

**Mennonite Creation Care Network
Creation Care Council Meeting Minutes Annual Face to Face Meeting
March 13-14, 2015**

Present: Janie Beck Kreider, Greg Bowman, Mike Currie, Luke Gascho, Dave Hockman-Wert, Joanne Moyer, Jennifer Schrock, Jim Smith, Marlisa Yoder-Bontrager

1.Devotional: Jim is teaching the *Every Creature Singing* curriculum at his church, Pleasant View Mennonite, right now. He showed a clip of the Celtic Thunder singing “All God’s Creatures Got a Place in the Choir” that he used in that context. He also mentioned Psalm 24: “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it.” Jim said that as a fraternal organization, Everence requires that people who buy its products must either be members of a Mennonite Church or related denomination or agree on the stewardship principles expressed in this Psalm; namely the idea that all things belong to God. He described the varied responses of potential clients when this is explained to them.

2. Sharing:

Luke shared about the dying process and death of Dale Hess agroecology colleague at Merry Lea.

Jim encouraged his church to work through the *Every Creature Singing* curriculum and has found it to be a good process. The circle question leader has been active and engaged with research, finding maps and creating Powerpoints.

Joanne does not own a car for sustainability reasons. Walking home even in cold weather sparks conversation with others and enables being attuned to the seasons and nature.

Mike has been watching people’s reactions to his job as an environmental consultant. Some cannot see what is contaminating their site and regard him as an impediment; others are terrified.

Dave Hockman-Wert reported that the northwest is at 10% of normal snowpack and his area has had the warmest February ever, causing concern and uncertainty. Dave also mentioned that Drift Creek Camp had a series of three talks over three years on different classes of creatures in the Bible. He did one on Trees in the Bible and is rooting for a sequel on insects. Third, Dave has shared our 2013 MCUSA creation care resolution as an example of an effective resolution in other church settings.

Jennifer told a story about connections between a staff member a woods and Wendell Berry’s poem, “The Peace of Wild Things.”

Greg talked about helping people understand gardens as sacred spaces.

Marlisa learned that the grant her congregation, East Chestnut Mennonite, received at their church to put in a permeable parking lot is a no go due to a failed perk test. Lancaster is having a

revival in interest in chickens. This includes snow chickens, plans for chicken catchers, standing room only at city council meetings and hopefully more local meat. Marlisa has also done presentations on creation care which have made her realize there is a wide range of what people know. Met with a parish resource director as to how curriculum might cross denominational lines.

Janie: Visited Tim and Krista Showalter Ehst who have a dream of starting a VS unit on a farm. Peace Farm, Bally, PA, is now partnering with Quaker Voluntary Service and DOOR and will be able to run its first season in May. Janie wrote an article on the Ehsts for her MCUSA job. Check MCUSA website.

Questions Related to Sharing:

- Greg asked how we might assess Dale's contributions and how we might learn from his legacy. Hands-on experience at Merry Lea seemed significant for students. Jennifer read several quotes from student letters.
- Joanne suggested we gather and collect techniques and best practices for teaching about creation care. Greg suggested that a "contest" used at the beginning of a session could reveal what people knew and suggest ways to proceed. Other ideas were to create Do-it-Yourself presentations available online and video examples of people teaching. (See p. __ below.)

3. Jim Alvarez, CFO of Everence

Jim provided an overview of Everence's work at the intersection of faith and finance. Everence owns five for-profit companies, but they are a non-profit. Part of Jim's role is to oversee the financial excess created because they are a fraternal organization and do not pay taxes. Fraternal funds are used for charity and building community in the places they serve. Curriculum and educational resources are created out of this money and MCCN funding comes from this pot as well.

Questions that came up:

Q- What are your thoughts on the longer term view of Everence as the church home for MCCN?

A- Jim A. sees our work as aligning with Praxis Funds' work with environmental screens. He plans to continue to support MCCN at the tune of \$10-12,000 per year.

Q- How do you communicate to people about the advocacy work that you do?

A- See Everence website, Stewardship and Investing tab or Inspiring Stories.

Q- Dave HW asked about a Sojourners Action Alert that listed Everence as an organization that had no fossil-free funds.

A- Jim said that Everence has been doing socially responsible investing since the late 1990s when no one was doing it before. Their strategy is to influence corporations. One example is Wal-Mart, where they were trying to influence HR policies. It is important to raise ethical issues, but it's not quite like flipping a switch. Creating awareness takes time. Greg observed that Everence probably is the Mennonite entity most frequently in the secular press for its activities.

Q- How does Everence engage with the theological component behind its ethics?
Sorry, missed response.

Jim A, Luke and Jim Sm met previously to discuss whether Everence would support the Doctrine of Discovery film project and agreed to do so.

The council expressed appreciation for the sharing funds they receive.

4. Question: What would make this two-day meeting worthwhile?

1. Define 1-2 goals or priorities for MCCN.
2. Continue to find ways to share good news that is in the curriculum.
3. Agree on one training support aid for sharing ECS.
4. Focus in on tasks that can be implemented by available staff and council time.
5. Hear stories from different parts of the church about how people are getting excited about creation care.
6. Think together about how to create more awareness of MCCN in Canada.
7. Think of ways to help operationalize Canadian resolution about climate change.
8. Five-year plan as to what MCCN will look like in five years.
9. Clearer sense of the different options for #8 above.
10. Talk about the *voice* of MCCN. Troubled by the fact that we were unable to sponsor the People's Climate March when asked because it is our policy not to sponsor things.
11. How can MCCN connect to other Mennonite institutions, both supporting their efforts and encouraging stronger actions? Example: Greening Conventions brochure.
12. Adopt one high-profile advocacy project. Team with MDS?
13. Staff members feeling energized and renewed to pursue ongoing efforts or start new ones.
14. Make network more robust and effective, particularly when it comes to sharing information about what works.
15. Workshop guides: make a plan.

16. Develop a set of web-based presentations for congregations.
17. Re-energized vision for our services to and for the Church.
18. Partner with Toyota: a Prius for every pastor!
19. Defining and sharpening what 100 Shades of Green means.
20. Talk about how to better relate to various audiences: MCUSA, MC Canada and beyond.

This brainstorming list was used to create the agenda for the remainder of the meeting.

5. PAST AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS:

Luke reviewed the history of MCCN in preparation for thinking about the next five years and beyond. We are at a 10-year juncture and it is time to review. The Environmental Task Force was first called forth at an MCUSA convention in 1989. The ETF functioned about 12 years, with a chief accomplishment being a Summit followed by the collection of essays, *Creation and the Environment*. The demise of Environmental Task Force was announced in a December 16, 2003 article in *The Mennonite*. Luke then contacted Marlene Kropf with the board of congregational ministries, and a steering committee formed, June 19th, 2004. It included Luke Gascho, Dave Neufeld, Vyron Schmidt, Peter Graber, Lois Hess Nafziger, Mary Jane Eby, Greg Bowman. At that time, this group tried to imagine what this group would look like in 10 years. People mentioned:

- advocacy for those without a voice
- churches as oases of environmental health
- transformation of systems and individuals
- working with youth, including home and family life connections
- electronic and published materials

SWOT ANALYSIS (strengths...weaknesses...opportunities...threats)

Strengths (internal)

- relationship with conference bodies
- good resources, namely web resources
- unique content to promote
- good balance of skills
- committed council members
- interest in creation care has grown
- providing informal feedback for other groups
- well-connected council head
- communication, especially through newsletters more frequent and reliable
- diligent skilled staff
- good connection to agencies and educational institutions

- strong food/ag focus
- network structure
- Bible on our side
- stable staff-leadership

Weaknesses (internal)

- small group
- small budget
- dilution of our effort
- continuity between meetings and from meeting to meeting
- race and diversity
- lack of business experience
- limit ability to do “rapid response”
- regional representation coverage
- congregational connections
- knowing better how to speak for the network
- Sense that at first, we didn’t get much done. “I no longer feel that way,” Joanne said. Increasing staff time with an intern helped this problem.

We noted relationships with Menno agencies was listed at both a strength and weakness.

Opportunities (external)

- Connecting with other organizations, denominations
- connecting with other Menno agencies
- webinar events
- new congregational interest
- face-to-face connections this summer at convention and world conference
- recognize current creation care efforts in other institutions
- potential for joint efforts with other denominations
- watershed discipleship emphasis (or is this competition?)
- connections with AMBS and their land conference
- lots of growing interest in churches, schools young people
- lots of interest in wider world (missional opportunities)
- connecting with disaster relief and planning with climate change and environmental issues

Threats (external)

- Menno activists going elsewhere
- Resistance brought on by media and policing by the Menno eco-nanny state
- Time/shortage
- Financial security?
- Increasing politicization of environmental issues
- Leadership transition

- Corporate agency support
- Lack of racial/ethnic diversity
- general disinterest and busy-ness
- Culture war shrapnel—being painted as too liberal
- Friendly fire—criticism for not going far enough or doing enough
- Declining interest in larger denominational body (i.e. National conference versus local church)
- Uncertain time in MCUSA

Comments:

Creation care may create new styles of worship.

Uncertain time in MCUSA could also make creation care a positive point of connection.

Joanne told story about a lesbian couple saying “We wish this same-sex discussion was over so we could concentrate on more important things.”

Question: Five years out, what do you see as one of the biggest challenges MCCN faces?

- Keeping creation care on the table without it getting stale.
- Money and people to keep things going.
- The many parts of the church where we don’t connect: Change the people or the topics! Don’t have the same conversations with the same people over and over.
- Fractious factions and ideologies. Media has cheapened greenness
- Clarity about whether we preach to the choir or the audience
- How can we connect with MDS? Are they an example of an advocacy project we would like to embrace?

We drew pictures: What might MCCN look like in 2022 with no support from either Everence or Merry Lea? (see scans)

Jennifer focused on staffing, with seven people working long distance from their homes, including a fund raiser, writers, webmaster, etc.

Dave drew a virtual round table where MCCN people embedded in our other agencies such as MEA, Everence, MCUSA, etc. can meet. An online wiki lists tasks for people to claim.

Joanne focused on MCCN Canada, which now has 1-2 staff who raise their own support and partner with CPT, A Rocha, KAIROS, and others.

Jim: Resources cycle around a loop that includes a multi-staffed MCCN, congregations, the natural environment and cornfields.

Janie’s idea draws on existing Mennonite structures. Conference creation care people come together around a central table.

Greg: Global Neo-Proto-Anabaptistics include eco-industrial entrepreneurs, freshwater water people and the honest food and justice league.

Marlisa: MCCN works within agencies that are already connected. Nucleus of creation care is fed and bounded by interchurch agencies.

Mike: Focused on funding. Funding sources include charging for things like curriculum, grants, crowdfunding partnerships with educational institutions, donors and a business that funds MCCN.

Luke: MCCN has staff of 2 FTE and 32 council people. Twelve regional bodies across the continent, schools, missional agencies, equipping agencies. Council people include 6 at large, reps from regional bodies...Has budget of \$130,000. These various bodies are all committed funders.

Comments:

- We liked Dave's embedded people.
- We noted similarities in that we had better ideas for structure than for content. *What are we offering that would make people want to give money and support?*
- What if Mennonites were characterized as people who know sustainability, as opposed to, "Oh, people who know how to farm?"
- Example: Students at Taylor come with the idea that the best way to serve the church as a scientist is to care for physical health as a doctor; how do we make the leap to caring for health of whole system?

Stories of communicating creation care concepts:

Marlisa—Described frustrating reactions at work where she makes creation care suggestions that seem to create a barrier for people.

Janie—It is easy to trigger guilt reactions.

Greg described the delicate challenge of visiting with farmers, even if he is there to listen and isn't trying to tell them what to do. Farmers feel very isolated by the politicization of what they do.

Luke—Part of our task is to find the values that connect to creation care. He also suggested asking people to relate stories of places that are meaningful to them.

Joanne described an idea she encountered called bright green environmentalism, in contrast to dark versus light green. Bright green means joyful, hopeful.

Jennifer told about teaching ECS, and having people tell their own stories that connected to the idea of session 5, Slow Violence and the Gospel of Peace.

Question: What are motivational words that help build a compelling case for the future we hope to build?

- creativity, teamwork and joy
- clean air, clean water
- meaningful work
- hopeful future
- healthy communities
- shalom and the Gospel of Peace
- birding hotspots...salmon spawning...native plant garden...edible landscaping...sustainable farms
- Prophetic storytelling
- Bright green resources
- denser, wider networks
- wild discipleship
- loving our “enemies” (recall and contrast Bill McKibben in *Rolling Stone*)
- reverence

We were then asked to write a paragraph using some of the motivational words we chose:

Join a network that is becoming denser and wider daily. Where there is prophetic storytelling and wild discipleship; where we journey together toward a beloved community. Experience creativity, teamwork and joy as you join others in extending the Gospel of peace to all of creation. We offer bright green resources that inspire profound and hopeful transformation.

Cultivate curiosity about all creation
Learn to care for our home on earth
Generate hope.

MCCN connects all of us in honoring the bounty and beauty of our home that God created.

Saturday, March 14, 2015

1. Devotional: Dave HW led, based on a program he’d done with his band. He offered four themes, each illustrated with a text and song.

- *Goodness of the land:* Deuteronomy 8:7-10 paired with the Scottish song, “These are my mountains” by Misty River.
- *Challenges of working with the land:* Genesis 3, paired with song, “Lawrence Kansas”
- *The need for care of creation:* Hosea 4:1-3 paired with “Paradise” by John Prine.
- *Celebration of the Bounty of Creation and Good Stewardship:* Psalm 65:9-13 paired with “Homegrown Tomatoes” by Guy Clark.

2. Question: Think of a time and place in your life where you have encountered beauty but also encountered injustice relative to that beauty.

Luke: Digging 40 holes two feet deep into great, rich topsoil on a new property he bought. Receiving abstracts on the history of this land that went back to Andrew Jackson and the time when the Potawatomi were expelled from Indiana. The promised land of Goshen and particularly Luke's property, has an older, troubled history.

Mike: Described an area of British Columbia where there is beautiful young forest. The original forest was clear-cut in the 1970s and 80s by a man who later had a crisis of conscience.

Joanne has experienced the game parks of East Africa and their amazing flora and fauna, juxtaposed with meeting people so poor they were begging. She also knows that the Maasi were evicted to create the Serengeti Game Parks.

Marlisa described seeing invasive species while biking, and knowing how harmful these can be even when a natural area looks beautiful.

Dave focused on a visit to Chile in 1990.

Jennifer told of a wise and beautiful friend who was also scarred by physical and sexual abuse.

Jim has extended family in Southern Illinois, which is culturally very "southern." Coal mining has made roads and buildings drop four to eight feet. Mining is one of the few job opportunities in this area.

Janie took a course in Guatemala City where she learned about the United Fruit company's injustices and destruction of the cloud forest, followed by a visit to the cloud forest.

Greg's daughter, Jenna, documented human rights abuses in Colombia. Greg visited and met displaced people who had already left everything and were attempting to survive in the last place available to them.

Note that this is a question that could be used in settings across the church to spark discussion about creation care.

3. Doctrine of Discovery: A film project is underway on the Doctrine of Discovery (white Europeans' assumption that they had the legal right to indigenous lands) in the United States and MCCN is helping sponsor the project. It is one of our donation options. Sarah Augustine, a Native American who lives in the Yacama Nation in Washington State is working on this project. She has been featured in a recent issue of *The Mennonite*.

Luke also reported on his experiences talking with students at Wheaton about the Doctrine of Discovery. Showed photographs of paintings and prints depicting the coming of whites to the New World.

4. Small group tasks: Groupings and topics were as follows.

A. 100 Shades of Green Revisited: 100 Shades Revisited: Jennifer, Mike, Dave HW

- Mike indicated that he and his congregation were unclear what the point of signing up for 100 Shades was.
- We discussed whether the name is too similar to 50 Shades of Gray and decided to leave the name alone.
- Jennifer explained removal of congregational pages and plan to create a kit so that congregations making their own creation care pages on their own sites.
- Expectations for 100 Shades of Green congregations should be as follows:
 - Step 1:* Clear with pastor, governing board.
 - Step 2:* Create awareness among congregation
 - Step 3:* Engage with the Scoresheet
 - Step 4:* Educational initiative: Study the Every Creature Singing curriculum, or another creation care curriculum of your choice.
 - Step 5:* Create a creation care webpage for your congregational
 - Step 6:* Liaison makes at least one connection to MCCN each year; email, phone call.

Additional suggestions:

- Reduce number of words on 100 shades pages.
- Have a yearly webinar opportunity for liaisons.
- Show appreciation for liaisons, perhaps by offering a gift at the MCUSA convention.
- Obtain website stories about liaisons with their congregations
- Need a yearly calendar of when MCCN staff do various tasks: sending out donation requests, annual reports.
- *Communicate* to liaisons!
- Do we want to implement two-leaf, three-leaf system shown on our score sheet? ASHE's star system is one example.

B. Rubric for Endorsements: Luke, Marlisa, Janie

The small discussion group looked at the following questions.

- What part can endorsements such as the request we received to sponsor the People's Climate March play in making MCCN relevant?
- What are the criteria for signing on as a sponsor?

They noted that a political action endorsement is different from endorsing an event. They also noted that advocacy also takes place through awareness—making our network aware of the issues. They thought it would be helpful to hear how Mennonite Central Committee and Peace and Justice Support Network handle this. They concluded that the important question was, “Does this align with our goals?” and that our goal statement could be very helpful in making endorsement decisions.

When the council as a whole discussed this topic, the focus shifted to, “Should we endorse anything at all when we are a network that includes a wide variety of people?” Dave reported

that Peace and Justice Support Network shies away from endorsements. He gave an example of a Palestinian group that they thought would alienate some people. Another example that proved controversial was an idea to overturn tables at Phoenix, based on Jesus cleansing the temple. Jim emphasized that MCCN decisions reflect on Everence, and it was not clear beforehand whether the People's Climate March would be a peaceful event or not. Janie shared about how bad it felt to say no to a fellow Mennonite who was a minority. We listed the following pros and cons of sponsorship:

Pros:

- ❖ opportunities to build the network
- ❖ being relevant
- ❖ being a faith-based witness at an event
- ❖ gaining support from people outside the network
- ❖ our goals can give us helpful guidance
- ❖ we can distinguish between the council and network as the sponsoring body
- ❖ being responsive to the people who come to us

Cons:

- ❖ alienating potential supporters
- ❖ contamination of our message
- ❖ limited time and resources to deal with this
- ❖ network structure is different from a nonprofit. Council cannot speak for the network
- ❖ implications for Goshen College, Everence and Merry Lea very real. Also for the professionals on our council.

The conversation was a respectful opportunity to hear the ideas of council members, but did not come to a conclusion about endorsements.

C. Webinars and Workshop Ideas: Greg, Joanne, Jim

This small group planned the following content:

1). Three basic workshop guides:

- Why creation care
- How creation care
- Climate change

2). Examples of someone leading examples of Every Creature Singing circle questions.

Levels of church input from simplest to more complex are:

Powerpoint with script

Recorded webinar

Live webinar

Brain Shark is a technology that combines input streams.

Interlude and other bits and pieces:

Greg introduced us to his seed collection and its ability to inspire conversation.

Luke reviewed several resources he brought for show and tell. Larry Rasmusen's *Earth Honoring Faith*; *African Earthkeeping*; Randy Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation*; Amory Lovins, *Reinventing Fire* (Can get a summary from a TED talk.) *Just Sustainabilities*, Julian Agyeman.

Luke was amazed the number of times that questions of justice and equity came up at a secular gathering he attended of the National Council for Science and the Environment.

Idea: Sign saying, "God so loved the world" for litter cleanup or other outdoor caring actions. Emphasize expansive love of God.

Fun stuff: During breaks, Jim asked us trivia questions and gave us nifty Everence prizes like key chains and calculators. *Examples:* What is the temperature of outer space? How much money did Everence give away in grants since 2010.

5. Group Work II:

A. Choosing two to three top actions for churches: Marlisa, Joanne, Jennifer

This discussion was inconclusive, but we covered the following ground.

- Promoting carbon taxes. However, Joanne reported that this idea is very controversial in Canada.
- Food, transportation, buildings
- Turning our theology into active values. From "loving your neighbor" on paper to a public and active passion for justice. There is evidence that just because you believe something doesn't change your action.
- Cultivating the ecological virtues, as in Bouma-Prediger's virtue ethics. For example, the response that the Amish gave at Nickel Mines was out of a long habit of offering forgiveness.

B. Relevance of MCCN: What makes us worthwhile?

Dave HW, Greg, Jim

Our network...

Inspires
Resources
Equips
Connects

Activists find faith basis for their work
Congregations find technical resources to serve local environment
Institutions have a trusted partner to support them in ecological stewardship

1. Inspires new interest in CC and new energy for long-timers
2. Equips congregations and individuals at many points along the continuum to a lifestyle of Christian sustainability
3. Strategic matchmaking between how-to and why-to
4. Niche: provide trusted recommendations and interpretation for resources
5. Environmental spiritual director or coach.
6. Nonviolence: We do not demonize the enemy. We call all persons to love all creatures. Connects all of us in honoring the bounty & beauty statement...

C. Long term Sustainability

Concerns:

- Leadership transition, as Luke is nearing retirement age.
- Church structure under stress right now.
- Ability of Church to support ministries like MCCN.

Possible responses:

- Fundraising
- Strengthening relationships with 100 Shades Congregations
- Charitable contributions from businesses
- Could a sustainability coordinator from a corporation serve as the next leader?
- Build stronger ties to regional conferences
- Should we work at pulling in more people from inter-church agencies?

6. Updates from Canada:

Joanne reported that the Creation Care Primer is out and a paper copy will be mailed with the Leader packet that they send to churches twice a year.

An \$800 honorarium and another \$700 for design work is available to add Canadian content to the *Every Creature Singing* curriculum Circle Question Guide. An author is not yet secured. They hope the additions will be done by May of this year. Joanne plans to do additional promotion of ECS once the Canadian version is there.

Joanne is recruiting people for an oil divestment study committee. Randy Haluza-Delay will chair. Send Joanne any resources on divestment or communicating about climate change that you have.

Regents College, Vancouver, British Columbia, has an event coming up May 5 to 8. Mike will send info to Janie or Jennifer.

7. MCUSA Update:

Janie reported on the canoeing field trip with the Friends of the Kaw River. Up to 25 to 35 people can do a 4.5 hour trip, canoeing or kayaking. They will hear a sandbar presentation along the way on water quality, but the exact nature of the input has not been decided yet. Janie raised

questions about collecting payments. One wrinkle is that this will be on Friday, July 3, which makes it difficult to get Friends of Kaw volunteers.

8. Next Meetings:

Travelers agreed that the extended day on Friday made travel easier. The pace was also more relaxed. Dave suggested we do a field trip out of the building; maybe to Merry Lea.

Face-to-face meeting is April 1 and 2, 2016, beginning 10:30 a.m.

Virtual Meetings: Thursday, September 10th 7 p.m.
 Thursday, January 14, 7 p.m.

At the September virtual meeting, we will discuss the webinars and online workshops since we did not yet make a plan to execute them.

This year's reward for reading this far:

Two favorite quotes from Greg: "Menno Eco Nanny State" and "Global Neo Proto Anabaptistics."

- *Minutes submitted by Jennifer Schrock*