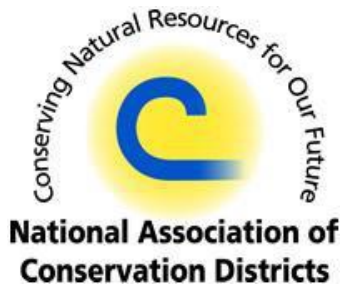


Church Leaders Guide



**National Association of
Conservation Districts (NACD)**

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The National Association of Conservation Districts is the non-profit organization that represents the nation's 3,000 conservation districts, their state associations and the 17,000 men and women who serve on their governing boards.

Conservation districts are local units of government established under state law to carry out natural resource management programs at the local level. Districts work with more than 2.5 million cooperating landowners and operators to help them manage and protect land and water resources on nearly 98 percent of the private lands in the United States.

NACD's mission is to serve conservation districts by providing national leadership and a unified voice for natural resource conservation. The association was founded on the philosophy that conservation decisions should be made at the local level with technical and funding assistance from federal, state and local governments and the private sector. As the national voice for all conservation districts, NACD supports voluntary, incentive-driven natural resource conservation programs that benefit all citizens.

NACD maintains relationships with organizations and government agencies; publishes information about districts; works with leaders in agriculture, conservation, environment, education, industry, religion and other fields; and provides services to its districts. NACD is financed primarily through the voluntary contributions of its member districts and state associations.

The association's philosophy is that conservation decisions should be made by local people with technical and funding assistance from federal, state and local governments and the private sector. The association's programs and activities aim to advance the resource conservation cause of local districts and the millions of cooperating landowners and land managers they serve.

Visit www.nacdnet.org for additional information. To find your local district contact information, go to www.nacdnet.org/general-resources/conservation-district-directory

STEWARDSHIP WEEK INFORMATION

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) Stewardship Week is one of the largest conservation-related observances. The 3,000 conservation districts that make up NACD manage soil and water conservation programs in virtually every community in the United States. Since 1955, NACD has sponsored the national Stewardship Week program by selecting a theme and developing materials for schools, communities and churches of all denominations. 2017 marks the 62nd year to celebrate NACD Stewardship Week.

Stewardship Week, celebrated annually between the last Sunday in April and the first Sunday in May, reminds us of our personal responsibility to care for the natural resources for which we all depend. The celebration and observance of Stewardship continue throughout the year - not for just one week. The concept of Stewardship involves personal and social responsibility. We have a duty to learn about and improve natural resources as we use them wisely.

Stewardship Week, celebrated annually between the last Sunday in April and the first Sunday in May, reminds us of our individual responsibilities to care for the natural resources upon which we all depend.

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Special Thanks To Gina DeMarco



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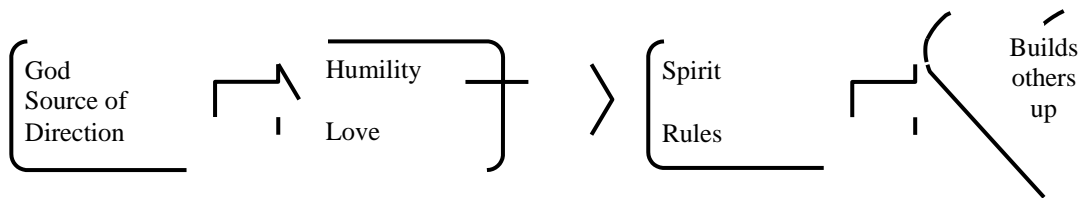
Harmony

by Gina DeMarco

A Christian Perspective based on the Holy Bible

God's original and continual intent for His creation is to be in harmony with Himself and among itself. One of Webster's definitions for harmony is "having musical tones combined to give a pleasing effect." We will look at how following God's plan and direction for how we live in relationship with Him, ourselves, others and the non-human creation, can result in relationships with a pleasing effect. This beauty is best reflected in the beginning – in the Garden of Eden, and will one day be fully restored – when Jesus returns to earth to reign.

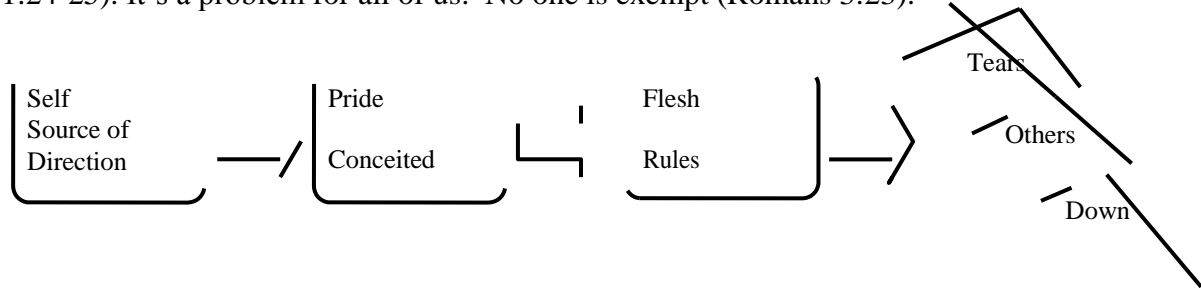
In the beginning, God walked with Adam in the cool of the day and spoke with him (Genesis 3:8). While God was pleased with all he had created and called it good, it is mankind that was created in the image of God and called very good (Genesis 1:27 & 31). Mankind was formed with purpose and to have a relationship with the Creator (Genesis 1:26). God is relational and part of the image bearing of mankind has includes a craving and need for relationships not only with God, but with one another (Genesis 2:18-23) and with the rest of God's creation (Genesis 2:15) This fulfilling relationship cycle is the essence of true harmony and can only be found under God's loving care and direction. It existed in perfection in the beginning.



But what about now? As a society we are living far from God's original intent. We need only to turn to the news and find excessive pain, injustice, war, degradation and depletion of natural resources necessary for survival on earth. On a more intimate level, relationships are broken, divorce and abortion numbers are rampant and that deep need and craving for relationship has created a void that is like a bottomless pit striving to be filled. (Romans 1:20-23) The loving relationship cycle worked under God's direction and in obedience to Him. In God's mercy He has shown us the way back. His loving plan for the redemption or restored harmony of all of His creation is expressed in His revelation to us in the Holy Bible.

What went wrong? Instead of recognizing ourselves as the "very good" creation of our loving God and living joyfully under his direction, mankind has strived to put itself at the helm. We strive to create a god in our image. This can never be, yet we keep trying. Almost anyone you ask outside of the church will tell you what they can accept as "their" God. In their minds eye they will "create" the God they desire from a menu of attributes they choose. This is the essence of new age religion and it has permeated our culture. But it is really nothing new. It began in the Garden when mankind disobeyed God's one

directive (Genesis 3:1-7) and it continues as we strive live a self-directed life. (Romans 1:24-25). It's a problem for all of us. No one is exempt (Romans 3:23).



How can it be made right again? Can I be at peace with God? We can be reconciled to God and that **ultimate** relationship can be restored. Peace with God has been made available to us, as Jesus has taken the punishment for our selfish, sinful behavior on himself and it has been nailed to the cross. Our loving Father is calling us back to him (Acts 3:17 – 21). We may confess our sin and selfishness to him and he is faithful to forgive us and restore us. He is able to deliver us from evil. While we are not yet perfected and may regularly fall into temptation and sin, we are a “new creation” living under the grace of God. He is no longer counting our sins against us. He calls us to live and reign with him in His Kingdom that is already established on earth and will be completed upon his return. (2 Corinthians 5:17-19). Rather than being governed by outward laws, as a child of God we live by the Spirit of God, and His law is written on our hearts.

Can I have peace and harmony within myself? Upon reconciliation with God, your body becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit (1Corinthians 6:19). Nurture and care for yourself spiritually by prayer, meditation on the Word of God and by studying and fellowshiping with other believers. Forgiving others can bring great peace within yourself (Matthew 6:12 – 15). By surrendering your will to His will and allowing Him to rule and reign in your life, He is willing and able to restore you and bring you great peace.

Our bodies, minds, spirits and emotions are all connected. We need to take care of our whole selves. It is important to take care of the body God has given you. There are some very practical ways to do this.

After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church – for we are all members of his body. Ephesians 5:29-30

Eat healthy. New guidelines from the USDA provide some very simple steps you can begin to take today for a healthier you (www.choosemyplate.gov):

- Enjoy your food, but eat less.
- Avoid oversized portions.
- Make half your plate fruits and vegetables.
- Make at least half your grains whole grains.
- Switch to fat-free or low fat (1%) milk.

- Choose lower sodium foods.
- Drink water instead of sugary drinks.

Also, eat less processed foods.

Exercise. Take a step, literally. Incorporate exercise into your normal daily routine particularly if you struggle for time to exercise. Park further from your destination and walk more. Do a few jumping jacks while you wait for the copy machine. Try to make it fun. Exercise can easily be combined with recreation. What do YOU like to do? Make a choice to do it or you may be choosing to be ill down the road! Find out more about America's quest to get healthy at <https://letsmove.obamawhitehouse.archives.gov>.

Recreate. God offered us a Sabbath rest for our good. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). Our maker knows what is best for us, and recharging by rest and recreation is not only his word for us, but He modeled it for us in example when He rested on the seventh day.

Care for the temple of your body by the foods you eat, getting exercise and recreating all at the same time when you visit a family owned farm or farmers market in your community. Eating local foods will benefit your health and the health of the local economy as well as preserve the aesthetics in the area where you live. It can be a fun experience for all the members of your family as many farms provide hiking trails, contact with animals such as watching a milking operation, and you can often pick your own fruits and vegetables. Teach your children where their food comes from. Buy shares in a Community Supported Agriculture opportunity. Try to make some choices that will lead to driving a market for fair treatment of farm workers and livestock. In these economically hard pressed times, you can arrange a vacation free or at little costs by volunteering at a farm. It may be surprising how emotionally, spiritually and physically refreshing the experience can be.

Making time for spiritual, emotional, and physical self are choices we can make and they will cause us to be in a better position to love others – the greatest gift God can use us in.

Can I have peace and harmony with others? The greatest commandment is to love the *Lord your God* with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. The second great commandment is to *love your neighbor as yourself*. While we cannot be guaranteed peace with others, we are instructed in Romans 12:18 “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”

The Bible is full wisdom on the process of sanctification which occurs as we surrender ourselves to Christ, confess our sin and submit to his Lordship. Let's glean some advice that can lead to peace with others from a very practical short book, the Epistle of James. We will use an easy to remember acronym – HARMONY.

H

HUMBLE YOURSELF. James 4:10 & 16 - 17 “Humble yourselves before the Lord and He will lift you up.” “As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. If anyone knows the good they ought to do and doesn’t do it, it is sin for them.” 2 Chronicles 7:14 “if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in the place.” Brothers and sisters in Christ, our land is in need of healing, let’s act.

A

ACT. James 1:22, 2:26, 5:4. “Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves, do what it says”; “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead”; “Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.” **BE GENEROUS.** Although we are no longer primarily an agricultural society, we must apply the principle of fair treatment and justice for all workers. Our markets are consumer driven and when we can make choices that will impact the treatment of workers.

R

RECONCILE. James 5:15b & 16a. “If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other.” You have been reconciled to God and you are given the ministry to reconcile others to God. 2 Corinthians 5:18 – 20a. “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.”

M

MERCY EXTENDED. James 2:13, 3:17 & 18 “because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.” “But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.” Matthew 12:7b “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.”

O

OWN YOUR TONGUE. James: 3:9 – 11 “With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God’s likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?” Proverbs 12:18-19 “The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.”

N

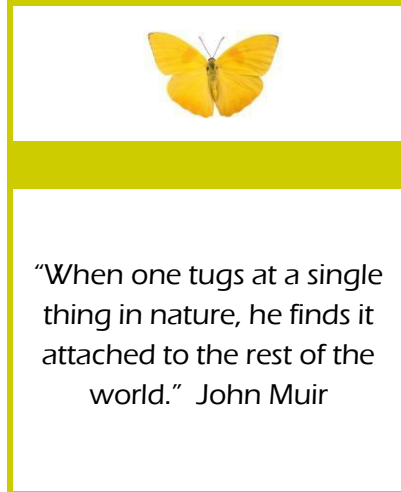
NEVER HOLD A GRUDGE. James 3:14 & 15 “But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such ‘wisdom’ does not come from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.” James 5:9 “Don’t grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!”

Y

YIELD TO OTHERS. James 1:27 & 2:15-16 “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” “Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical need, what good is it?” James 2:1, 8 & 9. “My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism.” “If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.” **SHARE and CARE** from the heart.

Following the guidance of James and other Scriptures should certainly lead us on the right path toward keeping peace with others in as much as it depends on us. Apply these principles within your closest relationships first, with your spouse, children, parents, and close friends and extend them also to your greater community.

What about peace with the non-human creation? God’s design for harmony among his creation leaves us with many interwoven connections that can be simultaneously achieved as we seek peace with God, self and others. You cannot desecrate natural resources, or torture animals and destroy their habitat without also adversely effecting yourself, your fellow man (particularly the poor who often feel the impact most severely) as well as future generations. There is a connectedness between humans and the non-living creation as is so well illustrated in Romans 8:20 - 22 where we find the whole creation groaning as it awaits our redemption, because it too will be redeemed and fully restored upon Christ return.



In the meantime, we can implement stewardship practices toward the healing of our hurting planet. A very good place to start to work toward stewardship is to develop an affinity for the beauty and blessing God has provided in His creation. Go out among nature, whether that be among the forests, mountains, the ocean, or a stream. “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.” Think about the number of artists who strive to capture the incomprehensible beauty that God has created! This beauty is not limited to the vast abundance of land such as in a state or national park. Stop and take a closer look even in the most urbanized environment. Watching and waiting among the birds, insects, and small pockets of land set apart for recreation can be awe inspiring as well. Enjoy the sunrise and sunset – spectacular!

Starting a garden even as small as a container plant on your porch can connect you with nature. This is all part of God’s intention for harmony among His creation - a bountiful harvest providing for the health of mankind and mankind caring for the land through proper stewardship practices (Genesis 2:15 – 16).

Certainly the process of creating harmony even in your small part of the world can seem challenging, overwhelming and idealistic. But we serve a God who is able and He has empowered us with His Holy Spirit. Jesus said in John 14:27, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

It may seem like a paradox to be able to care for yourself at the same time as caring for others and the creation. You may ask, “How can I consider others above myself and still

love myself? How can I sacrifice my time and some comforts to care for the creation and still love myself?" It comes back to the image bearing reflection we have been created with. You were created to be in relationship with God and others. You were created in Christ Jesus to do good works. You were created to care for and tend to the rest of creation. True inner joy and contentment includes self-sacrifice, meaningful work and living the life God created you to live, under His direction.

Put your trust in God and expect Him to work in and through you. Consider yourself a vessel under submission to your maker and rejoice as you stop every so often to reflect the changes you see Jesus working in and through you.

"Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is admirable – if anything is praiseworthy – think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you." Philippians 4:4 – 9.

["Once one chooses to become a
disciple of Jesus Christ, stewardship is
not an option." Bishop John J. McRaith]

Scripture

Genesis 3:8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the lord God among the trees of the garden.

Genesis 1:27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning--the sixth day.

Genesis 1:26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

Genesis 2:15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

Genesis 2:18 – 23 The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." **19** Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. **20** So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts

of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. **21** So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. **22** Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. **23** The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man.

Romans 1:20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. **21** For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. **22** Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools **23** and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

Genesis 3:1-7 Now the serpent was craftier than any of the wild animals the lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"

2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

4 "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. 5 "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Romans 1: 24 - 25 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. **25** They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator--who is forever praised. Amen.

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Acts 3:17- 21 "Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. **18** But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. **19** Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, **20** and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you--even Jesus. **21** He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.

2 Corinthians 5:17 - 19 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! **18** All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself

through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: **19** that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

1 Corinthians 6:19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;

Matthew 6:12 - 15 Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. **13** And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. ' **14** For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. **15** But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Mark 2:27 Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

Romans 12:18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.
Epistle of James

2 Chronicles 7:14 if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

2 Corinthians 5: 18 – 20 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: **19** that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. **20** We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.

Matthew 12: 7 If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent.

Proverbs 12: 18 - 19 Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. **19** Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.

Romans 8: 20 - 22For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope **21** that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. **22** We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

Genesis 2:15 – 16 The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. **16** And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden;

John 14: 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Philippians 4:4 – 9 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! **5** Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. **6** Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. **7** And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. **8** Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things. **9** Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Music

Traditional

Humble Thyself in the Sight of the Lord by Bob Hudson

They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love by Peter Scholtes

Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing by Robert Robinson & Tune Nettleton in
the Garden by C. Austin Miles

Wonderful Peace by W.D. Cornell, Music by W.G. Cooper

It is Well with my Soul by Horatio G. Spafford, Music by Philip P. Bliss

Contemporary

Sing for Joy by Don Moen copyright 1996 Integrity's Hosanna Music/ASCAP

You Are My King by Billy James Foote copyright 1999 worshiptogether.com Songs
Publishing/ASCAP

Revelation Song by Jennie Lee Riddle copyright 2004 Gateway Create
Publishing/Integrity's Praise! Music

Soil and Water Stewardship Harmony Litany

Leader: The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and things on earth, visible and invisible...all things have been created through him and for him. (Colossians 1:15-16)

Response: Know that the Lord is God. It is He who made us, and we are his, we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. (Psalm 100:3)

Leader: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you: I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws." (Ezekiel 36:26)

Response: Put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. (Colossians 3:10)

Leader: For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (Colossians 1:19-20)

Response: For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth...they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands...They shall not hurt or destroy on my holy mountain. (Isaiah 65:17-25).

Leader: People of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help! He will send you rain for the seed you sow in the ground, and the food that comes from the land will be rich and plentiful. (Isaiah 30:19-23)

Response: Come let us return to the LORD! (Hosea 6:1) Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:22)

Written by: Gina DeMarco, District Manager Northern RI Conservation District, RI

If my people who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land (2Chronicles 7:14).

A Lesson from a Farmer
by Gina DeMarco

Recently the board of directors at my district needed to choose a farm of the year to recognize. One of the directors at our conservation district who is a farmer was nominated by a partner. He refused to have his farm considered, instead he nominated a fellow farmer - who won the distinction. At the award ceremony, he delivered a humble speech of warmth, fond memories and well wishes for his fellow farmer – there was not a hint of competition.

In working for a not for profit organization, I have purposely tried to maintain a non-competitive demeanor toward all of my partners and instead focus on the achievement of the work before us as a group. I must confess there have been times when a competitive spirit has risen up in me, but once I recognize it, I try to lay it down and focus on the cause of our collective organizations, as do an amazing number of the people I am so blessed to work with.

This brought me to think about the church. What organization or should I say organism, has more clear directive and empowerment from the Holy Spirit to remain united in brotherly love than the church of Jesus Christ?

I am brought to ask myself a few questions.

How much money and time do we spend constructing and maintaining multiple Christian church buildings in one town, while the poor go hungry? Did Christ care so much about buildings and money when He himself had no place to lay his head? Matthew 8:20

How much do we focus on peripheral doctrines and argue about fine points while the lost go into eternity?

Did Christ have a preference for hymns or contemporary music, or did He simply say we would worship in Spirit and in Truth?

Did Jesus honor the ego of leaders who seek to lord it over others and must have final authority? His word says, “Jesus called them together and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’” Matthew 20:25-28

What Christ did care about, he uttered in His last moments on earth, “That they may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” John 17:21

Somehow many in Christ's church have put the emphasis on the wrong syllable as we divide into schisms. Humility and love need to be the strength of the church and Christ mission needs to be where we put our energy and resources.

A missionary to China recently shared that the underground church was so united and strong in part because our churches were sending them Bibles, and they were strengthened by the Word. At some point, these same churches began to send their doctrines along with the Bibles. Division suddenly arose. Now they are seeking to overcome the division and again unite. They are putting aside the doctrinal statements and focusing on the Bible again. Let's face it they have bigger issues as they face such as persecution and government intervention.

Will our churches need to face persecution and death before we unite and passionately move on with the Lord's work? Many are doing just that and the gates of hell will not prevail against the work of the church – but still, we must admit we need a bit of fire to ignite us.

Discernment from heresy must be employed by the church. When there is heresy there will be division and rightly so, as there are wolves among the sheep. Discernment is serious business in the church. But when minor issues that were not on the heart of Christ arise, we need to set them aside and unite, encourage and love one another.

Like my farmer friend, we need to lay down competition in the church and focus on the will of our Lord and Savior – Jesus Christ.

Can this World Be Fed?
Quote by W. Stanley Mooneyham

Everything I know and understand causes me to come down on the optimistic side of this question. It can be done.

Not easily.
Not inexpensively.
Certainly not without some changes.
But it can be done.

It is not the way that is lacking. It is the will. The more you understand about basic causes of hunger in the world today, the more you cannot avoid the conclusion that God has given man and the earth the capacity to conquer and control it.

If we treated all humanity with the dignity and love they are due as the offspring of God, if we acted toward our environment as its caretakers and not its ravishers, if we viewed the mandate to “tend and dress” the earth as the Creator’s orders to us, men could live together in peace and the earth would bring forth its abundance.

THAT WAS GOD’S PLAN.

Anything short of that is the result of man’s sin – his sin against God, against his fellow man, against his environment.

It is history.
And it is prophecy.

.... If we have the capacity to relieve suffering and save a life – and we do – and refuse to do it, that will undoubtedly be part of our judgment.

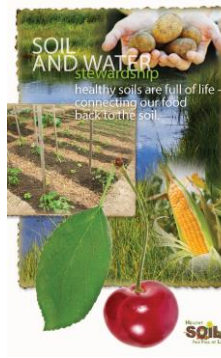
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