



Fossil Fuels and Future Generations—An Intergenerational Activity

This activity works best in an intergenerational setting, but can also work well for a youth gathering. It is designed to engage church members across generations in reflection on the impact of consumption on future generations. It is a powerful activity because it compresses our sense of time.

This activity takes about 30 minutes and is suitable for groups of 9 or more people, and it works well even with very large groups.

This activity is a part of our divestment resources because it is helpful for reflection on intergenerational environmental impacts. However, it is a bit flawed for purposes of teaching about divestment in that it may leave participants with an inflated sense of the importance of their individual actions. While individual actions matter somewhat at this moment in history, only systemic change has the power to transform our current energy economy into one that is sustainable for future generations. What we most need are regulations that level the playing field for sustainable energy companies to become established in the marketplace and a sustainable energy infrastructure. These will create a world where it is much easier for individuals to make smart, sustainable choices. With this in mind, it is important to help participants recognize that the exercise is best understood as a metaphor for the systemic impacts of our current modes of extraction and consumption.

If this activity is being used with a group that lacks age diversity, please have some participants play the role of a person in an underrepresented generation. This activity is well-suited for the outdoors, but can be done indoors too.

Supplies:

- basket or bucket for each participant
- 10 pinecones, small rocks, sticks, or other small objects per person
- three pens and pieces of paper
- A stopwatch or timer
- a 25'x25' square area marked on the ground. For groups larger than 25 people, you may wish to create more than one square.

Instructions for Facilitator:

1. Share that they group will do an exercise about environmental sustainability. Invite group members to share what sustainability means to them. Acknowledge that there are many definitions for sustainability.
2. Share this definition of sustainability developed by the United Nations: *Sustainability means meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.* In other words, to live sustainably is to provide for the needs of today while at the same time assuring that those who come later will have what they need to live fulfilling lives.



3. Divide the participants into three groups:
 - Group One: Elder Adults
 - Group Two: Younger Adults
 - Group Three: Children and Youth
4. Spread all the pinecones/objects in the marked off square area. Ask group members to imagine that pinecones are an essential part of life, something they cannot live without, like clean water or nutritious food. Give a basket or bucket to each member of group one (the elder adults) and ask them to collect as many pinecones as they can in 20 seconds. Repeat this with group two (the younger adults) and group three (the children and youth). Ask each group to tally the number of pinecones collected and write it down.
5. Collect all the pinecones and spread them out in the square again. This time, explain that though pinecones are an essential part of life, they can live very comfortably with eight pinecones, but would be considered very rich if they had 15 pinecones or more. Let the groups collect pinecones in order again. Tally the pinecones and report the numbers. Did the numbers change? How did the groups feel about the results this time?
6. Share that Group One represents its generation, Group Two represents its children, and Group Three represents its grandchildren. Tell them that the pinecones represent the earth's resources. Share that people with few pinecones are likely to live in a place with limited access to clean water, healthy food, and clean air. Play again, but this time, offer the groups time to talk and strategize before they begin. Following this round of pinecone collecting, talk about whether there were any changes. Ask: Did people in groups one and two take fewer pinecones so there would be some left over for group three? Why or why not? How does group three feel about the decisions of groups one and two?
7. Explain that this exercise isn't just about reflecting on what we consume day to day. The greatest threat to future generations is the extraction and burning of fossil fuels. We need to move toward a world that is not dependent on fossil fuels for energy. For government leaders to enact regulations that will create a clean energy future, they need a clear mandate from their people. One way that people are expressing their will is by urging institutions like churches, universities and pension funds to divest from fossil fuels. (To divest is to sell off stocks.) This is a way of demonstrating unwillingness to profit from the industries that are destroying God's creation. If we as a church are committed to addressing issues that harm the most vulnerable among us—things like poverty, hunger, and human health—we must take a strong moral stand against climate change. Divestment is one important part of taking that stand.