

# Churches of Restoration

Year 3 Cohort 2026-2027

**Living out God's call to care for creation, one church at a time!**



## What

The Churches of Restoration (CoR) program helps churches integrate care for God's creation more deeply into congregational life. During a year-long cohort experience, participants will learn from A Rocha and each other as they engage in meaningful earthkeeping in their congregational context.



## Who

Local churches in the United States that want to live out God's call to care for creation by starting or expanding earthkeeping initiatives with support, resources, and guidance from A Rocha USA and others. Participating churches may come from a range of denominational traditions as long as they affirm the Nicene Creed and are not in conflict with A Rocha's Commitment to Creation Care.



## Where

During the 2026-2027 year, cohorts will be based in West Michigan, Nashville TN, and Chicago, IL. There will also be a virtual cohort for select congregations in other parts of the United States. Future years' cohorts may shift locations depending on interest and availability.



## When

Cohorts will begin with local kickoff retreats in the fall of 2026 and conclude in the summer of 2027 with a time of reflection and celebration. The virtual cohort will also launch with an in-person retreat.



## How

Each cohort will have approximately five congregations, and each congregation will be represented by a CoR team of 2-4 leaders, including at least 1 member of the church's leadership team (clergy/elder/deacon/vestry member) and 1 representative under 35 yrs old. These CoR teams will participate in the kickoff retreat, stay connected through monthly get togethers (whether virtual or in-person), and work together to identify and implement creation care initiatives that fit their congregations.



## Kickoff Retreats

Retreats for each cohort will include times of worship, prayer, refreshment, planning, connecting, and learning from both theologians and scientists.

- Local cohort retreats will begin on a Friday evening with dinner and an opening session, reconvene on Saturday with breakfast and lunch provided, and end before dinner on Saturday (specific dates and times to be determined based on participants' availability).
- Details for the virtual cohort retreat will be communicated with participants in advance.
- Costs for the retreats are being covered by generous grants (overnight housing is not needed for the local retreats).
- We encourage all members of the CoR teams to participate in their kickoff retreat, although exceptions can be requested as long as at least 2 members of each congregation participate (with at least one of those members being on that church's CoR team).



## Monthly Meetups

Throughout the yearlong cohort, CoR teams will take part in monthly meetups (whether virtual or in-person) for mutual support and encouragement in our creation care efforts.

- Monthly meetups will typically include full-cohort gatherings with occasional 1:1 catch-ups with A Rocha USA support staff.
- A Rocha USA and our partners will also offer a series of optional webinars featuring leading theologians, scientists, and sustainability experts. Webinars are open to anyone in participating congregations and will cover a range of relevant topics including native landscaping/habitat restoration, conducting energy audits, collaborating with local conservation efforts, and more.
- Local cohorts can also take advantage of opportunities to meet in-person to visit or support one another's initiatives, hold joint events, or volunteer with A Rocha USA's conservation projects.
- Ongoing opportunities to connect and collaborate with each other and others will also be made available through A Rocha USA's Love Your Place online platform.



## Congregational Discipleship

In consultation with their respective congregations, CoR teams will identify and implement at least one activity from each pathway over the course of the year-long cohort:

### Pathway #1: Spiritual Formation

- **For Children:** Use our *Wild Wonder Camp* VBS curriculum during the summer, or other.
- **For Corporate Worship:** Use our *Worship and Creation* liturgical resource, or other.
- **For Preaching:** Use the *Compelling Preaching for a Climate-Changed World* resource from Creation Justice Ministries, or other.
- **For Small Group Study:** Use the *Liturgies of Restoration* 5-week study for adults or youth, or other.
- **Custom Option:** Expand work already underway, or start something new and specifically suited to your church.

### Pathway #2: Practical Action

- **Habitat Restoration:** Conduct a landscaping and grounds audit and identify opportunities to restore wildlife habitat through pollinator gardens, invasive species removal, native tree planting, and more (with support from the Au Sable Institute).
- **Energy Audit/Carbon Footprint Reduction:** Conduct an energy audit of your facilities and/or use our *360 Carbon Footprint Calculator* to identify and make achievable improvements (with support from Energy for Purpose and Climate Stewards).
- **Waste Reduction:** Identify and pursue opportunities to reduce food waste at church, introduce or expand composting, or other.
- **Volunteer in the Community:** Participate with existing groups to support environmental action and conservation in your area, such as protecting critical habitats, conducting river/beach/park cleanups, maintaining hiking trails, and more.
- **Custom Option:** Expand work already underway, or start something new and specifically suited to your church (e.g., installing solar panels, community gardens, electric vehicle charging stations, etc.).



## Support

- Local A Rocha USA staff will coordinate and support the in-person cohorts in MI, TN, and IL, and remote staff will coordinate and support the virtual cohort.
- From January to May 2027, *Church and Community Conservation Interns* will be based in each cohort location to provide additional support for events or initiatives organized by participating congregations (in-person cohorts only).
- We will also provide connections to our wide range of conservation partners in the US and across the worldwide network of A Rocha organizations in over 20 countries.
- As funding allows, a select number of \$300-500 seed grants will be made available as needed to help participating congregations implement their chosen actions under Pathway #2 (see above).



## Desired Outcomes

By participating in Churches of Restoration, our goals and prayers are that you and your congregation will:

1. Be renewed through deepening your connection with God, one another, and your local communities and ecosystems
2. Draw from the deep wells of Christian faith and practice to share God's love and care for this good but groaning creation
3. Be inspired and supported through fellowship, collaboration, and peer-to-peer learning with other participating churches and the wider A Rocha network and our partners
4. Become worshiping communities of belonging and encouragement for those who sense God's calling to particular vocations of environmental/conservation service
5. Bear visible and compelling witness to God's mission to reconcile, restore, and renew all things in Christ (Colossians 1, Romans 8, Revelation 22, etc.)



**To reserve your spot in one of our upcoming cohorts, please contact Ron Rienstra, Director of Church Partnerships, at [ron.rienstra@aorcha.org](mailto:ron.rienstra@aorcha.org) or Jenna Henderson, Director of Community Engagement, at [jenna.henderson@arocha.org](mailto:jenna.henderson@arocha.org)!**

**A note about the program:** Thank you for your interest! We are grateful to the Lilly Endowment, Inc. for their support of the Churches of Restoration program. Please note that 2026-2027 is our third year of the program, and we are eager to identify ways we can continue to refine and scale this program to support greater church engagement in creation care. To that end, we will ask all participants to take a pre- and post-cohort survey. We greatly value your participation and welcome any feedback you have along the way to help us continue improving!