To explore and export full trends, subscribe to [Gallup Analytics](#).



(Figure 9: Gallup, 2017)

## In Depth Interviews with Church Leadership in Oxford, Mississippi

### Views in the Oxford Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is well known as being actively engaged in the social issues of the world, including environmentalism. Every two years, leaders from the Presbyterian Church meet in their governing body called General Assembly to discuss many national issues such as gun violence and immigration and the Presbyterian Church's role in addressing those issues. There was a report in 2018 from a committee that suggested Presbyterians divest from any company that produces fossil fuels. A

minority report was presented which argued if they decide to divest, they will lose their voice at the table. “By a vote of 332-178, the assembly voted in favor of a minority report that called for the PC(USA) to continue its corporate engagement with fossil fuel companies—through its Mission Responsibility Through Investment Committee—rather than divest from those companies. The Assembly Committee on Environmental Issues had voted 35-20 for the divestment proposal offered by the Presbytery of Hudson River. After the minority report became the main motion, it was approved by the assembly 409-106” (Highlights from the GA).

Reverend Kelly, Acting Head of Staff at First Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in Oxford, Mississippi, explained that the Presbyterian Church will continue to review the performance of fossil fuel companies until the next General Assembly meeting in 2020 to evaluate any improvement in the companies and how that will affect the church’s support or divestment. “Presbyterians all over the world are thinking about that and thinking about how we can have an impact on what’s going on with creation. But there aren’t easy answers,” Reverend Kelly commented.

The Presbyterian Church’s involvement in promoting environmental sustainability goes beyond discussing official stances to important topics at General Assembly. One seminarian professor, the Reverend Dr. Paul Galbreath is working to implement environmental sustainability into the everyday practices of Presbyterian churches through an Earth care liturgy. He has been awarded a grant that will allow him to “develop liturgical resources for congregational use that link Christian discipleship and Earth care, grounding environmental advocacy in corporate worship practices” (Union Presbyterian Seminary). The primary goal of this project will be to support “creation care

grounded in Scripture, reflection, and prayer; and to produce prayers and liturgies that support congregational and individual engagement in caring for the Earth.” Galbreath is focused on how local liturgical practice can enable ways for environmental engagement in conjunction with Christian discipleship. His research will approach creation care by examining “the ways that Scripture and Christian worship practices form and inform the choices that we make to care for the Earth” (Union Presbyterian Seminary).

As Acting Head of Staff, Reverend Ann Kelly says service is an important component of the mission at First Presbyterian Church (USA) in Oxford, Mississippi. The congregation is reflective of other nationwide Presbyterians in that it is made up of affluent professionals, those who value education and are therefore highly educated. The individuals who attend First Presbyterian are also known as being very generous and involved in the Oxford community. First Presbyterian “was influential in the beginning of the food pantry so they’ve always had service as a big part of who they are.” Reverend Kelly thinks the church has a role participating in environmentally sustainable issues; however, she is unsure how successful the church is in approaching the management and undertaking of specific sustainable practices. When she first became involved at First Presbyterian seven years ago, the church served Wednesday night meals on paper plates, paper cups, and plastic silverware. Once their kitchen was renovated, the church stopped ordering and purchasing those disposable products and instead switched to a new matching set of dishes, easily stored in the new space. Although First Presbyterian has successfully reduced the amount of waste generated (only one or two meals are served on disposable paper products each year), reusable plates and cups presented a unique set of challenges including the maintenance work of washing and cleaning, whereas the paper

products could easily be disposed of in the garbage. Reverend Kelly commented there is no paid kitchen staff. Volunteers are recruited to assist in setting up, cleaning up, and washing dishes after an event at First Presbyterian.

When discussing the administrative side of First Presbyterian Church, Reverend Kelly described two trash bins next to the office copier. One is labeled as “paper only.” She shared, “the entire time I’ve been here, I thought that meant that that paper was getting recycled somewhere...I just happened to be in there one day when they were unloading the trash, and it was going right into the trash. I was like ‘what is the point?’” She shared a common frustration with many Americans who have doubts that the materials placed in designated recycle receptacles are actually being taken to a recycling center. This can create lack of trust in the overall system and a decreased amount of motivation to continue recycling. However, Reverend Kelly immediately put in a voucher for a fifteen-dollar recycling bin “so that we can at least do what we’re leading everybody to believe we’re already doing.” She recognizes the importance of self-examination and ensuring her church practices what they preach.

As far as First Presbyterian Church’s congregation, Reverend Kelly thinks that overall, there is some understanding that as a collective body of people, they are responsible for taking care of creation, but there might still exist some disconnect when it comes to living it out. “We as leaders in the church, the two of us who are associate pastors, and the other officers of the church, could do a better job about just giving them (the congregation) that food for thought. We can’t tell them how to live their life or what decisions to make, but to help them think about it in terms of faith because it goes all the way back to creation.” Reverend Kelly then referenced a familiar passage in scripture of

God instructing Adam to till and keep the ground (Genesis 2:15), and because of being made partners with God to take care of the earth, Reverend Kelly thinks “we have a big responsibility.”

First Presbyterian Church in Oxford collects the majority of their 250 printed paper bulletins at the end of their Sunday services and with the implementation of new recycling bins, those collected bulletins will then be recycled. The church produces a weekly and monthly newsletter which is published online, and they print out approximately 20 newsletters for members of the congregation who do not have access to or simply do not prefer to use the Internet. Reverend Kelly is hopeful about the implementation of a recycling initiative within First Presbyterian. She thinks it will be an easy transition to begin recycling papers in the office “since we all thought it was happening anyway.” As far as members of the church, those who live in town and have access to Oxford’s curbside recycling program most likely already participate. However, members who are residents of the county and outside city limits may face more obstacles as far as an increased effort to take recycling into town. There was some speculation around the possibility of offering a space for members to drop off their items at First Presbyterian so the church could then take it to recycling center. Reverend Kelly guessed there would be “a handful of people who would do that because there are a handful of people that do other things.” As with any new idea or program, this would be a large undertaking, beginning with a designated individual who would head the process of checking the recycling receptacle regularly and ensuring the bins are placed outside for pick up. Reverend Kelly’s secretary has already volunteered to be the one responsible for getting the bins out to the curb. She identified one of the main inhibitors to taking on this

responsibility of creation care is the generation gap. The younger members of the congregation are perceived as more conscious than older members. However, there is one older member of First Presbyterian who has been a champion for the Presbyterian Church overall to divest from fossil fuels.

### **Views in the Oxford United Methodist Church**

Many members of the United Methodist Church are involved in contributing to the conversation on a broad range of worldwide social issues, including sustainability, where the term creation care is integrated and synonymous with environmental justice. The Social Creed of the United Methodist Church lists several broad statements to help guide the denomination's thinking and acting in how its members live. One sentence of the creed specifically addresses environmental stewardship stating, "We affirm the natural world as God's handiwork and dedicate ourselves to its preservation, enhancement, and faithful use by humankind" (United Methodist Communications, 2013). Furthermore, the United Methodist Church subscribes to a multitude of Social Principles, one of which principle is dedicated to the natural world. The foundational document acknowledges creation as belonging to the Lord and accepts responsibility "for the ways in which we use and abuse it. Water, air, soil, minerals, energy resources, plants, animal life, and space are to be valued and conserved because they are God's creation and not solely because they are useful to human beings. God has granted us stewardship of creation." The Social Principles of the Natural World urge United Methodists to recognize their responsibility as members of the church to place a high priority on supporting a sustainable world "leading to a higher quality of life for all of

God's creation" (United Methodist Communications, 2013). Regarding the global climate, the United Methodist Church's Social Principles of the Natural World attribute "humanity's disregard for God's creation" as a cause of increased pollutants in the earth's atmosphere and the negative impact caused on the earth's climate. The principles support efforts "to require mandatory reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and call on individuals, congregations, businesses, industries, and communities to reduce their emissions" (2013).

The Social Creed and corresponding Social Principles serve as guides to official church action as part of the United Methodist Church's larger Book of Discipline. The Book of Discipline is formal written law and doctrine, serving as a foundation for how each church should participate as a member of the global United Methodist Church. The first version was published in 1784, and it has traditionally been re-published every 4 years when the General Conference, the official authorizing body of the United Methodist Church, meets. The most recently updated version is from 2016. There are several more references to environmentalism within the Book of Discipline. For example, paragraph 717 titled "Sustainable and Socially Responsible Investments" dictates United Methodist institutions make a conscious effort to invest in groups whose policies and practices are consistent with the goals outlined in the Social Principles, including those that promote preservation of "the natural world, including mitigating the effects of climate change" (2016). Inversely, United Methodist institutions should avoid engaging with businesses or companies whose practices are not aligned with the guiding Social Principles according to the Book of Discipline (2016).

Oxford-University United Methodist Church in Oxford, Mississippi, carries out the call for sustainable activity and the environmental mission outlined in the denomination's doctrine in multiple ways, one of which is devoting several weeks to a series of sermons centered around the theme of creation. Reverend Eddie Rester, Senior Pastor, and Reverend Chris McAlilly, Associate Pastor at Oxford-University United Methodist Church, introduced an integrated worship series titled "Encounter Creation" in the summer of 2017. The project was based on creation theology, the idea for the sermon series inspired from an interest Reverend McAlilly developed during his time in seminary at Candler School of Theology where he took a class on the doctrine of creation. One of the goals of "Encounter Creation" was to invite members of the church to consider how they could participate in the practice of recycling. Through messages on Sunday mornings and the church's social media platforms, children and families were encouraged to go outside and immerse themselves in creation with the option to submit or post photos of their experiences using specific hashtags. "Part of wanting to care for creation I think comes from a love of creation. Once you have a love of anything, you're going to care for it," explained Reverend Eddie Rester. Oxford-University intends to bring back the popular series during the upcoming summer of 2019. Reverend Rester commented, "The general United Methodist Church says 'you shall do' thousands of things. A lot of times it comes down to churches picking 'well we'll follow that "shall" and not that "shall."' I think creation care is one of the 'shalls' that we maybe all should be focusing on."

Revered Rester thinks of motivation to participate in environmentally sustainable practices as being rooted in the very first section of the Apostles Creed which states, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth." He explained that part



of believing God as creator is that God is not done and continues to create. “In Romans and the book of Revelation, God talks about the restoration of all of creation, bringing together a new creation. I think what that means is that part of salvation is everything we see.” Reverend Rester added, “If God cared enough to create it, then I think we should care enough to take care of it.”

Reverend Chris McAlilly maintained that creation theology shapes the way United Methodists view the material world, shaping it not for utilitarian use, to consume, buy, sell, and throw away, but rather thinking of the material world as a gift from God, responding as a human with thanksgiving, good stewardship, care, and a “recognition that long before we got here and long after we’re gone, it’s there. That requires us to think not only about our use of it, but future use as well.” Reverend McAlilly referenced the book of Romans in the Bible “where Paul talks about the redemption of Christ would extend beyond human persons, beyond souls and bodies to communities and creation itself which is groaning with a desire to be reborn.” Reverend McAlilly attested that for United Methodists particularly, the orientation toward sustainability issues is because of theological commitment to a holistic vision of salvation that would lead toward reconciliation between human person and creation itself which is longing to be reborn. “The problem comes when you move from official theological position and pulpit preaching to living in the world day-to-day. I think part of what may be at play there is that our efforts to disciple our people are thwarted by other forms of formation. Consumer capitalism does a really good job of shaping our habits and desires and our views of the material world. And I think that’s an issue in terms of official teaching and lived reality.”

Reverend McAlilly acknowledged the United Methodist Church's Social Principles and expressed familiarity with how the General Conference's decisions are passed down to local churches. However, he said he was not sure how effective the Social Principles are at "finding their way into the commitments of jurisdictions...or local parishes, even though it's official teaching." While the church looks to the Book of Discipline and Social Principles for official teaching, Reverend McAlilly believes creation care has largely risen in importance due to other authoritative sources like seminary education, many of which offer classes on sustainability issues like the one that inspired the pastors at Oxford-University to develop a sermon series centered around creation care. "Theological education, at least in the United Methodist Church, plays a strong role in shaping the lives of pastors and congregations in some ways as much or more than the official teaching," Reverend McAlilly reflected.

Admitting that most churches produce large amounts of paper waste, Reverend Rester assured that Oxford-University recycles their waste and has made an effort over the last five years to reduce the amount of paper printed by switching to online communications or simply decreasing the frequency in which the church sends out newsletters or postcards. Oxford-University has expanded their recycling efforts in the past couple of years, resulting in positive feedback from the majority of the congregation. Many of the members at Oxford-University expect their church to recycle according to Reverend Rester. There is a large silver garbage can labeled for recyclable bulletins situated by the exit doors of the main sanctuary, and it is intended for depositing bulletins after the services. Reverend Rester said many older members initially expressed distaste for the addition because it did not match the decor of the sanctuary; however, the bulletin

recycling can is noticeable, and it is used. The can is a physical reminder of an ethical commitment of the church to creation care. According to the head pastor, most members leave their bulletins in the pews of the church, and ushers are tasked with ensuring the bulletins are placed in the recycling bins after worship. He estimates the silver recycling can is emptied and taken to the recycling center in Oxford by one of Oxford-University's custodians every two weeks due to bulletin collections. When asked about the possibility of curbside pick-up, Reverend Rester commented on his noticing First Presbyterian had a new recycling bin and said that was a question "worth looking into."

Implementing the recycling program at Oxford-University United Methodist Church emerged over time according to Revered Rester. Reverend McAlilly recalled how beginning to recycle in the church "was a very simple way for us to communicate to the congregation a first step in moving from believing that God is Creator and creation is a gift, to doing the first simple, practical step." The church staff identified their biggest areas of paper waste production occurring in the office and in Sunday morning bulletins. Then, they began answering two fundamental questions: How can we provide people an opportunity to recycle those? How can we reduce the amount that we actually produce on the front end anyway? Revered Rester explained that Oxford-University's bulletins are larger in terms of paper size, but the newsletters have become smaller than before, so "shifting what you produce...is a part of reducing waste." Within the administrative office side of the church, there are two recycling bins, "usually overflowing."

Part of the success of the "Encounter Creation" series in terms of popularity among members of Oxford-University is the way in which the practice of recycling was framed. When recycling was implemented as a part of a discipleship program, teaching

the fullness of the biblical story from Genesis to Revelation, it was framed “in terms of a biblical commitment rather than a liberal or progressive social action. We want people to think of recycling as a theological, biblical, discipleship commitment rather than just a good thing they can do,” reflected Reverend McAlilly.

### **Views in the Oxford Episcopal Church**

Care and justice for creation is a core value of the Episcopal Church. There is an Episcopal Advisory Council dedicated to the Stewardship of Creation as well as a multitude of organizations with distinct focuses within the realm of environmentalism and sustainability. One example of these organizations is the Office of Government Relations Environment Resources which seeks to advocate for environmental policy by influencing policy makers and lawmakers. A plethora of online resources are available for Episcopal churches through partner organizations like “ecoAmerica” and “Blessed Tomorrow.” One popular document titled, “Let’s Talk Faith and Climate” serves as a communication guide for those who wish to begin the conversation on sustainability in their Episcopal church communities. The file provides key talking points when engaging in one-on-one conversations about faith and the climate as well as outlines fifteen practical steps on how to create an individualized message regarding climate communication. Furthermore, there is an example of a sermon which incorporates all fifteen steps into a cohesive message for a congregation (15 Steps to Create Effective Climate Communications).

The Anglican Consultative Council developed “The Five Marks of Mission” for the Anglican Community; these statements were adopted by the Episcopal Church as a

constituent member in 2009. “The Five Marks of Mission” are a collection of brief statements which provide a framework for mission and ministry work throughout churches across the country. The fifth mark of mission is “to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth” (The Public Affairs Office, 2018).

The official mission statement of St. Peter’s Episcopal Church in Oxford, Mississippi, is to share the love of Christ which transforms lives. The Reverend Dr. Sarah Moses, Priest Associate at St. Peter’s Episcopal Church in Oxford and Professor of Religion at The University of Mississippi, described the mission statement of St. Peter’s based on actuality of practice “is to be a worshiping community and to offer a space for spiritual formation and worship.” Rector at St. Peter’s, The Reverend Jody Burnett described the congregation at St. Peter’s as active and engaged; many people are affiliated with the nearby University of Mississippi. “We have a historic connection to the university. Our first rector Frederick Barnard was also the Chancellor of the University. We’ve tried to maintain (that connection) through the years,” he explained. Reverend Burnett also described the members of St. Peter’s as politically “very diverse” but regarding other matters, especially on the theological spectrum, the parish tends to be more progressive. He shared that St. Peter’s is growing “like Oxford in two demographics, young families and retirees.” As far as college students and their involvement in St. Peter’s Episcopal Church, Reverend Burnett observed that college students “want to be a part of the larger life of the parish, to be around people of different ages and to just be a part of our everyday week to week rhythm. Everybody is pressed for time, but people want to be meaningfully connected and involved.”

The Reverend Dr. Moses compared churches to schools and businesses in the sense of being considered members of a civil community. She thinks the same expectations concerning recycling and energy conservation should also apply to churches in the same way they apply to other local establishments on the square. Additionally, from a religious perspective, she thinks there is justification through biblical texts and theological tradition for Christian people to practice sustainability. Reverend Burnett identified the practice of recycling in the church as “a scriptural imperative,” referencing the story of creation in Genesis as clearly defining “our God-given obligation and responsibility as stewards of creation.” He elaborated on the cause and effect relationship between the way in which inhabitants treat the earth and the earth’s capacity to respond in dramatic ways such as natural disasters and floods. Caring for the earth as stewards of creation could be considered a “double-edged responsibility” when examining how often it is those who are in most need who are most greatly affected by natural disasters. Reverend Burnett reinforced this idea of dual responsibility by stating that “we are called to care for those who are on the margins.” On Ash Wednesday, Reverend Burnett said St. Peter’s will read a Litany of Penitence which reads, “for our waste and pollution of Your Creation and our lack of concern for those who come after us, accept our repentance.”

Reverend Burnett explained that St. Peter’s recycles paper, plastic, aluminum, “and everything that we can.” There are recycling boxes around the church, and after each of the five different Sunday services, printed bulletins are collected either at the door or in the pew by the ushers at St. Peter’s. Reverend Burnett shared that the church makes a conscious effort to use renewable resources as often as possible, attempting to utilize items the members can wash and reuse. On Sunday mornings the church uses

paper cups, but Reverend Burnett proudly clarified, “not styrofoam!” He has been at St. Peter’s for two and a half years, and the church has continued to participate in recycling efforts since before his arrival. He ventured to guess if St. Peter’s were not recycling “people would be upset. This is not a place that would stand for sort of whimsical, lackadaisical approach to that sort of thing.” St. Peter’s Sexton, Calvin Harmon is responsible for taking recyclable products to the recycling center in Oxford.

St. Peter’s Episcopal Church in Oxford has mostly transitioned to online quarterly newsletters, reducing the amount of paper printed and postage required. Other church-wide announcements are sent via email. There is a group estimated to be of about 20 people who do not prefer to communicate by email, so the church prints and distributes those materials individually which is “much more manageable than sending something to 500 people every month.” Reverend Burnett admitted it does take more time, effort, and energy to be good stewards because “the best interest of the environment is not always the most convenient.” He is adamant in following scriptural direction, stating “even if what we do has no effect on long-term health of the world, it’s still...right there in the Bible. What do we stand to lose by taking better care of the earth? Do our souls somehow become in peril when we try to be better stewards of that which has been entrusted to us? No, so there’s nothing to lose, other than proving a point or winning an argument, and I don’t think that’s part of the Christian ethic either.”

While she has not attended every service, in the ten years The Reverend Dr. Moses has been at St. Peter’s, she does not recall having heard a sermon on topics concerning sustainability, concluding “in general, there is a lack of emphasis” and “an underuse of the liturgical resources” provided by the national church. Although there is

potential for implementation, to her knowledge, there is no Earth Day observance at St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Oxford. The Reverend Dr. Moses commented, "In general, what is fair to say of all mainline churches...is that there are very progressive policy statements at a national level...and things get passed, but again whether they trickle down to the local communities is not a guarantee at all." Sustainability issues were introduced at St. Peter's in the context of an adult education form largely in part "because one of our members was actually the head of the sustainability office here at Ole Miss...and now she's moved away," The Reverend Dr. Moses recalled. Attention to the topic of sustainability emerged from an individual member's interest and passion, not the clergy or formal national statements. Topics on which churches actually choose to focus are largely influenced by the individual parishioners and their participation in local churches.

Speaking from experience, The Reverend Dr. Moses expressed St. Peter's could do a better job of making recycling more convenient by providing clearly designated recycling bins. She referenced a positive model of effective recycling containers present on The University of Mississippi's campus. The containers serve as dual garbage cans and recycling receptacles, separated by three types of material: waste, paper, and plastic and aluminum.

### **Views in the Oxford Catholic Church**

The Catholic Church has been an active participant in the global conversation on environmental conservation for decades, most recently illuminated by Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical, the most significant degree a pope can issue, titled *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home* which positioned the environment as a moral and spiritual issue.



While this official document garnered much media attention, Pope Francis is not the first Catholic leader to address environmental awareness. In 1971, Blessed Pope Paul VI described the ecological concern as “the dramatic and unexpected consequence of human activity. Man is suddenly becoming aware that by an ill-considered exploitation of nature he risks destroying it and becoming in his turn the victim of this degradation.” Blessed Pope Paul VI said this social problem concerned the entire human family, and he urged Christians to “turn to these new perceptions in order to take on responsibility, together with the rest of men, for a destiny which from now on is shared by all” (Paul VI, 1971).

Saint John Paul II was increasingly more concerned with environmental issues. He continuously witnessed a great respect for nature, calling on Catholics during the World Day of Peace in 1990 “to regard the natural world as one of God’s creations worth protecting” (Stone, 2013). In his speech, Saint John Paul II cited biblical texts to better understand the relationship between human activity and all of creation; however, he clarified the sense of a suffering earth is not exclusive to the Catholic Christian faith, “shared by those who do not profess our faith in God...the increasing devastation of the world of nature is apparent to all” (Paul II, 1990). Elaborating on the extent of the consequences of harmful behavior, “The destruction of the human environment is extremely serious, not only because God has entrusted the world to us men and women, but because human life is itself a gift” (Francis, 2015).

Pope Benedict XVI is widely considered the first “green pope” perhaps in regard to his efforts to make the Vatican carbon-neutral, acquire a hybrid popemobile, and the installation of solar panels on a Vatican hall (Stone, 2013). During the 2010 World Day of Peace, Pope Benedict XVI, proclaimed, “If we want justice and peace, we must protect

the habitat that sustains us.” (Benedict XVI, 2010). Not long after, according to an article in National Geographic, “the influential Pontifical Academy of Sciences, a scientific arm of the Vatican, released a report on climate change recommending that world leaders cut carbon dioxide emissions, reduce existing pollution, and prepare for the inevitable impacts of a changing climate” (Stone, 2013). “The misuse of creation begins when we no longer recognize any higher instance than ourselves, when we see nothing else but ourselves” (Benedict XVI, 2008). His time in the papacy is remembered “not in how many solar panels he installed at the Vatican or how many gallons of gasoline he saved with the popemobile, but regarded in “how he harnessed the influence of his global church to act on the sort of change he advocated toward environmental sustainability and conservation” (Stone, 2013).

Pope Francis began his 2015 encyclical by acknowledging the work of previous popes and recognizing the unity between many religions under the common concern for the same issue. “These statements of the Popes echo the reflections of numerous scientists, philosophers, theologians and civic groups, all of which have enriched the Church’s thinking on these questions. Outside the Catholic Church, other Churches and Christian communities – and other religions as well – have expressed deep concern and offered valuable reflections on issues which all of us find disturbing” (Francis, 2015). Pope Francis’s appeal presented the urgent need to seek sustainable solutions, asserting “humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home.” He expressed the necessity of continuing inclusive conversations, because although “the worldwide ecological movement has made considerable progress in the establishment of numerous organizations committed to raising awareness...regrettably, many efforts to

seek concrete solutions to the environmental crisis have proved ineffective” due to powerful opposition and a general lack of interest. The encyclical is separated into six sections. Each chapter addresses a different aspect of the intersection of faith and environmentalism from explaining what is happening to our common home, the gospel of creation, human roots of the ecological crisis, integral ecology, ecological education and spirituality, to lines of approach and action. In summarization, Pope Francis declared, “Climate change is a global problem with grave implications. It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day. A great cultural, spiritual, and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal” (Francis, 2015).

The Yale Program on Climate Change Communications reported in 2015, following Pope Francis’s visit to the United States, the frequency of discussions regarding climate change in Catholic communities increased. The pope has also contributed to an increase in positive climate opinions among Americans and American Catholics. “17 percent of Americans and 35 percent of Catholics say his position on global warming influenced their own views of the issue” (Maibach et al. 2015). This study also revealed that “25 percent of respondents think that the pope’s statements concerning the environment will inspire them to take environmentally-friendly actions, like conserving water and recycling” (Moore, 2015).

Father Joe Tonos, priest at Saint John the Evangelist Catholic Church in Oxford, Mississippi, thinks of environmental sustainability in terms of the resurrection. Father Joe explained some of the varying speculations of what life after death can mean for different Christian churches. A multitude of ideas range from imagining heaven as a utopian

environment like “the Make-A-Wish foundation, where it’s possible to meet all these celebrities, play checkers with Einstein, and meet all the people you’ve always had questions for” to thinking of resurrection in terms of new life “like the spring comes after the winter or living on in spirit if you’ve done good things.” However, Father Joe does not subscribe to either realm of thinking; his belief in the resurrection is, quite simply, “We will rise from the dead. We will rise again and live forever. Where are we rising from? The earth. The way we treat this planet now is the planet we’ll come back to.”

Father Joe explained, “When Jesus returned from the dead, he walked the beach and ate with his disciples, and gave us a real clear indication that it has something to do with rising from this earth, not being zapped up into heaven.” One thought for some Christians who push environmental issues aside in terms of importance is identifying harmful actions to the environment such as pollution as having no lasting effect after “going to heaven,” thinking of the afterlife as a new and separate physical place. Some people have the mentality, “why worry about the environment when Jesus Christ came to save us?” Father Joe clarified, “That’s not a Catholic perspective.” However, the resurrection is one of the greatest arguments of Christianity today, according to Father Joe, “what is the resurrection, and is it true?” Even some Catholics will define resurrection as a metaphor, a myth, or describe it as a beautiful way of talking about renewal, “but that kind of gives them the license to treat anything with abandon or recklessness.” Some people will insist to be more worried about heaven than they are worried about the planet, but Father Joe thinks “that’s not really what Christ wants of us...If we don’t believe in the resurrection, we believe in nothing.”

Father Joe then posed questions from God, “What did you do to my world I gave you? Why did you treat it with such disgust and recklessness?” When Christians neglect to care for the environment in even the simplest tasks such as picking up trash that one did not litter, Father Joe says that is the same mentality as neglecting to care for a person who is homeless or thirsty or in prison, “I think the planet’s the same difference.”

In an effort to become more conservative with resources, Saint John the Evangelist Catholic Church has combined their bulletins to incorporate the song sheets used during Sunday morning services. About 500 are printed each week and then recycled. Father Joe says the parish recycles paper and plastic, and they have participated in the Oxford curbside recycling program for almost a decade, “as long as they’ve offered it, we’ve been doing it.” Father Joe was quick to point out that recycling is perceived as a “feel good thing.” In comparison to the environment as a whole, the act of recycling is “just a drop in the bucket.” An overall sense of stewardship is the main approach at Saint John the Evangelist. Father Joe says the parish and the office make a collective effort to conserve energy, explaining that parishioners “can go in (to the sanctuary) and pray and we’ve got enough sunlight streaming through” so leaving lights on all day is unnecessary. The staff at Saint John the Evangelist Catholic Church is environmentally conscious and cost conscious of running the heat and air at acceptable temperatures throughout the seasons of the year.

Although the practice of recycling is at times considered miniscule in the efforts to address worldwide environmental concerns, Father Joe references one’s sphere of influence, and the ability to impact behavior of surrounding people through an individual’s actions. Father Joe claims, “Stewardship of our planet and stewardship of the

environment is fundamental because it's tied into the resurrection. I've never died before so I can't tell you how this is going to be, but if I don't go to hell, which you know could happen, I'm pretty sure that I'm going to see you in the resurrection, but I'm not going to see Einstein because I never knew Einstein. When Jesus came back he didn't go sit and talk to Carl Sagan...it was like there's Peter and James. He came back to his primitive time frame among the people he loved. This planet, Oxford, Mississippi, might be my heaven, I don't know, but I think I ought to treat it that way."

Three major themes emerged from the six interviews conducted at four local churches in Oxford, Mississippi. All church leaders interviewed expressed some level of awareness in participation and support of the practice of recycling within the context of the church. However, the motivations for implementing sustainable practices differ according to each denomination.

Reverend Ann Kelly at First Presbyterian Church referenced the creation story and Adam being made partners with God as the church inheriting responsibility to care for creation. Father Joe at Saint John the Evangelist Catholic Church thinks of sustainability in terms of the resurrection, stating, "The way we treat this planet now is the planet we'll come back to, and stewardship of the environment is fundamental because it is tied into the resurrection." Reverend Rester at Oxford-University United Methodist Church thinks motivation for implementing sustainable practices comes from a love of creation and love of God as Creator which translates into a desire to care for the earth. Reverend McAlilly at Oxford-University United Methodist Church frames topics of environmental sustainability in light of theological teachings, context of biblical

references, and in terms of a discipleship commitment. While all leaders expressed the importance of caring for creation, their reasoning differed slightly.

The third recurring theme gathered from the interviews is local churches can be a leader of social change in the community to the extent that an individual's actions positively influence or inspire another person. Both Father Joe at Saint John the Evangelist Catholic Church and Reverend Burnett at Saint Peter's Episcopal Church referenced a person's sphere of influence or realm of influence and the transformational potential that can take place. Reverend Sarah Moses at Saint Peter's Episcopal Church also touched on the impact of an individual by sharing how one particular member of Saint Peter's largely implemented and led a recycling initiative within the parish. Reverend Moses expressed the difference in church wide motivation and participation after the member left the parish.

## **CHAPTER IV: CONGREGATIONAL VIEWS OF SUSTAINABILITY**

To better understand the Oxford community's perceptions and expectations regarding the church's participation in sustainable practices like recycling, a survey was distributed to members of the four local churches interviewed. The fifteen-question survey was sent to approximately 2,100 members and participants of groups involved with the four local churches interviewed in Oxford, Mississippi, yielding a response rate of 10.5%. Questions aimed to gather the Oxford community's thoughts, opinions, attitudes, and beliefs surrounding the topic of environmental sustainability and the intersection of these beliefs with the Christian churches in the area. Multiple choice questions asked for specifics like which church respondents attend most frequently, the importance of religion in their life, and how often participants recycle at home. Multiple choice questions also helped to determine the level of familiarity respondents have with their community's recycling program and then measured how familiar they are with their church's recycling program. A question in matrix form appeared near the end of the survey, asking respondents to select the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with following statements.

The target was to receive 200 survey responses. Distribution began by sending the survey link in an email to the church leaders following the interviews conducted with First Presbyterian Church, Oxford-University United Methodist Church, Saint Peter's Episcopal Church, and Saint John the Evangelist Church. Some churches chose to publish



the link to the survey on their church's website. Some included the link in an email to their members. In the event that the survey did not receive expected participation from certain churches or age ranges, the survey was distributed to local college student organizations such as the Ole Miss Wesley Foundation, Catholic Campus Ministry at Ole Miss, and UKirk Ministries of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

Saint Peter's Episcopal Church reported 750 members on their email list. Oxford-University United Methodist Church included the survey link in an email to 550 members of the church and a separate email to 51 members of the OU college group. Saint John the Evangelist Catholic Church has 482 parishioners subscribed to their emails, and an email was sent to 216 members of the Catholic Campus Ministry. 61% of the 216 read the email, and there were 44 clicks on the survey link attached. UKirk Ministries distributed the survey link in a group message to 49 of its organization members.

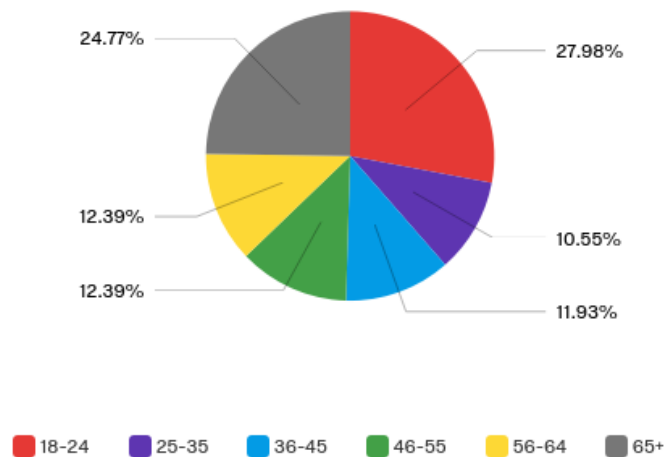
### **Survey Results**

Of the total 235 recorded responses, 224 respondents chose to consent and begin the study. Out of 235 surveys started, 221 surveys were completed for a completion rate of 94%. One hundred and seventeen respondents attend Saint John the Evangelist Catholic Church. Fifty respondents attend Oxford-University United Methodist Church. Thirty-five respondents attend Saint Peter's Episcopal Church. Three respondents attend First Presbyterian Church. Four respondents chose to write in "UKirk" under the Other option. UKirk ministries is a student organization division of First Presbyterian Church in Oxford, Mississippi, and for the purposes of this study these four responses will be

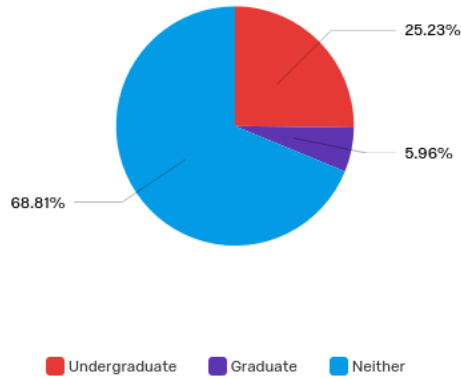
considered in the same category as those who chose First Presbyterian Church as the church they regularly attend making the combined total seven responses.

One respondent wrote, “Underground Church.” One wrote, “I am a member of St. Peter’s Episcopal Church but am not able to attend regularly.” One wrote, “We travel often so we attend many different churches but belong to a parish in Florida.” Six respondents do not attend church regularly. The remaining three respondents did not continue the survey after the first question asking for consent to participate in the study.

Participants were asked to select their age range. The two categories of 18-24 and 65 or older make up over half of the survey respondents. Since Oxford is a college town, the survey aimed to explore the possible difference in opinion from college students and residents of the community. Question four asked respondents if they are currently a student in undergraduate, graduate, or not in college. Almost 70% of respondents are neither an undergraduate nor a graduate student. One fourth of respondents are currently undergraduate students.

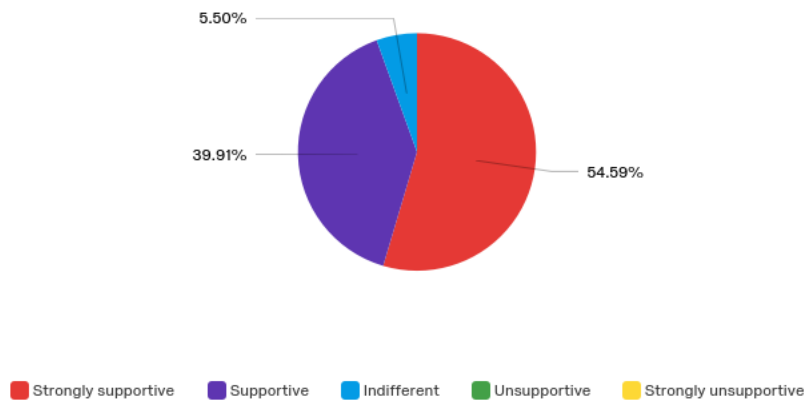


(Figure 10: Percentage of Age Groups Q2)



(Figure 11: Percentage of College Students Q4)

Question five asked participants about their attitudes on environmentally sustainable efforts, specifically recycling. Out of five options, ranging from “Strongly Supportive” to “Strongly Unsupportive,” not one participant chose “Unsupportive” or “Strongly Unsupportive.” 119 respondents chose “Strongly Supportive,” 87 respondents chose “Supportive,” and only 12 respondents, or about five percent of the total, are “Indifferent” toward environmentally sustainable efforts. These results not only reveal that an overwhelming majority of parishioners hold an opinion of environmental sustainability, but also that all respondents who answered other than “indifferent” are supportive of environmentally sustainable efforts.



(Figure 12: Attitudes on Recycling Q5)

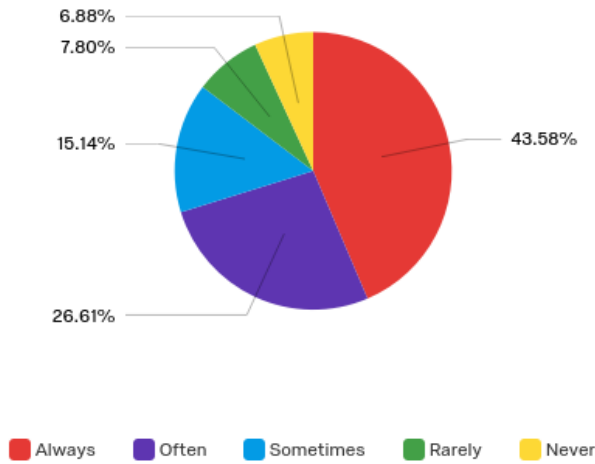
Table 1 represents attitudes toward environmental sustainability efforts cross referenced according to age. Typically, recycling and other issues concerning the environment are thought to be topics exclusive to younger parishioners or college students. However, survey results indicated a strongly supportive attitude among all age groups surveyed. Age of participants was not a major factor in influencing respondents' attitudes towards recycling.

		What is your attitude toward environmentally sustainable efforts, specifically recycling?					Total
		Strongly supportive	Supportive	Indifferent	Unsupportive	Strongly unsupportive	
Which best describes you?	18-24	26 42.62%	29 47.54%	6 9.84%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	61 100.00%
	25-35	11 47.83%	11 47.83%	1 4.35%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	23 100.00%
	36-45	14 53.85%	10 38.46%	2 7.69%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	26 100.00%
	46-55	17 62.96%	10 37.04%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	27 100.00%
	56-64	16 59.26%	9 33.33%	2 7.41%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	27 100.00%
	65+	35 64.81%	18 33.33%	1 1.85%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	54 100.00%
	Total	119 54.59%	87 39.91%	12 5.50%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	218 100.00%
Are you currently a college student or graduate student?	Undergraduate	23 41.82%	26 47.27%	6 10.91%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	55 100.00%
	Graduate	5 38.46%	6 46.15%	2 15.38%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	13 100.00%
	Neither	91 60.67%	55 36.67%	4 2.67%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	150 100.00%
	Total	119 54.59%	87 39.91%	12 5.50%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	218 100.00%

(Table 1: Cross Reference of Q2, Q4 and Q5)

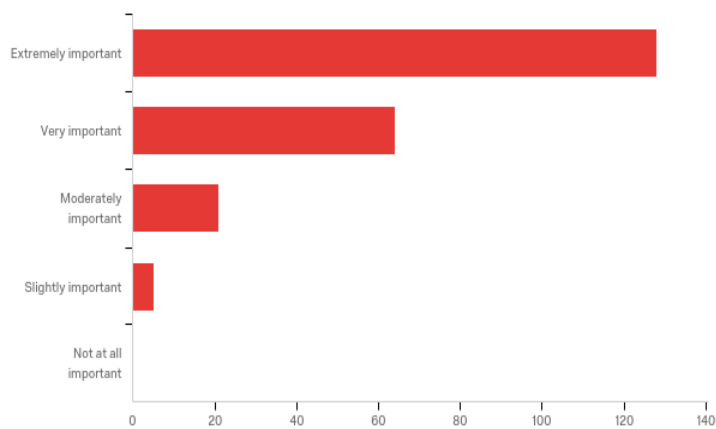
When respondents were asked if they recycled at home, the dominant response was “Always” with 95 responses. Over 70 percent of respondents reported they always or often recycle at home. Only 15 percent of respondents rarely or never recycle at home. This is consistent with the previous findings, indicating strong support of

environmentally sustainable practices is largely reflected in practice like participation in recycling at home.



(Figure 13: How often do you recycle at home? Q6)

Question seven asked respondents, “How important is religion in your life?” Out of 218 responses, 128 identified religion as being extremely important, 64 answered very important, 21 said religion was moderately important, and for 5 participants, religion is slightly important in their life. Although “Not at all important” was an answer choice, no respondents chose this option.



(Figure 14: How important is religion in your life? Q7)

Question ten asked participants to report what they do with paper products received while at church. Answer choices included leave in pew or building, take home, throw away, recycle at home, or recycle at church, with the option to select more than one answer choice. Three hundred and eighteen total selections were made. Eighty-seven respondents reported they recycle paper products from church at home while 83 respondents choose to leave paper products in the pew or church building. There were 63 selections to “take home” paper products and 37 selections to “throw away.” Forty-seven participants reported they recycle paper products at church. Only one participant responded “Other” writing in, “We don’t have any at our church.”

1	Leave in pew or in building	26.10%	83
2	Take home	19.81%	63
3	Throw away	11.64%	37
4	Recycle at home	27.36%	87
5	Recycle at church	14.78%	47
6	Other:	0.31%	1
			318

*(Figure 15: What do you do with paper products after church? Q10)*

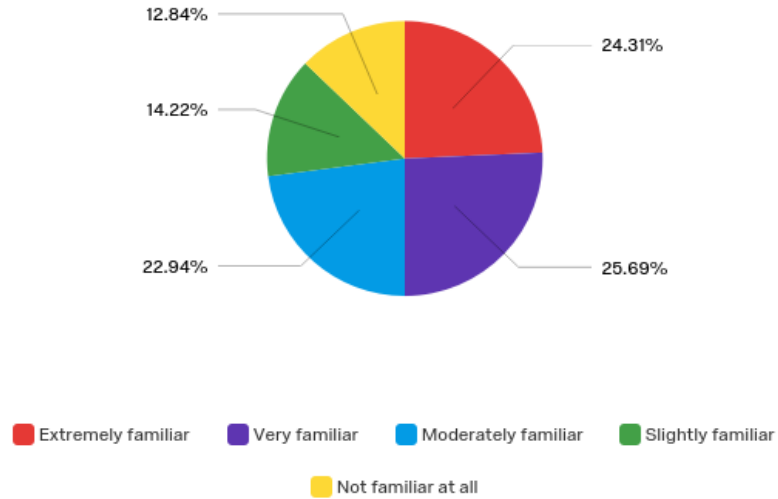
The less familiar a member is with their church’s recycling program, the less likely they are to recycle at church. Referencing question ten, 47 respondents reported they recycled paper products at church; however, when asked how familiar participants are with their church’s current recycling program, 16 of those 47 are slightly familiar, and 7 are not familiar at all. Similarly, of those 83 participants who leave paper products in the pew or building, 51 are not familiar with their church’s recycling program, and 8

answered the church did not have a recycling program. This table highlights the relationship between how familiar participants are with their church’s recycling program and how they are most likely to dispose of paper products after church events. Almost half of the survey respondents are not familiar with their church’s recycling program, and they are the ones who are less likely to recycle.

		How familiar are you with your church's current recycling program?						Total
		Extremely familiar	Very familiar	Moderately familiar	Slightly familiar	Not familiar at all	We don't have one	
What do you do with the paper products (bulletins, cups, song sheets, etc.) you receive from church events?	Leave in pew or in building	2 2.41%	4 4.82%	6 7.23%	12 14.46%	51 61.45%	8 9.64%	83 100.00%
	Take home	3 4.76%	4 6.35%	11 17.46%	11 17.46%	28 44.44%	6 9.52%	63 100.00%
	Throw away	1 2.70%	1 2.70%	4 10.81%	5 13.51%	21 56.76%	5 13.51%	37 100.00%
	Recycle at home	4 4.60%	9 10.34%	20 22.99%	16 18.39%	35 40.23%	3 3.45%	87 100.00%
	Recycle at church	7 14.89%	10 21.28%	7 14.89%	16 34.04%	7 14.89%	0 0.00%	47 100.00%
	Other:	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	1 100.00%	1 100.00%
	Total	10 4.61%	20 9.22%	33 15.21%	38 17.51%	106 48.85%	10 4.61%	217 100.00%

(Table 2: Cross Reference Table of Q10 and Q12)

Question eleven was intended to determine the level of which respondents are familiar with their community’s recycling program. The results were fairly evenly spread across in terms of familiarity. About 72% of participants expressed some distinguishable level of familiarity with the community’s recycling program. 31 participants reported being slightly familiar, and 28 participants are not familiar at all with their community’s recycling program.



(Figure 16: Familiarity of Community’s Recycling Program Q11)

For comparison, question twelve intended to measure how familiar participants are with their church’s recycling program, assuming there is one in place. Almost half of the participants (48.62%) are not familiar at all with their church’s recycling program. Participants who indicated as attending Saint Peter’s Episcopal Church are divided among all varying levels of familiarity with the number of responses increasing as the level of familiarity decreases. Of those 35 participants who attend Saint Peter’s, four are extremely familiar, six are very familiar, seven are moderately familiar, eight are slightly familiar, and ten respondents are not at all familiar with Saint Peter’s recycling program. At Oxford-University United Methodist Church, 28% of survey participants are extremely or very familiar with Oxford-University's recycling program, 24% are moderately familiar, and 28% are slightly familiar. 18% (9) of the total participants who indicated as attending Oxford-University United Methodist Church are not familiar at all with the church’s recycling program, and one respondent answered the last multiple choice answer, “We don’t have one.”



68% of Saint John the Evangelist Catholic Church respondents are not familiar at all with the church’s recycling program, and 6.8% or 8 respondents answered, “We don’t have one.” Fourteen respondents, or about 12% of Saint John the Evangelist responses are slightly familiar, 12 respondents (10%) are moderately familiar, and 11 respondents (about 9%) are very familiar with their church’s recycling program. Three respondents from Saint John the Evangelist are extremely familiar with the recycling program at their church. The next survey question asked participants if they would use recycling facilities, if available in their church. Over three-fourths of the survey’s respondents said yes, they would use recycling facilities if available at church. Only 5 out of the total 218 responses answered “no.” Thirty-six participants answered, “maybe,” and 11 participants said they would “sometimes” use recycling facilities at church.

#	AWA.FIELD	First Presbyterian Church	Oxford-University United Methodist Church	St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church	St. Peter's Episcopal Church	Other (please write in):	I do not attend church regularly.	SIMPLETABLEWIDGET.TOTAL
1	Extremely familiar	0.00% 0	30.00% 3	10.00% 1	40.00% 4	20.00% 2	0.00% 0	10
2	Very familiar	0.00% 0	55.00% 11	10.00% 2	30.00% 6	5.00% 1	0.00% 0	20
3	Moderately familiar	2.94% 1	35.29% 12	35.29% 12	20.59% 7	5.88% 2	0.00% 0	34
4	Slightly familiar	0.00% 0	36.84% 14	36.84% 14	21.05% 8	0.00% 0	5.26% 2	38
5	Not familiar at all	1.89% 2	8.49% 9	75.47% 80	9.43% 10	0.94% 1	3.77% 4	106
6	We don't have one	0.00% 0	10.00% 1	80.00% 8	0.00% 0	10.00% 1	0.00% 0	10

(Table 3: Familiarity of Church’s Recycling Program Q12)

Question fourteen was displayed in a matrix format to gather opinions on certain statements. After reading each statement, participants selected to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the statement. Participants generally agreed with most statements. 73% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement, “Communities should provide recycling services to residents.” 35.48% of respondents strongly agreed with the

statement, “Churches should provide recycling services to its congregation.” 49.54% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement, “Congregations should participate in sustainable efforts, such as recycling.” 45.83% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement, “Churches should be leaders of social change in the community.” 40.55% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement, “It is the church’s responsibility to care for creation and protect the environment.” 39.45% of respondents agreed with the statement, “It is the church’s responsibility to participate in environmentally sustainable practices, like recycling.”

#	Field	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
1	Communities should provide recycling services to residents.	73.39% 160	20.18% 44	4.59% 10	1.83% 4	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	218
2	Churches should provide recycling services to its congregation.	35.48% 77	29.49% 64	12.90% 28	16.59% 36	1.38% 3	3.69% 8	0.46% 1	217
3	Congregations should participate in sustainable efforts, such as recycling.	49.54% 108	32.11% 70	8.72% 19	8.26% 18	0.46% 1	0.92% 2	0.00% 0	218
4	Churches should be leaders of social change in the community.	45.83% 99	32.41% 70	8.80% 19	8.80% 19	0.46% 1	2.78% 6	0.93% 2	216
5	It is the church's responsibility to care for creation and protect the environment.	40.55% 88	29.49% 64	13.82% 30	9.68% 21	2.30% 5	2.76% 6	1.38% 3	217
6	It is the church's responsibility to participate in environmentally sustainable practices, like recycling.	35.78% 78	39.45% 86	11.93% 26	8.26% 18	0.92% 2	1.83% 4	1.83% 4	218

(Table 4: Matrix Responses Q14)

The last question in the survey invited participants to share any additional thoughts about churches and their congregations’ responsibility to participate in environmentally sustainable practices, like recycling. Forty-nine respondents chose to leave additional comments before completing the survey. Commentary ranged from positive to negative, offering suggestions or giving support of the project as a whole, “This issue isn’t talked about enough. I’m so glad to see research going into this.” and

“Thank you for doing this important research!” At least two respondents shared that they had not considered the topic before in the context of the church to care for creation. Some positive comments addressed the Christian community as a whole and its need to “participate actively in beneficial civil actions.” One respondent described recycling as “a moral responsibility. We owe it to future generations to make an earnest effort.” Others offered support for the practice of recycling, but clarified, “I don’t feel the church has the responsibility to demand its members adhere. I do think the church should make such a service available where practical and possible.”

One participant identified the church as “a strong influencer (especially in the South)” and commented on its ability to facilitate recycling efforts. Another respondent identified as belonging to UKirk, a Presbyterian-sponsored organization, expressed their appreciation “for our leader who has come to me to discuss our sustainability practices as a group, as well as her own. I hope that we can be an example to other groups on how to care for our communities and the relative ease with which simple decisions can be made to change habits.”

Several dissenting opinions are held on the topic of addressing sustainability in the religious environment, thoughtfully explained in the comments. Some participants voiced the need for a clear separation of what constitutes as a church issue, “Churches are primarily for spiritual matters, and political and social issues, for the most part...unless they directly involve established church teaching, are ordinarily better left to political and other social entities.” Several participants also articulated the distinction of responsibility, “Recycling is to be encouraged as a way to help take care of our part of God’s creation. It is not possible nor should we try to force anyone. The church’s main mission is to share

the Gospel of Jesus. The Lord has to highlight to each person that he or she is able to Glorify God by doing what we can individually to ‘tend the Garden.’” Similarly, another explained, “While I think it is good for communities to recycle, I don’t believe that the onus should be on churches to create this change. I believe churches form the moral backbone of a good social fabric...I think the onus should be on private individuals to organize and create these recycling services. If churches would like to participate by allowing recycling bins to be placed on their properties, that would be wonderful, but \*it should not be the responsibility of churches\* to ensure these services are provided.” One respondent voiced their opinion of how recycling, while good, “supports a broader, anti-Christian trend. By engaging in social change and environmentalism we are supporting the very individuals and organizations that want to destroy The Church.”

Participants also chose to express concerns about the practice of recycling in general and what happens to the items that are recycled. One respondent provided a link to a news article offering that while “effective environmental programs are important, too often, the effort is wasted.” Another respondent cited the problematic issue as having “three causes: idiots who can't separate non-recyclables from recyclables, municipalities who can't afford to keep the various recycling streams separate and clean and the lack of a market for recycled products. A much bigger focus needs to be put on reducing our consumption.” This particular respondent voiced their frustration with the non-use of coffee mugs and liturgy books which have been substituted for printed booklets and disposable cups. While admitting these products are easier to use, the respondent acknowledged these practices “increase our environmental footprint. I'm not sure what the correct thing to do about this is.” Participants also expressed their disappointments in

cooperation when attempting to start recycling and expressed their desires to see their “church switch from styrofoam take-out boxes and cups to paper products.”

One argued recycling “should be encouraged as a natural extension of respecting life, but it isn’t as important as advocating for an end to legalized abortion or capital punishment, either.” A complete list of participant responses is included in Appendix C.

Qualtrics was the survey software used to conduct the survey. Cross tabs and filters were applied to the responses to better understand and analyze the results. Three major trends were revealed through survey results. There was a strong supportive attitude toward environmentally sustainability among all age groups surveyed. Participants are unfamiliar with their church’s recycling program but express interest in using recycling facilities if provided. Paper products taken home from church are most likely recycled.

Participants are largely unfamiliar with their church’s recycling programs despite the existence of such programs described by clergy and leaders through individual interviews in the local churches. Saint Peter’s Episcopal Church and Oxford-University United Methodist Church participants expressed some level of familiarity from extremely familiar to very familiar. Alternatively, for Saint John the Evangelist Catholic Church, about 68% of participants answered they were “not familiar at all” with the church’s current recycling program. However, about 71% of Saint John the Evangelist participants said they would use recycling facilities if available. 80% of Oxford-University United Methodist Church respondents and 85.7% of Saint Peter’s Episcopal Church respondents would use recycling facilities if available. Moreover, over three-fourths of the total number of respondents answered “yes” when asked if they would use recycling facilities

if available at their church. This trend illustrates participants' desire to implement recycling programs.

		How familiar are you with your church's current recycling program?						Would you use recycling facilities if they were available at your church?					
		Extremely familiar	Very familiar	Moderately familiar	Slightly familiar	Not familiar at all	We don't have one	Total	Yes	No	Maybe	Sometimes	Total
Which church do you attend regularly?	First Presbyterian Church	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	1 33.33%	0 0.00%	2 66.67%	0 0.00%	3 100.00%	3 100.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	3 100.00%
	Oxford-University United Methodist Church	3 6.00%	11 22.00%	12 24.00%	14 28.00%	9 18.00%	1 2.00%	50 100.00%	40 80.00%	1 2.00%	9 18.00%	0 0.00%	50 100.00%
	St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church	1 0.85%	2 1.71%	12 10.26%	14 11.97%	80 68.38%	8 6.84%	117 100.00%	83 70.94%	3 2.56%	22 18.80%	9 7.69%	117 100.00%
	St. Peter's Episcopal Church	4 11.43%	6 17.14%	7 20.00%	8 22.86%	10 28.57%	0 0.00%	35 100.00%	30 85.71%	1 2.86%	4 11.43%	0 0.00%	35 100.00%
	Other (please write in):	2 28.57%	1 14.29%	2 28.57%	0 0.00%	1 14.29%	1 14.29%	7 100.00%	6 85.71%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	1 14.29%	7 100.00%
	I do not attend church regularly.	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	2 33.33%	4 66.67%	0 0.00%	6 100.00%	4 66.67%	0 0.00%	1 16.67%	1 16.67%	6 100.00%
Total		10 4.59%	20 9.17%	34 15.60%	38 17.43%	106 48.62%	10 4.59%	218 100.00%	166 76.15%	5 2.29%	36 16.51%	11 5.05%	218 100.00%

(Table 5: Cross Reference Table of Q8 and Q12 + Q13)

Of the 63 participants who take home paper products, 19 always recycle, 17 recycle often, 12 recycle sometimes, 7 rarely recycle, and 8 never recycle at home. Of the 87 participants who reported recycling paper products from church at home, 62 always recycle, 23 recycle often, and 2 recycle sometimes. This concludes there is a very high likelihood that the paper products taken home are also being recycled.

		Do you recycle at home?					Total
		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	
What do you do with the paper products (bulletins, cups, song sheets, etc.) you receive from church...	Leave in pew or in building	28 33.73%	28 33.73%	13 15.66%	6 7.23%	8 9.64%	83 100.00%
	Take home	19 30.16%	17 26.98%	12 19.05%	7 11.11%	8 12.70%	63 100.00%
	Throw away	8 21.62%	11 29.73%	7 18.92%	5 13.51%	6 16.22%	37 100.00%
	Recycle at home	62 71.26%	23 26.44%	2 2.30%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	87 100.00%
	Recycle at church	23 48.94%	13 27.66%	8 17.02%	3 6.38%	0 0.00%	47 100.00%
	Other:	1 100.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	1 100.00%
Total		95 43.78%	57 26.27%	33 15.21%	17 7.83%	15 6.91%	217 100.00%

(Table 6: Cross Reference Table of Q6 and Q10)

## **CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION**

### **Key Findings**

Survey trends and interview themes translated to six key findings in the research. Primarily, there is a gap between what is expected in terms of service by congregations and what is actually delivered by church leaders. Based on survey responses, 76% of participants would use recycling facilities if available at their church, and only 2% answered “no.” When asked what is done with paper products received from church, 42% of the responses were attributed to recycling at home or recycling at church. 14.78% of survey participants report recycling paper products at church. Survey results also indicated most members are not familiar with their respective church’s recycling program even though church leader interviews described forms of recycling practice already in place. This lack of effective communication between church leaders and members has potential to lead to a customer experience gap. When members’ expectations of service in terms of recycling are not met by their churches, satisfaction and loyalty is negatively affected. This gap results in dissonance.

Secondly, broad, doctrinal statements are not effective in incentivizing change for local churches. Instructional statements may exist at the institutional denomination level, but they do not necessarily translate to whether local churches are aware of certain statements and are actually incorporating those statements into daily practice. The United Methodist Church is guided by the Social Principles in the Book of Discipline. The

Catholic Church heeds encyclicals and teachings from the leader of the worldwide faith, the Pope. The Episcopal Church abides by adopted Marks of Mission as part of the Anglican Community. Yet there is no established structure for enforcement of these guiding declarations across denominations.

Rather, churches become involved in adopting practices and implementing change on the local level through individuals who care enough to initiate and follow through with certain programs or ideas. Whether it be pastors inspired by a class in seminary, a member who also heads the department of sustainability office on a nearby college campus, an observant employee in the office, or a conscientious volunteer in the church's kitchen, substantial change in communities is invoked by individuals belonging to local churches. As one survey respondent commented, the "level of church participation is dependent on desires of congregation." And yet another expressed, "the leadership of the church is only as good as the individual pastors and bishops.

The fourth key finding is that the intersection of environmental sustainability and religion is not an issue of indifference. Several strong opinions are held surrounding either area, religion or the environment. Consequently, when the two are considered together, several profound thoughts emerged. Almost 50 survey participants chose to leave additional thoughts, and some comments were extremely passionate. One participant described taking care of the environment as "one of the church's major crusades. The church's involvement with unsustainable resources is shameful." Another offered, "There is massive potential for the church to become a leader in environmental justice." Positive comments included references to the Creation story in Genesis, the Pope's remarks regarding global warming, and an overall sentiment of obligation to



respect creation. One respondent described sustainability, while not the church's mission, as being "compatible and consistent with the church mission." Some negative comments defined environmentalism as supporting a broader, anti-Christian trend, and engagement in sustainable practices such as recycling supports organizations who want to destroy The Church. There were overall positive remarks toward recycling practices, negative attitudes toward the topic in general, and some responses offered suggestions on how to better address and implement sustainable practices beyond just recycling. Many participants expressed a desire to see greater effort put into recycling.

The fifth key finding is to examine how the clergy's attitude influences the delivery and reception of messages by the congregation. Passionate, not passive, clergy members are vital to the success or failure of a possible campaign to increase the practice of environmental sustainability within local churches. In order to make meaningful connections with the members of the church, leaders must present messages in a way that resonates with the audience. Parishioners will be most receptive to information that is consistent with their faith-based values and beliefs. When addressing an issue such as environmental sustainability, it is more advantageous to frame it in terms of faith, rather than in terms of political affiliation or social responsibility.

Lastly, as self-proclaimed stewards of creation and evident leaders in society, local churches and their individual members hold a unique position in their ability to positively influence behavior. Moreover, survey results indicated members of local churches would utilize recycling facilities if provided. The potential for addressing issues of sustainability in the local church is great. To begin, the creation of a campaign should be grounded in church teaching, not in terms of the political or environmentalism sphere.

Messages will resonate if they are closely aligned with the belief systems of churches, and the practice of environmental stewardship will be better received by members when connected to the church. To implement an effective recycling program, each local church needs to designate a project coordinator or leader within the congregation. This individual would spearhead the effort and remain committed to ensuring the program's continuation within their local church.

The trends derived from survey results and themes emerged from leadership interviews conclude churches have a responsibility to promote environmental conservation and implement sustainability practices like recycling.

### **Limitations**

In future research, stronger efforts to encourage participation from other denominations (including non-denominational) of the Christian faith would result in a more diverse sample size of churches in the local community. Involvement from differing practices would ultimately be more representative and inclusive of all members of the Christian faith community.

For further research, the research conductor recommends adding a question to the survey asking participants for their individual motivations behind choosing to participate in environmentally sustainable practices such as recycling. The question could be formatted in multiple choice, check all that apply, or possibly an open-ended response.

Some survey participants expressed confusion on the wording of one statement in the matrix on Question 15. The statement, "Churches should provide recycling services to its congregation" might have been better worded as, "Churches should participate in

sustainable efforts in the community like recycling.” There was a misunderstanding of the word “services” to imply churches should substitute the work of community recycling programs by starting their own program. The intention of the particular statement in Question 15 was to gauge opinions of churches participating in existing community programs by providing recycling bins or receptacles to its members.

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## **APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT SCRIPT**

Hello, (NAME),

I am Katie Campbell, a senior at the University of Mississippi, majoring in Integrated Marketing Communications. I am conducting research for my thesis as part of the requirement for graduating from the Honors College at Ole Miss. My research is addressing the question:

Do churches have a social responsibility to promote environmental conservation and implement sustainability practices such as recycling?

I would like to interview you, (PASTOR) of (CHURCH), to learn about your church as an organization's views and your personal thoughts on this topic.

If you are interested in participating, please email me at [krcampb2@go.olemiss.edu](mailto:krcampb2@go.olemiss.edu) so we can schedule a time to interview. I anticipate the interview time to last 30-45 minutes.

I am looking forward to speaking with you!

Sincerely,

Katie Campbell  
903-472-2279

### **Sample/Suggestion of what to include in Bulletin/Newsletter:**

University of Mississippi senior Katie Campbell is conducting research for her Honors Thesis which explores individual's religious habits and how they relate to sustainable issues such as recycling. She has asked that as a member of this church, you take three minutes of your time to express your thoughts and opinions in this short online survey. Thank you for your help!

## APPENDIX B: TRANSCRIBED INTERVIEWS

**REVEREND ANN KELLY  
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
DECEMBER 4, 2018**

**What is the primary mission of your church?**

I would say it's discipleship and service. I mean I think what we focus on most is discipleship but service is a big component of both discipleship and teaching discipleship because you learn about it as you go out and serve. I think it's both of those. When the senior pastor who just departed in August, when he first came here they worked on the whole discipleship piece and then getting involved in the community and then they were going to work on the evangelism piece, and what they discovered was that because they had worked on the other two pieces, the evangelism sort of took care of itself and they didn't have to go out and seek new members. Now that's not to say that we've picked up a lot of people who are currently...we have gotten people to the church because of discipleship and service.

**Can you describe your congregation?**

Presbyterian by nature is generally made up of professionals and people who tend to value education and therefore they are highly educated therefore they also tend to be affluent because you know they're highly educated and they've gone and got Masters degrees so they have jobs where they make a little more money than your average person. At the same time, they're very generous congregation. Last year, we have our Christmas tree lot where we sell trees...

**I love that.**

...and it's a fundraiser for youth, and we got down to like 15 trees last year and we posted on Facebook that "we're down to 15 trees y'all help us sell these trees" and a church member made a donation to the youth for the cost of the 15...I mean we had slashed prices down so I mean they weren't \$100 trees at that point, but they made a contribution to the youth that covered all the trees, and then another church member who works at NMRC came and got the trees and took them out to NMRC so that the people in the little cottages could have trees. So you know they come through with things like that. You know, they weren't just helping the youth, but they were helping someone else to have a tree. But they do that with the pantry, it's a church that helps start...The Christmas store that the rotary club does began here. ICM for a while was housed here. That's Interfaith Compassion Ministries, and they do things that help with utility bills and rent and things. And then the food pantry. This church was influential in the beginning of the food pantry so they've always had service has been a big part of who they are.

**How many college students would you guess?**

We have a decent number and I don't know how to guess what percentage. On Sunday morning...maybe as much as 10% as either a college student or someone who's recently graduated college, graduate school kind of thing. We have our UKirk Ministry that meets in the building across our parking lot, and so we have college students involved in that, that are sort of connected to the church, but we also have college students who come to church that don't go to campus ministry. We have a significant number, and a lot of them who have stayed in the area after graduation have either become a member or an affiliate member.

**How do their expectations differ from the rest of the congregation? Or do you kind of see them line up with service is important and getting involved?**

Service seems to be important. They seem eager to get involved and to do that sort of thing. We have a hard time getting them to things like Sunday School. That Sunday morning time frame doesn't seem to work for people that age very much, but we do bible with brews program. Bible and brews. So they go to the Growler, it's once a month during the school year, but it was every Wednesday in the summer. And they'd gather and they'd have a word, like HOPE, and everybody had to bring a bible verse that had something to do with hope, and then they'd sit around and talk about hope and what it was and what the scriptures meant and what other people heard in their scriptures and all that sort of stuff. And they have a good conversation. And so in that sense, they're getting some of that conversation that they would get in Sunday school anyway, but it's just in an atmosphere that they like and that meets their needs.

**Does the church have a role participating in environmentally sustainable issues?**

I think the church very much has a role in it. Are we good at it? I'm not sure about that part. When I first got here, I've been here for 7 years this year, we were doing our Wednesday night program, and we ate on paper plates and paper cups and plastic silverware, and it took several years...I mean we had to wait until after the renovation of our kitchen. And once we renovated the kitchen, we just sort of stopped ordering, we bought new dishes, just plain white dishes that all matched and were easily stored in the thing. And we just quit buying the paper products to use on a regular basis. That makes it hard because then you have to have kitchen staff. I mean, we don't have paid kitchen staff. We have volunteers who come and set everything out but that also meant you have to have a clean up crew who would come and wash all the dishes, all the glasses, all the silverware, but they've...moved into that without complaining. But we always have to think about it when we add a new meal. And if we have a speaker, it's noisy when you have to go through the whole washing things. So the practicality of all of that makes it difficult. And there's some people who sort of growl about having to, not being able to just use the paper and be done with it. But they've really gotten down to where they only do that once or twice a year. So I think that's a success.

**That's impressive.**

But we've had these two trash cans next to our copier. One of them says "paper only." The entire time I've been here, I thought that meant that that paper was getting recycled somewhere, and then I discovered. I just happened to be in there one day when they were unloading the trash and it was going right into the trash. And I was like "what is the point?"

**Oh no!**

And just before you got here I went and I put in a voucher for fifteen-dollar recycling bin that will have paper and two other things so that we can at least do what we're sort of leading everybody to believe we're already doing.

**And this was not meant to be a critique or anything.**

Oh I know!

**I was just genuinely interested...self-examine...**

We ought to be self-examining and looking at that sort of thing. And I mean, we house doors of hope, transition ministries, and I was walking through Kroger one day and I saw that they were collecting bottles of water, and this was Kroger's idea, it wasn't Doors of Hope idea, but were collecting bottles of water for our clients. And I'm thinking...why are we not just buying them a water bottle that they can just reuse? So we started doing that, but you know it's just so much of a mental thing and a convenience thing, and you have to really believe in it and really want to make that change, and even my generation is not good at that. Even our UKirk campus minister will think about...she said something just the other day about doing something so that we wouldn't use any more paper for whatever it was. And I was like Oh yeah we shouldn't print all these things out.

**And they're aware of it.**

I think that overall our congregation understands that we are responsible. They get that part. How to live it out, some of them get it better than others. And we as leaders in the church, the two of us who are associate pastors, and the other officers of the church, could do a better job about just giving them that food for thought. You know we can't tell them how to live their life or what decisions to make, but to help them think about it in terms of faith because it goes all the way back to creation. Adam was told to till and keep the ground and then made partners with God to kind of take care of it, and so yes, I think we have a big responsibility. I don't think that we do it as well as we can. Part of it is the generation. The younger ones are more conscious of it I think than some of our older ones, although we have an older member of the church who has fought really hard to get the Presbyterian church overall to divest from fossil fuels.

I was a commissioner when our general assembly met, that's our national governing body and so I had a vote. We had a report come from a committee that suggested that Presbyterians divest from any company that produces fossil fuels. Then the minority

report came out and said well if we divest, we lose our voice at the table. And what do we do if we lose our voice at the table? Because Exxon doesn't care if we sell our stock, they'll just sell our stock to somebody who will buy it and that person may not care as much as we do. So if we divest, we lose our voice. If we don't...well the minority report ended up being the one that passed in that body.

**Really?**

But they did, there was a little thing, they were going to see how things had gone before the next meeting, we meet every two years, so between now and 2020, see how much those, what those companies had done, and if some of them don't show some improvement, then we may cut them out.

**That's interesting.**

So anyway, Presbyterians all over the world are thinking about that and thinking about how we can have an impact on what's going on with creation. But there aren't easy answers.

**Weekly bulletins...**

We haven't done that kind of thing. I mean really and truly, it's just been switching from not using as much styrofoam and paper and putting the recycling bins so here in the office we're doing that. But we don't do much to encourage that in our congregation.

**Well I was thinking because most people take them home.**

Oh we collect them at the end. We have two of our ushers stand at the doorway to collect them at the thing. And that's why I thought we were recycling! We take the trouble to collect them but then we don't take them to recycling. And I don't know maybe it was just that day, it was a bad day and the custodian didn't have time to take it.

**I get what you're saying. So the majority are collected at the end of the service.**

At the end of the service, yes

**Can you estimate the amount that you print on a weekly basis?**

We can ask Jessica before you leave. We'll do about 250 bulletins for Sunday. We print out maybe 20 of our newsletters, and everything else has gone to the Internet. We do a weekly internet newsletter and then a monthly internet newsletter. There are some people who don't do the internet and so those 20 will get print copies. We're doing an Advent devotional right now and so every morning, in your email you'll get a thing from First Presbyterian Church and it's day whatever of your advent devotional. Then we have print copies for those who either prefer to sit with their morning coffee and a printed page or

for those who don't do email. So we do some things that you just don't think about that are sort of eco-friendly.

**Well and I prefer reading if I'm doing a devotional or something so I can make notes.**

Me, too

**It sounds like you've already kind of started, but how do you think implementing a recycling program or initiative would be received in your church?**

In the office, I think that's going to be an easy thing since we all thought it was happening anyway. In the church, I think that the people probably who live in town and have recycling available to them probably already do it. I mean that's just who they are. But the ones for whom it's a little more difficult, like if they live in the county, or whatnot and they don't come and pick it up, I mean that's when it gets a little tricky. When you have to make the effort to go, and take it, if we did something where they were able to bring it here, of course we don't really have any space. We can't park around here, much less do anything else! If we had space where they could come and bring stuff here and we would dispose of it or get it to recycling for them, you know there'd be a handful of people who would do that because there are a handful of people that do other things.

**That's a big undertaking, though.**

That would be a big thing, and you'd have to have somebody who was checking it regularly and taking it to empty it and that sort of thing. But encouraging them to recycle, like I said, I think the people who live in town and for whom that is available probably already do it anyway. I would imagine that at least half of them, maybe not all of them, maybe better.

**But as far as like within this space, you think it would be received well?**

Yeah

**How do you think the community and the city would support you in recycling efforts? Do they pick up on the square?**

They will pick up on the square. At least that's what my secretary tells me. And she's already said she would be the one responsible for getting it out to the curb. They'll pick it up right out here at the gate. So we can put it out there and bring it in at the end of the day. And also, in the dumpster, that's just where we do take our trash bags, there's a cardboard recycling thing there because the local restaurants use that to get rid of what their meat comes in and that sort of thing.

So we can do that. I mean it's over there by the city lot, so it's a block away from us but we use that to take our cardboard and that kind of stuff already.

I didn't know I knew this much about what was going on.

**I created a survey for congregations just to measure what their expectations were as far as do you recycle at home and all that kind of stuff. Would you be willing to, it's online, but would you be willing to distribute it in the monthly or weekly newsletter that you send out? Or I could come and do it in person one Sunday after a service.**

We turned somebody else down when they were trying to do a survey here. Just so we wouldn't set precedent for everybody who wanted to come and do a survey.

**I wasn't sure...my thought process behind that was that it would be more well received coming from your church but then also this is a sacred space where you don't get solicitation, and you don't want to be advertised to.**

That's kind of how our senior...I haven't had to make those kind of decisions.

**Is that kind of a communications question, then?**

No, it would have been our senior pastor and I'm acting head of staff, and I just know in the past we have not done that. And what I don't know is was that his personal preference or was that our governing body that makes those kinds of decisions. And I could ask. I think they took it the last time and asked. So I can ask.

**And I can email it to you, too, so you can see what the questions are.**

That would be helpful.

**I got it approved by the IRB and my advisor and all that. I don't want to step on anyone's toes. Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. I really appreciate it.**

**FATHER JOE TONOS  
SAINT JOHN THE EVANGELIST CATHOLIC CHURCH  
DECEMBER 12, 2018**

**What is the primary mission of your church? Some are all about service, discipleship, evangelization, what would you say the primary mission of...?**

Well I mean, you know, I'll just come out of the gate saying I mean we're not a church. Really when you look at the Catholic Church, it's a faith, it's the Christian faith. The phenomena of Christianity really has its origin with Roman Catholicism. So it's not like a church or a congregation. So, you know the mission of the Catholic church is basically, you know spread the good news of Jesus Christ. So that's the deal.

**So talking about Saint John's specifically...**

Oh the parish itself.

**How would you describe our congregation?**

Well as you know, so I would say this much, the parish itself, like town wise, I mean we're getting bigger but I would say probably in the town we represent which is a healthy number, maybe 3% of the population in Oxford or Lafayette County. So it's not awesome big like you would see in Mobile, AL or something like that but it's pretty healthy for us. But what we also see is makes up the parish is the college campus and then again we have a lot of people who just don't even live in Oxford but they live here on the weekends. We got 480 families registered which is pretty great. And then another I think it's 1300 students who identify themselves as Catholic. And I would probably throw in at least another 100 people who just are here every weekend.

**The percentage of college students. We have a lot that you know come to the 5:00 mass, and I could probably talk to Vidi more about how their expectations differ from the rest of the congregation. You said, yes the church has a role participating in environmentally sustainable practices.**

Are you talking about my parish or the Catholic church?

**We could start go big and then small.**

So big? Of course. I mean really if you think about it, this is the challenge. So if you go to any Christian church and ask about resurrection, you'll get anything from, we're all gonna go to heaven which is of course you've probably heard me say, a lot of people think it's like the Make-A-Wish foundation. I get to be up there and meet all these celebrities and play checkers with Einstein and I can't wait to see the people I've always had questions for so that's not heaven. That's not heaven. I mean, that's fantasy. Or they'll say the resurrection, well what is resurrection? Maybe it's just new life and like the spring comes after the winter or maybe it's just that you live on in spirit if you've



done good things. But no, we really I mean we're the fundamental, I mean if we don't believe in resurrection we believe in nothing. So really we believe we will rise from the dead, we will rise again and live forever and so really Katelyn if you kind of put the map together...where we rising from? The earth. So the way we treat this planet now is the planet we'll come back to. So if you treat it like crap now, probably not going to come back. Because God's gonna say what did you do to my world I gave you? Why did you treat it with such disgust and recklessness? So when people say oh well you know I'm going to go to heaven and so I'll pollute and everything cause heaven's going to be clean streets of gold and up in the clouds and that's not a Catholic perspective. Because when Jesus returned from the dead, he walked the beach and ate with his disciples and gave us a real clear indication that it has something to do with rising from this earth, not being zapped up into heaven. So yeah, stewardship of our planet, stewardship of the environment is fundamental because it's tied into the resurrection.

**That's an awesome way to put it.**

It is the only way.

So if you're walking down the street and you see a piece of paper, little Catholic girl, just to put more guilt on you, and you see it and you're like ah, I didn't put it down there. Well, okay, then God might say, you didn't give a damn about your...you know, and you want to rise again? I mean you want to rise again to walk these streets again, and you said it's not my job. Same thing is when you see someone homeless or thirsty or in prison, you know I think the planet's the same difference.

**Can you estimate the amount of bulletins you print out each week?**

Why are you asking that?

You'll see our bulletins now because we just try to be a little bit more conservative with our resources, our bulletins are song sheets now. We made that change and what we also do with our bulletins is we do recycle. I mean so that's a parish effort. That's done here because Oxford offers that opportunity. How many? Since it's just the song sheet and bulletin now, I think we do 500 and that way people who just don't want a bulletin because the other thing is to save I mean to save ink and trees, you go online and we have our bulletin online. So guys your age can do that.

**So we do have a recycling program?**

Yeah, we recycle plastic and paper, and we put our bins out like everybody else, and I mean we have for almost a decade. As long as they've offered it, we've been doing it. Right here, they'll pick it up. As a matter of fact, all the houses down the street do it as well.

**I guess most people leave their bulletins in the pew or at the door when they're leaving so that gets taken care of there. Most of these were under the assumption that we didn't have a recycling program. Well, I'm proud of that!**

That's just a minor thing about the environment, but you know some other things that you'll notice we try to be you know as a parish and again it's kind of like oh I'm helping the poor by having a canned soup drive. That's just a drop in the bucket. That's kind of a feel good thing. So I'm not going to insult you, but this, I mean, recycling's a feel good thing. It's just an overall sense of stewardship so like downstairs for spaghetti dinner, you know, we do use styrofoam. The only reason we use styrofoam is because people like to take their drinks with them...but most other functions we have, we use the plastic cups and the plastic plates, and we have that dishwasher down there so that we don't waste. And also, when it comes to bigger functions, we try not to use the paper plates and things so funerals and things like that we try to use the plastic even though it's not elegant.

**Everything I've read, literature, just trying to get some background on it, because I'm not well versed is greenhouse emissions and big picture things. And I'm like what if we started small and just recycling is minute but I think it kind of changes the attitude in your congregation if you're like okay we're taking these active steps to try...**

We don't just little things. I'm not gonna live in a yurt or anything but like we don't run the lights all day long and we just figure you could go in and pray and we've got enough sunlight streaming through. We don't run the heat all day long, we don't run the air all day long in the summer. We don't cut lights on in rooms that aren't being used. So all that stuff is you probably won't see that in some places, but we are just real conscious of that, and cost conscious.

**Exactly. I think it kind of goes along with, you said this in one of your homilies, I'm not going to go out and tackle the big global warming issue, but I can affect the person next to me or change one heart.**

Yeah, your sphere of influence. Thank you for listening.

**Would you say most information and announcements gets sent through the bulletin or do we have a newsletter?**

So for the students, Vidi uses the Flocknotes, it's kind of like an instant message for campus. She uses that. For the parish, we send a mass email out to parishioners. We try to get that out as information comes. And we have a website we update that with information. So the bulletin, really unless your nana likes to read the bulletin, I mean that's all who really likes the bulletin. And no one, thank God today really relies on that paper like they used to. Except 60+. Everything you need to know you can get it online or if you're a communion minister you get updated via email, you don't really need the bulletin to find out if you're going to be doing.

You know of course in a liberal environment like a college campus you're gonna get folks that say I wish we could be out in the field somewhere and you know those are sort of a fringe. Other folks that say why worry about the environment when Jesus Christ

came to save us and all this stuff and so it's really extremist. But in the mid, like I said, you as a Catholic cannot believe in the resurrection. And that's one of the greatest arguments of Christianity today: What is the resurrection and is it true? Sadly, there's still a debate. Even some Catholics will say it's just a metaphor or that's just a myth or that's just a beautiful way of talking about renewal, but that kind of gives them the license to treat anything with abandon or recklessness. Or to be as kind as they choose rather than no this is the world you're gonna go back and the people you see again are the people you're gonna be with! I mean, I've never died before so I can't tell you how this is gonna be but if I don't go to hell, which you know could happen, I'm pretty sure that I'm gonna see you in the resurrection, but I'm not going to see Einstein because I never knew Einstein. I never visited... When Jesus came back he didn't say oh I'm gonna go sit and talk to Carl Sagan who's going to be born 2000 years from now I mean he didn't do that it was like there's Peter and James...Your sphere of influence.

**I've never thought about it that way.**

You could cross your arms and say I'm not going to be involved with these people cause when I die and go to heaven I'm going to be with really cool people. Well, you know, I mean that's not necessarily what I consider. To me, scripturally, Jesus "and then he came back rose from the dead and sat down and talked to BB King." That didn't happen. He came back to his primitive time frame among the people he loved and I think that you know I can't ignore somebody on the street because Jesus also says you know Lazarus and the rich man. The rich man looks up and he sees Lazarus, he doesn't see anybody else except the people that he could've had an influence on. So this planet, Oxford, MS, might be my heaven, I don't know, but I think that I ought to treat it that way. You'll get that fight out of people, well the resurrection may or may not be true and I'm going to go to heaven, I'm more worried about heaven than I am worried about this planet. I think that's not really what Christ wants of us.

**REVEREND DR. EDDIE RESTER  
OXFORD-UNIVERSITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
JANUARY 16, 2019**

**What is the primary mission of your church?**

Make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

**Is that the United Methodist Church?**

Yes, that's the United Methodist mission.

**Okay, does OU have a specific one?**

We do. Ours is to embrace all, encounter Christ, and release servants.

**Can you describe your congregation?**

Oh gosh.

**You can do it terms of percentage of college students...**

You know that's hard to do. We are a congregation that worships in three services in two different worship styles. We have a great mix of young and old. We have a growing number of young families with small children right now. That's probably our fastest growing segment of folks, particularly parents with small preschool kids. So yes, it's hard to describe a large congregation because it just kind of changes, it can change very quickly. One Sunday you can look out and you see 50% young people, college students, and the next Sunday you look out and you're like oh look it's all senior adults this Sunday. It really kind of ebbs and flows very quickly.

**How would you say the college students' expectations differ from the rest of the congregation?**

I think they're looking for something much more short term. Very few college students I think when they enter a church are looking for a this is going to be my church home for the next 10 years. I think college students are looking for a place they can connect, where there's good worship, maybe some small group Sunday school classes. We see a lot of college students who just come for worship, and that's okay. That's absolutely okay because they have busy lives. There are a lot of religious opportunities on campus through the week, so yeah but they're not looking to, although some will go on mission trips and some will volunteer to do things, those seem to be the exception and not the rule.

**What do you think: does the church have a role participating in environmentally sustainable issues like recycling?**

Yes, in fact we talked about this, Chris and I did Sunday morning, at the What we believe session. The very first section of the Apostles Creed, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth," and one of the things we believe is that God is creator and that in creation, God is not done. God continues to create. When God talks about redemption and restoration, particularly in Romans and the book of Revelation, God talks about the restoration of all of creation, bringing together a new creation. And so I think what that means is that part of salvation is everything we see. And therefore, that means we have an ethical role to play. If God cared enough to create it, then I think we should care enough to take care of it. And so I think that means, looking at recycling, how do you talk about it, how do you teach it, what are the practical ways that you're taking care of things. We do a lot of recycling bulletins and paper. Churches produce lots and lots of paper waste. We are sure that we're recycling all of that. We over the last 5 years have cut down on the amount of things that we print and produce paper wise. We try to do a lot of online stuff or we just print less. We don't send out as many newsletters. We don't send out as many just basic letters or postcards or any of that. We try to do as much electronically as we can, so we're producing less.

**I think that's kind of the shift we're seeing, too. Especially college students and everybody is going online to check emails and simpler.**

What I know is I can get a letter from the church, that probably I've sent and it will sit on my counter for three days. But if I get an email from the church, I'll scroll through it real quickly and decide whether or not it applies to me. So I think that's probably most people.

**And I've also noticed you guys have the little bins right by the exit of the church.**

Yep, exactly.

**So would you say most people leave their bulletins or song sheets...**

Most people leave them, most of them, as our folks would tell you, would leave it in the pew. But then we pick it up and put it in recycle. So we have a lot of folks that will recycle afterwards, but most of it is picked up by ushers after worship and put in the recycling bin. And we've really expanded that the past couple of years. We put a big silver garbage can back there that a lot of our older members didn't like cause it doesn't match the decor. It looks like a garbage can. But it's noticeable, and it's used. I mean every couple weeks we have to have it emptied.

**Who is in charge of that? Who goes and takes it?**

One of our custodians takes it to recycling.

**Do you know if they would pick up here on the square?**

Yeah I don't know if they do but I saw the Presbyterians had a bin so it's probably worth looking into.

**Some churches do not have a recycling program. What would you suggest for them to kind of get that started or who was in charge of...?**

Just emerged here over time. I think the easiest thing to do is what we did. What's your biggest production of particularly paper waste? It's in the office and it's Sunday morning bulletins. So how can you provide people an opportunity to recycle those? How can you reduce the amount that you actually produce on the front end anyway? Our bulletins are larger, but our newsletters tend to be smaller than they used to be. So I think shifting in what you produce as well, is a part of it, just reducing waste.

**In the United Methodist Church, Billy showed me the Book of Discipline and you have specific sections devoted to...do y'all talk about that at Annual Conference or General Conference is that what it's called?**

Annual Conference. Not as much at Annual Conference. Here we'll talk about it occasionally. Couple summers ago we had a worship series called Encounter Creation. We're actually bringing it back this summer, a little bit differently, but that summer we encouraged people to consider how they could recycle. We encouraged our kids and families to be out in Creation. Part of wanting to care for Creation I think comes from a love of creation so we did a lot of things from hashtags and people submitting pictures to really develop a love of creation. Because once you have a love of anything, you're going to care for it.

**I agree. Yeah. That was really cool. So you would say it's like more on the local level churches are getting involved.**

Yeah, I think churches are...you know the general United Methodist Church says "you shall do that" but the church says "you shall do" thousands of things. So it comes down a lot of times churches are picking well we'll follow that "shall" and not that "shall" but I think it's important that's one of the...Creation Care is one of the "shalls" that we maybe all should be focusing on.

**I'm sure it's hard to like not pick and choose, but it takes time to get all of those done. Could you estimate...This might be a question for administration...the amount of paper products you print?**

Oh gosh. Emile could give you how many 8.5 by 11 pages we run through the copier in a month. She can give you an estimate.

**How do you think the community and the city, or maybe just within your congregation, do they seem receptive of the recycling? Do they like that?**

They do. In fact we have a lot of folks in the congregation that expect it, that want it. Particularly when we kind of went bigger with the bulletin recycling and let folks know that we're recycling all of our boxes and cardboard we got a lot of positive feedback.

**That was one of the first things I noticed, too. So for other churches in this area, what barriers do you think there are that are keeping people from implementing a recycling program?**

That's a good question. Um, it might just be one, that they haven't thought about it as a possibility. They may assume that it's difficult to do. It's not really difficult to do. Three, they just haven't looked at their system, how easy would it be to do that. You know for us it's putting out just here in the office a couple of recycling bins. Usually they're overflowing.

**Just making the effort.**

Just making the effort.

**All I have left, how would you say most information and announcements are communicated through the bulletin or through the email newsletter?**

Both. We do announcements in the bulletin but then we do announcements in email, through social media. When I got here they had reduced from a newsletter every week to a printed newsletter every other week. And we dropped that down to one newsletter a month. And you could sign up to get it online and not in print if you want which a lot of people do.

**So I have made a survey for congregations of churches that I chose to interview in this area. Would it be okay, I can send it to you and Chris first, I'm trying not to cross the line between solicitation and then I just need data for my thesis. Would that be something that we could include at the bottom of a newsletter?**

What if we did it social media? Just figuring out how to get it to people in a way that they'll actually click a link. If it's online...is it an online survey?

**It's online. I can print it off. One of the things Mrs. Sparks told me to offer is to come by one Sunday and administer it in person, and I can do that if you think more people would be receptive but**

Send me a copy of it and ask me that question. And I'll ask a couple of people around here. I think it might be easiest for us to send it out in our weekly email and then social media and see how it gets received and if we feel like we need to boost your numbers some...

**People value the stuff they get from their church and I don't want them to feel the survey isn't relevant to them.**

Well part of it, they realize we're in a university town. I get passed along surveys all the time from students who are whether it's in psychology or grad students or whatever it's part of the existence of being in Oxford. Yeah, let me see it and then we'll try to do it online and social media and we'll go from there.

**I appreciate it.**



**REVEREND CHRIS MCALILLY  
OXFORD-UNIVERSITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
JANUARY 22, 2019**

**What is the primary mission of OU?**

The mission of OU is, we take the mission of the United Methodist Church globally which is “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” So we shoot low.

**Would you say it's primarily service, discipleship, evangelization, or is all rolled into one?**

A couple years ago we did a process to kind of figure out what does it look like to live out our mission here in Oxford in the next 5 to 10 years? So the leadership of the church met and so part of it kind of breaking up the mission into three big chunks. One is to embrace all people, lead them to an encounter with Jesus Christ, and then release them to be servants in the world. So evangelism, embrace all is kind of the evangelism hospitality chunk. Encounter Christ is worship, preaching, sacraments, Christian education, formation, discipleship. And then releasing folks to serve is both kind of being members of the body of Christ internally serving here but then also externally going out into the world and serving others as Christ kind of in the model of Christ. And so that's more mission outreach. We try to take seriously all three of those components. Yeah, I think you know the UMC was founded by John and Charles Wesley and they put an emphasis in their teaching on and their understand of salvation in holistic terms so thinking about both personal holiness and then also social holiness. And they also used metaphors that come out of Eastern Orthodox theologies that speak of salvation as this medicinal instead of juridical, legal framework for thinking about salvation as “I'm guilty and I need pardon” thinking of salvation as “The wound of sin goes all the way down but Christ's salvific work in the world could heal me. I could be healed, rehabilitated, in order to participate in God's kingdom work here and now. And so yeah. I could say more, but I'll let you ask the next question.

**If you could describe your congregation here at OU, that's a pretty broad topic, I was thinking in terms of percentage of college students versus everybody who comes.**

So the demographics of our church are I would say primarily, so they kind of fall into a few chunks. One is families of school-age children, so roughly 35-50 year olds that's probably the base of our church. Some of whom live here in Oxford and grew up here but a lot of whom moved to Oxford for the school system. We have retirees, 60+ and then we also have young folks who are college or grad students and it's a little bit harder to track the numbers there just because those are folks that typically have not joined the church but who participate in the ministries of the church. On an average Sunday morning we'll have 700 or so on average. Maybe more, maybe less. On a big Sunday like Easter we'd have 1,600. Probably 3-5% college students. Maybe something like that.

**Well and it's hard to gauge because we're gone on breaks. How would you say the college students' expectations differ from the rest of the congregation?**

That's a great question. And I would love an answer to that.

**Okay**

You know I think in general, we found there are a lot of campus ministries that provide small group relationships. One of the things that college students tell us they come for is to be a part of an intergenerational community. So, you get a lot of peer to peer relationships on campus and I think that is something that college students are looking for is opportunities to interact with children, older adults, and people kind of across the spectrum. One of the most popular programs that we have for college students is host family program. And I think that provides students with a home away from home. An anchor and a place of orientation during a time of life that can be destabilizing and transitional and where a lot of things feel like they're influx, the church feels for the students that engage like a place where there's some stability.

**I think you're absolutely right. So I'll just kind of jump right in, what do you think, does the church, overall, have a role participating in sustainable issues like recycling?**

Yeah so my thinking on these matters are, so yes I think the answer is yes. The methodist teaching on salvation and even the work of Christ is rooted in Creation theology. So it's rooted in an understanding that God is Creator, maker of heaven and earth, and we are creatures that the material world around us is not. So Creation theology shapes the way we view the material world. And it shapes it in the direction it's not instrumental or utilitarian. It's not just that the material world is there for our use for us to consume and buy and sell and use and throw away but rather that the material world is gift. It is a gift from God to be...and so kind of human response to the gift that God has given includes thanksgiving, good stewardship, care, and a recognition that long before we got here and long after we're gone, it's there. And that requires us to think not only about our use of it but future use as well and I think.

So yeah I think the church has an interest in caring for, the source of the material world is God as Creator and gift. There's also another place for theological reflection on these matters. Is Romans where Paul talks about the work of Christ, the redemption of Christ would extend beyond human persons beyond souls and bodies to communities and creation itself which is groaning with a desire to be reborn.

I think for Methodists particularly, our orientation towards issues of sustainability and things like recycling come out of theological commitment to the work of Christ extending beyond human souls that will go to heaven after mortal death to it's a holistic vision of salvation that includes bodies and souls that salvation would be something that leads toward reconciliation between human person as Christ draws all the world to himself that would include a community of persons across different Jew Gentile, rich poor, etc. and then it would also extend to Creation itself which is longing to be reborn. The problem

comes when you move from official theological position to life on day-to-day living. When you move from pulpit preaching to living in the world day-to-day and I think part of what may be at play there is that our efforts to disciple our people are thwarted by other forms of formation. Right? So I'm thinking about consumer capitalism does a really good job of shaping our habits and desires and our views of the material world. And I think that's an issue in terms of official teaching and lived reality.

**So you mentioned the United Methodist Church as a whole. Is there anything in the Book of Discipline or like official teaching that focuses on that at all or Creation Care?**

Yeah there is a section of the Book of Discipline and there would be some official statements in the United Methodist Social Principles. So the Social Principles are in the Book of Discipline. And there's a section on a natural world. So I would check out the social principles for sure.

**Is that ever brought up at Annual Conference or General Conference is that ever a discussion?**

Yeah so the social principles are official teaching that are looked at every 4 years at general conference. General Conference is the, you know we don't have a pope, nor do we have a magisterium, we have General Conference. General Conference is the official authorizing body that speaks for the church. And so those are brought up and talked about at General Conference every 4 years. And they're pushed down to the local church, but just being honest, we don't I couldn't tell you the last time we've had a class on the social principles or how well the social principles have found their way into the commitments of jurisdictions annual conferences or local parishes. Even though it's official teaching.

**OU has the recycling bins where you put bulletins after church so you guys have definitely implemented some of that locally.**

So we did a series of sermons on

**Encounter Creation**

The sources have come from other teaching. They've come from Wendell Berry, or Norman Wirzba who is at Duke Divinity School. Official teaching on the church side is Book of Discipline and social principles. But creation care I would say has risen in importance in seminary education so that would be another source or evidence. Another thing that you could potentially explore would be, there are 13 United Methodist seminaries that are officially kind of sponsored, and, presumably, you could call them all up and see who offers a class on creation care, sustainability, issues like that.

**That's an awesome idea**

And I think that would give you another authoritative source to draw from beyond the official church teaching. So let's just backtrack...How did we end up with a recycling can in our church?

**Yes**

That really began...We did that as part of a sermon series called Encounter Creation which was a sermon series we did a couple summers ago. Basically, on Creation theology. The reason we did that in part was an interest that I developed in seminary at "Taylor" School of Theology. There were classes on creation care there. I took a class on the doctrine of Creation with Ian McFarland. I was reading Wendell Berry, Norman Wirzba, Sandra Richter who's also done some work around creation care. Oh, I'll tell you who else. Ellen Davis. So I think that's another potential source. So theological education at least in the United Methodist Church plays a strong role in shaping the life of pastors and congregations. In some ways as much or more than the official teaching.

**That makes sense. So the recycling bins came about as a part of the Encounter Creation series. You guys were actually a model for me on this is how churches can do it. Who is in charge of taking it to recycle or leaving it out on the street? How does that process work?**

That's a good question. I actually don't know the answer. Either Emilie or Russ would know. I would ask Emilie kind of what that process looks like.

**As far as implementing a program like that, do you have any advice that you would give to other churches in the local area how they could set that up?**

It's definitely not difficult. It was a simple measure. It was a very simple way for us to communicate to the congregation a first step in moving from believing that God is Creator and Creation is a gift to doing the first simple, practical step. We're going to do Encounter Creation again this summer.

**I saw that.**

The reason is because it was actually really popular sermon series. In part because I think we live in the deep South and a lot of Christian teaching is like Good Friday to Easter Sunday on repeat every Sunday. And you get a lot of the death and resurrection of Jesus, but you don't get the full picture of the biblical narrative often. One is that we found that if we implement recycling as a part of a discipleship program to teach people the fullness of the biblical story from Creation to, from Genesis to Revelation that it becomes...that it's framed for people in terms of a biblical commitment rather than a liberal or progressive social action.

**Exactly.**

So we want people to think of recycling as a theological biblical, discipleship commitment rather than just a good thing that they can do.

**That was hard for me to steer away from, political standpoints. What do you think are some of the barriers for other churches? Have they not thought about it?**

I think that's probably...I think it's an interesting question. I do think that evangelical Christian teaching is very much geared towards human persons. Thinking of the work of Christ as being about humanity solely, and particularly the soul rather than the body, so yeah I mean I think there's a long strand of frankly it's a Neoplatonism that finds its way into Christian teaching that emphasizes the soul over the body, heaven over earth, the spiritual world over the material world, and so the goal is to get away from this world that is corrupted and going to hell and to allow Jesus to take you into this more spiritual plane where you don't have to worry about all of the bad things. And I think that doesn't take into consideration fully the fact that the incarnation the word made flesh, the fact that God was pleased to dwell in the womb of Mary, and to be born. That God would live and move and have being as a part of the material world. It dignifies the material world. And when somebody spiritualizes it in a way that grounds Christian commitment to materiality to life before death and to life beyond human persons. So it just grounds our commitment to not only communities but also all of God's Creation, all creatures and community and the planet itself. So yeah, in terms of barriers though I do think there's strong strands of evangelical teaching that emphasis people over non-people. I don't say that in judgement. I think that I have a lot of respect for certain...I just don't think it's been an emphasis in the way that perhaps has risen to the level of priority.

**Was it well received within OU when you guys started that program?**

Yeah, it was well received and has just been operating in the background. You know if anything, there have been some people who have said you know it doesn't go far enough, you know what I mean? That we need to do some more work. Maybe think about what the next steps...I mean particularly around, but I do think for us it gave us a way in. It's a physical something you see every day when you come into the church and it's a physical reminder of an ethical commitment of the church to Creation care.

**And you guys also print on the bulletin "make sure you recycle this on your way out."**

Right.

**Really the last couple of questions I have I already asked Eddie about this. I made a survey for congregations and members of the church to fill out. I was trying not to cross the line though between solicitation and just trying to get information for my thesis. Would that be something that OU could post on social media or do you have an email newsletter?**

What did Eddie say?

**He was like send it to me, or well I offered to send it first and he was like we could probably do social media first and then if that doesn't get enough traction we'll send it out.**

Yeah I think so the goal would be to get a sense of

**What are the congregations' expectations and are they aware of the program, just stuff like that.**

I would say work something up and we can look at it.

**Would you say that's how most information and announcements are communicated is through the bulletin or through the email?**

Yeah, I think on Sunday morning. The things that we do are email, newsletter, bulletin, social media are the typical ones.

**Well I got a lot of great information. Thank you.**

I think it's a good topic for sure. How did you get interested in it?

**THE REVEREND JODY BURNETT  
SAINT PETER'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
JANUARY 31, 2019**

**I emailed you about the basics of what I'm trying to do with my thesis, but if we could I'll just start out asking what would you say the primary mission of your church is? We can start big with the Episcopal Church or we can go St. Peter's in Oxford, what's their mission?**

So our mission statement is to share the love of Christ which transforms lives.

**And can you describe your congregation here at St. Peter's?**

Oh gosh. Is this on record? Yeah so it's... I would say it's a large as far as Episcopal churches go it's a large congregation. We have close to 800 members on the rolls or a better way to kind of measure membership is average Sunday attendance which is about 350. It is a very active, engaged congregation. It's a pretty well-educated and culturally, economically affluent congregation. A lot of people are affiliated with the university. So we're growing right now just like Oxford in two demographics. Young families and retirees. So issues of justice, particularly issues related to racial reconciliation have historically been very important to this place. We have a historic connection to the university, our first rector Frederick Barnard was also the Chancellor of the university so going all the way back to the very beginning. And we've tried to maintain that through the years. It tends to be fairly, though this is not universally true, because we do certainly have some more conservative members of this parish but it tends to be more on the progressive end of things, especially the theological spectrum. Politically, though it's a diverse place.

**Alright. and how would you say, if you had to compare college students, what would you say your percentage of college students is, you can give a rough estimate.**

Oh gosh.

**I know it's hard to tell, too, because we go home for breaks and summers and stuff.**

Well, so it's actually a really interesting question that I've been thinking a lot about this because we're looking for a new chaplain. We have a college ministry, like a ministry specifically designed for college students, and they have a service in fact it's tonight. And it has been very large in the past. it is not right now. We usually get about 8 or 10 students at that service. But we also have, I mean I don't know if you noticed, but there are college students in the kitchen now preparing food for people who are experiencing food insecurity. Most of them don't go here but this is where their home on Thursday afternoons. We host leap frog here. They start back next week, so we get a bunch of college students come help with that. They come to worship on Sunday mornings. You know I bet we have interns on Wednesday nights. I bet between all of the different things

that happen here we probably have 40 or 50 college students. So that would be, I don't know what that percentage would be.

**That's perfectly fine. I was just trying to get an idea of how active they are in the church community. How would you say that their expectations differ from the rest of the congregation? It sounds like service opportunities...**

I think in many ways their expectations are the same. What I'm seeing is people, and you correct me on this if I'm wrong, but a lot of college students that we get here don't want to be sort of segmented off, they want to be a part of the larger life of the parish because y'all spend so much of your time segmented. And so to be around people of different ages and to just be a part of our everyday week to week rhythm. And you know I think everybody is pressed for time, it's not just college students. It's working professionals, a lot of retirees are pressed for time, surprisingly. But people want to be meaningfully connected and involved. Connected in this community and involved in the larger community, I think.

**I would agree. Alright I'll just ask, what do you think? Does the church have a role participating in environmentally sustainable issues like recycling?**

Yeah I think we have a role and responsibility. And in fact, you asked what our mission is, so I gave you the mission statement of St. Peter's, but so the Episcopal Church is part of the worldwide Anglican Communion. And so the Anglican communion has 5 marks of mission. Which I think these were set back in 2003 and they're still sort of our guiding lights. And we have adopted these in the Episcopal church, too. And one of them is to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth. So that's something about how important...

**So this is for the Anglican Community?**

Yeah and we've taken it on as a constituent member of that body. We've taken it on as our marks of mission as well.

**That's awesome. So I know there's...I'm good friends with Seth Dickinson and Maddie Beck and Maddie was telling me there's a specific Eucharistic Prayer C maybe? That you say on Earth Day like it's very integrated into every day so it kind of derives from this or?**

Well the prayer came first. And they're actually that's why I have my prayer book, and I'll give you this I won't talk about this because a lot of it was new to me, but the Episcopal church actually sent a delegation to the United Nations on Climate Change. And we've done that and so there are just some observations from the larger church.

**Thank you very much. As far as within St. Peter's do you guys currently have a recycling program? Or do you address it in the congregation?**



It's not a program necessarily, but we do recycle.

**Okay!**

And we try to use renewable resources. Honestly we try to use, as often as is possible, and it's just not always possible for us, we try to use things that, like flatware, like real plates and silverware, stuff that we can wash and reuse. Rather than throw away. But Sunday mornings we're using paper cups. Not styrofoam!

**It's a conscious effort. Would you say that's been well received within the congregation? Or how did that come about, how did it get started?**

It predates me so I don't know. I've been here for two and a half years but I'd be willing to bet that if we weren't doing things like that people would be upset. This is not a place that would stand for sort of whimsical, lackadaisical approach to that sort of thing.

**If you could estimate the amount of paper products your church prints? I know things like bulletins and you probably have online newsletters.**

Yeah we do, that's mostly we've gone to online newsletters. We used to, so when I got here we mailed out newsletters every month. And they were you know really out of date by the time people received them, and it was truly just a waste of paper and postage, so now we send quarterly newsletters and we just we advertise everything. We just sent out one today for instance and it takes us all the way through vacation bible school this summer so like everything that's happening. And then everything else goes out via email. And we have a group of about 20 people who don't email and so we'll just print out and take it to them but that's much more manageable than sending something to 500 people every month.

**Can you explain how, so you do recycle, is there a member on staff that takes it to the recycling center or do they pick up here on the square?**

Well we so our Sexton who is basically our custodian takes care of that for us.

**Do you know if they take it there?**

I think he has to take it.

**It's been received well, so for other churches in this Oxford community, do you have any advice for them on how to get that started?**

Oh gosh, no.

**Why it's important?**

Yeah I'll definitely say I don't have advice, but I think it's a scriptural imperative. I think scripture's very clear about our responsibility as stewards of creation. And you know what the fact that we have, there is a cause and effect relationship between how we inhabit this earth and the earth has the capacity to respond in dramatic ways with natural disasters and floods, and often it's the people who are most in need who are affected the greatest and I think that's just a double edged responsibility. Because we're called to care for those who are on the margins. One of our Eucharistic Prayers, yeah, but so Ash Wednesday which is coming up, March 5th or 6th. So there's a, we read this Litany of Penitence. And in that litany, it says, "for our waste and pollution of Your Creation and our lack of concern for those who come after us, accept our repentance."

**Wow.**

So I think we as Christians can't overlook that God-given obligation that really shows up in the story of Creation at the very beginning of the Bible in Genesis, and doesn't stop. I'll preach but I won't give advice.

**Can you think of any barriers for churches who want to start recycling and haven't?**

Yeah, I mean I think convenience. You know we're slaves to convenience. And doing the thing that's probably in the best interest of the environment is not always the most convenient. And so it does take more time and effort and energy to be a good stewards. And I mean the other thing is I think there are plenty of people who just are persuaded by the science of climate change which is unfortunate. I don't know that it's as conclusive as some people think it is but I think it's pretty clear that we have an effect on the environment and long term studies and trends show that pretty explicitly. So I think you know knowledge and lack thereof is probably another barrier, though I would say a lesser barrier.

**And I haven't asked everyone, it's not on my interview question sheet, but I was really trying to steer away from the political side of this because I don't want it to be a paper about what your political beliefs are, I think it should be a biblical, theological based argument. Do you find that it's hard to separate the two?**

No, I don't. I think because what do we stand to lose by taking better care of the earth? Do our souls somehow become in peril when we try to be better stewards of that which has been entrusted to us? No, so there's nothing to lose, other than proving a point or winning an argument and I don't think that's part of the Christian ethic either. Winning and proving I didn't read anything in the Gospels about that. So I think you can pretty easily separate the two and just say Scripture is clear. We have an obligation as disciples to do this work and to think about what, the way in which we live. And even if what we do has no effect on long term health of the world, it's still, it's right there in the bible. This is probably political, but I find it interesting that all of the world's leaders fly on airplanes to Switzerland for that Climate Change conference. You know, and I think there

are scientists out there who would say, “well at this point, it doesn’t matter what you do it’s too late.” and I don’t believe in fatalism either but what was your question?

**I guess I’ve just gotten a little bit of push back like why are you focusing on recycling when there’s so much more going on.**

Yeah okay so maybe the more charitable way to respond to that is, or constructive way. I think we can only, there’s only a certain...we all have a certain realm of influence. And it’s you know I read an article one time that said, the title of it was “your three feet of influence” so the people who are around you, your household, your relationships, your day to day behavior and patterns of thought, we do have a great deal of control over that very small area of influence. And if more and more people recognize that, recognize their power, their God given power, then yeah there is I think transformational potential there. And the same is true in the Christian life. The problems of the world are so overwhelming. Yeah they are, human sinfulness and brokenness is real. But if we don’t do our part...

**Gotta start somewhere.**

Yeah, nobody’s exempt. And if more people do their part and others see that and are inspired by that and buy into it, then that’s where the transformational potential comes into play I think.

**Awesome. Okay, we talked a little bit about how you communicate with your congregation. You do have bulletins on Sunday. Do you just pick them up after? I find that most people just leave them in pews.**

We recycle paper and plastic and aluminum and everything that we can.

**So I made a survey for members of the congregations. It is electronic, but if I sent it to you first, would that be something that you could possibly distribute to your congregation?**

Is it just a link?

**Yes.**

Yeah, we can put it in our email next week. We send them on Thursdays. So the one today already got sent out, but I can definitely put it in next week’s email.

**THE REVEREND DR. SARAH MOSES  
SAINT PETER'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
FEBRUARY 7, 2019**

**I interviewed Rev. Jody earlier, and I'm excited that I get to interview both of you. If you could just start, kind of describe, what is the primary mission of your church? You can say the Episcopal Church or St. Peter's, what would you say the primary mission is?**

Well, okay so it's going to be impossible for me to answer these questions without bringing a professor of religion perspective on it.

**That's fine!**

So, my answers will probably differ in certain ways from Jody's answers. So I can point you to the official mission statement of St. Peter's are you aware that there is one?

**Yes, he printed off a couple of copies for me. Is it more in the realm of service, discipleship, evangelization, what's the most important aspect?**

Well what I wanted to point out to you is that when you write this, you want to make, you know for an academic paper, you want to make a distinction between the official statements of a religious body which you can look at usually a virtual record of that or a documentary record of that versus what well then there's the whole level of what practitioners actually say, and then there's what practitioners actually do. And so, I would say that the primary mission of St. Peter's based on what it actually does, okay?

**Okay.**

Is to be a worshipping community. And to offer space for spiritual formation and worship.

**Can you describe your congregation at St. Peter's? I know that's pretty broad.**

Yes, it is. What do you want to know?

**Like percentage of college students versus...**

Oh well it's a much higher percentage of non-college students. I don't know the exact numbers. The church actually has a, you know if you actually wanted to look at the empirical data, you could get ahold of that. Without giving you hard numbers, I can tell you there are more non students than college students. It is an overwhelmingly white congregation. It is a well-educated, professional class majority.

**How do those college students' expectations differ from the rest of the congregation? Do you see a difference there?**

I have no idea.

**Okay. Do you think the church has a role participating in environmentally sustainable practices?**

Should have a role?

**Yes**

Okay I have two different answers to that. One is I think that churches like schools like businesses are members of a civic community and insofar as we have expectations around recycling conservation of energy, those apply to churches just like they apply to The Library Bar or Bottletree. So first, I think churches should be subject to the exact same kinds of insofar as there is any kind of, there are laws or anything like that, churches should have to follow them as well. Now, from a religious perspective, I think that there is religious justification for Christian people to practice sustainability.

**Based on like Biblical passages?**

Well you could look at biblical texts, but theologians, the theological tradition. I mean those would be your two main sources but I think within those two sources you would find justification for that, yeah.

**So in St. Peter's how do you approach the disposal of paper products, or can you estimate the amount of paper products your church prints?**

I have no idea.

**Okay, are you aware of the recycling initiative or can you talk about that a little bit?**

I certainly can. We have recycling boxes around the church. I mean I'll give you an example on a Sunday morning, there are printed bulletins every single Sunday and as people leave they can leave those and they are taken out in recycling.

**So they leave them in the pew?**

Or they hand them to the usher on the way out. And so insofar as the church gets them back, they should go out in recycling. Now I don't know personally see the...the Episcopal church has a silly name for everything so we would call it a janitor but the Episcopal church calls it a sexton so I don't actually see him. So he's the one, at the end of the day, he's responsible for making sure that recycling goes out as recycling and trash goes out as trash. So he would even be interesting for you to talk to.

**And then I was curious to see if they picked up on the street or if he has to take it to the actual recycling center.**

See and I don't actually know. I actually don't know. That's actually a great question. I don't know what the city of Oxford does. Obviously it has residential recycling pick up but I don't know if businesses have to take it in. Did Jody know?

**I've heard different things from different churches.**

You should call the recycling center. I would actually ask them because I don't know the answer to that. But that would make a massive difference...

**As far as convenience**

...in whether people do it. I mean it's why people in residents do it ultimately if you pick it up on the curb they'll do it. If you don't, they won't. But we produce a lot of printed material, so just for instance those printed bulletins every single Sunday, there are 5 different services that paper gets printed.

**Oh okay so they don't really reuse**

So just to take that as an example. We could talk about energy consumption and how the church certainly does not follow energy guidelines about what you set air conditioning at in the hot times of the year. And so you know there's the issue of paper use, there's the issue of energy consumption, there's no composting of food waste and obviously a lot of stuff that happens at the church is food, around food.

**That was one of the things I struggled with this thesis is I can go super broad or I can just focus on one aspect and that's recycling.**

Oh is that what you're focusing on? Okay then I won't even mention those other things.

**No, but that's an important part and if we're talking about it then it has to be. I was just like how do I do this where it's not 10 thousand pages long? Do you think the community and the city has supported you in your recycling efforts?**

So again, I actually don't know. I can speak as a resident. I think the fact that they pick my recycling up, but I don't know, so my answer would be yes if they pick it up. My answer would be no if they don't.

**And I mean some have told me yeah we leave it out on the curb every week and some have told me no we have to take it. So I will call the center but it was just interesting to see what the different churches practiced.**

And the other thing is Calvin, so Calvin is an older African-American man, he's always around the church during business hours Monday through Friday if you literally swing by St. Peter's you can find him and you can ask him.

**And he's the sexton?**

Yes

**What barriers do you think there are that are keeping other churches from starting a recycling program? Or why don't people recycle?**

Because, I mean I can't speak about other churches, but I can say that I've been at St. Peter's for 10 years, and I've never ever heard a sermon about these issues. Now, I have not been at every church service in 10 years, but in general there is a lack of emphasis on it. Then I think that...you know, you just have the general issue of, well you have the issue of the infrastructure. So if you walk around St. Peter's you do not see the kinds of garbage cans that eventually Ole Miss has gotten where it's broken down and so beyond the office and whatever sorting Calvin does, like in the main parish hall or in classrooms, we do not have clearly designated recycling bins. So this is the convenience issue and I think that and I mean again I can only speak about St. Peter's. St. Peter's could do a better job of making it more convenient for people.

**I know that the Episcopal Church has a Eucharistic Prayer on Earth Day, that specifically addresses this is our...supposed to care for the earth and so would you say it's kind of being addressed in that aspect or through liturgy?**

Um, there's no Earth Day observance at St. Peter's to my knowledge. So it's there. There's potential. But it's just, so part of it is there's an underuse of the liturgical resources that the national church has put out. And of course that's another thing you gotta think about when you are discussing this is that what may exist at the national denomination level, you have a question of whether local churches are a) aware of it and b) actually using it.

**If it's being translated down. That makes sense. So as far as theological teaching, Rev. Jody gave me a couple of things. Do you have any specific comments on the...**

...let me see what he gave you.

**I got the 5 marks of mission and then sort of an official stance on Climate Change.**

This is from the national Episcopal Church right?

**But he was just saying look at this right here, the Creation part. This one talks about being in support for the Paris Agreement.**

I'm just trying to see where he got that. I've never seen that document at St. Peter's.

**He may have typed it up or something.**

Yeah, so that's from the national Church.

**Okay, so you think it's being addressed more on the national level and not so much on the local parishes.**

Yes. What's the other thing he gave you? Yeah so this is national as well. That's right. So I think in general what is fair to say of all mainline churches, Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopalian, is that there are very progressive policy statements at a national level that come through big national all of these denominations have annual or tri-annual

### **Conferences**

Conferences and these things get passed, but again whether they trickle down to the local communities is not a guarantee at all. Now so, I think one thing that would be important for you to think about in your analysis is like a lot of things, a lot has to do with individual members of local communities. So the one stretch of time in which issues of sustainability were brought up in the context of like an adult education form at St. Peter's was because one of our members was actually the head of the sustainability office here at Ole Miss.

**Oh!**

And she spearheaded bringing some attention around it. But it came from her not the clergy.

**That's interesting.**

And now she's moved away. So I think I mean it's really true, a lot on the local level depends on the individual parishioners and the things that they, cause again, if you go on the Episcopal Church website, and you look under the life and (mind?) they've got a statement on everything under the sun, and so what churches end up focusing on a lot has to do with the membership.

**Cause they're the ones who are actually going to carry it out, or influence it. I made a survey, too for congregations just to get their expectations and see if they're aware, things like that. Would you say most information and announcements is through the bulletin or probably email newsletter?**

So there's the weekly email that goes out at St. Peter's and then there are announcements printed in the Sunday bulletins and those are the two main ways.

**My survey is online and I talked to Rev. Jody. He said "We'll try to get it out in the Thursday thing." I just don't want to cross that line between what your church sends you is a safe space and you don't want to be infiltrated with surveys.**

No, that's fine. There's stuff the church publicizes stuff that is sponsored by other things yeah yeah yeah.



**I appreciate your perspective on this and you've given me some good information to think about.**

Feel free to email me any follow up questions you have.

**I will. Thank you.**

## APPENDIX C: SURVEY

### Researcher

Katelyn Campbell, Student  
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903-472-2279

### Advisor

Chris Sparks, Assistant Professor of Integrated Marketing Communications  
The University of Mississippi  
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662-915-8985

I am a student at the University of Mississippi working on my honors thesis. The purpose of this research project is to explore religious habits of individuals as they relate to attitudes and opinions about recycling. You will not be asked for your name or any other identifying information. It will take you approximately 4 minutes to complete this survey. We do not think there are any risks associated with completing this survey.

### Confidentiality

No identifiable information will be recorded; therefore, we do not think you can be identified from this study.

### Right to Withdraw

Participation in this survey is voluntary, and you may discontinue at any time. You may skip any questions you prefer not to answer.

### IRB Approval

This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482 or [irb@olemiss.edu](mailto:irb@olemiss.edu).

### Statement of Consent

By clicking the button below, you acknowledge that your participation in the study is voluntary, you are 18 years of age, and that you are aware that you may choose to discontinue your participation in the study at any time and for any reason.

Thank you for your participation!

- I consent, begin the study
- I do not consent, I do not wish to participate

Q2: Which best describes you?

- 18-24
- 25-35
- 36-45

- 46-55
- 56-64
- 65+

Q3: Which best describes your household? Check all that apply.

- Single
- Married
- Kids under the age of 10
- Teenagers in the house
- Adults in the house

Q4: Are you currently a college student or graduate student?

- Undergraduate
- Graduate
- Neither

Q5: What is your attitude toward environmentally sustainable efforts, specifically recycling?

- Strongly supportive
- Supportive
- Indifferent
- Unsupportive
- Strongly unsupportive

Q6: Do you recycle at home?

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

Q7: How important is religion in your life?

- Extremely important
- Very important
- Moderately important
- Slightly important
- Not at all important

Q8: Which church do you attend?

- First Presbyterian Church
- Oxford-University United Methodist Church
- St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church
- St. Peter's Episcopal Church
- Other (please write in): \_\_\_\_\_
- I do not attend church regularly.

Q9: Would you describe yourself as a(an):

- Member
- Frequent visitor
- Occasional visitor

- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Q10: What do you do with the paper products (bulletins, cups, song sheets, etc.) you receive from church? Check all that apply.

- Leave in pew or in building
- Take home
- Throw away
- Recycle at home
- Recycle at church
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Q11: How familiar are you with your community's recycling program?

- Extremely familiar
- Very familiar
- Moderately familiar
- Slightly familiar
- Not familiar at all

Q12: How familiar are you with your church's current recycling program?

- Extremely familiar
- Very familiar
- Moderately familiar
- Slightly familiar
- Not familiar at all
- We don't have one

Q13: Would you use recycling facilities if they were available at your church?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- Sometimes

**Q14: Matrix in Qualtrics**

This section is to gather your opinions. Please read each statement and select the option that best describes your opinion to the following statements.

Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<hr/>						
Communities should provide recycling services to residents.						
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Churches should provide recycling services to its congregation.						
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Congregations should participate in sustainable efforts, such as recycling.						
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Churches should be leaders of social change in the community.						
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is the church's responsibility to care for creation and protect the environment.						
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is the church's responsibility to participate in environmentally sustainable practices, like recycling.						
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q15:** Please share any additional thoughts you have about churches and their congregations' responsibility to participate in environmentally sustainable practices, like recycling. Thank you for taking my survey!

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## QUESTION 14 MATRIX RESPONSES BY CHURCH

### Saint John the Evangelist Catholic Church Responses:

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St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church

#	Field	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
1	Communities should provide recycling services to residents.	64.96% 76	24.79% 29	7.69% 9	2.56% 3	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	117
2	Churches should provide recycling services to its congregation.	27.59% 32	31.03% 36	12.93% 15	22.41% 26	0.86% 1	4.31% 5	0.86% 1	116
3	Congregations should participate in sustainable efforts, such as recycling.	41.03% 48	33.33% 39	13.68% 16	9.40% 11	0.85% 1	1.71% 2	0.00% 0	117
4	Churches should be leaders of social change in the community.	40.52% 47	37.07% 43	7.76% 9	9.48% 11	0.86% 1	2.59% 3	1.72% 2	116
5	It is the church's responsibility to care for creation and protect the environment.	33.62% 39	28.45% 33	15.52% 18	12.93% 15	3.45% 4	3.45% 4	2.59% 3	116
6	It is the church's responsibility to participate in environmentally sustainable practices, like recycling.	23.93% 28	43.59% 51	13.68% 16	11.11% 13	1.71% 2	2.56% 3	3.42% 4	117

Showing rows 1 - 6 of 6

### Oxford-University United Methodist Church Responses:

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Oxford-University United Methodist Church

#	Field	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
1	Communities should provide recycling services to residents.	78.00% 39	20.00% 10	2.00% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	50
2	Churches should provide recycling services to its congregation.	38.00% 19	28.00% 14	14.00% 7	14.00% 7	4.00% 2	2.00% 1	0.00% 0	50
3	Congregations should participate in sustainable efforts, such as recycling.	54.00% 27	34.00% 17	6.00% 3	6.00% 3	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	50
4	Churches should be leaders of social change in the community.	44.90% 22	26.53% 13	18.37% 9	8.16% 4	0.00% 0	2.04% 1	0.00% 0	49
5	It is the church's responsibility to care for creation and protect the environment.	40.00% 20	34.00% 17	16.00% 8	4.00% 2	2.00% 1	4.00% 2	0.00% 0	50
6	It is the church's responsibility to participate in environmentally sustainable practices, like recycling.	38.00% 19	42.00% 21	14.00% 7	4.00% 2	0.00% 0	2.00% 1	0.00% 0	50

Showing rows 1 - 6 of 6

## Saint Peter's Episcopal Church Responses:

St. Peter's Episcopal Church													
#	Field	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree					Total
1	Communities should provide recycling services to residents.	91.43% 32	8.57% 3	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0					35
2	Churches should provide recycling services to its congregation.	51.43% 18	28.57% 10	14.29% 5	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	5.71% 2	0.00% 0					35
3	Congregations should participate in sustainable efforts, such as recycling.	62.86% 22	31.43% 11	0.00% 0	5.71% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0					35
4	Churches should be leaders of social change in the community.	60.00% 21	28.57% 10	2.86% 1	5.71% 2	0.00% 0	2.86% 1	0.00% 0					35
5	It is the church's responsibility to care for creation and protect the environment.	57.14% 20	28.57% 10	8.57% 3	5.71% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0					35
6	It is the church's responsibility to participate in environmentally sustainable practices, like recycling.	60.00% 21	31.43% 11	5.71% 2	2.86% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0					35

Showing rows 1 - 6 of 6

## First Presbyterian Church Responses:

First Presbyterian Church													
#	Field	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree					Total
1	Communities should provide recycling services to residents.	66.67% 2	33.33% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0					3
2	Churches should provide recycling services to its congregation.	0.00% 0	66.67% 2	0.00% 0	33.33% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0					3
3	Congregations should participate in sustainable efforts, such as recycling.	33.33% 1	66.67% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0					3
4	Churches should be leaders of social change in the community.	33.33% 1	33.33% 1	0.00% 0	33.33% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0					3
5	It is the church's responsibility to care for creation and protect the environment.	33.33% 1	33.33% 1	33.33% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0					3
6	It is the church's responsibility to participate in environmentally sustainable practices, like recycling.	0.00% 0	66.67% 2	33.33% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0					3

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Other:

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Other (please write in):

#	Field	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
1	Communities should provide recycling services to residents.	100.00% 7	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	7
2	Churches should provide recycling services to its congregation.	71.43% 5	14.29% 1	14.29% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	7
3	Congregations should participate in sustainable efforts, such as recycling.	85.71% 6	14.29% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	7
4	Churches should be leaders of social change in the community.	85.71% 6	14.29% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	7
5	It is the church's responsibility to care for creation and protect the environment.	71.43% 5	28.57% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	7
6	It is the church's responsibility to participate in environmentally sustainable practices, like recycling.	85.71% 6	14.29% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	7

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No Regular Attendance:

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I do not attend church regularly.

#	Field	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
1	Communities should provide recycling services to residents.	66.67% 4	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	6
2	Churches should provide recycling services to its congregation.	50.00% 3	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	6
3	Congregations should participate in sustainable efforts, such as recycling.	66.67% 4	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	6
4	Churches should be leaders of social change in the community.	33.33% 2	33.33% 2	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	6
5	It is the church's responsibility to care for creation and protect the environment.	50.00% 3	16.67% 1	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	6
6	It is the church's responsibility to participate in environmentally sustainable practices, like recycling.	66.67% 4	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	33.33% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	6

Showing rows 1 - 6 of 6



## COMPLETE LIST OF RESPONSES FROM QUESTION 15 (49 TOTAL)

Churches are primarily for spiritual matters, and political and social issues, for the most part and unless they directly involve established church teaching, are ordinarily better left to political and other social entities.

Na

Thank you for doing this important research!

I think...

Many denominations don't want to get involved with activities or thoughts outside Sunday morning worship. I personally think it is the responsibility of the church to get involved in political issues, such as environmental ones, because the earth and all it encompasses is God's gift to us to enjoy and respect.

I agree that my church should support caring for creation, because in taking care of our environment we are honoring our God who created it.

oxford sucks at recycling

I recycle all paper products, plastic, metal! I wish Oxford would recycle glass!

I do not suggest that recycling should preempt religious support and development of its members and the community. Preservation of God's creation is only one obligation which should bind every Christian (and every thinking human being, regardless of religious belief or the lack thereof).

This doesn't have to do with the church or their congregations responsibility, but you will notice that in Question 5 I strongly support recycling, but in Question 6 I never recycle. This is due to the fact that Lafayette County does not have a curbside recycling program and I am unaware of any program that exists for county residents. If there were a program, I would recycle as much as I could.

Effective environmental programs are important. Too often, however, the effort is wasted time:<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/29/climate/recycling-landfills-plastic-papers.html> and <https://www.ft.com/content/360e2524-d71a-11e8-a854-33d6f82e62f8> Sometimes it is too expensive for limited benefit, and other times it is more a political thing than environmental. That can be especially true of college sustainability programs.

the church should be more responsible about using recyclable products at meals & should esp. use tablecloths that are reusable.

Hail State.

I have not considered this before, and now...will. First thought is, yes...certainly...within the church but am not into schlepping my recyclables to the church from home.

In my opinion there is a lack of recycling information among the less fortunate in our community. However, if one is living from paycheck to paycheck recycling would be a low priority.

Recycling is all well in good but it supports a broader, anti-Christian trend. By engaging in social change and environmentalism we are supporting the very individuals and organizations that want to destroy The Church.

Environmental justice has unfortunately been forgotten by our churches, especially as they have become further extensions of American capitalism. However, I believe there is massive potential for the church to become a leader in environmental justice

The church's responsibility is not to be a social service agency it's to be a spiritual guide, leader and refuge. If society becomes immoral (such as in the fostering of abortion or advocating assisted suicide or in the case of sexual predators) then its responsibility should be paramount because immorality kills the spiritual life of both the individual in particular and society in general. However, the leadership of the church is only as good as the individual pastors and bishops: some are inspirational and some are just in the wrong profession.

I agree we should care for God's earthly creation as much as we can

As there is not a recycling program in my neighborhood, recycling is a problem, a big problem. I don't want to ride around with boxes of "trash" in the car and forget to take it somewhere. However as I frequently go to the church I believe I would take my recycling there. But, we do not have staff or space to do this.

I think the state, county and cities should provide or offer recycle services and the Church participate. The Church teaches us to care for and protect creation and our environment especially the unborn and humankind.

I strongly believe that members of any church should participate in recycling. It makes perfect sense to participate especially when it is very easy to do.

Hadn't thought about it being the church's job to care for creation. Gave me some food for thought. Thanks!

It is the responsibility of each individual to use the resources of the earth in an efficient manner. Recycling is one avenue. I don't feel the church has the responsibility to demand its members adhere. I do think the church should make such a service available where practical and possible.

I think that Churches are places of learning about religion and growing through faith. Churches should care for creation and the environment, but should not be a mandate of the Church. If we as parishioners practice what we preach, we are in fact leaders in our communities for what is moral, ethical and good stewards of what God has given us. As for being “leaders of social change,” is this in regard to recycling or a broader picture of what the community calls “social change?” The city of Oxford provides not only curbside recycling pick up for residents, but also drop off locations around the city. The Church should recycle its own waste, but not provide ongoing recycling services. An option would be to host a “recycling event” to encourage our parishioners to bring items to recycle and get in the habit.

My “church” is actually a college Presbyterian sponsored organization, so it’s a little different than a typical church. I’m grateful for our leader who has come to me to discuss our sustainability practices as a group, as well as her own. I hope that we can be an example to other groups on how to care for our communities and the relative ease with which simple decisions can be made to change habits

When we eat at church instead of throwing the food away we should be composting any material that can be.

We are fairly new to the community and live in the county, so I’m a little unsure about what's going on here. I’d like to see more recycling available... especially pick up from homes. I believe it must be convenient for people to really support recycling. Many people who wouldn’t take recycling to a center, would participate from home.

I don't think churches need to bear the work or expense of running a recycling program if the city offers the same program, but I do think it is incumbent on the church to recycle items used in offices, kitchens, etc.

I believe that one issue relative to recycling that does not seem to be part of the conversation is what happens to the items that are recycled. There are stories that say we produce more recycle products than the demand for those items. What is the cost of an efficient recycling program vs the economic value of the production.

Sustainability is not the church's mission, but it is compatible and consistent with the church mission. We should not squander the Lord's gifts, recycling and engaging in sustainable practices is one way to do that. There is a verse (can't recall it now) that directs us to only take what we need and we are accountable for what we take. I've always thought that's what sustainability is all about.

Recycling is to be encouraged as a way to help take care of our part of God’s creation. It is not possible nor should we try to force anyone. The church’s main mission is to share the Gospel of Jesus. The Lord has to highlight to each person that he or she is able to Glorify God by doing what we can individually to “tend the Garden.”

When I was an active member of St Johns I tried to start recycling in the kitchen. I was disappointed in the cooperation exhibited. I and a few others made efforts. When large cans were opened for instance I would rinse them out and put them in my truck to be recycled. I feel recycling is a moral responsibility. We owe it to future generations to make an earnest effort.

Please note, our family is in strong support of recycling as good stewardship of God's creation, as outlined in the book of Genesis. However, we do not support efforts that place environmental concerns over people. In other words, we are fortunate in Oxford that the city offers recycling--they are paying and absorbing some of the transportation costs. Some towns don't have enough revenue to absorb those costs, as in the Delta, and we shouldn't be enforcing a blanket solution on every community. If asking people to recycle puts them at a material disadvantage--for instance, some people in Oxford pay for glass bottle pick up--and the church asks everyone flatly to pay for it regardless of income, I would not support that. It should be encouraged as a natural extension of respecting life, but it isn't as important as advocating for an end to legalized abortion or capital punishment, either. Thank you!

I deeply believe that humans were created to be in positive relationships with both with our fellow humans, and the rest of creation. It seems pretty logical then that we are obligated do everything we can to care for the non-human living things among us!

The Christian community at large needs to participate actively in beneficial civic actions

I don't worry about paper recycling as much as things like styrofoam usage. I would like to see our church switch from styrofoam take-out boxes and cups to paper products.

Churches should not be mandated to do anything like that. Their responsibility is to bring people closer to God. Their waste is nothing in comparison to business. It is the businesses that need incentives for recycling. The amount of just boxes (plastic containers/bottles) that goes into the regular garbage disposals is far more important to look into for the sake of the environment.

I think it is good for everyone to recycle. I have never thought about it being the responsibility of the church, because I think it is everyone's responsibility.

Taking care of creation should be one of the church's major crusades. The church's involvement with unsustainable resources is shameful. This issue isn't talked about enough. I'm so glad to see research going into this. If you need extra resources, Memphis Theological Seminary has lots of staff, classes, and general resources on this subject.

I think they should, but not because it's the church. I think everyone has the individual responsibility, but that the church is a strong influencer (especially in the South) and that they can facilitate recycling efforts.

If the church were to pass out bulletins before church so the congregation could read them prior to the service, the church could remind parishioners to recycle those already read bulletins after the service unless they would like to take them home. They could then use the recycled bulletins for future services that day or recycle completely.

I think it is important that churches make efforts to participate in sustainable practices. The Bible begins with Creation saying that people are to have dominion over the earth and they will be stewards of it too. The Pope has spoken about the environment and global warming multiple times. Also, if we believe that all of this (environment, animals, water, etc.) was God's creation we should respect it as such. We take care of things we value.

For me it is the difficulty of moving recycling containers to the street or loading in car and delivering them to a center or the church.

While I think it is good for communities to recycle, I don't believe that the onus should be on churches to create this change. I believe churches form the moral backbone of a good social fabric and are therefore responsible for building good people. With that being said, I think the onus should be on private individuals to organize and create these recycling services. If churches would like to participate by allowing recycling bins to be placed on their properties, that would be wonderful, but \*it should not be the responsibility of churches\* to ensure these services are provided.

As has become clear from more recent research, recycling is problematic. For one thing, a huge proportion of our recyclables end up back in the garbage stream. This has three causes: idiots who can't separate non-recyclables from recyclables, municipalities who can't afford to keep the various recycling streams separate and clean and the lack of a market for recycled products. A much bigger focus needs to be put on reducing our consumption. The uphill battle I fight is to reduce the use of disposable coffee cups. We own a lovely set of coffee cups and mugs, but I would estimate that 80% of the coffee consumed at church is served in disposable cups. Similarly, our Wednesday night meal is served on paper plates. Instead of using our liturgy books (BCP), we have printed booklets with the liturgy in it. This is easier to use, and is more welcoming to newcomers, but increases our environmental footprint. I'm not sure what the correct thing to do about this is.

City & county have ultimate responsibility for environmentally sustainable practices. Churches & individuals have a moral & social responsibility to support and encourage the use of recycling programs. Level of Church participation is dependent on desires of congregation.

Just a note that I am in the County & not offered recycling.

Your survey uses the word "responsibility" in several questions. To the extent that "responsibility" in this context means to be a responsible citizen - then I would agree that to care for the environment is a responsibility of a church. However, I would not agree

that a church bears “responsibility” to promote or further any political agenda in terms of environmental issues.