

# 10 types of people who care about creation

People care for creation in different ways

by Jennifer Halteman Schrock

We at Mennonite Creation Care Network have always encouraged a big-tent approach to creation care and avoided one-size-fits-all prescriptions about what churches should do. We call our member churches Green Patchwork Congregations, emphasizing the many shades of green that make up the body of Christ. We have emphasized that every geographical and social context is different, but the same could be said about the mix of gifts people bring to their work with creation care.



The typology below names the gifts of a large circle of people who care about creation. I hope it helps congregations recognize the gifts they can build on and provides language for discussing our differences. I also hope it inspires congregations to do their own work on gift discernment. This is my view from a web of relationships that is predominantly white and economically comfortable. The categories might look different to people of other backgrounds. I offer my view, knowing that incomplete answers are a swift and efficient way to collect feedback. We are at a critical juncture in history when we cannot afford to leave any of our resources untapped if we are to maintain a livable planet.

### Acknowledging our differences

I found it helpful to recognize two camps: the **traditional** and the **eco-hip**. The two groups draw on different sources, use different language, and different projects occur to them, so they can't always see each other's contributions.

Many may find themselves a mix of these two streams. And for some land-based, indigenous people groups, creation care may have always been a way of life (see page 16).

The green virtues of the traditional are primarily rooted in faith themes they have inherited—such as “stewardship of the earth”—and practices they learned from their families. The eco-hip draw on contemporary science and the environmental movement and synthesize this with their faith to varying degrees. They are often younger and have had more instruction in environmental science in school.

Traditionals may be suspicious of the secular environmental movement. The eco-hip may be suspicious of the Christian tradition's track record with the environment and of the Bible, even though they are doing what the Bible tells us to do. The traditionals bring perseverance and historical perspective; the eco-hip bring new information and ideas. Eco-hip people have hybrid cars and environmental rhetoric; traditionals have canning equipment and Bible verses.

I also see our efforts taking place in three spheres: (1) the household, (2) the region and (3) the big picture. While these areas support each other, it can be frustrating if your congregation doesn't recognize the sphere you work best in.

### 1. Household:

Home or church life is where this group expresses its concern for the earth. They find hope in being faithful in the spheres of influence they have at hand. Using Paul's body language from 1 Corinthians, we might call them hands and feet.

What they decide to do depends on whether they are simple living servants or the more specialized gardeners, foodies or building geeks.

**Simple Living Servants** are generalist householders who want to focus on what really matters in their day-to-day lives. The traditionals in this group may have learned their thrifty ways from depression-era parents or the original *Living More with Less*; the eco-hip have Blessed Earth tip sheets on their bookmarks bars. The traditionals recycle their sweaters into mittens; the eco-hip build straw bale houses. Traditionals shop at thrift stores to save money; the eco-hip shop at Fair Trade stores to pay just wages. Traditionals hate wasting things; the eco-hip hate chemicals. Both use vinegar to make their own cleaning supplies. The simple living servants add integrity to any congregation. However humbly, they act on what they believe.

**For Foodies**, eating is a moral issue. They recognize that how we grow our food has an enormous impact on both farm workers and other species. They don't all agree on what the moral issues are, so you will need to ask your foodies whether they are passionate about buying from local farms, avoiding products with palm oil,

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reducing cruelty to animals or all of the above. Traditional foodies have worn out and recycled three *More-with-Less* cookbooks by now; eco-hip foodies use *Simply in Season* and an array of vegetarian sources. Careful labeling at potlucks is a starting place for making foodies feel at home and enabling them to share their commitments. The foodies' discipline is an inspiration to all.

**The Gardeners** are a common type in some Mennonite churches. They overlap with the foodies. Many garden for the joy of it and find the work spiritual. Some make it a ministry, providing fresh produce to the local food pantry or schools in urban settings or gardening space and know-how to their communities. Like the foodies, they understand that how we grow our food matters. Traditional gardeners may have grown up on farms; eco-hip gardeners may have learned from organic gardening magazines.

**The Building Geeks** love energy efficiency. The traditionals have caulk guns and a long track record of changing furnace filters on time. They try to save money for missions. The eco-hip have

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Kill-o-Watt meters and pamphlets on ground source heat pumps. They try to reduce carbon footprints. Either way, they save the church more money and carbon than anyone else does. Ask them for a tour of the church basement: You'll make a new friend and get tips for your own home.

## 2. The regionally rooted

The most significant sphere for this group is the local community or watershed, but they experience it in different ways. The body part that describes them best is the heart.



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**The Naturalists** have an abiding love of nature. They camp, hike, watch birds, walk on beaches—and sometimes skip church to do it. While gardeners enjoy cooperating with nature in order to bring forth something practical—like lunch—the naturalists love dragonflies or mountains or palm trees for their own sakes. Beauty, solitude and wildness draw them outdoors. This is where they most likely experience God's presence. Traditional and eco-hip naturalists are not too different, except the field guides of the eco-hip are apps instead of tattered books, and they have more expensive camping equipment. Naturalists help others see God's glory in the created world.

**The Wounded Witnesses** have direct, painful experience with environmental problems in their current or past communities. Maybe they live in a food desert or their children have asthma due to a polluting industry nearby. Maybe they watched their childhood farm bulldozed into a shopping mall parking lot or spent time overseas, where they encountered the effects of mining on the local population. The eco-hip talk about eco-justice and systemic evil; traditionals more likely accept what happens as just the way things are. The firsthand testimony of wounded witnesses is a powerful gift—and a compelling motivator—to their congregations and the broader church.

**The Watershed Disciples** are rooted in—and rooting for—the places where they live. They participate in local organizations that serve the common good and know the channels for getting things done. They are bridge builders and joiners. Traditionals have lived in one area for many years and bring historical perspective to their churches. The eco-hip have read authors such as Ched Myers and Todd Wynward. This strengthens their ability to connect the dots between their environmental passions and the gospel. Watershed disciples spearhead bike-friendly initiatives and take field trips to the local landfill. They extend God's love beyond the walls of their church to the surrounding community and ecosystems.

## 3. The big picture people

This group brings breadth and vision to their congregations. Their minds romp beyond the household and the region. Big picture people are often connected to other big picture people, which enables them to pass along outside perspectives. Paul might call them the eyes of the body.

**The Theologians** may or may not have a degree, but they use God language to make sense of the world. They have the gift of connecting contemporary culture and environmental issues with the Christian tradition, whether through

advanced readings or by asking basic questions, such as, What does this have to do with Jesus Christ? Theologians lead Bible studies, write church vision statements and plan creation worship services. Theologians remind their churches why we should care about creation and help the other types recognize their gifts.

**The Activists** believe in the power of political leaders to bring positive change and are sometimes frustrated by the near-sightedness of their more locally focused friends. Activists read widely on environmental issues and receive many action-alert emails. They have programmed their senators' numbers into their phones. Traditional activists may pursue causes such as healthy food and clean water for all. Eco-hip activists might embrace solar legislation, animal rights or ecosystem protection. They have been to at least one climate march and maybe Standing Rock, too. Activists embody and explain issues that many find abstract. Because they care about injustice in the broader world, their churches might, too.

**The Professionals:** Whether they work with a tractor or a computer, these people generously apply the unique expertise they've developed on the job to creation care. Their gift to the church could be either a visionary idea or a healthy dose of realism. Traditionals may resist the green label despite the fact that they are quietly improving practices on their farms or in their industries, where even a small change may do a lot of good because of the scale of the operation. Eco-hip professionals have environmental jobs. They might be climate scientists or land managers or environmental educators. Their donated labor is indispensable for some projects.

#### **Nurturing our creation care base**

Recently I asked members of a congregation active in creation care what advice they had for other congregations. "Do something," they said.

Not every congregation needs to be at the forefront of creation care. But we can all do something. As the list above suggests, there are plenty of starting places. Maybe one is to bless the gifts of the people who come to mind when you read the list of types above and think about what other gifts exist in your congregation or community.

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*To join the network or explore its website, see [www.menno-creationcare.org/](http://www.menno-creationcare.org/). Want more guidance on what type you are? Take our quiz under >Start Here > Assess*

**Not every congregation needs to be at the forefront of creation care. But we can all do something.**

### **Glossary**

**Carbon footprint:** This is the amount of carbon dioxide a particular person or group emits due to the consumption of fossil fuels. Carbon footprint calculators are available at sites such as <http://coolclimate.berkeley.edu/carboncalculator>.

**Eco-justice:** Marginalized communities in particular bear the brunt of environmental destruction. When eco-justice is practiced, environmental burdens and benefits are distributed fairly and both humans and the broader creation are thriving. That hard-working hyphen is trying to repair the rift between people who care about wild places and people who care about struggling urban neighborhoods.

**Food desert:** An impoverished area that does not have easy access to healthy food. Have you ever found a turnip at a convenience store?

**Food desert locator:** <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data/fooddesert/>

**Kill-O-Watt meter:** A gadget that measures electricity usage, enabling people to find the best ways to reduce consumption. <http://www.p3international.com/products/p4400.html>

**Rooted and Grounded Conference:** See ad on page 14.

**Sustainability:** The art of meeting the ecological, social and economic needs of the present without compromising the needs of the future.

**Watershed:** All the land that drains into a given river or other body of water. Understanding how the natural features that surround our communities function is essential for practicing eco-justice.

**Ched Myers and Todd Wynward:** Leaders in the watershed discipleship movement, which emphasizes loving, knowing and committing to the health of our home places rather than giving in to abstract anxieties. See Myers' *Watershed Discipleship* and Wynward's *Rewilding the Way*.—Jennifer Halteman Schrock