

**Annual Report 2022**  
**Diocese of Virginia**  
**Creation Care Task Force**  
**Submitted by Stacey Remick-Simkins, Chair**

**Members:**

Stacey Remick-Simkins, Chair (St. Peter's in the Woods, Fairfax Station)  
Kathy Ellis, Co-Chair, Spiritual Resilience Working Group (St. James, Warrenton)  
Rev. Mary Kay Brown, Co-Chair, Spiritual Resilience Working Group (retired, St. David's, Ashburn)  
Rev. Deacon Courtenay Evans, Chair, Garden Working Group (Christ Church, Charlottesville)  
Doug Gehley, AIA LEED AP, Co-Chair, NetZero Working Group (Holy Cross, Dunn Loring)  
Mary Haberl, Ed.D, Co-Chair, NetZero Working Group (St. David's, Ashburn)  
Dr. Nancy Searby, Netzero Working Group, author of R-6 passed 227th convention (St. Dunstan's, McLean)  
Barry O'Keefe, NetZero Working Group (St. Stephen's, Richmond)  
Sharon Wayne, (St. James Earth Steward Ministry, Richmond)  
Rev. Kristin P.R. Wickersham, SOSc (Priest-in-Charge, Epiphany, Henrico)

**History and Context**

February 12, 2021, Bishop Goff commissioned the Creation Care Task Force to begin building the foundations of a powerful, sustainable and Christ-centered Earth care ministry. The group comprised several who had been involved in the Creation Care ministry development prior to COVID. Members of the pre-COVID group and some new participants convened and proposed a strategic plan that was presented to Bishop Goff. We then began an application process in compliance with Diocesan rules and canons that resulted in the appointment of ten members. Our charge has been to develop and establish the infrastructure for this ministry. All our events are published on our diocesan website on our public calendar.

**NetZero Working Group**

In 2021, Nancy Searby authored Resolution R-6 (R-6: Declaration of Climate Emergency, Commitment to Net-Zero Greenhouse Gas Emissions by 2045, and adoption of Episcopal Covenant for the Care of Creation) which passed. After passage, Doug Gehley and the team researched and discovered the successfully employed checklist used by the Church of England. With Doug's management and many meetings, it has been adapted and revised so as to be an evolving document that speaks most effectively to our churches and institutions. Since then, this working group has devoted its energy to developing the documents and the new resolution which offers actions and guidance to meet the NetZero (carbon-neutrality) goal for 2030. Thank you to Nancy Searby, Doug Gehley, Mary Haberl, Barry O'Keefe, Sharon Wayne and Kevin Van Natta who is our first non-task force participant to help us shape documents that will provide tools for churches and institutions.

**Garden Ministry**

Gardens are an important component of our diocesan parishes' evangelistic service to their surrounding communities. Churches within the working group manage a wide variety of gardens ranging from vegetable and native gardens to Monarch waystation and flower gardens. Some parishes have a combination of all and others are beginning the design and planting strategy for theirs. Evangelistic missions include supplying food pantries, recipe provision at the time of food distribution and gardening educational opportunities. The Garden Working Group meets every month via Zoom, providing a forum for churches throughout the diocese to connect and learn from each other best gardening practices. We began monthly presentations in May 2022. All Souls, Mechanicsville, St. Peters in the Woods, Fairfax Station, Grace, Stanardsville and St. Christopher's, Springfield have all given presentations to the group. Trinity, Charlottesville and Good Shepherd, Bluemont are scheduled to present in October and November respectively. More churches are joining our monthly presentations. In 2023, this group will begin an assessment of

how to expand its work. Ideas include habitat restoration/sanctuary management and parish partnerships. Several of our Northern Virginia parishes are Audubon certified sanctuaries. Rev. Deacon Courtenay Evans has faithfully inspired participants and continues to draw more of our diocesan members into this important ministry. On October 30, All Soul's will celebrate the 10th anniversary of its garden.

### **Spiritual Resilience Ministry**

This began as a focus on eco-grief (the experience of grief and anxiety around the effects of climate change) but has transformed into a ministry of healing and resilience in the face of the phenomenon known as eco-grief. Kathy Ellis attended a series of grief circles hosted by other denominations and non-religious groups. This research has informed her approach. She and Rev. Mary Kay Brown (retired) have joined forces to build a ministry which will now include a focus on clergy training and opportunities for ministry of resilience and healing. Specifically, the book *Refugia Faith* by Diane Rienstra is the text that offers the model for resilience and healing in the face of climate stress and disasters. They have coordinated and hosted two Resilience Circles. The October 6 Circle was publicized outside the diocese. Rev. Guimond Pierre Louise, Associate Rector at St. Peter's in the Woods has enthusiastically agreed to join the ministry team.. The next Resilience Circle is November 3. In the near future, SRWG hopes to begin working with each parish to evaluate and increase readiness in the face of climate trauma resulting from ongoing climate events. Our first major event takes place December 8 at 4pm, when we sponsor a conversation titled "Preaching Hope" led by Dr. Jerusha Neal, Professor of Homiletics at Duke Divinity School that will be offered at no cost.

### **Church Visits**

In my role as chair, I have visited churches to share with them the work we are doing and urge them to get involved with our working groups/ministries. I have visited St. James, Richmond; St. Mary's, Colonial Beach; Buck Mountain Parish, Earlysville; Trinity, Charlottesville; St. Dunstan's, McLean; Holy Cross, Dunn Loring; All Soul's, Mechanicville; St. Christopher's, Springfield (we share bird surveys and they have gardeners who regularly participate in our garden ministry every month) and I will be visiting St. James in Warrenton in late October. I have given 2 sermons, and have helped groups map out first steps towards achieving their goals for gardens and general carbon-neutral strategies. I have spoken at coffee hours and given presentations during adult formation events. I will continue to visit churches upon request.

### **Convention Presence**

I and Rev. Deacon Courtenay Evans will be staffing the Creation Care table at Convention. For those who visit our table, we are working on having seed packets, the new resolution and R-6 available there for people to read, and information on *Refugia Faith*, the book written by Diane Rienstra, that is the basis for the Spiritual Resilience ministry.

### **Webpage Redevelopment and Outreach**

Early in 2022, I worked closely with Erin Kamran to restructure the Creation Care website to be more useful and up to date. We deleted the old outdated page and replaced it with a page containing five specific sub-pages which explain our working groups, members and added a calendar that I have been able to manage in real time. We have had several inquiries and interest in our ministries and programs as a result. I am setting a regular communication to be posted at our Facebook page since we currently have about 300 followers setting a routine day of the week to ensure that all events and announcements will be included in the E-Communiques to both clergy and general subscribers.

### **Aspirations**

Our main goal is to continue to establish the foundations for Creation Care that can be the basis for a sustainable ministry well into the future. We are looking forward to meeting and working with Bishop-elect Stevenson to expand and grow this ministry. Our plans include engaging with those managing church buildings and grounds to work

towards Net Zero carbon emissions. Our hopes include partnering with Shrine Mont to host a networking conference with liturgical celebration, diocesan networking between churches and institutions where Shrine Mont can become a centerpiece of Creation Care initiatives. We also aspire to develop children and youth education initiatives which draw our younger generations into the development of strategies for Creation Care. We want to expand the Garden Ministry network and build a clergy-centered program focused on Spiritual Resilience that can evolve from clergy involvement, inspiration and input. Our long term view is we pray that there will be a day when we will have a Creation Care Missioner called to lead the ministry forward.