ANNEXURE B

Task Team Ecology
SEASON OF CREATION

1. What is the Season of Creation?

The Season of Creation is an **ecumenical time of prayer, celebration, reflection, and action** during which Christians purposefully renew their relationship with God as Creator as well as with the whole of created reality.

The origin of the season is interesting:

- In **1989** the Ecumenical Patriarch **Dimitrios I** called out 1 September as a day of prayer for all of creation.
- The **World Council of Churches** then helped to expand it to a season lasting from 1 September to 4 October.
- The Roman Catholic Church formally accepted the Season of Creation in 2019, after Pope Francis in 2015 instituted the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation.
- **4 October**, the last day, is the feast day of **St Francis of Assisi**, who is generally regarded as the patron saint of ecology.

The season is therefore truly ecumenical: Orthodox believers, Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, Reformed Churches, Methodists and other Christian traditions take part in it.

The most important theological point is that it is **not in the first place a month for environmental awareness**. The purpose of the season is to make ecological concerns a part of the Christian understanding of **God, creation, salvation, worship, discipleship, and missions**.

The official description articulates it in terms of celebration, repentance, and devotion.

In the Season of Creation, **the focus is on God the Creator**. The church year allows ample space for seasons where the light falls on God the Son (Advent, Easter, etc.) and God the Holy Spirit (Pentecost). A specific season for God the Creator complements this well. This season also presents us with the opportunity to

rediscover and celebrate our ties with other faith communities and with other members of the earth community.

Some faith communities who have incorporated a Season of Creation, do it with a **local focus and perhaps on a small** scale. All are encouraged, however, to join up with, or be inspired by, **the greater, worldwide Season of Creation initiative, that is, the ecumenical Season of Creation initiative** (https://seasonofcreation.org/) which is supported by numerous well-known denominations and ecumenical bodies that contribute to it.

In South Africa several denominations and interdenominational organisations have encouraged and developed material for the Sason of Creation. Examples are the South African Faith Communities Environmental Institute (SAFCEI) (https://safcei.org/season-of-creation-materials) and the Anglican Church (chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://jaei.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Season-of-Creation-2024-book-to-Hope-and-Act-with-Creation.pdf). Within the Church several congregations, sometimes coordinated on the level of a regional synod, have already begun to give shape to a Season of Creation. See, for instance, the work of the Green Team of the Cape Church's Testimony Action (https://getuienis.christians.co.za/2022/08/22/seisoen-van-skepping-2022/).

2. Season of Creation 2026: 'Living Water'

To gain deeper insight into what the Season of Creation can entail, we can note what the Ecumenical Committee of the World Council of Churches planned and prepared for 2026 with it in mind.

2.1 Theme, text, and emphasis

The Ecumenical Committee suggests that the **Season of Creation 2026** shall run from **1 September to 4 October.** The theme is **Living Water**, and the central text is **Ezekiel 47:1-12**, with especial emphasis on verses 9-12.

The official emphasis does not fall merely on water conservation, but **on God's life-giving presence, on ecological recovery, interconnectedness, and humanity's participation in God's renewal of creation**.

The theme is extremely applicable in a South African context. The official website explains the theme using Ezekiel 47:1–12: Water flows from the temple—initially as a tiny stream but it gradually grows deeper. It brings life to a parched land, transforms unhealthy water, and makes trees grow of which the fruit provides food, and the leaves bring healing.

The central movement can therefore be expressed as follows:

God → water → land → eco systems → animals → people →abundant life.

This is important because the text **does not portray salvation as only for human beings**. God's restorative act affects a whole ecological system.

The World Council of Churches stresses this point very strongly. Ezekiel's vision is about the restoration of land, water, en eco-systems, and this includes the restoration or healing of humanity.

2.2 Why is Ezekiel 47 such a powerful ecological text?

The section is made up of several layers.

2.2.1 The river comes from God

Ezekiel sees water flowing from the temple. The first source of life is therefore **God**. It prevents the process whereby Christian ecological theology simply transitions into secular environmental conservation. Care of creation begins with a theological confession. **Creation belongs to God and receives its life from God**.

2.2.2 The river becomes deeper and deeper

The prophet is taken further and further into the water: ankle deep, knee deep, waist deep, and eventually he gets to water that is too deep to walk through. This is the source of the 2026 symbol and slogan: **Immersion in Living Water.**

The metaphor is extremely rich. Christian ecological discipleship must not remain on the mere level of, '*I know that ecological problems exist*'. Neither must it stop at, '*Now and then I do something that is environmentally responsible*.'

Rather: **We constantly move deeper into God's life-giving work in creation.**

The official material expressly interprets the image as a call to 'move in deeper and deeper', and to get involved in the renewal of creation.

2.2.3 The river changes damaged eco-systems

One of the most striking aspects of Ezekiel 47 is that the water does not merely supply drinking water. It **alters the ecological state of the landscape**. The Dead Sea is made capable of sustaining life. There are fish aplenty. Trees flourish. It gives the text an exceptionally strong ecological dimension.

The theological question is then: **Where does God invite us to participate in the restoration of damaged eco-systems?**

2.2.4 The trees are part of the vision

Ezekiel sees trees growing on the riverbanks. They perpetually bear fruit and their leaves bring healing. This creates a wonderful bond between water, soil, plants, food, healing, human well-being, and ecological flourishing.

Creation is presented as **an interconnected community of life**.

2.2.5 Human well-being and ecological well-being belong together

This is possibly one of the most important emphases in preaching. Ecological ministry must not be imagined to be merely that '*Christians must save nature*'. A better theological formulation is that **God desires that the whole community of creation. man included, must flourish**. The official material for 2026 expressly states that the healing of the environment and human well-being flourish together.

2.3.The context of Ezekiel 47

The Biblical context makes the message even more powerful.

Ezekiel prophesied during the **Babylonian exile**, after Jerusalem and the temple had been destroyed. Israel had to struggle against the estrangement consequent to exile, national catastrophe, a theological crisis, loss of land, the destruction of the city, and the apparent collapse of God's promises.

And then Ezekiel receives this exceptional vision of **water flowing from the temple and bringing life to a devastated landscape.** This means that Ezekiel 47 is at its heart a text about **hope after an economic, social, and political catastrophe**.

The World Council of Churches expressly stresses this context: the vision of the river originates within the reality of exile and destruction, but moves further, past judgment, towards recovery.

This makes the section extremely relevant to the present ecological crisis. The message is not, *'The world is being damaged and therefore everything is hopeless.'* Rather, it is, **God's purpose for creation is restored at last, and God's people are invited to take part in that restoration**.

3. Some practical tips for the Season of Creation.

When a faith community is inspired to enter a Season of Creation, they can consider the following:

- Investigate the work that is already done elsewhere. The links to web pages (above) provide a good starting point. They contain inspiring material and very practical tips.
- Use examples of how worship services are structured and the interpretation of Bible texts that are already available but also develop material that respects and reflects the local context. .
- When it comes to writing sermons, a further useful source is the book, *Season of Creation: A Preaching Commentary*. The editors are Norman Habel, David Rhoads and Paul Santmire). For particulars about the book, see https://www.google.co.za/books/edition/The_Season_of_Creation/-1w1biWjkqcC?hl=en&gbpv=1&printsec=frontcover
- Plan ahead to make time in the congregation's programme for the Season of Creation which should preferably take place from September to early October. In the southern hemisphere the Season aligns nicely with the coming of Spring. Some congregations already have a Spring singing service, which offers a natural springboard to the Season of Creation.
- Consider how the full ministry of the congregation can in this time connect with the focus offered by the Season of Creation.
- Make use of the gifts and abilities of people (children also) in your area. Farmers, poets, artists, scientists, people with indigenous knowledge of the veld, tour operators, etc.

- Find an environmentally related issue within the congregation's immediate experience (perhaps a local problem) with which the faith community can advocate and engage.
- Plan how this season in the church year can go hand in hand with opportunities for new experiences. A worship service can on occasion be held out of doors, and excursions can be taken to places where people are exposed to the beauty of, and dynamics within, creation, but also to the impact people have on it.
- Use Season of Creation as an opportunity to take hands with other faith communities (the ecumenical dimension) that can help to live out the connection between everyone and everyone else, as well as between everyone and everything.
- Also participate in events that the ecumenically coordinated Season of Creation has established for joining an online global initiative on 1 September, 21 September en 4 October. Make use of the Season of Creation 2024: Celebration Guide available at https://drive.google.com/file/d/12M3weSD4D2mvjCiI3Mxen3JQZ5Rrazz3/view

  Upload on social media platforms made available by the Ecumenical Committee for the Season of Creation, short reports and photos of congregational initiatives inspired by the Season of Creation.