



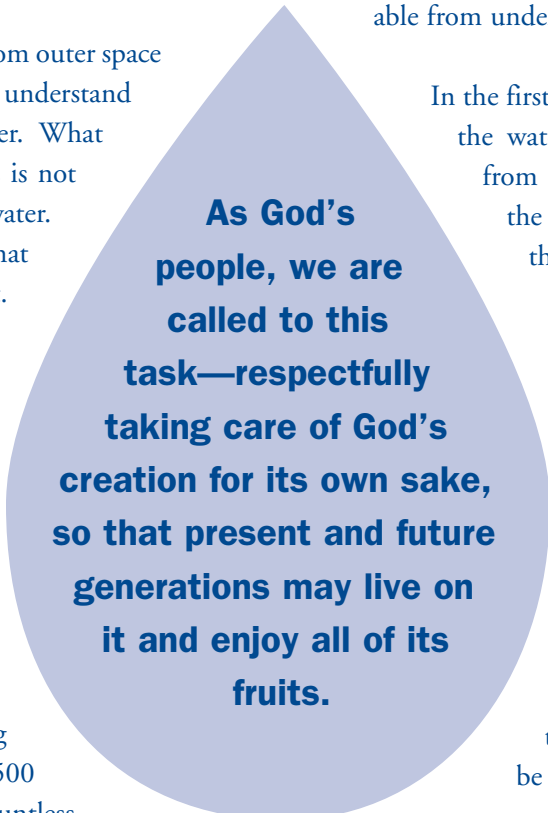
# *Why Churches Care About the Bay: Theological and Ethical Foundations*

**G**od's creation is wonderfully complex, interdependent, and beautiful. The gifts of creation and the responsibility of its stewardship were given to all of humanity so that each would have access to its bounties. As God's people, we are called to this task—respectfully taking care of God's creation for its own sake, so that present and future generations may live on it and enjoy all of its fruits.

Those wondrous pictures of the earth from outer space offer a particularly good place to start to understand the importance of God's gift of water. What strikes one in looking at those pictures is not the land masses, but the abundance of water. From outer space, one can see clearly that earth is a "blue planet" – a water planet.

Throughout both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, water plays a significant role in helping us understand the nature of God, God's purposes in the world and our relationship with God. One need only think of the crossing of the Red Sea, Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River, the woman at the well, and Jesus describing himself as living water. In fact, the Bible includes over 500 references to the word "water" and countless more on water-related subjects, like rivers, rain, seas, floods and storms. Many of the main water themes that run through the Bible include creation, sustenance, purification and transformation and begin to tell us about God and the relationship God would like us to have with the waters God created.

The best place to begin to appreciate the importance of water is with the creation stories themselves. To understand the stories, it is important to remember that the ancient writers did not have a concept of infinite space as we do. And, the writer had to accommodate his/her experience of water coming from the sky in the form of rain, being on the surface of the land in the form of seas and rivers, and available from under the ground from wells.



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In the first chapter of Genesis, God first separates the waters into those from above and those from below by forming a solid dome called the sky. Then, God creates the earth out of the waters. Only after the water is in place does God put vegetation, animals and other creatures on the earth. Genesis 1:20 teaches that creation literally comes out of the waters. From the beginning, all of creation is dependent on the gift of water. This ancient narrative is uncannily similar to modern understanding. Science confirms that life as we know it first arose in the water, and it goes without saying that without water, life on earth can not be sustained.

For five days, God creates and creates. After each challenging day of creation, God stops and acknowledges that it is indeed "good." This declaration reminds us that even before humans were created, God loved and valued creation for its own sake. Regardless of how small the creature, God recognized its value before even before humankind.



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And we know from our own experience that, indeed the creation is good. We all enjoy a blue sky and the green buds of spring. We love the feel of cool water on our skin on a hot summer day, the glowing colors of fall and the gleam of sunshine on snow in winter. We are sometimes almost overcome at the myriad stars shining on a clear night, and love to see the full moon lighting up the nighttime world with its pearly glow. We marvel at the mysteries of migrating birds and butterflies and fish—such as the shad who return to Chesapeake streams each spring. We are enchanted by the attentiveness of a mother bird to her chicks and charmed by the beauty of wildflowers in the spring. We are often left speechless by the splendor of a sunset, or the fury of a thunderstorm, or the power of falling water. We enjoy the fruits of summer and the harvest in the fall, the fresh fish, crabs and oysters that are pulled from our waters. Yes, the Earth—and the whole universe—is good. God made it that way.

On the sixth day, God creates both men and women in God's own image and gives humans "dominion" over the earth (Genesis 1:27-28). The combination of having been created in God's image as well as being given dominion over the earth has often been misinterpreted as giving humanity absolute right to use and exploit creation for its own purposes. What the Scripture actually says is that the earth and its

waters belong to God and God alone. In the ancient Near Eastern world the word "image" was understood as one's representative and often used for a king standing in for, or representing, a god. The human role, therefore, is to stand in for the Creator, to represent God's creative purposes in the world, not humanity's. As images of God, we are called to love, value, and sustain the waters of the world just as God does.

The word "dominion" is understood in the same vein. Dominion is not domination. Dominion is exercised in recognition of God's sovereignty over earth. We are given the privilege of joining God in the care-taking of the waters. If we are looking at a model of how to establish leadership in creation, we need look no further than Jesus who taught us to lead by being servants.

In the creation story, on the seventh day God "rested." A special kind of rest; the Hebrews called it "menuha." In this "menuha," God enjoyed all that had been created, and God continues to invite humans to enter into this deep enjoyment. To fulfill our ministry, it is important to take time apart, time for "Sabbath rest."

**Explore more water theology by conducting an  
adult education or Sunday school class.  
See the curriculum located in this Toolkit for suggestions.**