

**STEWARDING**

**THE**

**EARTH**

From Earth Ministry Greening Congregations Tool Kit

Earth Ministry believes in the unique power of communities of faith working together to live more sustainably. Of course, we also recognize that for many people, the first step towards caring for the Earth is to acknowledge our own environmental impact and to change our lifestyles accordingly. While advocating for sustainable practices in your congregation, there are choices you can make in your personal and home life to better steward the Earth. Here are some ideas to get you started.

**Reducing Waste**

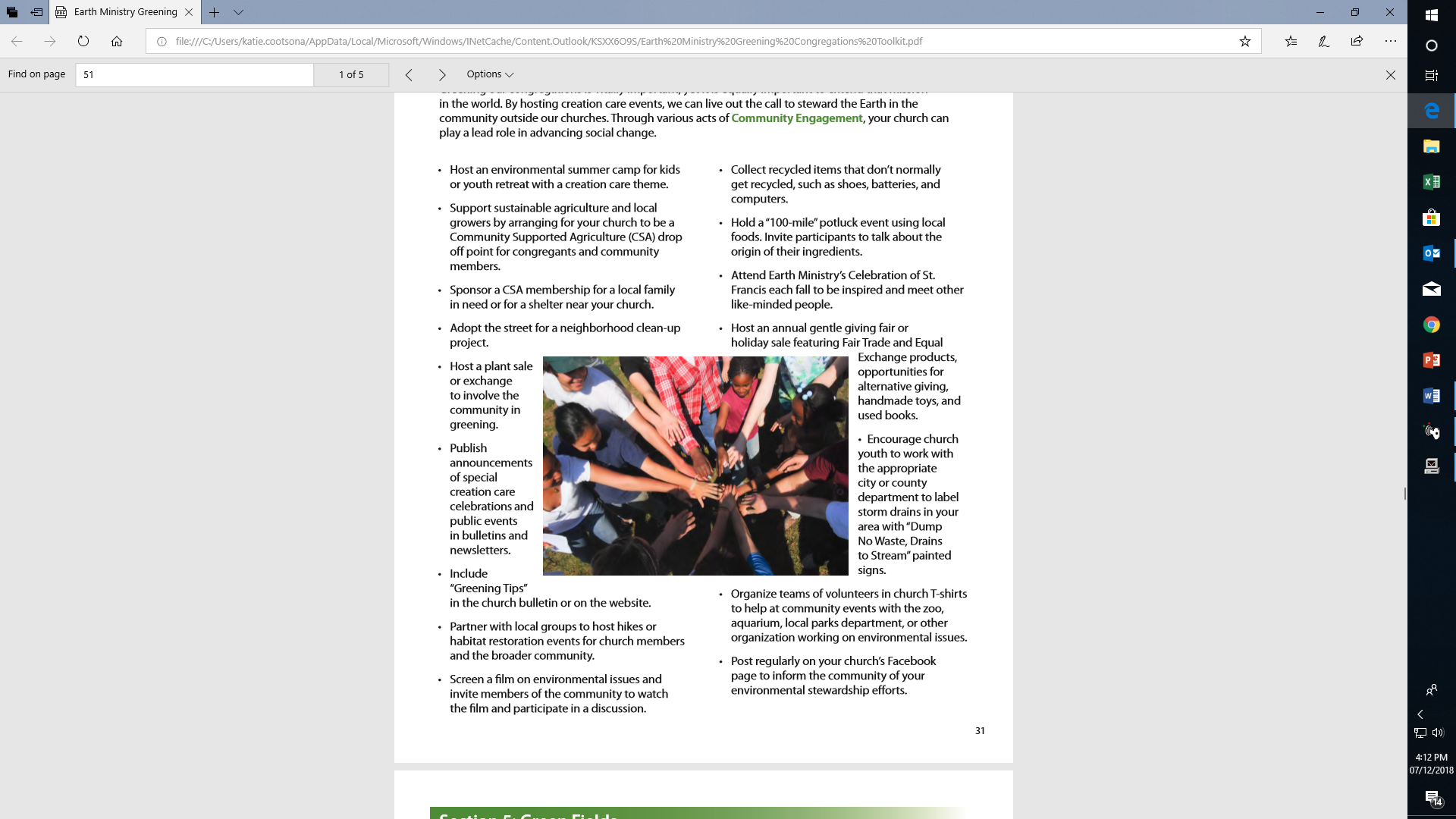
An invaluable first step toward stewarding the Earth is to reduce waste. Recycling and composting provide hands-on opportunities to learn how to be more thoughtful consumers.

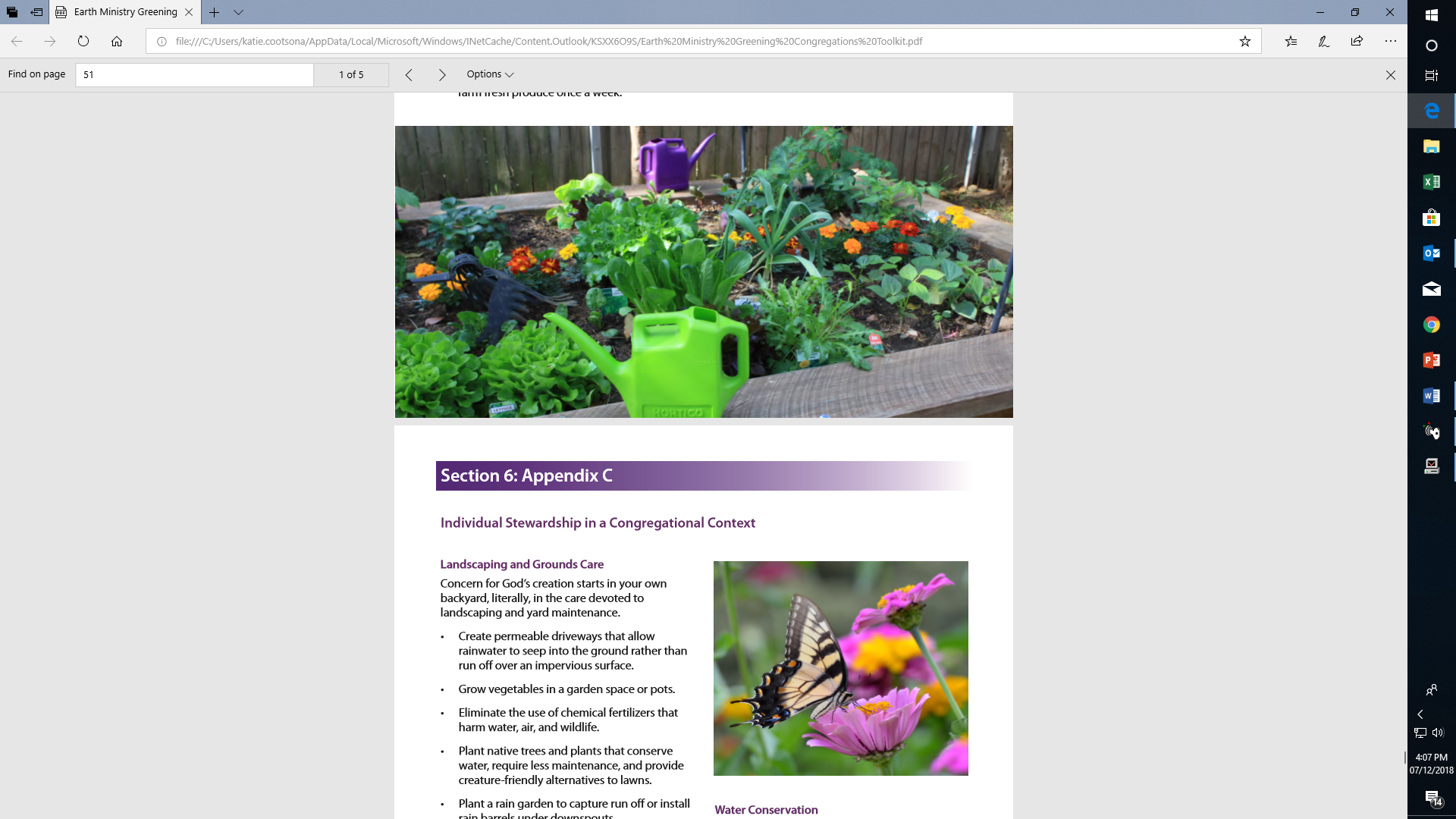
* Sign-up for recycling and/or yard waste service from your local utility.
* Reduce the size of your outdoor garbage can, and create an incentive to recycle and compost more with larger bins.
* Buy products with the least amount of packaging or that come in reusable containers.
* Make sure to have convenient indoor recycling bins in areas of the house where your family uses paper (office), sorts mail (living room), or discards cans, bottles, or plastic tubs (kitchen).
* Check your household bins to see if your family is in compliance; educate yourselves on what materials can be composted or recycled in your community (this information is often updated on city or county websites).
* Purchase items made with recycled materials.
* When making any purchase, consider where it will enter the waste stream—Will it go directly to the landfill? Is there a greener alternative?
* Compost your food scraps; worm bins are great for families with children.
* Donate used clothing or household items. In addition to traditional charities, new social media groups such as the hyper-local “Buy Nothing” groups on Facebook are a great way to pass things on and meet your neighbors.

**Transportation**

Transportation has been identified as the most significant, consumer-related environmental problem. Although it may not be intuitive, making sustainable transportation choices can be an act of worship. For example, choosing to walk rather than drive provides more time and space for you to appreciate God’s green Earth.

* Commute by bus, bike, carpool, or walking.
* When buying your next vehicle, try a smaller car or consider a hybrid or electric model.
* Walk or ride a bike for trips under 2 miles. Many of our journeys are short and don’t require a car. Spending time outside while walking or biking is a great opportunity to interact with nature!
* Check with neighbors and coworkers to see if carpooling is an option.
* Consolidate trips to reduce miles traveled.
* Use more efficient, less polluting vehicles.
* Check your car’s tire pressure monthly.

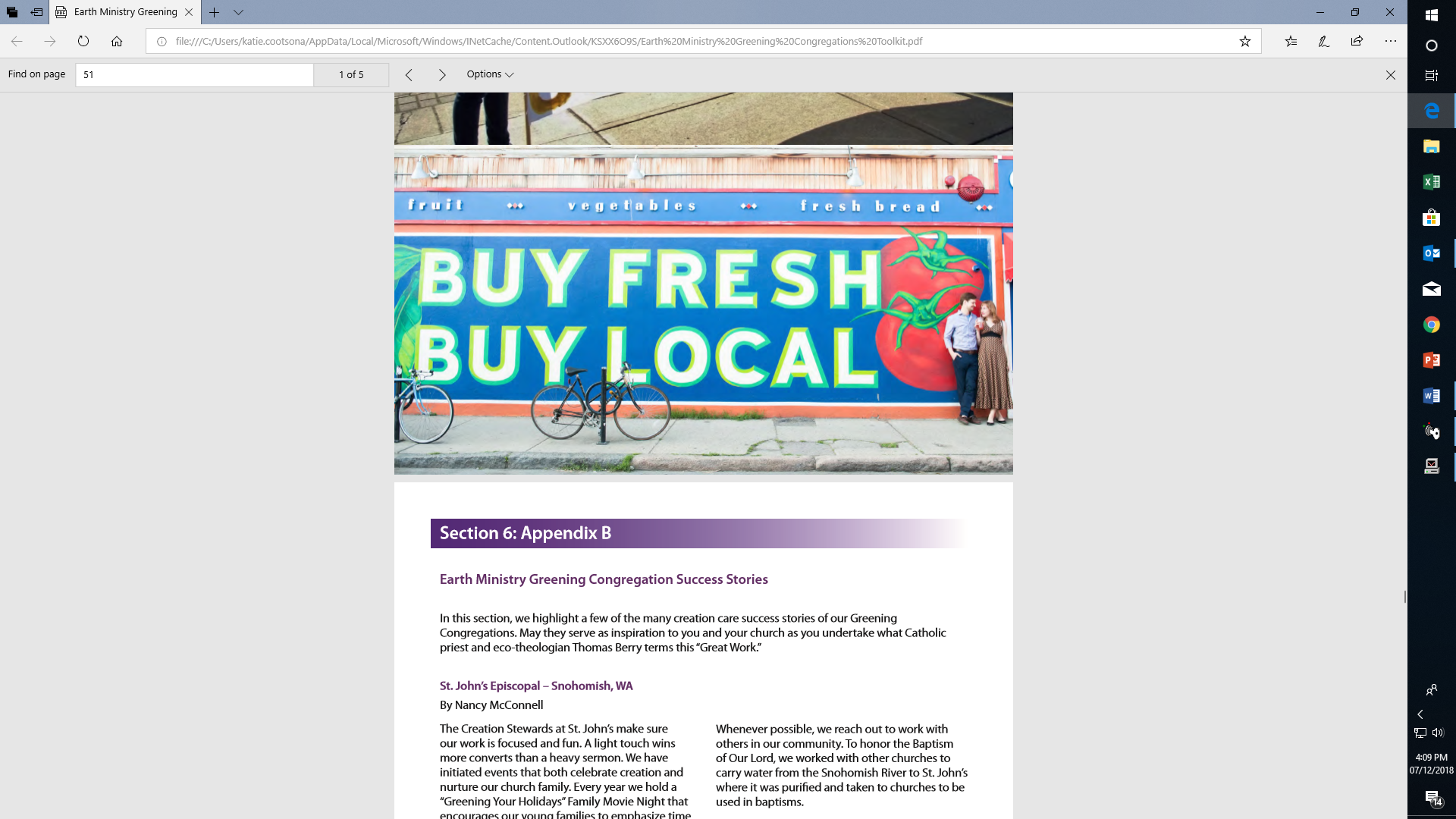




**Food and Farming**

Food is often a central feature in many congregations: as a sacramental part of worship, an important dimension of fellowship, or an absolute necessity to those in need.

* Support local family farms by shopping at Farmers’ Markets.
* Try to eat vegetarian at least once a week.
* Attempt a “100 mile diet” during the summer, eating only food grown or produced within 100 miles of your home – or try a “500 mile diet” if that is an easier place to start.
* Turn your front lawn into an edible garden. If you don’t have the space, look into growing plants in pots indoors or on balconies.
* Dehydrate, can, or freeze fruits and vegetables when they are abundant and in season.
* Join a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, signing up to receive a box of farm fresh produce once a week.



**Home Cleaning and Toxics**

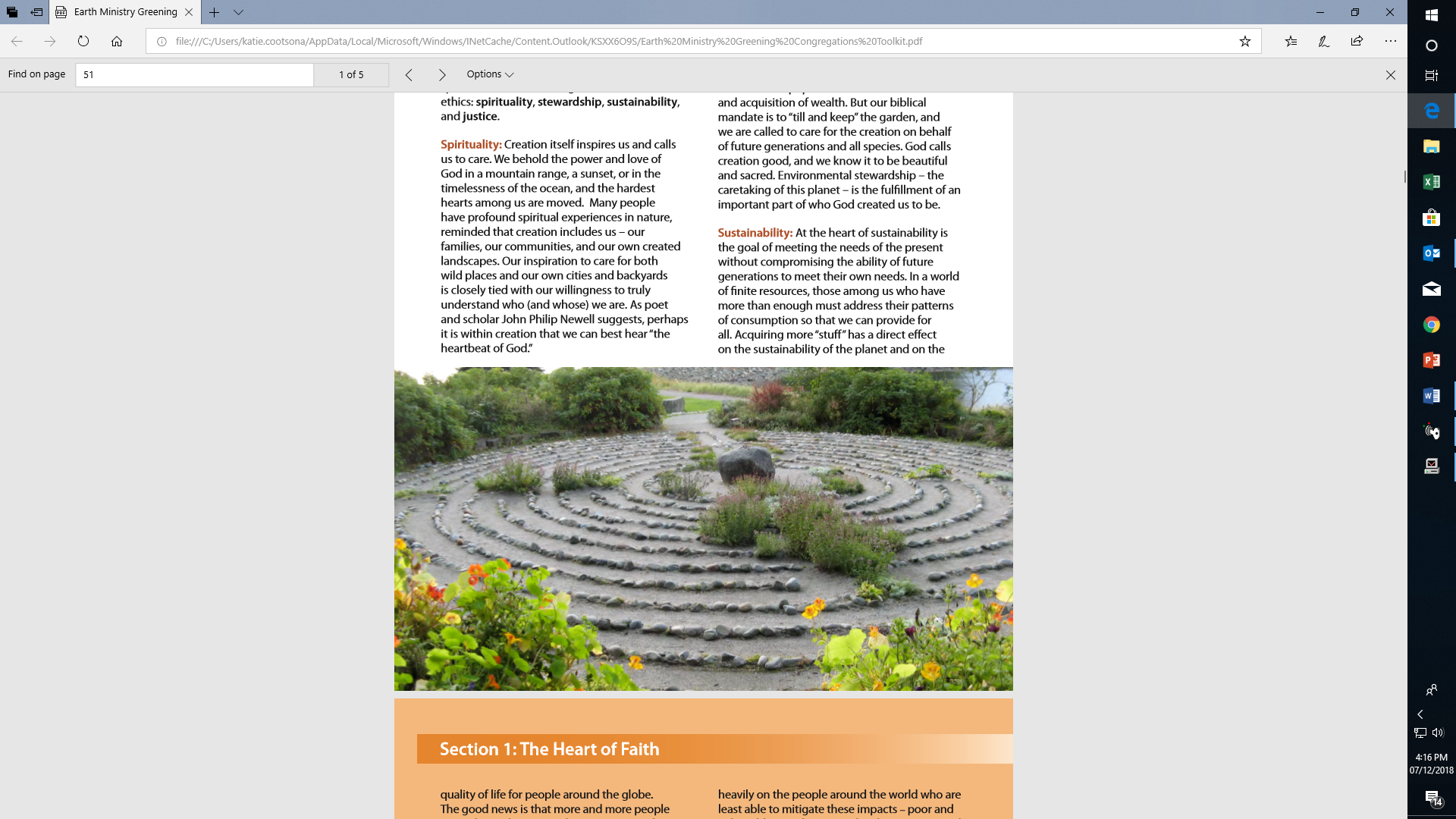
Some cleaners contain ingredients that are hazardous to people, as well as pets and wildlife. Help care for all God’s creatures by creating a healthy space for your family and friends!

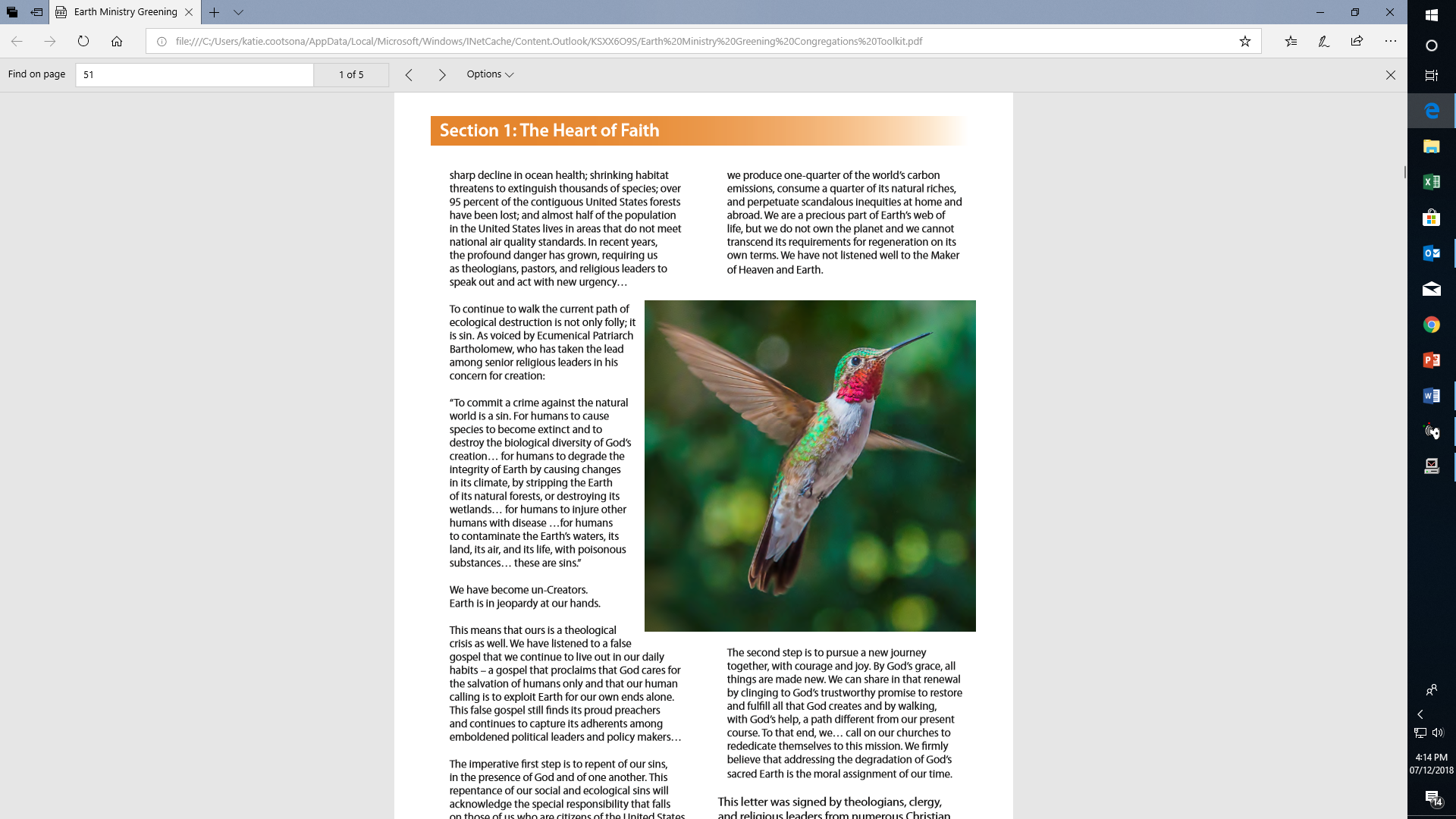
* Look through your cleaning products and remove cleaners made with harmful chemicals.
* Properly and safely dispose of hazardous cleaners and other chemicals.
* Assemble a safe cleaning kit using the least toxic products available; you can make your own cleaning solutions from common household items like baking soda and vinegar.
* Use non-toxic, biodegradable soaps, detergents, and cleansers.

**Landscaping and Grounds Care**

Concern for God’s creation starts in your own backyard, literally, in the care devoted to landscaping and yard maintenance.

* Create permeable driveways that allow rainwater to seep into the ground rather than run off over an impervious surface.
* Grow vegetables in a garden space or pots.
* Eliminate the use of chemical fertilizers that harm water, air, and wildlife.
* Plant native trees and plants that conserve water, require less maintenance, and provide creature-friendly alternatives to lawns.
* Plant a rain garden to capture run off or install rain barrels under downspouts.
* Create “backyard wildlife habitats,” butterfly gardens, or other natural spaces to enjoy.





**Water Conservation**

Conserving water is an act of stewardship. Water is a precious gift and we should seek to use only what we need so that there will be enough for all.

* Turn off the faucet while brushing your teeth.
* Install low-flow shower heads, toilets, and faucets – the savings will surprise you!
* Shorten the length of your shower – 5 minutes is more than enough time to get clean.
* Repair leaky faucets and toilets.
* Only run the dishwasher when full.
* Use eco-friendly, phosphate-free dishwasher detergent to avoid contaminating water.
* Consider rain water catchment systems for grey water needs.
* When you do laundry, wash your clothes in cold water instead of warm or hot.
* If you’re going away for a few days, switch off the central water heater.

**Energy Conservation**

Home heating, hot water, air conditioning, and household appliances have the largest ecological impact after transportation and food consumption.

* Turn your thermostat down to 55o F at night and when you’re not home.
* Weather seal your home’s windows, doors, ducts, and plumbing.
* Insulate hot water heater and pipes to conserve energy.
* Turn your water heater down to 120o F.
* Turn off and unplug electronic equipment and lights when not in use.
* Upgrade to smart power strips that don’t continue to use electricity even when appliances are turned off.
* Change at least five light bulbs to compact fluorescent bulbs or LEDs.
* Improve insulation in your home’s attic, crawlspace, and walls.
* Choose energy-conserving products or get a loan to fund energy conservation upgrades.
* Take advantage of your local utility company’s energy audit programs.
* Try drying some of your clothes the natural way by hanging them on a line or drying rack rather than using a dryer.

**Renewable Energy**

Renewable energy or “green power” is defined as electricity that is generated from environmentally preferable renewable resources, such as solar, wind, geothermal, biogas, biomass, and low impact hydro. These resources generate electricity with less carbon dioxide emissions and buying green power helps support the development of new renewable energy.

* Purchase renewable energy through your utility’s green power program.
* Take advantage of utility rebates and loans for home or small-business solar projects.