

# INTRODUCTION

## *Are US Religions Going Green?*

### FAITH COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

In June 2015, publication of Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, inspired great excitement from world media, leaders of the United Nations, scientists, environmentalists, and religious organizations. The pope addressed his words to all people of the world, expressing the hope that it would "help us to acknowledge the appeal, immensity and urgency of the challenge we face" due to environmental damage, especially climate change.<sup>1</sup> Because encyclicals present authoritative papal teachings for the whole Catholic Church, the pope's message that being "protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue" and that "it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience"<sup>2</sup> would now be designated as a doctrinal belief for a world religion with 1.2 billion members. Commentators speculated that *Laudato Si'* would be a "game changer" that would affect the attitudes of American Catholics<sup>3</sup> and motivate political leaders from around the world to reach an agreement about how to mitigate climate change during the 21st United Nations Conference of Parties in Paris in December of 2015.<sup>4</sup>

These hopeful discussions about Pope Francis's potential influence reflect widespread concern about the enormous global challenge of climate change. It is not just an environmental problem that will transform ecosystems; the destabilization of planetary systems is a social, economic, and political problem that will affect human and nonhuman lives in every corner of the world. Addressing it requires changes to social systems that are

unlikely to occur without the involvement of leaders who can articulate cultural values that will help motivate sustained collective action. In the United States, the image of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. hovers in the background of every leader advocating a moral obligation to change unjust social systems, reminding Americans of the role religion played in the civil rights movement and suggesting the potential for a similar transformation of political will in the present. Moreover, because some Christian politicians have cited their faith in God's sole power to determine the fate of the earth as justification for blocking efforts to support national climate action, seeing an influential religious leader take up the issue raised hopes that the same faith influences used to block action might also be able to motivate action.

## RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENTALISM

The pope's encyclical and visit to the United States does seem to have increased American support for action to address climate change,<sup>5</sup> however media reports that lauded the encyclical as a new frontier in environmental activism were misleading because they ignored the fact that religious leaders, including the two previous popes, had been calling on people of faith to protect the earth and its environmental systems for nearly half a century. For academics who study religion and ecology, the encyclical continues a tradition of modern American religious environmentalism that began in the late 1960s and runs parallel to the modern environmental movement.

The development of American religious environmentalism is often linked to a 1967 essay that Lynn White published in *Science*, in which he argued that Christianity had contributed to a worldview that led Western societies to exploit natural resources, degrade the environment, and create an ecological crisis.<sup>6</sup> Since religion played a significant role in shaping the cultural attitudes that caused problems, White thought Western society needed a new religion or a new interpretation of Christianity to help change those attitudes and solve the ecological crisis.<sup>7</sup> Many scholars cite the publication of White's essay as a critical moment in the emergence of American scholarly interest in the relationship between religion and environmentalism. Although there were earlier texts promoting conservation based on religion,<sup>8</sup> White's article garnered widespread attention because it was published in a prestigious journal at a time of "dramatic ecological change" and fit nicely with emergent countercultural critiques of Western society.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, it triggered strong responses within environmental, theological, and academic circles.

Some environmentalists and scholars concurred with White's assessment, although they tended to oversimplify his argument by ignoring its emphasis on historical context and focusing solely on the idea that resource exploitation in Western societies derived from an anthropocentric "mastery-over-nature" worldview rooted in the biblical creation story that gave humans "dominion" over nature.<sup>10</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s, this perspective coincided with academic and popular interest in a variety of spiritual traditions that seemed to offer more environmentally friendly alternatives to Christianity, such as Asian and neo-pagan religions, deep ecology, and Indigenous traditions in which Traditional Ecological Knowledge was embedded in religion.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, American and European theologians also responded to White's article. In the face of a 1970s environmentalism closely identified with wilderness preservation, some Christian leaders and theologians distanced themselves from a movement they saw as more concerned with wildlife than human welfare. Others, however, accepted White's critique of pre-modern Western worldviews but argued that biblical religion could be compatible with environmentalism. They sought to recover a biblical environmental ethic by correcting dominion-themed "misinterpretations" of scripture and highlighting passages linking the welfare of humans and nature. They also reframed Christian theology, expanding ideas of justice and human responsibilities to God to include care for nature. Since its inception in the early 1970s, this genre of eco-theology has continued to grow and has expanded to include all of the major world religions, although the majority of texts are still produced in the United States and United Kingdom.

There have also been efforts to create new ministries to implement these ethics. For example, in the 1980s, the National Council of Churches created an Eco-justice Ministry that worked to promote faith-based support for environmental justice among Protestant denominations in the United States. This ministry was a major sponsor for the People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in 1991 and a National Black Church Environmental and Economic Justice Summit (Washington, DC) in 1993.<sup>12</sup>

The 1990s brought rising awareness of climate change, which transformed environmental issues into social welfare issues and inspired an upwelling of activity from religious leaders in the United States and Europe. In 1990, Carl Sagan and a group of scientists issued "An Open Letter to the Religious Community," that states, "The environmental crisis requires radical changes, not only in public policy, but also in individual behavior," and suggests that religion might be able to help create social changes that go beyond the scope of

science.<sup>13</sup> Senior religious leaders in the US responded to the letter by forming the National Religious Partnership for the Environment in 1993, a forum in which Jewish, Catholic, Evangelical, Protestant, and Orthodox Christian organizations could share resources and support each other in promoting climate action among their members and in the wider American society.<sup>14</sup> In the same period, Prince Philip of Great Britain helped organize the Alliance of Religions and Conservation to assist religious organizations around the world in developing environmental programs based on their beliefs and practices.<sup>15</sup> In the first decade of the twenty-first century, a new organization called Interfaith Power and Light<sup>16</sup> emerged to promote a faith-based response to global warming through energy efficiency upgrades to US houses of worship, while the Evangelical Environmental Network organized a “What Would Jesus Drive” campaign to encourage purchase of fuel-efficient cars.<sup>17</sup> During this same time period, the major denominations in the United States adopted formal statements calling on their members to care for the earth and support efforts to mitigate climate change.

#### THE ACADEMIC STUDY OF RELIGION AND ECOLOGY

The trends in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century religious environmentalism inspired emergence of a field of scholarship on religion and ecology, much of it predicated on the idea that “religious worldviews decisively shape environmental behaviors.”<sup>18</sup> Research questions within the field run parallel to trends in religious environmentalism. Early work in the field focused on what role biblical religion might play in causing negative environmental attitudes and behavior, while more recent scholarship has emphasized the potential for religion to promote positive environmental actions, especially in response to climate change.

In the 1980s, social scientists became interested in exploring the “Lynn White thesis,” that a biblical “mastery-over-nature” ethic contributed to a utilitarian view of nature, as a factor that might affect levels of environmental concern and activism. White’s ideas may have seemed particularly apropos at a time when the newly created Moral Majority (founded in 1979) was promoting a political agenda linked to conservative Christianity. Since the Moral Majority was closely affiliated with the Reagan administration, which was removing government support for environmental programs and increasing economic development of natural resources on federally controlled lands and waters, a correlation between conservative Protestantism and anti-environmental

attitudes seemed plausible. A few social scientists tried to empirically evaluate whether belief in divinely sanctioned human dominion over nature did, indeed, influence environmentalism. Unfortunately, efforts to use surveys to find correlations between specific beliefs and levels of environmental concern were inconclusive. Some researchers found evidence that membership in more conservative denominations or having greater belief in biblical literalism (also associated with conservative churches) correlated with lower levels of environmental concern, and theorized that people in these circumstances were more likely to subscribe to a dominion worldview, which could explain their attitudes.<sup>19</sup> However, subsequent studies in the 1990s found that there was variation within denominations and that political identity rather than dominion beliefs might explain the differing levels of environmental concern.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, as public awareness of climate change increased in the 1990s, leaders from across the spectrum of American religious denominations became vocal advocates for environmental action. Many Christian clergy cited the same biblical passage that Lynn White associated with Christian anti-nature attitudes as the basis for an environmental message, arguing that because humans were given dominion over nature, they had a divine mandate to practice sustainable stewardship of God's creation.<sup>21</sup>

As these eco-theologies multiplied and new religious environmental movement organizations were established in the 1990s, more academics began to study the intersection of religion and ecology. A contingent of scholars became particularly interested in the potential for religion to motivate responses to environmental crises. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim organized a series of conferences on world religions and ecology that explored religious narratives and practices that could be reframed to encourage environmental ethics. Their goal was to construct resources that could help faith communities engage with environmental crises. To those who participated in this constructive scholarship, the expanding body of eco-theology, proliferation of environmental statements among major denominations in the US, and emergence of religious environmental organizations seemed to indicate that US religions were "going green."<sup>22</sup>

Researchers who studied the new eco-theologies and faith-based environmental campaigns speculated about whether religion would be able to create a social movement to address climate change that would be similar to the civil rights movement of the 1960s.<sup>23</sup> However, a few scholars have challenged the idea that Western religions are becoming greener.<sup>24</sup> They note, for example, that people attending churches in Cornwall were unaware that

their denomination, the Church of England, was engaged in a campaign to encourage environmental action in its member congregations;<sup>25</sup> that many evangelicals in the United States have not heard of the Evangelical Climate Initiative and are distrustful of climate action messages from clergy they do not know personally;<sup>26</sup> and that surveys in the US indicate that Christians have lower levels of environmental concern than non-Christians and non-religious individuals, a pattern that did not change between 1993 and 2010.<sup>27</sup> These studies, which seem to indicate that denominational environmental statements have had little influence on the attitudes or actions of the people in the pews, have caused prominent scholars in the religion and ecology field to critique the idea there is an imminent greening of religion movement that will soon have significant effects on American society and advocate for much more research into how religion influences environmental behaviors.<sup>28</sup>

## RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENTALISM IN PRACTICE

The apparent disconnect between top-down theological pronouncements advocating earth care and denominational members' awareness is not, however, the end of the story. Some Christians, Jews, and other people of faith in the United States *are* engaging in faith-based environmental action. The number of religious environmental movement organizations in the US increased from nine in 1990 to more than eighty in 2010, by which time they were operating in most states.<sup>29</sup> A growing number of faith communities are working to put environmental ethics into practice. Clergy and lay members were a significant presence at the 2016 Climate March in Washington, DC, and supported the water protection movement at Standing Rock. Religious environmental action is also taking place at the local congregational level. People are making houses of worship more energy efficient, installing solar panels, and conserving water and other resources. They are restoring forests and prairies on their lands, purchasing local food, growing organic produce for food pantries, advocating for environmental justice, and participating in local climate marches. In 2018, there were 206 certified Earth Care Congregations in the Presbyterian Church USA<sup>30</sup> and 290 certified Green Sanctuaries in the Unitarian Universalist Association (about 30 percent of UUA churches).<sup>31</sup> People of faith use diverse terms such as earth care, creation care, restoring creation, being green, and practicing sustainability to describe these efforts, but what is striking is that they are taking action through the

venue of religious organizations, rather than through the venue of traditional environmental organizations.

Surveys attempting to measure whether religions are becoming green by correlating religious affiliation with environmental concern do not adequately capture or explain the earth-care activities that are occurring in these individual faith communities. The fact that some Catholic parishes engage in earth care while the majority do not, despite environmental pronouncements from three consecutive popes, indicates that theology and denominational leadership are not the sole, and perhaps not even the most significant, factors in determining whether people of faith undertake environmental actions. This fact begs the question, why? Why are some faith communities going green even though most are not? And, once motivated to engage in earth care, how do people of faith turn intention into action, and what actions do they undertake?

These questions are of interest because more Americans belong to religious organizations than any other type of voluntary association<sup>32</sup> and, collectively, religious communities are the single most prevalent type of human organization in the world.<sup>33</sup> Since religions are institutions that express social values and govern behavior, they provide a platform with significant potential for advancing social change. In a world confronting the realities of climate change and the imperative for environmental sustainability, there is need for a better understanding of the role religious communities can play in facilitating institutional changes that enable resilience, adaptation, and sustainability.

A few scholars have begun to study these movements, to examine the “messiness of religious environmentalism in practice,”<sup>34</sup> and their research is shedding light on factors that help overcome barriers to action. Stephen Ellingson analyzed the emergence of religious environmental movement organizations in the United States between 1990 and 2010. His work revealed how these organizations adapted religious ideas to give legitimacy to religious environmentalism in ways that fit the constraints of being embedded in religious institutions.<sup>35</sup> Scholars are also beginning to explore religious environmentalism at the community level. Sarah McFarland Taylor described the experiences of the green sisters, a network of Catholic women religious from diverse communities in North America, whose shared knowledge and moral support facilitated efforts to incorporate earth care into convents and retreat centers.<sup>36</sup> These women were early adopters of an earth-care ethic and helped establish many of the precepts and practices that others later took up. Amanda Baugh delved into the empirical experiences of one specific religious environmental organization and its efforts

to promote faith-based environmentalism within local congregations. She conducted fieldwork at Faith in Place in Chicago over several years and explored how race, ethnicity, and class caused variations in “the shape and meaning” of religious environmentalism in practice.<sup>37</sup>

## A CASE-STUDY EXPLORATION OF THE GREENING OF RELIGION

This book adds to our understanding of religious environmentalism in practice. Ellingson and Baugh focused on organizations that strive to motivate action within communities of faith. To better understand faith-based environmental behavior, this study examines the empirical experiences of fifteen faith communities that heeded the call to action and integrated sustainability into their religious organizations. These communities, which include Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and Unitarian Universalist congregations, have implemented initiatives that are designed to reduce their community’s environmental impact through activities such as conserving resources, growing food, restoring ecosystems, and advocating for policies that address environmental justice and climate change. In order to understand factors that contributed to these accomplishments, the book employs case-study methods, which are particularly well suited to exploring motivations and processes that affect human behavior. As Robert Yin comments in his classic text on case-study methods, “In general, case studies are the preferred strategy when ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions are being posed,” especially when trying to understand “contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context.”<sup>38</sup> To learn why some faith communities have undertaken earth-care programs and to understand how those who are successful were able to achieve their accomplishments, it makes sense to speak with the people who were personally involved in making things happen. Therefore, this project uses field research and comparative in-depth case-study analysis to investigate factors that triggered emergence and institutionalization of faith-based sustainability initiatives as well as the reach and substantive impact of those efforts.

### *Key Terminology*

This book uses the phrase “sustainability initiative” to describe the environmental activities undertaken by the case-study communities. The term “initiative” refers to a *set of actions* undertaken for the purpose of reducing a faith community’s impact on the natural environment. Earth Day worship



services or earth-care themed Bible study may serve as precursors to an initiative, but these types of activity alone do not constitute initiatives because they do not involve changes in community infrastructure or behavior that affect use of natural resources. A faith community that has undertaken a sustainability initiative is one that is engaged in activities such as conservation behavior through reduced use of water and energy, resource management through sustainable land stewardship practices, or policy advocacy work to promote regulations that protect air, water, and food.

Defining the initiatives to be studied in relation to “sustainability,” the idea of “improving the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting eco-systems,”<sup>39</sup> offers a broad umbrella under which to explore the diverse environmental activities being implemented by faith-based organizations. These activities range from habitat restoration to resource conservation; from support for organic, local, and fair-trade foods to social justice advocacy for policies to improve the quality of life for disadvantaged people. Faith groups use a variety of terms to describe their actions, including *restoring creation*, *creation care*, *earth stewardship*, *earth care*, and *being green*. Only recently have they begun speaking of *sustainability*, however, the term is gaining popularity because it avoids the social conflicts associated with references to climate change or environmentalism, which have become linked to liberal political identities in the United States. *Sustainability* is also a useful overarching term for describing a range of motives that inspire specific environmental actions. For example, one community may create a community garden to grow food as a means of reducing greenhouse gas emissions generated by transportation of non-local produce, while another community creates a garden in order to feed people who live in a food desert and have little access to fresh produce. In the first case, climate change is the motivation, whereas environmental justice is the issue in the second case, yet both can be described as actions that contribute to environmental sustainability. Therefore, this book uses *sustainability initiative* to describe programs for undertaking environmental actions within faith communities because the term is acceptable to people in diverse religious traditions and because all of the activities enacted under the various rubrics cited above can be subsumed under an overarching sustainability label.

The term *faith community* is used because this study includes both congregations and monastic communities, and because the term *congregation* has multiple meanings, which can create confusion. Congregations are “social institutions in which individuals who are not all religious specialists gather in physical proximity to one another, frequently and at regularly scheduled

intervals, for activities and events with explicitly religious content and purpose, and in which there is continuity over time in the individuals who gather, the location of the gathering, and the nature of the activities and events at each gathering.”<sup>40</sup> As faith-based social institutions, monasteries are similar to congregations except that the members are all religious specialists who have chosen to dedicate their lives to a full-time religious vocation. Because both congregations and monasteries are religious organizations with defined leadership and governance structures, memberships, locations, and fairly quantifiable material and social resources, it was possible to compare case studies from both types of faith community.

A second reason for referring to the case-study groups as *faith communities* was to avoid the potential for confusion that arises because the word *congregation* can refer to both a religious social institution (a church/synagogue/temple/mosque) and to its body of members. Thus, for example, one can say that “Trinity Presbyterian is a Christian congregation” and that “the congregation of Trinity Presbyterian meets on Sundays.” To avoid confusion, this book refers to the religious social institution as a faith community and the body of members as a congregation.

The fifteen case studies in this book include ten non-monastic communities and five monastic communities. Non-monastic faith communities make up the majority of the religious organizations in the United States, and the experiences of the cases described in this study may be of particular interest for better understanding the benefits and challenges such communities face in adopting sustainability as a religious activity. Although monastic communities are less prevalent, many have been early adopters of earth-care practices and, consequently, they provide a rich source of knowledge about the long-term evolution of sustainability initiatives. Because both types of religious institutions have primary missions of supporting members’ religious lives rather than being explicitly focused on environmental protection, these fifteen non-monastic and monastic communities faced similar challenges in adopting earth care as part of their community missions. The insights that emerge from comparing their experiences may be of use to people of faith in a variety of religious organizations.

### *Case Selection*

The faith communities studied for this book were selected because they have implemented exemplary sustainability initiatives. Prior to selecting cases, I

explored the range of environmental activities being conducted by faith communities in the United States by reading accounts presented on websites for interfaith environmental organizations. Brief descriptions of faith-community earth-care actions were available as Stewardship Stories on the website for the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, Cool Congregations Award winners celebrated by Interfaith Power and Light, Success Stories recounted by the Eco-Justice Program (later renamed Creation Justice Ministries) of the National Council of Churches, GreenFaith Certification Program participants listed by GreenFaith, and Engaged Projects compiled by Yale University's Forum on Religion and Ecology.<sup>41</sup> Analysis of 173 such stories revealed three general types of activities being undertaken by faith communities: resource conservation, land stewardship, and political advocacy. Resource conservation comprised the most widely practiced type of activity, as faith communities were: reducing use of energy, water, paper and gasoline; establishing recycling and composting programs; buying fair-trade coffee and recycled paper products; growing produce for local food pantries; and installing solar panels. Land stewardship activities were being undertaken by communities with larger grounds, where they were replacing lawns with native plant gardens, hosting community-supported agriculture (CSA) farms, and restoring prairie and forest ecosystems. Political advocacy appeared in various faith communities that engaged in actions such as writing letters to legislators to encourage support for climate action, attending municipal meetings to testify against permits for environmentally damaging projects, and submitting stockholder policy proposals to require that corporations report on the environmental effects of their supply chains.

Perusal of these stories revealed that some faith communities were engaged in environmental activities on a scale that set them apart from most congregations. The majority of the stewardship stories described faith communities that focused on one or two projects, however, a small portion had undertaken multiple activities that integrated earth care into diverse areas of their religious organizations, including worship, religious education, facilities management, and ministry work. In this subset of cases, sustainability seemed to have become embedded in the social norms that defined general behavioral expectations for the congregation. These "exemplary" cases of faith-based earth care became the focus of this research project. The goal was to compare success stories in order to identify factors that contribute to the process of integrating sustainability into a faith community's social norms. Consequently, the cases selected for this study involve faith communities with sustainability initiatives

that included multiple activities and were continued for at least four years.<sup>42</sup> All of the cases include resource conservation actions, and most also include advocacy and/or land stewardship. The four-year criterion was added in order to examine factors that contributed to durability of initiatives.

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

Using qualitative research methods, I collected three types of data: Fifty-two semi-structured interviews, site visit observations at all fifteen locations, and archival materials. Interviews were essential for gathering data from the people who were closely involved with the initiatives. The interview questions were developed based on information from research fields of conservation psychology, social movement theory, and collaborative resource management, which provide insights into factors that affect individual and collective action.<sup>43</sup> Interviewees were asked about motivations that inspired them to engage in earth care through the venue of a faith community and factors such as social networks, resources, and decision processes that enabled them to develop and sustain initiatives. Site visits were important for assessing the scale and outcome of initiatives. These visits made it possible to find out how visible earth care was in a faith community's buildings and activities, and to assess the breadth of congregational awareness of earth care through informal conversations with members who were not on the "green team" that led the initiatives or by observing how many people spent time in a community garden after worship service. The site visits also allowed me to learn about the local municipal context. Archival data provided information about the development of initiatives over time. This data included internal materials such as congregational histories, newsletters, meeting minutes, sermons, applications for green certification, brochures, and land management plans, as well as external materials such as media stories, denominational and interfaith earth-care program information, and scholarship on denominational polity. Electronic media such as webpage videos, blogs, and Facebook pages were also included in the archival materials.

The data was organized into case studies describing factors that affected development of each sustainability initiative. These case studies were then compared to identify similarities and differences across the cases. Although there was no one pathway followed by all the faith communities, comparison did reveal similar patterns of leadership and organizational factors that affected how deeply sustainability became embedded in the social norms

of faith communities. In each case, initiatives began when key individuals took the lead and organized earth-care activities through the venue of their faith community. Development of the resulting sustainability initiatives was shaped by the characteristics of these individual champions and their interactions with the faith leaders, congregations, and organizations that made up their faith communities. This shared pattern provided the structure for an analytical framework to examine factors within four domains of activity—Champions, Faith Leaders, Congregations, and Organizations—that affected the emergence and implementation of the sustainability initiatives. This book recounts the stories of the remarkable sustainability initiatives undertaken by these fifteen faith communities and describes insights that emerged from comparison of their experiences in each of these four domains.

## AN OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

Following on this overview of the tension between hope for an upwelling of religiously motivated environmental activity and the limited research on the practice of faith-based earth care, Part I of the book begins to describe and analyze the empirical experiences of faith communities that have developed exemplary sustainability initiatives. Chapter 1 presents an overview of the fifteen case studies, with brief descriptions of each community and its initiative. Chapter 2 describes key findings that emerged from cross-case analysis, which indicated that the initiatives were affected by factors in the four domains of activity (Champions, Faith Leaders, Congregations, and Organizations).

The rest of the book is organized into four parts that each focus on a domain of activity. Part II, Champions, comprises an introduction to the domain and Chapters 3 and 4, which examine motivations and leadership qualities that enabled individuals to effectively organize earth-care activities within their faith communities. Part III, Faith Leaders, begins with an introduction that describes the motivations that inspired clergy and leadership teams to promote earth care. Chapter 5 explores the messages through which faith leaders presented earth care as an issue requiring action from their faith communities, and Chapter 6 considers how the mechanisms through which faith leaders promoted earth-care affected initiative development. Part IV, Congregations, presents a brief summary of case-study community characteristics in the introduction, followed by two chapters that delve into factors that influenced levels of congregational support for earth-care activities. Chapter 7 focuses on community identity and historical practices, while

Chapter 8 explores variations in congregational involvement in initiatives. Finally, Part V, Organizations, examines operating procedures (Chapter 9) and organizational structures (Chapter 10) that provided opportunities, and sometimes imposed constraints, for implementation of earth-care activities. Each domain section ends with an analysis called “Summary and Domain Interactions” that summarizes specific contributions the domain made to the sustainability initiatives and examines how factors from that domain intersected with other domains to enable implementation of earth-care activities.

The Conclusion pulls together the contributions, enabling factors, and intersections from all four domains, which together form a matrix of observations, some of which suggest best practices for developing sustainability initiatives in faith communities. The chapter also includes reflections on the role of religion in these cases of faith-based earth care. It is important to remember that the primary purpose of a religious organization is to support the religious lives of its members. The case-study communities adopted earth care as an activity that was consistent with their religious purpose, but these communities are not environmental organizations; they are religious organizations working to protect the environment as an expression of their faith. Therefore, this research pays special attention to the processes through which faith communities reflected on the relationship between earth care and their religious missions, and what factors affected decisions to incorporate earth care into the religious organizations.