

Getting Started

Welcome! On this page, you will find a collection of strategies for your consideration when beginning your own “greening” process. While you will find what works best for your particular institution as you go, the following suggestions should help you get started.



Before You Begin - Here are a Few Things to Keep in Mind:

Keep the larger purpose in mind.

- **We are called** as human beings to be participants in, and keepers of God’s creation in all its human, biological, geological, and ecological manifestations. These efforts are part of a larger ecclesial movement to incorporate care for creation into the life and mission of both the church and the university.
- **The role of a theological school** is to serve as a model and to prepare people to provide eco-justice leadership in the congregations and communities where they serve.
- **The goal** is to transform the life and mission of your institution so that earth care is incorporated into every aspect of the institution. The key here is that the “environment” is not one more issue among others. Rather, earth care is fundamental to what it means to be human.

Remember your commitment to human justice.

- **Ecological and human justice** issues are inextricably intertwined. Every ecological problem affects the human community, usually having the greatest impact on the most vulnerable—the poor, the inhabitants of two-thirds world countries, the very young, the elderly, and the disabled. Therefore, earth care and social justice need to be unified.

Seek to act out of gratitude and grace.

- **In response to the many ecological crises facing the world**, it is natural for people to be motivated by fear, grief, guilt, or even outrage. While these emotions are indeed appropriate responses, they are not a solid basis to make wise decisions, and they will not sustain one's efforts in the long run. This is true both for your own sources of life-giving support and for the motivation you seek to engender in others. Be alarming without being alarmist. Do not become the environmental police. This in no way means we should minimize either the problems or our complicity in them or the urgency of the situation. We should seek to work positively and constructively out of the deep reservoir of God's grace present in nature itself.

Be in touch with nature.

- **Feeling close to nature** is crucial to sustaining your commitment to earth care. Encourage this relationship for the community—whether through greening the chapel with plants, keeping a garden, getting a naturalist to help you understand the ecosystem around your school, planning nature outings, or providing occasional retreat opportunities for the community. We seek to restore nature by being in solidarity with all creation rather than manipulating it from above. We are called to love and rejoice in creation as God does. Please visit our [worship page](#) and our [public ministry page](#) to learn more about how to accomplish these tasks.

Take Stock

Your first steps should be take stock of the opportunities and resources you have at hand. By working with what you have (instead of worrying about what you don't have), you can move forward quickly on the issues that concern you most.

Form a green team:

- **Find a few folks** who are already committed to eco-justice, social justice or other related concerns. Seek to find a balance of students, staff, administration and faculty. Commit to meeting regularly and working together for a set amount of time (e.g. an academic year).

Assess your opportunities and existing assets:

- **Reflect** on the programs, offerings, and structures already present at the school. The seminary is a notoriously busy place. So, when possible, work with the structures already present. See ways in which these already existing features of the institution can express a commitment to eco-justice or incorporate earth care. Build a green seminary around the opportunities at hand.

Find financial resources:

- **Like any other group on campus**, you will need financial resources to accomplish your larger goals. A number of creative and collaborative ways exist whereby you can find financial support for your efforts. It may be possible to get a line item in the budget; the committee could apply for some of the funds made available for student organizations and activities; the school may be willing to support a special event; your committee may be able to cooperate with other groups or organizations that have funds; or, it may be possible to work with the development office to obtain grant money for your efforts. Whatever your financial needs might be, by thinking outside the box and seeking funds in creative ways, you'll be surprised at what help you may find.

Find human resources:

- **Every group** needs passionate, dedicated people in order to achieve success. Volunteer work from students, faculty, and staff is crucial. You might also want to see if the administrative office in charge of community life or campus affairs might provide annual funding for one or two workers (3 to 4 hours a week during the school year) who could work for the greening of the school under the supervision of a faculty or staff person. In addition, you should seek out allies who will share in your labor. Your worship/chapel team, for example, might carry out earth-themed worship commitments, or perhaps the facilities department will take the lead in recycling efforts.

Be creative and careful in naming your group or project.

- **People will respond to a name** and remember what your school is doing in becoming green. You will want a name that refers to the whole institution. It might help to call it a "team" or a "group" (such as The Green Team or The Eco-justice Working Group or The Creation-Care Group) rather than a "committee" in order to emphasize the idea that it is not one committee among many but a catalyst and leaven for all the committees and programs at your seminary. It is also helpful to draw on the symbols and ideas from your tradition, to connect your name to your denomination, and to develop a logo that reflects your purpose.

Establish a Vision

Engage your theological school in envisioning a green future:

- **Gather as broad a constituency as possible** for a meeting or series of meetings to imagine what your green seminary would look like 2 years from now, 10 years from now, and 50 years from now.

- **Use your imagination!** Think about what the grounds would look like with native plants and organic vegetable gardens. Imagine faculty, students and staff arriving by bus, foot or bike. Think about each class having a creation component. Have fun with this!
- **Revisit your institution's mission statement** and work to incorporate your vision with the larger mission of your school.

Set Goals and Develop an Action Plan

Set goals:

- **Set specific long-term goals** that would help facilitate your vision (e.g. reducing energy use by 10% over five years).

Develop a yearly action plan:

- **Develop a specific, comprehensive yearly action plan** with discrete activities to implement your goals. Otherwise, the process will be haphazard and without direction.
- **Focus on five areas** when developing an action plan: [Worship, Education, Building and Grounds, Community Life, and Public Ministry](#).
- **Return to this action plan** each year to evaluate how you are doing and to make changes for the next year. This will ensure that you keep the larger picture in mind and that the process of brainstorming and planning is an ongoing part of your work.
- **Don't try to do it all at once.** It's easy to be overwhelmed by all that there is to do or all that could be done, but careful planning and constant mindfulness will keep you focused. The idea is to choose projects that are manageable, have a good chance of success, and that make the most substantive change. By setting realistic goals and choosing manageable tasks, you set yourself up for tangible, inspiring results. You will find that there are good starter projects. Then, as you reach a threshold of interest and support, other more ambitious projects will be possible.
- **Celebrate what you get done** without worrying about what does not get done. You can only do what you can do!

Make the transitions:

- **Transition times are critical moments.** Some students will graduate, others will take on internships and other work responsibilities. You will inevitably gain and lose volunteers during summer breaks. To hit the ground running at the beginning of the school year, choose the leadership for the next year in the early spring of the year before. So, in March, select the workers or elect the leaders who will plan during late spring for the events to take place at orientation and in the early fall. Otherwise you will find yourselves having to get organized all over again each fall with a new community, while precious time is lost.

- **Carry over structures from year to year.** Because of the rhythms of academic life, the turnover of population at a divinity school, and the occasions of sabbaticals and internships, it is so easy to let the movement drop for a period of time and then have to pick it all up again. Hence, it is important to devise a strategy that keeps the commitment going and keeps the concern before the community. Such a structure will give a familiar pattern to the program from year to year and it will help keep volunteers engaged.
- **Plan only those activities that you have resources and energy to carry out,** and, if possible, transform them into regular (even annual) events. For example, the committee may sponsor, or urge the community to sponsor some of the same key events each year, such as:
 1. Presentation at orientation for new students
 2. Fall worship service in which members make a “covenant with creation”
 3. Blessing of the Animals on St. Francis Day (October 2), Tu Bishvat (Jan/Feb), or Sukkot (Sept/Oct)
 4. Open committee meetings with an educational component
 5. One or two open lectures for the community with guest speakers
 6. Senior Dinner in which graduates are given eco-themed materials for their ministry.
 7. Earth Week worship
 8. An annual Fall workshop on gardening, composting, or green living
 9. Hosting an Eco-Justice tour
 10. Clean-up projects with local congregations and environmental groups to restore local waterways, unused plots of land, or other damaged/neglected ecosystems.

Build a Coalition

Inspire others – be a catalyst:

- **It only takes a few** to change the whole. The task requires a small group of dedicated and committed people who are willing to grasp a vision for the seminary and to stay at it for the long term. Seek to diversify involvement in terms of race, gender, ethnicity, age, and affiliation with the seminary. Engage students, faculty, staff, and alumni. Always have open meetings promoted so that all who wish to participate may do so.
- **The purpose of a committee is not to do *all* of the “earth care” activities,** but to serve as leaven to green the school as a whole. The committee should function as a catalyst. Your task is to assist other committees and offices of the seminary as they incorporate eco-justice concerns into their arena of responsibility. In this way, everyone participates and takes ownership at different levels and in different ways. As leaders, your task is to inspire, coordinate, and inform so that earth care becomes a central part of the ethos of the entire institution and community.

Get everyone involved at some level:

- **Strategize how to get everyone involved** in some aspect of the greening of your school. There is no need for everyone to join the committee. Engage people at the level of their involvement in the seminary, in relation to the things they already care about – some in worship, some in teaching, some in community activism, and everyone in recycling and conserving energy. Try to identify the nature of everyone’s potential involvement—the president, deans, curriculum committee, worship leaders, administration and staff of the seminary, students in various programs, faculty, the library, and so on – and then work to make it a reality. By engendering involvement by everyone, at even the most basic level, the entire community will soon be invested and committed to the greening process.
- **Work cooperatively and realistically.** One goal of the committee is to foster eco-justice decisions and events among all activities and offices of the institution. The role of the committee is to suggest, encourage, support, and offer resources – rather than to take over any decision-making or job belonging to another. In a small, close-knit community like a divinity school, there is little place for pressure or protest. Invitation, cooperation, influence, and support will go a long way.

Raise Awareness

Publicize, publicize, publicize:

- **Community organizers** say that in order to promote a movement or an event effectively, you must do so in seven different media. Try e-mail, newsletters, posters, personal contacts, phone trees, announcements in chapel or in classrooms, bulletin boards...be creative, be thorough! Even if fewer people than you had hoped show up for an event, the whole community knows what is happening.
- **Because there are new students each year,** it is necessary to re-acquaint the committee and the community at the beginning of each academic year with the goals and tasks of the committee. A brochure may help in this endeavor. Some groups have reported that involving their “green team” in each year’s orientation process is a great way to educate others, to bring new members on board, and to ensure that your commitment to greening your seminary remains a central focus at your institution.
- **Keep care for creation before the attention of the community.** Let people know the importance of the work of becoming earth-keepers who care about ecological justice through worship, community lectures, and course work. You can also accomplish this through occasional conferences, green notes in the newsletter, and through displays and hands-on activities such as planting and gardening events. If one goal is to shape the ethos of the seminary, then care for creation needs to be part of the atmosphere!

Plan for Posterity

Make it policy:

- **Institutionalize your actions** as quickly as possible. This way, it will not depend on the committee to suggest them anew each year. For example, if you celebrate Earth Week one year, seek to make it a regular part of the worship schedule. Do not reinvent the wheel each year!
- **Get authorized.** It may be helpful to locate the committee in the institutional structure or under an outside administrative office such as the community life office. Or, it may serve as a subcommittee of another committee, with a member of the oversight committee serving as a liaison member. Report regularly to those to whom you are accountable (e.g. the president, the dean, or the person in charge of community life) and let your activities be known to the whole community.

Enjoy and take advantage of your success!

- **The success of the program will draw students and donors.** Prospective students who learn about your activities and the greening of your theological school will often consider this an important factor, perhaps even the decisive factor, in their choice of a school. The emphasis on earth care can also draw interested donors. Specific projects can be very attractive to fund-granting organizations. Don't hesitate to capitalize on these benefits by including your efforts in your newsletters, recruitment materials, and website. Let others know about the great work that you are doing!

Further Thoughts

- **Once you have finished a certain number of activities, you will attain a threshold of support** that will enable you to do things you could not do before. By doing more activities, you will then move the school to the next level of engagement. Before long, there will be an eco-justice climate and a sense of identity, which will empower you to generate personal and institutional commitments that are not otherwise possible.
- **We also urge you to take advantage of all the Green Seminary Initiative resources on this site.** We hope they will be helpful to you in your greening process.

Send Us Your Suggestions

- Please send comments and suggestions to us about your ideas and experiences for the benefit of others who may wish to take this path. Tell others your story. Send suggestions and information to webmaster@greenseminaries.org.