

Local Church Creation Care Teams

Whereas, scripture proclaims God created all—from Earth’s hospitable atmosphere, mighty seas, abundant forests and other plants to nutrient-rich soil, from majestic whales to the tiniest microbes and all sentient and non-sentient beings in between; Scripture also proclaims God called humans to be caretakers of creation (Genesis 1–2). Jesus declared the Greatest Commandments are to love God and to love neighbor, especially the most vulnerable (Luke 10:25-37). Persons living in poverty, persons of color, and indigenous people in this country and throughout the world are harmed first and most by the degradation of creation, and these same groups have the fewest resources to recover from that harm. Thus, care for creation is clearly a matter of justice. Creation, including all people, is already or will be affected by the current and coming level of danger from climate change and its consequences that intersect with multiple expressions of injustice. It follows that loving God, the Creator, means loving God’s creation and that loving neighbors in distress requires stopping harm and righting wrongs, in other words, working for justice.

Whereas, tradition for United Methodists includes John Wesley’s Three Simple Rules for living faithfully: First, do no harm; second, do all the good you can; and third, stay in love with God. Proposed Social Principles for the next General Conference begin with “The Community of All Creation,” outlining the care and justice work that is needed in the midst of the multiple crises that are adversely affecting God’s creation and our neighbors. The 2009 Pastoral Letter of the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church, *God’s Renewed Creation: Call to Hope and Action*, pledges leadership in addressing the work of renewal. The 2016 *Book of Discipline* (Paragraph 254) includes an Earth Advocacy ministry group as a way “to fulfill the mission of the local church.” It follows that the church provides both a mandate and guidance for doing what is needed.

Whereas, reason is a God-given gift. Our reasoning capabilities are informed by modern scientific research and practices. The scientific community has given clear warning that creation is under tremendous strain due to the poisoning of air, water, and land; habitat destruction; the unsustainable consumption of earth’s finite resources; and the rapidly accelerating extinction of species. Scientists have sounded the alarm of catastrophic harm to creation if global warming and associated climate change are not halted and reversed. They point to how rising temperatures have already intensified wildfires, hurricanes, drought, and sea-level rise throughout the world with devastating impacts. Our reasoning capabilities are also informed by the examples of indigenous peoples whose traditional wisdom and practices honor living in harmony with nature. It follows that, globally, humans have the capacity for understanding the damage and danger and for stopping or mitigating the effects. Individuals and congregations have access to trustworthy knowledge and the reasoning ability to discern what is needed and how to carry out plans in their local situations.

Whereas, experience is honored by United Methodists as a way of recognizing lifetime gains of knowledge, understanding, perspectives, and practices of individuals, which they all bring to the work before them. Functioning as a team, they become stronger in their efforts (Ecclesiastes 4:12). Experience is also honored as the varied ways in which humans encounter God. For many people that meeting is through God’s gift of the natural world. It follows that a group of people caring about creation and justice, working together, can use their wisdom and passion to create faithful and meaningful experiences that help others love God and neighbor; **therefore, be it:**

Resolved, that every local church is urged to form a Creation Care Team or strengthen an existing one for action in five areas each year—Worship, Discipleship, Stewardship, Mission, and Evangelism—providing children, youth, and adults of all ages with inspiration, knowledge, encouragement, and practical means for caring for creation and justice. These actions include:

One or more occasions of worship, celebrating God's grace, glory, and beauty in creation and connecting creation care and justice to the scriptural call to love God and neighbor.

One or more discipleship (educational) opportunities, held within and for the congregation and/or community, related to some aspect of creation care and justice.

One or more positive changes in the stewardship practices of the church's life and/or to the church building or grounds.

One or more evangelism activities that put your creation care initiatives into action, and/or connect with your community to help others become involved.

One or more mission activities that advocate for change in systems that perpetuate injustice and harm to creation and communities either locally, regionally, nationally, or globally.

Resolved, that every local church is urged to integrate creation care and justice in all areas of ministry and mission, including preaching, liturgy, communications, education, outreach, and advocacy so that the church will become an increasingly effective witness of loving God and neighbor.

Resolved, that every local church is urged to communicate any actions taken as an idea exchange and inspiration throughout the connection. They can be reported at charge conference and could be celebrated locally, in the annual conference, and beyond; and, be it further

Resolved, that the annual conference will assist churches with resources and mentors, through the WNCC Mission Engagement office and WNCC Creation Care Team, as needed.

[Support and resources for creation care ministry actions can be found at <https://www.wnccumc.org/wncc-creation-care-ministry>; CreationCareWNCC@gmail.com; www.umcreationjustice.org.]