

# The Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good

## A Reflection Guide

### COLUMBIA RIVER WATERSHED

- ❖ Ecosystem of 259,000 square miles
- ❖ Core: 1,200 miles of the Columbia River, 400 miles in Canada
- ❖ Columbia River begins in British Columbia, Canada, is fed by U.S. tributaries in Montana, Idaho, Washington and Oregon and flows into the Pacific Ocean

## Introduction

This guide is intended to provide groups with a process for reflecting and acting on *The Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good*, a pastoral letter written by the Catholic Bishops in the international watershed region of the United States and Canada.

The Bishops, concerned about the regional economic and ecological conditions and conflicts over them, call on all people of good will to “work together to develop and implement an integrated spiritual, social and ecological vision for our watershed home, a vision that promotes justice for people and stewardship of creation.”

“The Columbia River Watershed stands as one of the most beautiful places on God’s earth. Its mountains and valleys, forests and meadows, rivers and plains reflect the presence of their Creator. Its farms and fishing boats, rural communities and cities, railroads, ports and industries reveal the varied ways in which peoples of the region have worked with earth’s beauty and bounty to derive their livelihood from the land and water.”

## Our Tradition

*Christians realize that their responsibility within creation and their duty toward nature and the Creator are an essential part of their faith.*

—*The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility*, Pope John Paul II

*At its core, the environmental crisis is a moral challenge. It calls us to examine how we use and share the goods of the earth, what we pass on to future generations, and how we live in harmony with God’s creation.*

—*Renewing the Earth*, U.S. Catholic Bishops

*God saw all that had been made, and indeed it was very good.*

—Genesis 1:31

*I saw a new heaven and a new earth. Then the angel showed me the river of life-giving water.*

—Revelation 21:1, 22:1



Map by Jim Heys, used by permission of The Mountaineers

## The Columbia River Watershed

A Process for Reflection and Transformation

### *Caring for Creation, Community and the Columbia*

The preservation of the Columbia River Watershed’s beauty and benefits requires us to enter into a gradual process of conversion and change.

### *The Rivers Of Our Moment*

We are becoming aware of the benefits and the complexities of the integrated ecosystem we share. We are responsible to God and to the community for all of creation around us.

### *The Rivers Through Our Memory*

Our regional and religious traditions provide an opportunity for us to reflect on our watershed region, to recall our moments of achievement and insensitivity, and to understand the importance of ecosystems and providing for the common good.

### *The Rivers Of Our Vision*

In our desire for spiritual, social and ecological transformation, we imagine together what we would like the watershed to be. With a hopeful heart, we can envision economic stability, ecological integrity and regional sustainability.

### *The Rivers As Our Responsibility*

We are challenged to fulfill our responsibility to God as we consider the possibilities to renew the watershed. With faith in God, and one another, and mutual cooperation we will have the courage, conviction, and perseverance to fulfill a transforming vision for the Columbia River Watershed.

# I. The Rivers Of Our Moment

## Caring for Creation

“When people travel in the Columbia River Watershed they see areas of pristine beauty, where the handiwork of God is hardly touched by human interventions. They see areas of ordered beauty, where people have worked well with the land and water in their care. And they see areas of blight, where people have disregarded their responsibilities to their Creator, their community and their environment.”

*In preparation for dialogue do a personal or communal inventory on your relationship to the Columbia River Watershed.*

 I/we recycle and reuse at home.

 I/we are selective about what is recycled and reused.

 I/we participate in and foster workplace conservation measures.

 I/we separate workplace issues from ecosystem issues.

 I/we promote and engage in dialogue on ecological issues.

 I/we avoid dialogue on ecological issues.

 I/we spend family or community time enjoying God's presence in our Columbia River Watershed.

 I/we have not taken time to experience our Columbia River Watershed.

 I/we educate ourselves on both the blessings and blight of our ecological situation.

 I/we mostly focus on the blessings or the blight of our ecological situation.

 I/we find diverse views helpful in seeking new possibilities for integrating social, economic and ecological systems.

 I/we find it difficult to understand some points of view in seeking new possibilities for integrating social, economic and ecological systems.

 I/we use the land for recreation in harmony with the needs of creatures for shelter and reproduction.

 I/we do not usually consider the needs of other creatures in planning our recreation.

*Faced with the widespread destruction of the environment, people everywhere are coming to understand that we cannot continue to use the goods of the earth as we have in the past... a new ecological awareness is beginning to emerge... The ecological crisis is a moral issue.*

—Pope John Paul II



*But ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; Ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; And the fish of the sea will inform you.*

—Job 12:7-8

What are the creatures of the earth telling us?

### Read:

*The Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good* from the beginning through the section on “The Rivers of Our Moment.”

### Reflect and Discuss:

- ⦿ Where and how do I live in relationship to the Columbia River Watershed?
- ⦿ What benefits do I experience from living in proximity to the Columbia River Watershed?
- ⦿ What do I experience or know of the social, economic and ecological challenges that have arisen in relationship to the Columbia River Watershed?

# II. The Rivers Through Our Memory

## Regional Traditions

“Native religions taught respect for the ways of nature personified as a nurturing mother for all creatures. They saw salmon as food from this mother, and the river as a source of their life and the life of the fish.”



*CheWana - the Great River*

## Religious Traditions

“Stewardship is the traditional Christian expression of the role of the people in relation to creation. Stewards, as caretakers for the things of God, are called to use wisely and distribute justly the goods of God’s earth to meet the needs of God’s children. They are to care for the earth as their home and as a beautiful revelation of the creativity, goodness and love of God.”

“The Columbia River and its tributaries are intended by God to be living water: bountiful and healthy providers for the common good. The water itself is to be a clear sign of the Creator’s presence.”

## Seeking Conversion

“As people have become more absorbed by material things and less conscious of spiritual and social relationships, consumerism has replaced compassion, and exploitation of the earth has replaced stewardship. There is a need for spiritual conversion to a better and deeper sense of stewardship for God’s creation and responsibility for our communities.”

### *Awareness:*

As I/we reflect, pray or share on the Columbia River Watershed, in what way is God calling me/us to conversion?

### *Confessing:*

Where in my/our family, community or work have I/we failed to be compassionate in relationships and good stewards of God’s creation?

### *Repenting:*

What step(s) do I/we desire to take toward healing relationships with people and all of creation?

### *Forgiving and Celebrating:*

How will I/we celebrate God’s mercy and presence in our journey to conversion?

### **Read:**

*The Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good* section on “The Rivers Through Our Memory.”

### **Reflect and Discuss:**

- ⊙ What is challenging and disturbing to me from my reading?
- ⊙ What passages were inspiring or insightful?
- ⊙ What gives me hope from our regional and religious traditions?

*Wanapum - the River People*

*God is present and speaks in the dynamic life forces of our universe and planet as well as in our own lives. Respect for life needs to include all creation.*

—Celebrate Life: Care for Creation,  
Bishops of Alberta, Canada

## History

- ◆ The first human communities entering the watershed generally adapted themselves to Che Wana—the Great River
- ◆ Europeans and Euro-Americans came to the west in the 16th century and the great river was renamed “Columbia” in 1792
- ◆ Unregulated fishing, cannery industries, dams on the Columbia-Snake river system and climate changes affected the salmon populations

What memories of achievement or insensitivity do I/we recall?

# III. The Rivers Of Our Vision

## Convictions

"In the presentation of our spiritual and ecological visions for the Columbia River Watershed...we manifest certain underlying convictions. These are:

- + God is the Creator of the universe and maintains its existence through an ongoing creative will.
- + God's presence is discernible in all creation.
- + God has blessed and called "very good" all that is created.
- + God loves the community of life.
- + God's creatures share a common home.
- + God entrusts the earth to human care. People are stewards of God's world.
- + God intends the earth's goods to be equitably shared."

## Our Vision

### Spiritual Vision

"...we see communities of faith exercising responsibility for the region."

### Social Vision

"...we see working people engaged in productive employment at living wages and renewed communities integrated with their environment."

### Ecological Vision

"...we see the Columbia Watershed community inhabiting an environment of clean land, clear water and pure air."

### Read:

*The Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good* section on "The Rivers of Our Vision."

### Reflect / Discuss:

- ⊙ What is my/our vision for the Columbia River Watershed?
- ⊙ How will I assist my family, parish or community to envision how we can be caretakers of the watershed region in the present and in the future?



## Prayer

We thank you God, for all of creation.  
You call us to be careful stewards of all that you have made,  
and you bless us with the wisdom of our leaders and ancestors.

"The peoples of the region...are envisioned as a unit connected by the web of waters and integrated as one watershed community.

—Bishops of the Columbia River Watershed Region

Teach your children that the earth is our mother.  
Whatever befalls the earth  
befalls the sons and daughters of the earth.  
We did not weave the web; we are merely a strand in it.  
Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.

— Chief Seattle

May we come to more fully appreciate the blessings of creation and community in this Columbia River Watershed.

May we live as a holy people in this holy place.

We ask this in God's name. Amen.

*For I know well the plans I have in mind for you...plans to give you a future full of hope.*

—Jeremiah 29:11

"We live in a literal watershed and are simultaneously at a figurative watershed moment, a time of making important decisions that will impact, into an unforeseeable future, this place we call home and habitat."

*Water flows from high  
in the mountains.*

*Water runs deep in the Earth.*

*Miraculously, water comes to us  
and sustains all life.*

—Thich Nhat Hanh

*And God spoke to me and said,  
all of creation lasts both now  
and forever, because I cherish it.*

—Julian of Norwich

# IV. The Rivers As Our Responsibility

“We offer the following ‘considerations’ for community projects—to renew the watershed.

1. Consider the Common Good
2. Conserve the Watershed as a Common Good
3. Conserve and Protect Species of Wildlife
4. Respect the Dignity and Traditions of the Region’s Indigenous Peoples
5. Promote Justice for the Poor, Linking Economic Justice and Environmental Justice
6. Promote Community Resolution of Economic and Ecological Issues
7. Promote Social and Ecological Responsibility among Reductive and Reproductive Enterprises
8. Conserve Energy and Establish Environmentally Integrated Alternative Energy
9. Respect Ethnic and Racial Cultures, Citizens and Communities
10. Integrate Transportation and Recreation Needs with Sustainable Ecosystem Requirements”

## Ten Considerations for Action

1. Consider how the property I own, or our church property, can be used for the common good.
2. Develop a new pattern of conservation in my life, or in our church community.
3. Read, study, discuss and pray about the many issues related to the dams in the Columbia River Watershed.
4. Seek a Native American perspective, perhaps from our parish, on this International Pastoral Letter.
5. Join a liveable wage coalition, or participate in building a Habitat for Humanity house.
6. Invite representatives of local and federal government, educational institutions and community organizations to join our faith community for a discussion on a related ecological and economic issue in our area.
7. Write a letter to a forest, agricultural or mining industry and thank them for evidence of stewardship, and pledge support for innovations that sustain the Columbia River Watershed.
8. Invest in an alternative energy source.
9. Gather with migrant workers to hear their story and experience of living and working in the Columbia River Watershed.
10. Walk through a state or provincial park to experience God’s presence.

## Prayer and Reflection Process

**Setting:** Gather in a circle and place symbols of creation on a table in the center.

**Prayer:** O God how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all.

**Reflection:** Put on soft instrumental music and invite people to quietly reflect on this statement from the Pastoral Letter—“We ask all people of good will to imagine what [you] would like the watershed to be like in ten, fifty, or one hundred years...”

**Sharing:** After the quiet time, invite each person to share what they have imagined.

**Commissioning:** Take a few minutes to reflect on what you have heard, then voice one action step you would like to take.

### Read:

*The Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good* section on “The Rivers as Our Responsibility” and “Conclusion.”

### Reflect and Discuss:

- ⊙ As I/we reflect on the “Considerations” where is the best starting place for me/us to take a new or next step toward transforming the watershed into an ecologically and economically sustainable place?

*I am the one whose praise echoes on high.*

*I adorn all the earth.*

*I am the breeze that nurtures all things green.*

*I encourage blossoms to flourish with ripening fruits.*

*I am led by the spirit to feed the purest streams.*

*I am the rain coming from the dew that causes the grasses to laugh with the joy of life.*

*I am the yearning for good.*

—Hildegard of Bingen

# Prayer and Resources

## Prayer

### Preparation

Invite people to bring water from a river, stream, lake or ocean. Prepare the prayer space with a cloth and bowl on a table.

### Opening Prayer

Creator God, we gather in your name to give praise and thanks for the wonder of your creation. We ask your forgiveness for the times we have failed to respect any part of your creation.

### Litany of Commitment

*Response:* We join with the earth and with each other.

*Leader:* To bring new life to the land. To restore the waters. To refresh the air.

*All:* We join with the earth and with each other.

*Leader:* To renew the forests. To care for the plants. To protect the creatures.

*All:* We join with the earth and with each other.

*Leader:* To recreate the human community.

To promote justice and peace.

To remember our children.

*All:* We join with the earth and with each other.

—U.N. Environmental Sabbath Program

### Reflection

Invite participants to quietly reflect on a commitment they want to make to renew the Columbia River Watershed. Then invite participants to individually pour the water that

they brought into the bowl. Play instrumental music while the water is being poured, or invite participants to briefly share their commitment while they pour their water.  
*Leader:* May this mingling of the waters of our region be a sign of our solidarity with the Columbia River Watershed Community.

### Closing Prayer

God heard a joyous song,  
notes of peace and harmony  
carried by the wind and waves.

The living waters flowed  
through the Columbia commons,  
housed the salmon and all aquatic life,  
and refreshed the biotic community:  
the birds and the animals,  
the plants and the people  
and all that had life;  
sustained the regional watershed  
preserving its ecosystems  
and nourishing their creatures;  
and watered the tree of life:  
providing food for all peoples  
and medicine for all nations.  
A new blessed earth came into being,  
renewed by the Spirit,  
enlightened by the Spirit,  
and filled with the presence of the Spirit.  
God saw that it was very good.

—Adapted from *Riversong*

## Resources

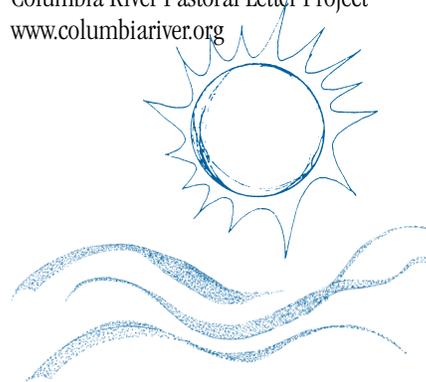
The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility, Pope John Paul II  
Available from NCCB  
[www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)

Renewing the Earth  
National Conference of Catholic Bishops  
NCCB/USCC • 3211 4<sup>th</sup> St NE  
Washington, DC 20017 • 202-541-3000  
[www.nccbuscc.org](http://www.nccbuscc.org)

USCC Environmental Justice Program  
[www.nccbuscc.org/sdwp/ejp](http://www.nccbuscc.org/sdwp/ejp)

National Religious Partnership  
for the Environment  
1047 Amsterdam Ave • New York, NY 10025  
212-316-7441 • [www.nrpe.org](http://www.nrpe.org)

Columbia River Pastoral Letter Project  
[www.columbiariver.org](http://www.columbiariver.org)



## Process

The process involved the following steps:

- ◆ Receiving Grants from the USCC Environmental Justice Program and National Religious Partnership for the Environment
- ◆ Forming an international Steering Committee representing the dioceses of the Columbia River Watershed Region, and Catholic colleges and universities
- ◆ Receiving input from diverse constituencies
- ◆ Seeking input from a wide range of consultants
- ◆ Establishing a website
- ◆ Presenting an exploratory document
- ◆ Holding listening sessions and including these perspectives in the process
- ◆ Presenting *The Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good* for ongoing conversation about the Columbia River Watershed

## Bishops

Bishops from the states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana and from the province of British Columbia who participated in this process include: Archbishop Alex J. Brunett, Archdiocese of Seattle; Archbishop John G. Vlazny, Archdiocese of Portland; Bishop Eugene J. Cooney, Diocese of Nelson, BC; Bishop Michael P. Driscoll, Diocese of Boise; Bishop Robert C. Morlino, Diocese of Helena; Bishop Carlos A. Sevilla, S.J., Diocese of Yakima; Bishop William S. Skylstad, Diocese of Spokane; Bishop Robert F. Vasa, Diocese of Baker; Auxiliary Bishop Kenneth D. Steiner, Archdiocese of Portland; Auxiliary Bishop George L. Thomas, Archdiocese of Seattle; Archbishop Raymond G. Hunthausen (Retired), Archdiocese of Seattle; Bishop Thomas J. Connolly (Retired), Diocese of Baker.

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