Strategies for Enhancing Youth Engagement in Stewardship of Environmental Protection within the ELCT-PD

Ruth M. Kilango[1], Faustin Mahali[2]

[1]Tumaini University Makumira, Tanzania

[2]Faculty of Theology, Tumaini University Makumira, Tanzania

DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.101000819

Received: 19 October 2026; Accepted: 24 October 2026; Published: 19 November 2026

ABSTRACT

This paper is a theological interpretation and extension of Kilango's (2025) Master's thesis titled "Youth Engagement in Stewardship of Environmental Protection as a Missional Approach to Church Ministry in ELCT-PD". The original empirical data (questionnaires 25, interviews 15, documentary analysis) were collected in Pare Diocese, Same District, in 2025. This article does not present new field data; instead, it re-analyses the finding that youth engagement remains low and offers a missiological reading that deepens the analysis of ELCT and other documents already noted in the thesis, while addressing Lutheran teachings on stewardship and critiques of faith-based environmentalism.

Keywords: Youth Engagement, Environmental Stewardship, Missiology, Eco-theology, Church

INTRODUCTION

Environmental degradation continues to threaten ecosystems, livelihoods, and social stability both worldwide and within Tanzania, calling for urgent action from faith communities. This requires various stakeholders to participate in protecting the environment in response to its increasing pollution and destruction.[1] Research conducted by Kilango in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania Pare Diocese (ELCT–PD) examined the church's role in environmental protection as part of its church and missiological stewardship mission.[2] The study views missiological stewardship rooted in biblical traditions as foundational for the realisation of the ecological-theological agenda of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania and the Pare Diocese, taken as a case.[3] The ELCT, through this theological-missiological framework, holds humanity, including youth, responsible for the care and sustenance of the environment and its ecological systems, aiming to enhance healthier and more sustainable livelihoods.

This paper offers biblical-theological perspectives on how environmental stewardship is initiated and implemented in churches, particularly within the ELCT. It also examines the theology of environmental stewardship as a comprehensive missiological approach towards a healthy and sustainable church. The study shows how environmental stewardship engages and empowers youth, encouraging their active participation in environmental protection as a multiple benefit for the church in fostering growth and providing pastoral care for young people who see their future as threatened by environmental degradation. Some practical strategies rooted in missiological stewardship have been studied to inspire youth with the spirit of action for environmental protection.

---

[1] Tanzania sees faith-based organizations as partners in planning and averting the problem of environmental pollution and destruction, United Republic of Tanzania, *National Environmental Policy*, 2021, p. 32, https://www.vpo.go.tz/uploads/publications/sw-1644923087-NATIONAL%20%20ENVIRONMENTAL%20POLICY%202021%20new.pdf.

[2]Kilango, Ruth M., *Youth Engagement in Stewardship of Environmental Protection as a Missiological Approach to Church Ministry in the ELCT – Pare Diocese*, Usa-River, Tanzania: A Research Paper Submitted to the Faculty of Theology in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Award of The Master of Theology of Tumaini University Makumira, July 2025.

[3] Messenger, Jack (Asst. Editor), *Mission in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment – An LWF Contribution to the Understanding and Practice of Mission*, Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2004, pp. 53-54.

The Transferability of Romans 8 to Creation Story as a Basis for Christian Eco-Theology

The Lutheran-Protestant understanding of Romans 8 has overlooked the ecological dimension by only emphasizing the human relational dimension with God through Christ. Christ's intervention on the creation that groans is quickly pushed into futuristic glorification of life. However, when one reads Romans 8 carefully, it seems to preserve a comprehensive analogy to the creation story and the Abrahamic covenant. The disturbed creation by human sinfulness is restored through Jesus Christ who embodies the Spirit of life giving to the whole creation.

Luther's comments on Romans 8 give a different picture by still emphasizing that it is the sinful human being yoked by the power of the flesh that is rescued by the power of love of the Spirit and other creatures.[4]Some of the old comments with such a view emphasize a translation of a "creature" instead of a "creation" from the Greek word used in this chapter.[5] This epistemic preference of dissociation of Christ's salvific role from creation has been propagated in the history of Christianity and biblical interpretation.[6]

An exegetically plausible conclusion from Boddy is that the enslavement of creation and its ruination are linked to the rebellious acts of humans since the fall, aligning with Paul's consistency with the creation story.[7] Boddy's focus is not on creation itself, but on the role of the Holy Spirit in the context of eschatological salvation of God's children.[8] Thus, the study is not dealing with the problem of creation (environmental degradation), but an encounter with South African Charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity.[9] Despite the interpretation seemingly being influenced by the African *eco-theological* holistic view of creation, which encompasses a holistic view of life and God as the source of life, the holistic context of the earth as inhabited by living things is not the agenda of Boddy.

This paper, in addition to holding missiological stewardship of the environment as a hermeneutical key, bases its eco-theological praxis on biblical foundations. It assumes that any action taken on earth must be connected with God's purpose to preserve creation and to involve human beings as participants in this noble task. Paul, being of Hebraic descent, understands Christ's event in the holistic context of creation and envisions the paradisiacal reclamation of the creation story through Jesus Christ. From the broader context of Romans 8, one sees the link between creation and human disobedience in the preceding chapters and the fulfilment of God's covenant of impartiality and inclusion of all nations in the following chapters. Romans 8 represent a micro-context in which Jesus Christ confronts the reality of sin that affects the fate of the entire creation.

Paul's passage in Romans 8 is situated between sections that discuss God's redemption of the entire creation. According to Paul, the 'Gospel' as God's power must be seen as a divine liberating force for humans corrupted by sin, including acts that destroy the order of creation (Rom 1:18-20). Other parts of Paul's writings provide a full picture of the connection between the covenant (Rom) and the coming of Christ, who is given the responsibility to redeem the whole creation (Rom 8:21). Paul views the faithfulness of Abraham as fulfilling the Abrahamic Covenant with God (Rom 4:3), which implies the remedy for Adam's (humanity's) sinfulness

[4] Luther, Martin, *Martin Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans*, Coromandel East, South Austraria: New Creation Publications Inc., 1966, p. 19.
[5] The word κτίσις is rather translated as "creature" than "creation" by Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary: Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible by Robert Jamieson, AR Fausset and David Brown Printed: 1871 Text in Public Domain.
[6]A length analysis of the dissociation of the wordκτίσις from the entire creation is accounted by Hunt, Cherry, David G. Horrell, and Christoper Southgate, An Environmental Mantra? Ecological Interest in Romans 8:19-23 and A Modest Proposal for Its Narrative Interpretation The Journal of Theological Studies 59(2), 2008, pp. 2-5, DOI:10.1093/jts/fln064.Videira-Soengas, Ruben, *A Rhetorical Study of Romans 8:18-22 as a Proof of Cosmological Witness of Creation for Glorification of the Believer*, A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty in Partial Fulfilment for the Degree of Master of Theology in the Division of New Testament Studies, Sun Valley, California, 2024, pp. 1-2, https://www.academia.edu/29410399/A_RHETORICAL_STUDY_OF_ROMANS_8_18_22_AS_PROOF_OF_THE_COSMOLOGICAL_WITNESS_OF_CREATION_FOR_THE_GLORIFICATION_OF_THE_BELIEVER.
[7] Boddy, Brenda Joy, *An Exegetical and Theological Analysis of Romans 8:18-30 with Specific Reference to the Role of the Holy Spirit in Intercession*, South Africa: A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Master of Theology at South African Theological Seminary, p. 181.
[8]Boddy, *An Exegetical and Theological Analysis of Romans 8:18-30*, p. 181.
[9]Boddy, *An Exegetical and Theological Analysis of Romans 8:18-30*, pp. 185-190.

through a new covenant in Jesus Christ (Romans 5:12). In essence, Romans 8 is positioned between God's works to bring humans to faith in Jesus Christ for their renewal (Rom 1-7) and to fulfil God's covenant of blessing all nations (Rom 9-12). Therefore, Romans 8 recalls the harmonious, paradisiacal world of the creation story, reinterpreting it to highlight the importance of stewardship over all creation for the glory of God.

Paul's rhetoric in Romans 8 goes as follows:

> The condemned human being is liberated from sin and now lives according to the Spirit, since sin has been dealt with by God who became flesh in Jesus Christ (1-4).
>
> The choices of permitted and unpermitted interaction with nature (Genesis 2:16-17) are in play in the antithetical simile of living according to the demands of the flesh or the Spirit as a result of faith in Jesus Christ (5-8)
>
> The new covenant in Christ has been fulfilled, since all who *the Spirit of God* indwells in them become children of God (9-14)
>
> Through the act of God in Jesus Christ and the Spirit of God explicating the work of the Triune God, we have been liberated from the enslavement of suffering and sin and entitled to glorification (16-18[John 1:14]).
>
> Having attained this new *spiritual status* as children of God we have to act differently towards God's creation by participating in God's call as stewards to redeeming (19-24a).[10]
>
> The Spirit of God, revealed through the sacrificial act of Jesus Christ, helps the whole creation, regardless of whether they were predestined or not (29), whether they are young or adults, as long as they recognise the work of the Spirit to be *justified* and *glorified* (24b-30).
>
> God's love manifested in the event of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as his own manifestation to the world is indelible and inseparable from all those who believe in Christ (31-39).

It is for sure that the coming of Jesus Christ brings the Spirit of God, the Spirit through which God created heaven and earth. It is the incarnation of God experienced in the acts of love manifested in the life and death of Jesus Christ that is at play in Romans 8. This Spirit renews its presence and empowers human beings to rediscover God's love and their role as stewards of God's creation. Romans 8 is foundational to the discourse of eco-theology in our time. If the suffering of Jesus is transformed into the glorification of creation, creation must be healed now, not in the future. The renewed life in Jesus through the Spirit of God is a continuation of God's promise of salvation now and in the future. This continuity demands that we continue to care for the creation of God and resist the destruction of the creation we inhabit, while also caring for future generations as stewards of God.

Therefore, engaging youth in churches to protect the environment is crucial, as they constitute a significant portion of the population in the African context. The understanding of the creational sense is comprehensive. It means protecting the environment as God's creation, including safeguarding human life and conserving the environment they inhabit.

Theological Foundation for Environmental Stewardship

Eco-theological scholars affirm that environmental care is central to Christian witness. For instance, Cobb Jr. emphasises that God is the centre of creation and "humans have a moral responsibility to care for the environment."[11] Boff further deepens this theological call by linking ecological crisis to social injustice,

[10] Alamu, Samuel Sunday, and Babawale Solomon Taiwo, "Creation Care and Climate Change: A Pauline Perspective on Environmental Stewardship in the Context of Romans 8:19–23," EJournal of Religious and Theological Studies 11, no. 8 (2025), pp. 390–400, especially p. 393. https://doi.org/10.38159/e rats.20251181. A valuable reading calls Romans 8:19-23 probably a theological climax of God's relationship to the whole creation and that it should be understood from the context of the narrative of the whole creation, Hunt, An Environmental Mantra? Ecological Interest in Romans 8:19-23, p. 9, pp. 12-13.

[11] John B. Cobb Jr., Is It Too Late? A Theology of Ecology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021), p.21.

asserting that "the cry of the Earth is inseparable from the cry of the poor."[12] Within this framework, youth are not merely passive participants but are vital agents of transformation, especially when empowered through theological education, access to leadership, and inclusive programming.[13] However, significant barriers remain, including misinterpretations of dominion theology, which have led to exploitative attitudes towards nature[14] and structural exclusions that marginalise youth within church decision-making.[15] These misconceptions hinder their participation in church-led environmental projects and disconnect creation care from spiritual formation.

The holistic view of environmental stewardship reflected in the interpretation of Romans 8 above is crucial for rethinking the Old Testament creation story (Genesis 1 and 2) within the context of New Testament understanding of God's redemption of the world as revitalising human responsibility to participate in sustaining creation (Genesis 2:15). Martin Luther's anthropological thinking and his dissociation of the human being from creation, as discussed in Romans 8, are challenged by Luther's teachings through the interpretation of Genesis, where the emphasis is on creation as God's provision for life and faith. This implies that caring for creation is mandatory, practical and spiritual.[16]

Bringing the African perspective on eco-theology, Manganyi introduces the concept of *oikomissiology*, urging churches to engage in ecological renewal as part of *missio Dei*. Manganyi contends that creation care is not a side ministry, it is central to mission, reconciliation, and justice.[17] Bujo adds that stewardship flows from divine grace; if God safeguards creation for humanity, then humans are equally bound to safeguard creation itself.[18] Adding weight from New Testament, Horrell said that stewardship must be embodied in community practices where ecological concerns, justice, and shared responsibility are lived out by disciples of the message of God in Jesus Christ.[19] Welker complements this by arguing that human dominion must always reflect God's wisdom and compassion, never exploitation, thus reinforcing theological responsibility toward all living systems.[20] To link theology with worship, Plaatjies-van Huffel's framework of *lex orandi, lex Vivendi* "the law of prayer is the law of life," she argues that when environmental care is expressed liturgically, it becomes ingrained ethically.[21] Worship in the church must integrate environmental stewardship as a cross-cutting issue.

Moreover, from the ecumenical voices against environmental destruction for instance, Pope Francis echoes these commitments in *Laudato Si* calling for "integral ecology" and an urgent unification of humanity toward the care of our common home.[22] This aligns with the WCC motto, *Together towards Life*, which places creation within the scope of salvation, urging churches to embody ecological witness as part of God's reconciling mission.[23] When youth in ELCT-PD are equipped through theological instruction, liturgical expression, and community engagement, they enter into environmental stewardship not as volunteers but as disciples. Their care for creation becomes a living testimony of faith, compassion, and justice an active expression of *missio Dei*.

Therefore, despite these challenges, examples within ELCT–PD such as the Maasai ecological empowerment initiative and choir-based advocacy exemplify promising models for integrating youth in the environmental

[12] Boff, Leonardo. *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997,p.1.
[13] DeWitt, Calvin B. *Earthwise: A Guide to Hopeful Creation Care*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2008, pp.25-45.
[14] Wilson, Paul. "Dominion Reconsidered: Reclaiming Responsible Stewardship." *Biblical Ecology Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (2019): 31–38.
[15]Lalitha, Pallavi. "Intergenerational Dialogue and Youth Exclusion in Africa." *African Journal of Development Studies* 11, no. 1 (2023): 101–15.
[16] Hanson, P. "Martin Luther Commentary on Genesis." (n.d)
[17] Manganyi, Charles. "Oikomissiology and Ecological Transformation." *Journal of Ecotheology* 15, no. 1 (2023): 1–12.
[18]Bujo, Benezet. *The Ethical Dimension of Community: The African Model and the Dialogue Between North and South*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998.
[19] Horrell, David G. *The Bible and the Environment: Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology*. London: Routledge, 2010.
[20] Welker, Michael. *Creation and Reality*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999.
[21] Plaatjies-van Huffel, Mary-Anne. "Lex Orandi and Lex Vivendi: A Framework for Eco-Discipleship." *Missionalia* 48, no. 2 (2020): 75-89.
[22] Francis, Pope. *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*. Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2015.
[23] World Council of Churches. *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*. Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012.

stewardship agenda for strengthen discipleship and community engagement (ELCT-PD 2023).[24]As a contribution to the church, this paper has explored how ELCT-PD can strengthen youth engagement in creation care by deepening missiological commitment, reforming theological education, and innovating outreach strategies. It argues that youth-led stewardship, informed by eco-theology and grounded in *missio Dei*, not only confronts ecological degradation but revitalizes the Church's holistic mission of justice, witness, and intergenerational restoration.

Youth Participation Models in Environmental Stewardship in ELCT-PD

Youth within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania-Pare Diocese represent a vibrant yet underutilized force in environmental stewardship.[25]While their presence in church and community life is visible, their engagement in creation care tends to be periodic and often lacks theological depth.[26] Findings from the field indicate that activities such as tree planting, waste management, and water source protection are implemented across parishes, but youth participation is largely sporadic and often driven by external incentives such as government contracts or environmental week campaigns.[27] A survey revealed that of a significant number of youth from the sample 60% occasionally engaged in church-led environmental activities.[28]Despite foundational teachings in confirmation classes and Sunday school primarily drawn from texts like *Furahini Katika Bwana (Rejoice in the Lord)*, the ELCT Lectionaries and House-to-House Worship Guide, do not consistently address environmental issues throughout the year.[29] As a result, many youth lack the theological vocabulary to articulate how environmental stewardship aligns with biblical teachings or their spiritual identity.[30]

A significant barrier identified by church leaders is the perceived disconnect between environmental stewardship and economic livelihood.[31] Several respondents noted that youth often prioritize income-generating activities such as *bodaboda* riding or small-scale entrepreneurship over volunteer-based environmental programs, viewing the latter as "extra work without tangible benefit"[32] This sentiment reflects what Albina describes as a major obstacle to youth engagement: lack of incentives and delayed returns from ecological commitments.[33]Cultural and generational dynamics also play a role in limiting youth participation. In many African contexts, youth are rarely invited into decision-making spaces, and their perspectives are undervalued in intergenerational dialogue.[34] As Lalitha points out, expressing one's opinion in front of elders is often considered disrespectful, leading to diminished influence and marginalization of youth voices.[35] This was confirmed during interviews, where young church members reported limited leadership opportunities in environmental projects despite their willingness to participate.[36]

Theological misconceptions further compound the issue. Mungure emphasizes that misinterpretation of *Genesis 1:28* particularly the term "dominion" has fostered a theology of exploitation rather than stewardship.[37] Many Christians, including youth, equate dominion with unchecked control, inadvertently justifying environmental degradation.[38] This distorted understanding undermines both practical commitment and doctrinal clarity around creation care. Pew Research Centre also found that only one-third of evangelical

[24] ELCT-PD, *Building Resilient Communities Project*. Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania-PD, 2023, 6.
[25]Ruth Kilango, Youth Engagement in Stewardship of Environmental Protection as Missional Approach to Church Ministry (Master of Theology Thesis, Usa River-Tanzania, Tumaini University Makumira, 2025), p.5
[26]Kilango, p. 5.
[27]Kilango,p. 49.
[28]Kilango, pp.49-52
[29]Kilango,p. 51
[30]Kilango, p. 48.
[31]Kilango, p. 53.
[32]Kilango,p. 49.
[33] Albina, A. "Barriers to Youth Engagement in Sustainability Initiatives." *Journal of Environmental Development* 17, no. 2 (2024): 112–125.
[34] Lalitha, *Intergenerational Dialogue and Youth Exclusion in Africa*, 101–115.
[35] Ibid
[36]Kilango,p. 59.
[37]Mungure, E. "Theology and Church in Times of Climate Change Crises." Presentation at LMC Roundtable, March 2023, p.2
[38]Kilango,p. 54.

Christians view environmental care as a religious priority, suggesting a global trend of spiritual disengagement from ecological ethics.[39]

In response to this misconception noted by Mungure, this article interprets dominion in Genesis 1:28 through Genesis 2:15, where humanity is called to serve and keep the garden. Dominion is therefore understood not as unchecked control but as responsible stewardship. To maintain coherence with the Lutheran tradition of the ELCT, this article clarifies that such stewardship is not presented as a means of earning salvation, which remains by grace through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9), but as a way of living out faith in daily life and serving the neighbour through care for creation (Romans 8:19-23). One might argue that the primary calling of the church is evangelism, not environmental work. This paper does not dismiss evangelism but argues that stewardship is part of Christian vocation in the world, not a distraction from it.

Despite these challenges, signs of promise are emerging. In obeying God's directives and supporting government efforts in conserving the environment, ELCT-PD has put in place different initiatives for environmental conservation such as tree planting programs and providing education on how to preserve the environment[40]. Strategic Plan identifies environmental stewardship as a key priority area (5.5.5), emphasizing the promotion of the integrity of God's creation[41]. Youth-driven awareness campaigns, interfaith collaborations, and parish-level initiatives reveal that when given tools, mentorship, and space to lead, young people in ELCT-PD can become catalysts of ecological change. [42] Their contributions not only enhance local sustainability efforts but also serve as missional expressions of justice, community restoration, and Gospel witness.[43] Understanding and restructuring youth participation in environmental stewardship demands both theological reorientation and structural transformation. As Shumba argues, African ethical principles like *Ubuntu* which emphasize solidarity between humans and nature can serve as culturally grounded entry points for reengaging youth in creation care and protection.[44]

While faith-based actions like tree planting may be critiqued for deflecting attention from structural drivers of degradation[45], the ELCT-PD approach complements rather than replaces structural critique. By linking parish education, youth empowerment, and livelihood partnerships with Floresta and Forest Focus, it addresses both local behaviour and economic pressures driving deforestation[46]. Grounded in Ubuntu and Lutheran justice, such initiatives foster ecological citizenship from below rather than ignoring political accountability.

Empowering youth to actively participate in environmental stewardship requires a multidimensional approach that addresses theological, structural, and cultural barriers while harnessing the transformative energy of young people. This research identified six key strategies rooted in both contextual realities within ELCT-PD and broader theological imperatives for creation care.

The first strategy is to integrate missional stewardship in Christian Education. One of the most effective interventions is embedding environmental theology into foundational church programs. Sunday school, youth fellowships, and confirmation classes should go beyond seasonal mentions and treat creation care as a spiritual discipline. This pedagogical integration cultivates lifelong stewardship habits rooted in biblical mandates. As Yak-Hwee Tan argues, "education in eco-biblical interpretation and eco-theology is indispensable to strengthen Christian discipleship".[47] The study found unanimous agreement among ELCT-PD respondents that including ecological responsibility in early faith formation would promote deeper awareness and commitment.[48] Moreover, Mary-Anne Plaatjies-van Huffel's framework of *lex orandi, lex vivendi* affirms that

[39]Pew Research Center. "*Religious Beliefs about Earth and the Environment*. Religious & Public Life. Nov 17, 2022. https:pewresearch.org/religion/2022/11/17-beliefs-earth-and-the-environment.
[40] ELCT-PD*, Environmental Report, 2023*
[41] ELCT-PD, 2023
[42]Kilango, p. 55.
[43]Kilango, p. 55.
[44] Shumba, B. "African Theological Ethics and Climate Justice." *Theological Review Journal* 8, no. 1 (2011): 47–59.
[45] Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 45.
[46] Kilango, p.4.
[47] Tan, Yak-Hwee. "Ecological Mission as Missio Dei: Implications for Theological Education." In *Mission Continues: Global Impulses for the 21st Century*, edited by C. M. Kao and L. A. Sanneh, 125–135. Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2010.
[48]Kilango, p. 65.

worship shapes lifestyle so integrating stewardship prayers, songs, and liturgy reinforces environmental ethics within communal identity.[49] However, this requires curriculum review that may face resistance due to limited resources.

The second strategy is empowering youth with leadership formation and engagement in leadership roles in the church. Participants across all three parishes expressed frustration over limited leadership opportunities for youth in church-based environmental projects. A respondent lamented, "It's not enough to just let them join small activities youth need to be part of the bigger picture".[50] This confirms Kosciulek's argument that structural exclusion suppresses youth engagement.[51] ELCT-PD should appoint youth coordinators at parish and diocesan levels, entrust decision-making authority, and support them with mentorship and resources. According to Calvin DeWitt, such "missional consciousness" allows youth to embody their faith through practical environmental witness.[52] While effective, this may be limited by uneven youth representation across parishes.

The third strategy is to create platforms for engaging *bodabada* (motorcycle) riders and youth choir members. The study uncovered innovative strategies grounded in local culture. *Bodaboda* riders many of whom are young and loosely connected to the church could become effective eco-ambassadors. Respondents suggested educating riders about stewardship, offering financial incentives, and integrating them into environmental programs.[53] This mirrors Shumba's advocacy for grounding ecological ethics in informal youth networks.[54] Similarly, youth choirs offer fertile ground for ecological advocacy.[55] By composing and performing songs themed around creation care, choirs become liturgical educators and missional storytellers. Music, deeply embedded in African worship, holds emotional power to inspire theological conviction and behavioural change.

The fourth strategy is to use sermons and church events of the year through church calendar to strengthen engagement for environmental protection. A major gap revealed by the research was the episodic nature of environmental preaching. Stewardship often appears only during "environmental week," diluting its spiritual significance. Stewardship is often emphasized only during "environmental week," which diminishes its theological weight and reduces it to a calendar-based obligation rather than a sustained expression of faith.[56] Sorley affirms that creation care must be an extension of our love for Christ and not a peripheral topic.[57] One environmental coordinator observed, "Teaching stewardship in confirmation classes is a step forward, but without practical implementation and follow-ups, the impacts remain least".[58] The ELCT-PD should encourage consistent emphasis in sermons, integrating Scripture such as *Genesis 2:15*, *Romans 8:22*, and *Psalm 24:1* to reframe stewardship as central to Church mission and Christian identity.[59]

The fifth approach is to recognize and encourage youth to engage in environmental stewardship. The study recommends introducing certificates, awards, and public acknowledgment for outstanding youth contributions in stewardship projects. As Lalitha notes, institutional validation inspires sustained participation and elevates youth credibility in intergenerational spaces, especially in contexts where youth voices are often marginalized.[60] When churches celebrate these efforts just as they celebrate academic excellence or musical talent they affirm creation care as vital ministry and signal that environmental stewardship is not peripheral, but central to Christian witness.[61] This recognition also fosters a sense of belonging and purpose among youth, reinforcing their identity as stewards of God's creation. One respondent emphasized that "when youth are

[49] Plaatjies-van Huffel, p. 75–89.
[50] Kilango, p. 59.
[51] Kosciulek, Thomas. "Barriers to Youth Participation in Climate Action." *Youth Engagement Journal* 6, no. 2 (2020), pp. 37–46.
[52] DeWitt, Calvin B. *Earthwise: A Guide to Hopeful Creation Care*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2008.
[53] Kilango, p. 63.
[54] Shumba, pp. 47–59.
[55] Kilango, p. 63
[56] Kilango, p. 52.
[57] Sorley, R. "Creation Care and Christian Ethics." *Biblical Worldview Journal* 12, no. 3 (2011), pp. 138–139.
[58] Kilango, p. 52.
[59] Kilango, p. 63.
[60] Lalitha, *Intergenerational Dialogue and Youth Exclusion in Africa,* 101–115.
[61] Kilango, p. 63

publicly appreciated for their environmental work, they begin to see it as part of their calling, not just a task".[62] Such affirmation can be transformative, especially when paired with visible roles in worship, community outreach, and diocesan planning. As highlighted in the findings, empowering youth through recognition and responsibility contributes to long-term sustainability and strengthens the Church's holistic mission.[63]

The sixth method is through strengthening collaboration with NGOs like Forest Focus and Sustainable Agriculture Tanzania (SAT) shows clear results in parish-level transformation.[64] Expanding partnerships and engaging other faith communities will amplify youth-led efforts and resources. As Baron observes, "interfaith collaboration strengthens ethical and theological witness for environmental justice". When youth across religious boundaries unite for creation care, they become agents of reconciliation, healing both the Earth and communal divisions.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion the study found that for a sustainable engagement of youth in environmental stewardship, biblical and theological foundations are critical in implementation of actions. The paper has proved there is a comprehensive biblical understanding of environmental stewardship that correlates human responsive initiative of human beings loving and caring for themselves, and stewarding God's creation. Engaging youths encompasses the continuation of God's mission to the whole world that commissions making disciples who also takes the responsibility of protecting and caring for the earth.

The strategies enlisted in this paper are a verification of the involvement of youth in missional stewardship in ELCT-PD despite the barriers youth encounter in effectively performing for environmental protection. The study has grounded ecological ethics as a missiological necessity to empower youth to creatively participate in environmental conservation and protection at the diocesan level and at the ELCT as a whole. Their engagement not only fulfils biblical mandates but also repositions youth as agents of transformation where creation care becomes worship, advocacy becomes discipleship, and sustainability becomes mission.

This study brings some implications if the Evangelical Lutheran Church wants to strengthen engagement of youths in environmental stewardship. First the church needs to overhaul Christian Education syllabuses to mainstream environmental stewardship in all Christian Education themes and topics. Second, the church needs to include youth representation in leadership and decision-making bodies to increase their awareness and roles in environmental stewardship. This initiative will create transformative strategy in linking youth spiritual growth, community empowerment, and ecological resilience. The research affirms that young people possess deep potential for leadership, advocacy, and innovation attributes which need to be promoted by initiating more research for biblical, theological and missiological grounding, nurtured through intentional church leadership structures, and practical support.

While this study affirms youth as agents of transformation in ELCT-PD, it is limited to one diocese and qualitative insights. Future studies should evaluate the long-term ecological impact of youth initiatives and compare across other dioceses to link grassroots stewardship with structural advocacy.

REFERENCES

1. Alamu, Samuel Sunday, and Babawale Solomon Taiwo, "Creation Care and Climate Change: A Pauline Perspective on Environmental Stewardship in the Context of Romans 8:19–23," *EJournal of Religious and Theological Studies* 11, no. 8 (2025), pp. 390–400, especially p. 393. https://doi.org/10.38159/e rats.20251181.
2. Albina, A. "Barriers to Youth Engagement in Sustainability Initiatives." *Journal of Environmental Development* 17, no. 2 (2024): 112–125.

[62]Kilango, p. 65
[63]Kilango, *Youth Engagement in Stewardship of Environmental Protection as Missional Approach to Church Ministry*, 69
[64] ELCT-PD. (2023). *Building Resilient Communities Project*.

3. Awojobi, Oladayo Nathaniel, and Godwin Tetteh. "The Impacts of Climate Change in Africa: A Review of the Scientific Literature." *International Journal of Climate Change Strategies and Management* 9, no. 3 (2017): 371–386.
4. Baron, L. *Faith-Based Environmentalism in Africa*. EcoTheology Press, 2021.
5. Boddy, Brenda Joy, *An Exegetical and Theological Analysis of Romans 8:18-30 with Specific Reference to the Role of the Holy Spirit in Intercession*, South Africa: A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Master of Theology at South African Theological Seminary, p. 181.
6. Boff, Leonardo. *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997.
7. Bujo, Benezet. *The Ethical Dimension of Community: The African Model and the Dialogue Between North and South*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998.
8. Cobb Jr., John B. *Eco-theology: Creation Care and the Church's Response to Climate Change*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021.
9. Conradie, Ernst. *Hope for the Earth: Vistas from the South*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013.
10. DeWitt, Calvin B. *Earthwise: A Guide to Hopeful Creation Care*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2008.
11. ELCT–PD. *Building Resilient Communities Project*. Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania–Pare Diocese, 2023.
12. ELCT–PD. *Strategic Plan 2020–2025*. Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania–Pare Diocese, 2020.
13. Francis, Pope. *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*. Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2015.
14. Hanson, P. "Martin Luther Commentary on Genesis." Unpublished document cited in ELCT–PD archives, (n.d).
15. Horrell, David G. *The Bible and the Environment: Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology*. London: Routledge, 2010.
16. Hunt, Cherry, David G. Horrell, and Christoper Southgate, An Environmental Mantra? Ecological Interest in Romans 8:19-23 and A Modest Proposal for Its Narrative Interpretation *The Journal of Theological Studies* 59(2), 2008, pp. 2-5, DOI:10.1093/jts/fln064.
17. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary: *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* by Robert Jamieson, AR Fausset and David Brown Printed: 1871 Text in Public Domain.
18. Jenkins, Willis. 2008. *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
19. Kilango, Ruth Mbwambo. *Youth Engagement in Stewardship of Environmental Protection as Missional Approach to Church Ministry*. Master's thesis, Tumaini University Maku mira, Usa River–Tanzania, 2025.
20. Kosciulek, Thomas. "Barriers to Youth Participation in Climate Action." *Youth Engagement Journal* 6, no. 2 (2020): 37–46.
21. Lalitha, P. "Intergenerational Dialogue and Youth Exclusion in Africa." *African Journal of Development Studies* 11, no. 1 (2023): 101–115.
22. Luther, Martin, *Martin Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans*, Coromandel East, South Austraria: New Creation Publications Inc., 1966, p. 19.
23. Manganyi, Charles. "Oikomissiology and Ecological Transformation." *Journal of Ecotheology* 15, no. 1 (2023): 1–12.
24. McFague, Sallie. *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.
25. Messenger, Jack (Asst. Editor), *Mission in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment – An LWF Contribution to the Understanding and Practice of Mission*, Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2004, pp. 53-54.
26. Mungure, E. "Theology and Church in Times of Climate Change Crises." Presentation at LMC Roundtable, March 2023.
27. Pew Research Center. "*Religious Beliefs about Earth and the Environment*. Religious & Public Life. Nov 17, 2022. https:pewresearch.org/religion/2022/11/17-beliefs-earth-and-the-environment.
28. Plaatjies-van Huffel, Mary-Anne. "Lex Orandi and Lex Vivendi: A Framework for Eco-Discipleship." *Missionalia* 48, no. 2 (2020): 75–89.
29. Sailhamer, John H. *Genesis Unbound: A Provocative New Look at the Creation Account*. Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1992.
30. Shumba, B. "African Theological Ethics and Climate Justice." *Theological Review Journal* 8, no. 1 (2011): 47–59.

31. Sorley, R. "Creation Care and Christian Ethics." *Biblical Worldview Journal* 12, no. 3 (2011): 138–139.
32. Tan, Yak-Hwee. "Ecological Mission as Missio Dei: Implications for Theological Education." In *Mission Continues: Global Impulses for the 21st Century*, edited by C. M. Kao and L. A. Sanneh, 125–135. Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2010.
33. United Republic of Tanzania, *National Environmental Policy*, 2021, p. 32, https://www.vpo.go.tz/uploads/publications/sw-1644923087-NATIONAL%20%20ENVIRONMENTAL%20POLICY%202021%20new.pdf.
34. Videira-Soengas, Ruben, *A Rhetorical Study of Romans 8:18-22 as a Proof of Cosmological Witness of Creation for Glorification of the Believer*, A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty in Partial Fulfilment for the Degree of Master of Theology in the Division of New Testament Studies, Sun Valley, California, 2024, pp. 1-2, https://www.academia.edu/29410399/A_RHETORICAL_STUDY_OF_ROMANS_8_18_22_AS_PROOF_OF_THE_COSMOLOGICAL_WITNESS_OF_CREATION_FOR_THE_GLORIFICATION_OF_THE_BELIEVER.
35. Welker, Michael. *Creation and Reality*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999.
36. Wilson, Paul. "Dominion Reconsidered: Reclaiming Responsible Stewardship." *Biblical Ecology Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (2019): 31–38.
37. World Council of Churches. *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*. Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012.