

Parish Greening Guide



Practical Ideas for
Living in a Way
that Acknowledges
God's Generosity

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Acknowledges God's Generosity**

February 2020

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FORWARD

*How magnified are Thy works, O Lord!
In wisdom hast Thou made them all;
The earth is filled with Thy creation. (Ps. 103)*

In the last few years one may have read the most astounding and concerning news reports about vast floating islands of plastic in the Pacific Ocean, micro-plastics not just in our seafood, but in the depths of the ocean, early fire seasons, super storms, a large city of some six million in India running out of water, various forms of massive pollution and so on. For many of us, reports and explanations (which seem regularly contradictory and heavily politicized) about weather and climate are terribly confusing. Perhaps one can simply observe that our God-given world, which is subject to corruption and sin, is hurting.

What to do? I don't know what to say regarding the controversial issues on climate and pollution. Neither am I interested in promoting a partisan agenda in this parish. I only know that I am responsible here, at my parish and my home, for living in a way that is not a wasteful or irresponsible use of the gifts, offerings and labor of our parishioners and God's generosity.

As a pastor, I am interesting in doing something "where I live" in whatever way I can responsibly manage. I'm interested in being inspired by what Fr. Alexander Schmemmann wrote: "...when we give up freely, totally, unconditionally, the self-sufficiency of our life, when we

put all its meaning in Christ, that the ‘newness of life’ – which means a new possession of the world – is given to us. The world then truly becomes the sacrament of Christ’s presence, the growth of the Kingdom and of life eternal.” — Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*.

In other words, I would like to live with gratitude to God, to live sacramentally: “O Lord, how magnified are Thy works, in wisdom hast Thou made them all. The earth is full of Thy...” Such sentiments help us to live with a sense of stewardship of the gifts the Lord has given us.

This document, humbly offered, is an invitation to examine the day-to-day habits at our parish regarding the things we consume, the water we use, the fuel we burn, the waste we leave behind (staying to clean up after an Agape Meal or BBQ, one would be surprised at the pollution left behind each week on the grounds and in the Parish Hall). Hopefully some of these ideas can carry over into our homes and possibly our communities. Let us give thanks to God for His kindness to us.

—Fr. Lawrence Margitich
St. Seraphim Cathedral, Santa Rosa, CA

Table of Contents

Part One

Garbage.....	Page 2
Space.....	Page 7
Food.....	Page 8
Energy	Page 10
Water.....	Page 12

Part Two

Parish Practices	Page 14
Waste.....	Page 15
Energy	Page 16
Transportation.....	Page 16
Finances.....	Page 19
Land.....	Page 20

Part Three

Community.....	Page 21
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Part One

SELF • FAMILY • HOME

Editors' note: This guide was written with the intention of helping us examine our everyday practices from the ground up—i.e., starting with our homes and personal lives, and then flowing into our communal parish lives, and perhaps cities or towns. Living in a way that is respectful of God's creation often starts at home, with the garbage cans, food and fuel that make up our daily routines. For Parish Council purposes, it may be helpful to start with the Parish section, which features ideas specifically for churches and starts on page 10.

GARBAGE

Our most obvious—though not necessarily greatest—ecological “point of harm” often lies in our trash cans. Digging through them at the end of the week can reveal a lot! What is in there that doesn't need to be? Ask yourself what can you avoid buying just to throw away again.

- Is it paper towels?

Can you switch to rags? This saves money in the long run. For example, you don't need to go out and buy new rags to replace paper towels—you can tear up old clothes that would otherwise go into a landfill.

- Plastic sandwich bags?

You can: purchase or make reusable ones with zippers, use reusable wax paper or wrap things in cloth. Be creative! Rather than buying a bunch of new things, focus on using what you already have.

- Plastic produce bags?

Substitute with reusable mesh bags or cloth. Or save those plastic bags, wash them and reuse them multiple times (a common practice at many monasteries). Can you buy corn-based compostable bags like those offered by ClearBags as a last resort if you really need something single-use? These can be found at Safeway stores in Sonoma County.

- Paint? Shoes? Electronics?

Look into your local recycling programs to help dispose of things properly and keep them out of the landfill. Examples: *Nike*, and the *Nike* outlets in Petaluma will take old shoes and grind them up to turn them into astroturf for playgrounds. *Apple* stores will take back electronics. Broken ceramics can go on your local *Freecycle* page for mosaic artists—in Sonoma County, the page is called *Sonoma County Unconditional Give or Take* (SCUGT); ask Rachel Dovey for a social media invite.

Half-full cans of paint can also go on SCUGT for remodelers on a budget. Half-used art supplies can go to the Legacy craft store in Sebastopol. Used pens and markers can to Staples—they will recycle them.

- Leftover building supplies?
Consider donating to *Habitat for Humanity's Restore. H.U.T.S.* (which builds tiny homes for homeless veterans) also takes donations from time to time—call *Homeless Action!* at (707) 742-3733. And SCUGT is another good place to unload paint, windows (for greenhouses), lumber, bricks, concrete chunks etc.
- Packaging from Amazon?
Certain UPS stores are now “Amazon locker” locations, meaning you can drop plastic mailers off. *Four Oak Farm* in South Santa Rosa uses recycled packaging for their CSA and veggie boxes and always needs donations (<https://www.fouroakfarm.com>).
- Hand soap dispensers or packaging from dish soap and laundry detergent?
Many stores now offer the option of refilling your old soap container or a reusable mason jar from their bulk soap containers. This saves plastic and money. In Santa Rosa, Community Market is the easiest place to do this — and bulk soaps, shampoos and detergents are surprisingly cost-effective.
- Grocery/food packaging?
Can you shop at a local grocery store with bulk containers and bring items home in reusable packaging (jars, Tupperware etc.) to avoid making more trash? Dry staples such as flour, sugar, salt, pasta and beans can be brought home in sewn cloth bags or old plastic bags. Wet pantry basics like olive oil, vanilla, soy sauce, vinegar, honey and peanut butter can be

transported in mason jars, as long as you ask a cashier for the “tare weight” first. Again, *Community Market* is the (surprisingly cost-effective) leader for bulk locally, and *Oliver’s* is a close second. If these are stores are too expensive, buying in bulk from a place like *Costco* is another good option — although they don’t offer zero-waste bins, they offer larger portions and less packaging overall (so long as you will actually consume everything you buy!).

- Leftover food?

According to the EPA, nearly one-third of the U.S. food supply is wasted—and rotting food is the single largest occupant of American landfills. Can you learn to buy less, and plan meals around what you already have? Can you identify a “point of waste” in your local food system and incorporate it into your regular meal-plan? Community Market offers discounted “ugly fruit” that would otherwise go to waste, for example, and many farms will trade discounted or free produce for some time spent “gleaning” or harvesting their leftovers. In Sonoma County, web sites and social media pages like *CropMobster*, *Farmers Black Market* and *SCUGT* often offer produce and shelf-stable food — and are a good place to unload unexpired goods that would otherwise go bad. Shelf-stable items and produce can (at times) go to Rachel and Michael Dovey for the ***Angels Unawares*** dinner.

- Food Scraps?

Do you have the option of a green waste bin? Space for a compost bin? Worms? Chickens to eat scraps?

Chickens will give you eggs and fertilizer in return. Compost will give you rich amendments for your soil should you choose to grow some of your own food. Overall, what are you throwing away that you knew would not last when you purchased it? Glitter? Toys that break easily? Gift wrapping? Things packaged in clamshell plastic? Ask yourself if you can avoid purchasing any of these items or kinds of packaging.



What items can you sell/giveaway to places like Goodwill? Second-hand purchasing saves packaging, stops items from going to the landfill and saves money. Are there online free groups or clothing swaps/baby toy swaps you can connect with? In Sonoma County, Sonoma County Unconditional Give and Take is a wonderful and very active Facebook group. You can also go to [freecycle.com](https://www.freecycle.org) for a list of further resources.

DID YOU KNOW:

In the U.S., only about 9 percent of plastics were recycled in 2018. A whopping 91% went straight into landfills. Just because an item says it CAN be recycled doesn't mean that it actually WILL be.



SPACE

Once you're finished with the trash, go through your house, room by room. What do you have that you don't need?

- **Stuff**

Are there so many toys in your house that you spend all of your time cleaning? Are electronics everywhere? Can you give some of them away? Can you stop yourself from buying more in the future? Can you put items away for future swaps, host a free garage sale (or swap) or put on them on your local freecycle page (SCUGT) rather than throwing them away?

- **Tool Sharing**

Does your community have a tool sharing library? Can you give it the extra tools you have laying around so that other others can access them for free? The County of Sonoma offers a tool lending library—contact it at GSenergy@sonoma-county.org.

There is another tool library located at 642 5th Street.

- **Unwanted Clothes**

Are your closets packed with clothes you don't wear? Americans send 10.5 million tons of clothing to landfills every year! Can you learn to buy clothes second-hand or buy only what you need (or get clothing from swaps)? SCUGT is a great place to find clothing. *The Just Between Friends* sale at the Fairgrounds is an excellent resource for children's clothing — see northbay.jbfsale.com/homeView.jsp.

Once you've gone through your home and seen what you don't need, can you come up with ideas for repurposing space? If you have an extra bedroom, can you host a parishioner in need? Do you feel called to foster or adopt? Are you inspired to downsize to a smaller home that doesn't require as much electricity or gas to heat and keep lit?



FOOD

Open the refrigerator doors and look in!

- What is: Heavily packaged? Flown or trucked in from far away? Grown or produced in a factory-farm setting

(often with little regard for animal welfare or human workers)?

- Can you learn to become a producer as well as a consumer of food? Gardening, foraging, farming, hunting, fishing—or buying locally or regionally from those who do—reduces the size and impact of your eating cycle. If you have limited space, just start with an herb garden! Anything grown in your own soil (even on your windowsill) will cut out waste and emissions.
- Can you join a Community Sourced Agriculture program (CSA) in your local area? Joining a CSA gives your local farmer a guaranteed income for the growing season. Consider *Laguna Farms CSA* at the more affordable end of the spectrum, *Open Field Farm*, *Let's Go Farm* and *Four Oak Farm* on the costlier end.



Can you learn to more rigorously follow the Orthodox fasting year? Industrial agriculture—particularly cattle farming—is a key driver of both climate change and biodiversity loss. One 2018 study found that avoiding meat

and dairy was the single biggest way for an individual to reduce their carbon footprint (published in the peer-reviewed journal *Science*). The research showed that without meat and dairy consumption, global farmland use could be reduced by more than 75 percent—an area equivalent to the US, China, European Union and Australia combined.

Our Orthodox Church, in her wisdom, already calls us to a plant-based diet for nearly half the year (maybe she understands some things better than us!).



ENERGY

Let's think about our light switches, heaters and cars.

Think about where your electricity and heat comes from. Can you find out? If it comes from non-renewable sources, can you switch? Does your state or municipal power company offer an all-renewable option? *Sonoma Clean Power* does with the *EverGreen* program! Can you look into solar panels? Can you consider leasing through a company like *Solar City* if buying isn't an option? Can you talk to your local electrician (if you have one available) and think outside the box? Here in Northern California, we see all kinds of fascinating set-ups: Dairies that power their operations on methane, people who have turned old trucks or school buses into giant batter-

ies to supplement their solar systems, etc. Make sure it's safe (hence the electrician!) and be creative.

- Can you switch your bulbs to LED?
- Can you turn the hot water option on your washer off? When clothing is washed in cold water, energy is saved.
- Can you think about stacking functions? For example, if it's cold, bake a loaf of bread with your kids instead of turning the heater on. The oven will warm the house, and your fuel will be used more efficiently.
- Can you learn to live without a car? If that's a resounding "no," as it is for most of us, can you switch your gas-powered vehicle for an electric or hybrid model? Can you take public transportation? Can you sub just one trip each week for biking or walking somewhere? Can you learn to be content at home? Can you educate yourself about carbon offsetting programs and find a reputable one?
- Can you learn to cut down on flying? Do you have the ability to sub shorter long-distance trips with a train ride or road trip? Train rides are long but they're a great way to travel with young children. Generally a train trip emits about half the emissions per person of a plane trip.



WATER

Where does your water come from? Is it a well you actively manage? Is it city water that you don't think about much because it just comes through your faucet? What if you were only able to use a few gallons a day? What would you do differently to conserve the precious resource God has given us?

Simple ways to conserve water include:

- ✱ Turning the faucet off after wetting your tooth brush while brushing your teeth.
- ✱ Wetting your hands for washing, turning the water off and then back on to rinse.
- ✱ While showering, wet your body and hair, then turn the water off while using soap and shampoo. Turn back on to rinse.
- ✱ Keeping a houseplant or two, and at the end of the day while collecting water cups (if you have kids, you'll have a million!) you can give the plants a drink from the water you would otherwise be pouring down the drain.
- ✱ Fixing any leaks in your house
- ✱ Swapping out decorative plants and lawn-space for edible or medicinal plants or native habitat for pollinators.
- ✱ Mulching your veggie and flower gardens, orchards etc.

- * Watering a garden or landscaping toward the end of the day or in the early morning to make the water stretch further. Watering in the middle of the day will cause more water to evaporate due to the heat.
- * Installing a gray-water system (the Sonoma County website offers guidelines on local gray-water set-ups here: <https://sonomacounty.ca.gov/PRMD/Eng-and-Constr/Graywater/>). Daily Acts (dailyacts.org) is another great resource for gray water.



Part Two

THE PARISH

SHARE YOUR JOURNEY

Talk about everything you've discovered from assessing your personal habits with your spiritual father or parish priest and members of your church. Discuss how you can apply those lessons to the church grounds and parish life. Perhaps, with the blessing of your priest, your parish could start by creating a "Greening" or "Care for Creation" council/committee — something like the parish council, but for helping your church bring its practices in line with good stewardship. Each year people could be nominated, as with the parish council.

IDENTIFY WASTE

Start, once again, with the garbage!

- What's in there?

Paper plates, plastic cutlery for agape meal? Plastic packaging from meal prep? Plastics/paper from Koli-va? Children's holy water cups? Food waste?

- Re-usables

Can your agape meals be served on dishes that can be put into a dishwasher at the end of the meal? Can disposable cups be swapped out for metal or hard plastic ones that will hold up to years of use and washing? Can you use cloth napkins? Can your church charge a small amount at agape meals and use that money to pay someone to clean up after the meal so less is thrown away?

What other waste can be:

- * Composted

- * Vermicomposted (Many kinds of paper and cardboard can be fed to worms! This is especially helpful, because some recyclers no longer accept paper waste.)

- * Used as mulch (cardboard, Amazon boxes)

- * Given to someone's chickens

- * Reduced by buying in bulk with reusable containers

- * Reduced by buying in bulk at a place like Costco (but watch for excess plastic)

- * Replaced with multi-use options (dishes, napkins, cups, hard plastic or tin washable cups for kids)

See **Personal** section for more local ideas!

Now the Recycling. What's in there that shouldn't be?

Is it:

- Hard plastics?
Many recyclers are scrambling to deal with plastics right now. What can be swapped for options that come in glass or tin, or better yet, bought in bulk with reusable containers?
- What can be repurposed?
Old coffee tins can become planters or ash trays for homeless shelters. Broken china and glass can be saved and given away to artists on Freecycle or Sonoma County Unconditional Give and Take. Hard plastics can become seedling trays. Cardboard can become mulch, or given away on SCUGT (people are always looking for moving boxes in our area!).
- What can become Tupperware?
What can be washed out and then repurposed for take-home meals, meal-trains or take-out containers for your shelter or soup kitchen?



ENERGY USE

Ask again, this time on a slightly larger scale, where your electricity and heat come from. Can you find out? Can you switch to an all-renewable option (like our local EverGreen)? If that option is pricier, can you consider asking (or praying) for donations? Is there any funding in the global orthodox community for parish “greening”?



TRANSPORTATION

Our trips to and from the church probably cause a fair share of our parish’s total carbon footprint. How can we learn to change our travel patterns with our children and grandchildren in mind?

CAN WE:

- Carpool?
Designate one Sunday a month as a special “carpooling” day and offer a free agape meal to those who participate?
- Ride bikes?
The church could make this mode of transport easier for parishioners by providing bike racks or ensuring

that the roads close by are equipped with safe bike lanes (probably not a very realistic option for St. Seraphim's, although we could think about advocating for safer route between the church and the nearest SMART stop).

- Take public transportation?

As a church, can we send out a shuttle for elderly parishioners/those who don't have cars? Or rent or purchase a bus to send out on Sunday mornings like so many Southern protestant churches? Or post one parishioner at the SMART station to pick up people who want to ride the train?

- Encourage people to live close to church?

We have one parishioner who looks for houses to buy that are close to church with the idea of renting them out.

- Switch our gas cars for electric vehicles or hybrids?

The church could consider providing chargers. There are a lot of used EVs with limited ranges (12 to 80 miles) coming on the market right now in California, so chargers could make a big difference.



FINANCES

Can we think about our parish's buying power. Are we buying food from local companies — supporting your neighborhood farmer? Are our appliances American-made? If cost is a barrier, can we choose one product in our kitchen to switch out for a local supplier?

Beyond that, can we:

- Divest our holdings (for things like pension plans that the church pays into)?

If our parish has anything invested in fossil fuel companies, can we move it? *350.org* has been a leader in the student divestment movement, but they also help faith organizations.

- Move our money to a community bank or credit union?

- Focus on community outreach?

What programs can we link up with in the greater community? River cleanup programs, CSA programs, Freecycle groups, people who host clothing swaps, tool sharing libraries, local programs for recycling, or solar, wind and geothermal programs? Can we consider building connections with these community programs as a way to witness our faith and spread the (still-limited) knowledge of Orthodoxy in the U.S.? Can we participate in Daily Acts' Sonoma Climate Challenge?



LAND

Does your church have extra land? How can it be repurposed for better use?

Can you:

- ✱ Build affordable housing for parishioners, to cut down on travel distance?
- ✱ Create a community garden or small farm? Keep chicken or other livestock for eggs, scraps and soil enrichment and to close the nutrient loop? Food could go to your food kitchen or parishioners on a limited income.
- ✱ Learn about carbon sequestration? Carbon can be “captured” by plants and stored underground when soil is healthfully managed with compost, livestock and certain planting practices. Can you set up a space with perennial plants or polyculture crops that will do this work? (Learn more about how soil can store carbon [here](https://permaculture-news.org/2011/10/21/why-food-forests/)).
- ✱ Plant native trees, fruit trees or a “food forest?” More about food forests at this link: <https://permaculture-news.org/2011/10/21/why-food-forests/>
- ✱ A recent study in the *Journal Science* estimated that planting trees on a massive scale could bring our atmospheric CO₂ saturation down to 1920s levels.



Part Three

COMMUNITY

Often, people persist in unsustainable practices because they have no other choice—not because they don’t care. Instead of judging our fellow humans for their waste and emissions (judgement comes so easily to us!), let’s ask ourselves how we can build greener options that work for everyone.

What are the big-picture laws, policies and incentives that are hurting your immediate environment? Is your water contaminated from pesticide runoff? Is your air polluted from tailpipe emissions or wildfire smoke? Is a waste facility burning plastics and harming the people around it?

CAN YOU:

- Develop a working knowledge of your city council roster, or state representatives? Make calls, write letters, become a squeaky wheel?
- Write or call retail chains, food suppliers and local organizations and ask them to be better environmental leaders? Trader Joe's recently made a commitment to cut down on plastic use in response to a widely-circulated petition.
- Join email lists with environmental policies you can pray about (Christians Caring for Creation offers a great one)?
- Join a local divestment group like Fossil Free California?
- Join an AG organization like the *Grange* or *4-H* to learn about the laws and policies affecting our local farmers?

For those of us who do live in the world, policy/advocacy can be an excellent way to create change on an accelerated timeline.

For more information on Orthodoxy and the environment, see:

The Orthodox Fellowship of the Transfiguration at
<http://www.orth-transfiguration.org>

The Face of God (film)
<https://www.faceofgodfilm.com>

The website of the Ecumenical Patriarch
<https://www.patriarchate.org/bartholomew-quotes>