



CHURCH & SOCIETY

The United Methodist Church

RESOLUTION

Caring for Creation: A Call to Stewardship and Justice

2016 Book of Resolutions, #1033

Our Call to Stewardship and Justice

Our covenant with God calls us to steward, protect, and defend God's creation. The psalmist proclaims, "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it" (Psalm 24:1) reaffirming our charge to care for creation as a trustee of God's handiwork (Genesis 1:28). We are to delight in and praise God for the abundance and diversity of creation (Psalm 148) and honor God's covenant established with all living creatures (Genesis 9:9).

The story of the garden (Genesis 2) reveals the complete and harmonious interrelatedness of creation, with humankind designed to relate to God, one another, and the rest of the created order. God's vision of "shalom" invites all of creation to know wholeness and harmony, and the good news that we are called to proclaim includes the promise that Jesus Christ came to redeem all creation (Colossians 1:15-20).

Violating the integrity of our relationship with creation is sinful. Our failure to serve as faithful caretakers of creation has local and global consequences. Our inability to share the abundance that God has entrusted to us has given rise to ecological crises and extreme poverty. Our unchecked consumption and unsustainable patterns of development have exacted a toll on creation and are increasing inequality of opportunity around the world.

Confronted with the massive crisis of the deterioration of God's creation and called to a ministry of reconciliation between God, humankind, and creation, we ask God's forgiveness and commit ourselves to a new way of being that integrates environmental, economic, and social justice. As United Methodists we therefore are called to participate in God's healing of creation through acts of personal, social, and civic righteousness. Proclaiming and modeling a new lifestyle rooted in stewardship and justice we work toward the day when all God's children respect and share in the goodness of creation.

Our Methodist Tradition and Witness

John Wesley taught a holistic view of salvation that included the deliverance of the created world in the creation of a new heaven and a new earth.

In the sermon “The New Creation” (#64) Wesley speaks imaginatively about what the new heavens and the new earth will be like, imagining into the scriptural promises of an end to death and suffering (Revelation 21:1-7), and an end to present environmental catastrophes like storms, polluted water, and animal suffering. This is all part of the promise of God’s “greater deliverance” from sin. “And, to crown all, there will be a deep, an intimate, an uninterrupted union with God; a constant communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, through the Spirit; a continual enjoyment of the Three—One God, and of all the creatures in him!”

Early Methodists worked toward this hoped-for view by addressing environmental concerns, such as open sewers, impure water, unplanned cities, and smoke-filled air. In response to squalor and filth in the mines and mills, Methodists advocated for a wider knowledge of concepts of basic health. The substantial decline in the death rate in England from 1700 to 1801 can be traced to this work.

Wesley’s eschatological vision for the deliverance of all creation led him to respect and care for the created world here and now. “They may encourage us to imitate him whose mercy is over all of his works. They may soften our hearts towards the meaner creatures, knowing that the Lord cares for them. It may enlarge our hearts towards those poor creatures to reflect that, as vile as they appear in our eyes, not one of them is forgotten in the sight of our Father which is in heaven... . Yea, let us habituate ourselves to look forward, beyond this present scene of bondage, to the happy time when they will be delivered therefrom into the liberty of the children of God” (Sermon 60, The Great Deliverance).

Our Vision

We believe clean air is a basic right and necessity for all life. Air pollution puts at risk the health of our communities and threatens to forever alter the climate. To ensure that future generations inherit a legacy of clean air:

We advocate the adoption and strict enforcement of adequate standards to control both indoor and outdoor air pollutants. These standards must be developed to protect vulnerable populations including children and the elderly. We advocate measures to prohibit smoking and the provision of adequate ventilation for indoor facilities as well as ambitious standards to limit harmful emissions from stationary and non-stationary sources.

We support efforts to protect our shared atmosphere by reducing emissions that contribute to ozone depletion, acid rain and climate change. Through bilateral and international frameworks, we advocate ratification and enforcement of agreements to reduce harmful emissions with particular emphasis and accountability by the most developed and historic emitters.

We believe water is a sacred gift from God. We further believe water is a basic human right and not a commodity to be traded for profit. To ensure that water remains pure and available to all: We support the right of native peoples to the first use of waters on their lands.

We advocate integrated, sustainable management to reduce or eliminate factors contributing to limited water quantity and poorer water quality. We call for measures to preserve groundwater sources, to address polluted runoff that threatens water quality and safety and for effective enforcement against illegal pollution.

We support the public's right to know that water is safe for drinking, swimming, and fishing and disclosure of any pollutants discharged by industries and municipalities.

We are to tend God's land and care for all creation's creatures as faithful trustees with a commitment to preserve its goodness and diversity for future generations.

We encourage economic and agricultural practices that conserve and promote the improvement of land resources, production of healthful foods, and preservation of a clean environment.

We call on governments to support careful management of agricultural lands, protection of forests, and preservation of biodiversity among both plants and animals. We support national and international efforts to protect endangered species and imperiled habitats.

We believe that natural resources, outside the control of different nations, from the genes that form life to the air and outer space, are the common heritage of all humanity and therefore must be developed and preserved for the benefit of all, not just the few, both today and for generations to come. We believe God's whole earth has inherent value and our use of these precious gifts, including energy resources, must balance the needs of human development with the needs of non-human creation and future generations.

We support the concept of common heritage guaranteeing that people have the right to enough of the resources of the universe to provide for their health and well-being.

We support policies that encourage energy conservation and a shift toward cleaner, renewable sources of energy. We advocate for just and sustainable energy policies that prioritize the needs of those individuals and communities with the fewest resources.

We advocate for equivalent environmental standards among countries entering into trade agreements so that creation and communities are not sacrificed in the name of "free trade." We oppose the use of creation as a means of warfare or economic oppression and urge the abolition of chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons and the cleanup of sites contaminated with the waste byproducts of militarization.

We encourage measures to minimize the use of toxic and hazardous substances, strengthen right-to-know policies so that individuals and communities can understand

threats from pollution, and support policies that hold polluters responsible for the cost of cleanup and health impacts.

We acknowledge the constantly imperfect state of our knowledge regarding the impacts of new technologies and urge the development of those technologies most in accord with God's plan of wholeness for all creation.

Our Commitment

As The United Methodist Church we understand our responsibility to address and our complicity in the challenges facing God's creation. We urge all United Methodists, local faith communities, agencies, and institutions to examine their roles as caretakers of creation and to study, discuss, and work to implement this resolution. Specifically, The United Methodist Church:

- Designates one Sunday each year, preferably the Sunday closest to Earth Day or World Environment Day, as a Festival of God's Creation incorporating creation care into the church's worship and study.
- Promotes an environmentally sound lifestyle mindful of consumption amid a culture that encourages over consumption and waste.
- Commits to reducing, reusing, and recycling goods and to the use of recycled and "processed chlorine free" paper by United Methodist boards, agencies, and publishers.
- Encourages all institutions to perform energy audits, improve energy efficiency, and utilize clean, renewable energy sources where available. In addition, we call for the following: Council of Bishops:
- Communicate to the denomination the urgency of reducing our individual and corporate impact on God's creation.
- Model for the Church a "ministry of witness" by practicing "social and environmental holiness" as recommended in "God's Renewed Creation: A Call to Hope and Action."
- Support the efforts of annual conferences to form teams of United Methodists committed to creation care. Connectional Table:
- Request that each quadrennial report to General Conference include an evaluation of creation care efforts and steps taken by the reporting body to integrate sustainable environmental practices into its ministry. Commission on General Conference:
- Request that the meetings of General Conference model sustainable practices and report on efforts to reduce waste and consumption. General Board of Church and Society (GBCS):
- Develop resources highlighting opportunities for personal engagement and advocacy for individuals, local churches, annual conferences, and the general Church to understand and respond to our call to be caretakers of God's creation.

- Organize teams of United Methodists to engage in concrete actions including advocacy to address locally identified challenges to creation. General Board of Discipleship (GBOD):
- Develop curriculum and programs for all ages, in consultation with GBCS, GBGM, and UMW, that emphasize ecological responsibility as a key element of discipleship. General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM):
- Join with GBCS, United Methodist Women (UMW), and other agencies in working with mission partners to participate in the ongoing global dialogue on sustainability through the United Nation’s Commission on Sustainable Development.
- Explore and implement tangible ways to incorporate creation care into the mission, ministries, training programs, operations, and administration of GBGM. General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM):
- Include a greater awareness in clergy education and training of the global ecological crises. United Methodist Communications (UMCom):
- Produce programs that stress Christian responsibility for the future of creation and include models of The United Methodist Church’s involvement in creation care. General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA):
- Assist the denomination in its effort to be ecologically responsible in its own use of resources by collecting statistics on local churches’ and general agencies’ use of energy, water, paper, local purchasing efforts, minimization of toxics, and recycling to monitor the progress of the denomination in these aspects of stewardship. General Board of Pension and Health Benefits (GBPHB):
- Develop investment guidelines, in consultation with agencies, to evaluate its securities on adherence to high standards of environmental accountability as evidenced by the adoption of an environmental code of conduct and a practice of transparency in public environmental reporting. United Methodist Women (UMW):
- Develop educational, missional, and policy initiatives surrounding climate justice, and environmental health and their impacts on women, children, and youths. Local Faith Communities:
- Develop programs to incorporate the concerns of ecological justice into their work in evangelism, social concerns, mission activities, stewardship, trustees, and worship
- Endorse the Clergy Letter Project ([www.theclergyletter project.org](http://www.theclergyletterproject.org)) and its reconciliatory program between religion and science, and urge United Methodist clergy to participate.

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See Social Principles, ¶ 160.

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