

Creation Care Resolution for Mennonite Church USA

Adopted by delegates on July 5, 2013

Introduction:

The purpose of this resolution, submitted to Mennonite Church USA, is to advance the commitment of congregations and members in caring for creation as part of the good news of Jesus Christ. The resolution is set in the context of: 1) our biblical belief statements; 2) our growing awareness of diverse forms of environmental degradation; 3) our location in North America, where complicity, power, and environmental benefits and harms remain unjustly distributed; and 4) our desire to be faithful to our missional vision as followers of Jesus Christ.

1. In 1995 we affirmed the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, which articulates Mennonite Church USA's biblical understanding and commitments. The following are several statements that were made regarding our relationship with God's creation.

"We believe that the universe has been called into being as an expression of God's love and sovereign freedom alone." (Article 5)

"Human beings have been made for relationship with God, to live in peace with each other, and to take care of the rest of creation." (Article 6)

"We believe that the church is called to live now according to the model of the future reign of God. Thus, we are given a foretaste of the kingdom that God will one day establish in full. The church is to be a spiritual, social, and economic reality, demonstrating now the justice, righteousness, love, and peace of the age to come." (Article 24)

2. The realities and impact of environmental issues are named in the Mennonite Church USA Purposeful Plan (2012). These excerpts remind us of the breadth of issues that we face as a church, as well as the opportunity for us to respond.

"Along the same line, a dramatic shift in global weather patterns has raised deep concerns about a lack of water, leading to a food crisis with its most dramatic effect in the global south. In addition to these events, the disastrous April-July 2010 BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico brought renewed urgency to a creation care movement concerned about the damage or depletion of natural resources. These disasters point to the importance of having Mennonite Church USA commit itself to increasing creation stewardship and to remain in vital partnership with relief and development agencies such as Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite Disaster Service. Environmental disasters provide significant opportunities for the church to engage in holistic witness." (p. 13)

"The dramatic changes in our world, even the deep crises that affect us in very negative ways, carry with them the seeds of renewal. The crises that bring us to our knees can point us back to our most basic commitments and help us see new ways to live these values in a changing world. Some of the most creative and life giving developments in the church have come about in response to a crisis." (p. 14)

3. The Purposeful Plan outlines many cultural, economic, political, and environmental issues confronting Mennonite Church USA today. Acknowledging and responding faithfully to today's environmental crisis requires wrestling more deeply with the impacts—both locally and globally—not only of U.S. economic and environmental policies, but more broadly of the daily patterns of life typical of North Americans. Just as previous resolutions have called Mennonites in North America to confess and repent on issues of racism, poverty, and militarism, so does the current context of ecological degradation and environmental injustice call forth a strengthened

resolve among North American Mennonites to confront their sinful complicity and ongoing responsibilities with regard to environmental issues.

4. Our missional vision calls us to action. Eleanor and Alan Kreider (*Worship and Mission After Christendom*, 2011, p. 46) poignantly name reconciliation as the center of our work.

“God’s mission is to bring God’s kingdom, God’s redemptive reign. God’s mission is creation-encompassing: it is to recreate creation, to bring new creation (Isa 65:17; 66:22: Gal 6:15). God’s mission is to make all things new (Col 1:20; Rev 21:5)—humans with “hearts of flesh” in right relationship to God (Ezek 36:26), humans reconciled to their bitterest enemies (Isa 19:23-24), and the whole of creation restored as a place where justice is at home (2 Pet 3:13).”

“Seek, and you will find,” Jesus told his followers (Matt 7:7-8). If we truly want to know Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen one who stands with the suffering (Matt 25: 37-40), we must look for those wounds causing the greatest pain in our times. It is within this context that the following resolution calls us to be faithful in caring for God’s creation.

Resolution:

Be it resolved that members of Mennonite Church USA commit to growing in their dedication to care for God’s creation as an essential part of the good news of Jesus Christ.

We resolve to explore the theological concepts and biblical resources that inform our commitment to creation care. We resolve to discern together how the Bible, our theological understandings, and the realities of the 21st century continue to shape and guide our relationship with creation.

We, as individuals and communally, are resolved to study and discern responses to the following questions during the next two years as part of our goal to be more faithful in caring for the gift of creation that God has entrusted to us.

A. Exploring Biblical and Theological Foundations:

Studying these questions will advance the *Christian Formation* priority in the Purposeful Plan (p. 21). These initial questions will assist us in exploring our belief that, *“As creatures made in the divine image, we have been blessed with the abilities to respond faithfully to God, to live in harmony with other human beings, and to engage in meaningful work and rest.”*

(Confession of Faith, Article 6)

1. How is caring for creation part of the holistic good news of Jesus Christ? What does that mean for the Mennonite Church USA vision and mission and our responses to the current environmental crisis?
2. How do biblical understandings of Jesus and creation guide us in discovering the ties that link all created beings to each other and to God?
3. How can we integrate our theological and biblical commitments to creation care into our communal worship, prayer, spirituality, and Sabbath-keeping?
4. How can church practices and spiritual disciplines – such as biblical interpretation, worship, prayer, and social action – teach us about creation? How can discipleship incorporate ecological learning, so that the church grows in its wisdom and delight regarding creation?

B. Choosing a Simple Lifestyle

This set of questions will aid in advancing the priorities of *Christian Community and Stewardship* in the Purposeful Plan (p. 21 and 23). The questions also guide us in responding to our statement that, “*We believe that everything belongs to God, who calls us as the church to live as faithful stewards of all that God has entrusted to us.*” (Confession of Faith, Article 21)

1. How should we, as individuals and the corporate church, pursue a simple lifestyle in the 21st century? What are ways that congregations and individuals can be the best stewards of energy resources?
2. How can we practice the sharing of goods (food, money, tools, transportation, houses, etc.) in our church communities?
3. How does our theology shape our view of economics and management of resources?
4. As North Americans inhabiting diverse economic, cultural, and racial contexts, what specific opportunities and challenges do we face as we seek to adopt and advocate simpler lifestyles?

C. Pursuing Justice and Peace

Responding to these questions will advance the *Holistic Christian Witness* priority in the Purposeful Plan (p. 21). They will also guide us in taking action on our belief that, “*The peace God intends for humanity and creation was revealed most fully in Jesus Christ.*” (Confession of Faith, Article 22)

1. What do our sisters and brothers in the global church teach us about creation care issues? How will this understanding shape our commitments?
2. What are the creation care issues within 25 miles of our congregations? How can we respond to these issues in missional ways?
3. How can we ensure clean water and air, healthy food systems, and quality shelter for all people?
4. In what ways can we cultivate our witness to governing structures and decision-making at the local, state and national levels?

Information for follow-up to the resolution

Mennonite Creation Care Network (MCCN) provided the leadership for developing and drafting this resolution. After the resolution is adopted, MCCN – in collaboration with other Mennonite Church USA church agencies and related networks – will provide leadership during the next two years to develop resources for study, discernment and response to the concepts in this resolution.

The MCCN was established in 2005 to serve as a network for Mennonite people and agencies actively engaged in the care and restoration of God's Creation. Both Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada affirmed the official role of MCCN in their denominations. MCCN functions under the Mennonite Church USA agency umbrella of Everence. Leadership for MCCN comes from Everence and Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center of Goshen College. Financial support for MCCN is provided by Everence, Merry Lea, Mennonite Church Canada, MCC Canada, as well as donations from individuals and congregations.

MCCN has a membership directory of 650 individuals. Currently there are 61 congregations with liaisons to MCCN in the 100 Shades of Green program, which serves to encourage congregations in their creation care efforts. (<http://www.mennocreationcare.org/100-shades-green-congregations>)

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