

In Indiana, Putting Up Solar Panels Is Doing God's Work

A cluster of evangelical groups in the state is pushing for environmental action. Leaders say they're following the biblical mandate to care for creation.



Christ's Community Church in Fishers, Ind.

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The solar panels on the churches were inspired by Scripture.

So were the LED lights throughout the buildings, the electric-vehicle charging stations, the native pollinator gardens and organic food plots, the composting, the focus on consuming less and reusing more.

The evangelical Christians behind these efforts in Indiana say that by taking on this planet-healing work, they are following the biblical mandate to care for God's creation.

50 States, 50 Fixes is a [series about local solutions](#) to environmental problems. More to come this year.

"It's a quiet movement," said the Rev. Jeremy Summers, director of church and community engagement for the Evangelical Environmental Network, a nonprofit group with projects nationwide.

In Central Indiana, a patchwork of evangelical churches and universities has been sharing ideas and lessons on how to expand these efforts, broadly known as creation care. Some have partnered on an Earth Day-like celebration they named Indy Creation Fest.



The Rev. Nate Pyle of Christ's Community Church. If you frame environmental action as combating global warming, he said, "it suddenly gets really politicized."

Faith communities of all kinds have been caring for nature throughout history, and many have taken up environmental causes in recent decades. Some religious leaders, [like Pope Francis](#), have made the environment a central focus and have called for action on climate change.

But the efforts in Indiana stand out because they're springing up in communities that haven't been as engaged.

Of all major U.S. religious groups, evangelical Protestants are the least likely to hear about climate change during sermons, [according to a survey by the Pew Research Center](#), and the least likely to view global climate change as extremely or very serious. Now, networks of evangelicals are looking to shift that.

"If you frame it as environmentalism, or if you frame it as combating global warming, it suddenly gets really politicized," said the Rev. Nate Pyle, senior pastor at Christ's Community Church in Fishers, Ind. "When you frame it as stewardship or caring for the creation that God has given us, people are more open."

In 2021, the creation care committee at his church led an effort to put solar panels on the building. Some members questioned the move, Pastor Pyle said. But they seemed to come around after learning that the church paid for them through grants and private donations and that the panels would save on energy costs, he said.

The next year, Christ's Community joined forces with Grace Church, a few miles away in Noblesville, and the Evangelical Environmental Network to sponsor the first Indy Creation Fest, a day of education and family-friendly activities.

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The second Indy Creation Fest, in 2023, was held at Grace Church in Noblesville. via Grace Church



Easter Sunday at Grace Church. AJ Mast for The New York Times

Visitors could sample vegan cooking, learn about composting and meet rescued dogs, rabbits and a potbellied pig. "Discover what the Bible says about conservation and sustainability and find out how others in your community are caring for Creation as an expression of their faith," an announcement read.

Concerns sometimes come up. Is creation care a form of nature

worship? ([Absolutely not](#), its advocates say.) Aren't people more important? (Caring for the environment is part of caring for people, they answer.)

At Grace Church, the creation care committee, called Project Eden, has converted about 10 acres behind the church into a meadow of native plants. Members have diverse interests, said Hannah Miller, who volunteers with the committee and also works for the church. Some are passionate about clean energy, while others care deeply for animals, both wild and domestic.

“The common thing that brought them together was seeing creation care as an integral part of the way that they express their love for God and their love for people,” Ms. Miller said.

Some of the most ambitious work has been undertaken by Englewood Christian Church in central Indianapolis, which has built senior housing with solar panels intended to generate at least as much energy as the building uses. The church also has solar panels on its roof and two electric-vehicle charging stations. Members turned an empty lot nearby into a nature play area for preschoolers with vegetables and native plants. Many in the congregation live nearby and share items like lawn mowers and cars.



Volunteers installed solar panels on the Englewood Christian Church in Indianapolis. via Englewood Christian Church





Joe Bowling of the Englewood Community Development Corporation, a nonprofit group, led a meeting at Englewood Christian Church this month.

Universities are engaged, too. Just over an hour's drive north of Englewood, two Christian schools, Indiana Wesleyan and Taylor, are home to a smattering of faculty members and students who are active in the movement.

Jennifer Noseworthy, a professor of biology at Indiana Wesleyan, in Marion, Ind., is studying how small, native plant gardens bolster native bee populations. In 2022, she helped start an environmental science major that has been growing every year, she said.

"It's something that we knew students were looking for, especially students looking for a Christian education," she said.

Students are often introduced to the concept of creation care for the first time at college, and class discussions sometimes center on why the idea isn't discussed more at church.

One student at Indiana Wesleyan, Becca Boyd, experienced a crisis of faith in middle school when her concerns about climate change were dismissed in her conservative Christian circle.

"One of the things that I feel like I heard a lot was that I needed to trust in God more," Ms. Boyd recalled, "that I was questioning God by wanting to take action in that way with the environment."

It made no sense to her, and she quietly decided that she was an atheist, she said. But during her senior year of high school, she began exploring her faith again. Then, in her freshman year of college, Dr. Noseworthy introduced her to the concept of creation care.





Jennifer Noseworthy, a professor of biology at Indiana Wesleyan University, with young plants destined for a community garden in Marion, Ind.



Students helping to prepare the community garden in Marion this month.

“It was an answer for me,” Ms. Boyd said.

Now Ms. Boyd is a college fellow with Young Evangelicals for Climate Action. She holds a weekly Bible study called Creation Care and Faith in Action. In one meeting this month, the group discussed how consumer culture in the United States can be a kind of false idol. She has been working to get space for a new pollinator garden on campus. And she helped start a student Sustainability Club, which is working with its counterpart at nearby Taylor University, a club called Stewards of Creation.

Now, as the academic year draws to a close, she’s focused on

what's to come, including educational programming and a clothing swap to encourage students to buy less.

"We're not going to find ourselves through having more things or more money," she said. "It's through the community that we have, and being able to provide a healthy future, not just for ourselves, like, as an individual, but for those around us and those on a global scale, and the people who aren't even here yet, you know?"



A peach tree blossom at the community garden in Marion.

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