



Mennonite Church USA Climate Justice Ministry

Greener Congregation Score Sheet Discussion Guides

Use these discussion guides with the Green Congregation Score Sheet.

While the results of your discussion and your scores are mainly for your own benefit, MC USA's Climate Justice Ministry welcomes you to share the information with us, along with any feedback about the score sheet or discussion guides.

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Vision for Creation Care & Climate Justice

***IMAGINE THAT...** Congregations everywhere understand that caring for the earth and caring for marginalized peoples are intertwined aspects of our Christian calling. Care for creation and climate justice are named in the congregation's mission and core values.*

Don't forget to invite: pastors, elders/governing board, committee chairs, people in charge of church communications.

Step 1: Assemble your congregation's vision statement, mission statement, and descriptions of the roles of various committees. Print out what your congregation says about itself on your website or in brochures and fliers.

Step 2: Look through these documents. How and where is care of creation represented, if at all? If care of creation is represented, does your congregation resonate with this part of its vision? How is that evident?

Step 3: Rate your congregation's creation care vision from 0 to 5. A zero indicates no current activity or plan; a 5 represents that your congregation is fully engaged in a given task or planning.

Step 5: If creation care *is not* represented in your documents, consider these questions:

- Is there some aspect of caring for creation that is authentic to your congregation but remains unnamed?
- What kind of study and discernment process might address this? A series of sermons, a Christian Education class, a plan to rewrite a mission statement?
- Appendix 1 of this document contains examples of statements that embrace creation care in a variety of ways. **See below.**

Step 6: If creation care *is* represented in your documents but not well integrated in congregational life, how might you change that? Discuss with the help of the other categories on this score sheet.

Other examples of Congregational Score Sheets:

- From the [Presbyterian Church USA](#)
- From [GreenFaith](#), an interfaith nonprofit that attempts to mobilize people of diverse religious backgrounds for environmental leadership.

Creation Justice Leaders

***IMAGINE THAT...** Congregations all over the world include people with a passion and gifts for guiding the church in sustainability and climate justice practices. These people are recognized and their congregations have formally blessed their gifts.*

Don't forget to invite: pastors, elders/governing board, current or potential creation care leaders

Step 1: Is there a Climate/Creation Justice Committee or Advocate position position at your church?

If yes, review and discuss:

- Is this a spontaneous, ad hoc group, a standing committee or simply an individual with a passion?
- How are they appointed?
- How often do they meet?
- What do they do? Do they have a written job description?
- Is the congregation aware of their work?
- Are there any gaps in this committee's work that should be addressed? Are there new directions to pursue? New people to incorporate?

If no:

- Are there people at your congregation with a special interest in caring for the earth? Keep in mind that this can take a variety of forms, from avid gardeners to political activists. Make a list of everyone who comes to mind, noting strengths and interests.
- How might your congregation nurture and encourage these gifts?
- Is now an appropriate time to call an individual to a climate or creation care advocate position, or appoint a committee? What are the costs and benefits?

Step 2: Rate the availability of creation justice leaders in your congregation and the structures that enable or hinder them. A zero indicates no creation justice leadership; a 5 represents excited and engaged individuals supported by structures that enable work to go forward.

Ecological Setting

IMAGINE THAT... all congregations have a sense of their place in the local ecosystems, watershed and foodshed. Awe and gratitude are common responses. Local soils, plants and animals are familiar to members and they understand how support diversity in this setting. Members are aware of the environmental issues in their community, and some are intimately involved in addressing them.

Don't forget to invite: your facilities committee, people who do the yard work, people in the congregation with a special interest in natural history or environmental issues.

Step 1: Describe the ecological setting of your congregation.

- How would you describe your climate?
- What watershed are you in?
- What foods grow well in this area? Is there access to locally grown foods?
- What plants and animals live on your church property?
- What abuses is this ecological setting prone to? Name the top three environmental issues in your community. How aware are most members?

Step 2: Rate your congregation's engagement with its ecological setting from 0 to 5. A zero indicates life in a concrete box and a congregation that could be moved to the Sahara without anyone noticing. A five indicates regular activities that bring people in touch with surrounding ecosystems, concern about local environmental problems and the presence of knowledgeable individuals who freely share their expertise.

Step 3: Discuss...

- How does this setting reflect God's grace?
- How has it shaped your congregation?
- How can your congregation serve as a healing presence in this ecological setting?
- In what ways might deepening its ecological awareness be fun for your group?

Step 3: Consider possible actions. Here are examples:

- Church grounds are managed as an "outdoor sanctuary" so that members take pleasure in spending time there, walking, praying or thinking.
- An urban congregation plans a field trip to the local landfill to see where their trash goes.
- A watershed map is posted on the wall with the church's location marked.
- The church grounds include a community garden for members or outreach.
- Native plants on the church grounds minimize mowing and attract wildlife.

MC USA Climate Justice's Greener Congregation Score Sheet: Discussion Guides
climatejustice.mennoniteusa/resources/assess-your-church/

- Natural history fans or gardeners in the congregation have opportunity to share their knowledge.
- The children's curriculum includes some outdoor teaching in a nearby park.
- Potlucks include locally grown food.
- Your church partners with a civic group focused on earthkeeping.
- An annual retreat in a natural setting encourages members to get outdoors and appreciate creation. The day includes some environmental education.
- A bulletin board highlights species that live on the church property.
- A newsletter includes occasional articles about local environmental opportunities or issues.
- Small groups help with local projects such as tree planting in challenged neighborhoods, river clean-ups.

Creation Justice in Worship & Prayer

IMAGINE THAT... *The worship experiences of the congregation recognize God's love for all things, human and more-than-human. God is worshipped as Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer of all creation. Caring and seeking justice for creation are addressed in sermons and appear in visual elements, in sharing times, in confessions, in song. Spiritual practices that foster compassion for the earth and all its inhabitants are encouraged.*

Don't forget to invite: The pastor in charge of worship, the worship commission, people who frequently lead worship or music.

Worship services include at least some of these elements:

Scripture	Music
Sermon	Visual elements
Children's Time	Offering
Confession	Sharing & Announcements

Step 1: Review the list of worship elements above. Can you think of an example of a time in the last year when God's broader creation or its care appeared in each of these?

Step 2: Rate the inclusion of creation care in your congregation's worship from zero to five. A zero indicates complete silence or teachings that discourage investing in our present world. A five indicates that you thought of multiple examples in many of the categories above and have worship planners who routinely discuss how worship might reflect God's love for all of creation.

Step 3: How might greater connection to creation enrich your worship? Here are some examples of ways creation care might be integrated into worship:

- A pastor offers a sermon series on creation Psalms or on a Christian perspective on an environmental problem.
- A sermon on a text such as the parable of the mustard seed reflects an awareness of the plant involved and its role in Middle Eastern ecosystems.
- An environmental professional who sees his/her work as a calling is invited to share a message or story.
- An outdoor service, Earth Day event or other special service is part of the church year.
- Church architecture connects worshippers to the natural world through windows and natural lighting.
- Locally grown flowers, fruits, vegetables are included on a worship table as a focal point.
- Environmental sins are named in a litany of confession, or people are invited to confess their own in silence.
- An offering includes the opportunity to offer garden vegetables to be given to a food pantry.
- Members are involved in environmental activities and these come up in announcements or sharing time.
- During communion, the plants that the elements were made of are acknowledged and are visually present.

Creation Justice in Congregational Life

***IMAGINE THAT...** Church offices, committees and other groups consider environmental and social impacts when making decisions. Structures are in place to enable practices such as recycling, carpooling, buying recycled materials.*

Don't forget to invite: Committee chairpersons, small group coordinator, pastors, office and janitorial staff or volunteers.

Step 1: Invite each chairperson or group represented to answer the following questions:

- What kinds of resources does your committee require in order to do its work?
- What kinds of wastes does your committee produce? How much waste is produced?
- In what ways does your committee use fossil fuel energy?
- Did you make any decisions in the past year that had a creation care angle to them?
- Are there opportunities to reduce, recycle, avoid toxins, model best practices?

Step 2: Rate your congregational life on its attention to creation care from zero to five. A zero indicates that no one present has ever asked any of the questions in step 1 before. A five indicates that these questions have been under consideration for some time and the congregation's life includes multiple practices that conserve or reuse resources.

Step 3: Here are some ways congregations might apply creation care to their congregational life. Are there practices you would like to work on?

- Communal meals include recycling, composting or dishwashing.
- Consumption of fossil fuels is considered when planning youth service trips or church gatherings.
- The church purchases recycled paper. Electronic copies are used where possible to save paper.
- Recycling bins are visible and well-marked.
- The church organizes the recycling of objects individuals might not know how to dispose of.
- The church installs a bike rack and encourages biking or carpooling.
- The maintenance crew uses non-toxic cleaning products.
- Policies such as recycling are written down and transmitted to new committee members as roles shift.
- Gifts to youth, new attenders or others are chosen carefully, recyclable or consumable.

Energy

***IMAGINE THAT...**The stewardship of every congregation includes evaluating energy uses in the church building. Facilities committees have established a historical baseline of heating, cooling and lighting costs.*

Don't forget to invite: Facilities committee, most frequent occupants of your building, including renters or other ministries.

Step 1: Have someone review utility bills from the past two years and present a summary of usage.

Step 2: A wealth of resources are available to help you evaluate your energy efficiency. Here are two Do-it-Yourself Checklists:

- [U.S. Department of Energy Home Energy Audit](#)
- [Interfaith Power and Light Cool Congregations Checklist](#)

An electricity usage monitor is a helpful tool. For around \$50, you can buy a gadget that will tell you how many kilowatt hours your appliances use and which ones are energy hogs. Kill-a-Watt is a common brand.

Available from professionals:

[Blower door test:](#) This test checks for air leaks around windows, doors, light sockets and shows where more insulation is needed.

Step 3: Evaluate your congregation's energy usage from zero to five. A zero indicates that energy-saving measures have never been considered previously. A five indicates that your building receives excellent routine maintenance, energy usage is tracked and evaluated and steps to reduce usage have been successful.

Step 4: Assemble estimates for energy upgrades needed. If possible, obtain information on how quickly these investments will pay you back. One advantage of having a professional energy audit done is that the company may be able to advise you on this. Some even offer a minimum savings guarantee.

- Which needs are highest priority?
- Are there people in the congregation willing and able to do the work needed?
- Is renewable energy an option?
- How will you finance these projects? Note that MCCN offers [Net Zero Energy Grants](#) for solar arrays and car charging stations.

Step 5:

- Appoint someone to track energy usage and report on savings.
- Form policies to guide future purchases, such as requiring Energy Star appliances.

Creation Justice in Daily Living

IMAGINE THAT...Members are routinely challenged to adopt earth care practices at home. Individuals have moved toward lower consumption lifestyles in the last five years.

Don't forget to invite: Pastor, small group coordinator, anyone who is interested.

Step 1: Discuss...

- Who in your congregation models environmental responsibility in their daily lives? Do their stories reach youth, new members?
- How are members made aware of lifestyle issues in a world of limited resources? How often do creation care practices come up in Christian education courses?

Step 2: Rate your congregation's daily living practices from zero to five. A zero indicates that people assume consumption and energy use issues are their own business and have little to do with the Christian life. A five indicates that the majority of the group is actively engaged in lifestyle practices that have reduced their ecological footprint over the last five years.

Step 3: How might your congregation find joy in simpler lifestyles? What are the trade-offs?

Examples:

- Members invest their money in funds that screen for environmental problems.
- Members walk, bike, carpool when possible.
- Members attend to the energy usage of their homes.
- Newsletter articles or announcements offer creation care tips.
- Fossil fuel consumption is a factor when considering travel and time commitments.
- Members with home repair skills help others with tasks like changing to low-flow showerheads.
- A congregation encourages its members to practice low-impact alternative Christmas celebrations.

Practicing Climate Justice

***IMAGINE THAT...**The congregation participates in mission activities that promote climate justice within the local community and beyond.*

What is climate justice?

Climate justice recognizes that extreme weather and climate change disproportionately affect marginalized peoples around the world. Climate justice is closely related to Eco-Justice.

“**Eco-Justice** holds together commitments for ecological sustainability and human justice. It sees environmental issues and justice issues not as competing agendas, but as intertwined elements of how humans are called to relate to God's creation. It asserts that it is not possible to care for the earth without also caring for humanity, and that seeking human justice must involve care for the environment.” – [from the Ecojustice Ministries website](#)

Don't forget to invite: Your mission commission, people involved in para-church ministries, people most knowledgeable about local environmental and justice issues, pastor involved in community outreach.

Step 1: List all of the ways your congregation reaches out beyond its own members.

- Do any of these ways have an a climate-justice or eco-justice angle? Is it recognized?
- How might attention to creation care or the local ecology enhance this ministry?

Step 2: Identify the most pressing environmental issues in your community. Who is negatively affected?

- How is your congregation involved in working toward solutions?
- If individuals are involved, have they received a prayer of blessing for their work or been invited to share stories?
- Are there situations your group feels called to work on?

Step 3: Rate your congregation's attention to eco-justice from zero to five. A zero indicates no awareness of any ecological injustice anywhere in the country. A five indicates you have multiple people actively involved with at least one problem.

Examples of Practicing Climate Justice:

- A congregation shares its community garden with local residents in high-rise buildings who have no place to garden.
- A congregation advocates for a neighborhood adversely affected by a polluting industry.
- Members support local businesses with a green record and avoid businesses known for negative environmental impacts.
- Members of a congregation begin a Voluntary Gas Tax group for their community. The group spends its tax funds on local projects such as trees for poor neighborhoods.
- Fellowship times feature fair trade coffee.

Climate Justice Plan

***IMAGINE THAT...**The congregation has developed a plan for mitigating climate change by reducing your carbon footprint and has considered ways to care neighbors suffering from climate-related events.*

Don't forget to invite: Pastors, elders, those most involved with each category of the Greener Congregation Scoresheet.

Step 1: Assemble a list of recommendations and ideas generated by working through each category of the Greener Congregation Score Sheet. Identify top priorities and look for ways to coordinate efforts.

Step 2: Identify the person or group that will be in charge of overseeing creation justice plans. Decide when you will return to this score sheet again to evaluate your progress.

Step 3: Plan how the conclusions you came to in each category of the Greener Congregation Score Sheet will be shared with the congregation and compiled into an overall plan.

Step 4: Send a report to MC USA's Climate Justice Ministry. We love to know what congregations are up to!

Examples:

- A congregation challenged all of its members to reduce their carbon footprints by 10% in a year's time.
- A congregation appointed a standing committee to attend to climate justice and provided a job description.
- A congregation resolved to revisit food issues in its Christian education time every three years.

Appendix 1

Creation Care/Climate Justice Vision: Sample Documents

Below are examples of statements that include creation care:

A mission statement:

“Together, sharing all of Christ with all of creation.”

- Mennonite Mission Network

[Good News to the Whole Creation](#), an essay by Executive Director Stanley Green explains what this statement might mean.

A goal statement:

Mennonite Creation Care Network encourages the Church to:

- Claim its biblical and theological foundation regarding the care of God's Creation.
- Discover the ties that link all created beings to each other and to God
- Confess the harm we have caused the natural world and our neighbors.
- Act faithfully to restore the earth.

Creation Care Covenants:

Example 1: [Green Chalice Covenant](#), Disciples Home Missions

As children of God and followers of Christ Jesus, we covenant to:

Worship God with all creation and pray for the healing of the earth.

Study the climate crisis and engage others in climate solutions.

Repent and forgive for the harm we have inflicted on the earth that sustains life.

Advocate for ecojustice public policies and witness by living sustainable lifestyles.

Rest in God's good creation and invite others to delight in nature.

Example 2: This covenant was adopted by the Bethel College Mennonite Church, Newton, Kansas in September, 2002.

Creation Care Covenant

This covenant was adopted by the Bethel College Mennonite Congregation, Newton, Kansas September, 2002

God created the earth and all that is in it and declared it good. God's creation is marked by wondrous complexity, interdependence and beauty. Human beings are called by God to the task of stewardship - taking care of the earth respectfully for its own sake and so that present and future generations may live on it and enjoy its fruits. The gifts of creation and the responsibility of stewardship were given to all of humanity, so that all might have enough and no one would have more than is needed and God's justice would prevail.

In our pride and brokenness, all of humankind is in sin and separated from God. The earth has not been well cared for. The water and air and land are polluted with poisons which hurt people and all creation. Many species of animals and plants are endangered by the behavior of human beings and the rate of extinction of species has dramatically increased, eroding the diversity of life on earth.

We have not shared the fruits of creation justly. Some people live in luxury, taking more than they need, while others are desperately poor, especially people of color.

God, through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, heals and reconciles humanity and all of creation to God. We are able to become new creations - the new comes and the old passes away.

God calls the church to participate in the redemption of individuals, all of humanity and creation. Ministries of environmental stewardship and environmental justice are significant in the mission of the church. Therefore we, the Bethel College Mennonite Church, affirm the importance of healing and defending creation to our mission. We promise to continue to be engaged in this ministry in the following ways:

Worship - In worship, we will celebrate God's grace and glory in creation and will declare that God calls us to participate in the redemption of the world by cherishing, protecting and restoring creation.

Learning and Teaching - We will seek opportunities for ourselves and our children to learn more about the wonders of creation, the threats posed by human beings to the survival of creation and the possibilities of our participating in God's redemption and justice.

Lifestyle - Our individual and congregation's lifestyles will respect and cherish creation. We will form habits of consuming, conserving and sharing that serve to protect and restore the environment. In particular, we will reuse and recycle as many materials as we can and seek ways of limiting our consumption of limited resources and minimizing our pollution of the environment.

Community, National and Global Involvement - In our community, the nation and the world, our congregation will witness to and participate in God's redemption of creation by supporting public efforts and policies which support vulnerable people and protect and restore God's creation. We seek to cooperate with other faith communities and secular institutions toward this goal.

Example 3: [Albuquerque Mennonite Church](#) has a covenant that members renew annually. See the excerpt below and highlighted statement.

Expressions of Faith

As Anabaptists, we strive to interpret and live the Scriptures faithfully with the help of the Holy Spirit and the wider Body of Christ. The following expressions are responses to our trust in Jesus Christ:

- Together we join to worship, discern, and participate in the business of the church.
- Together we affirm that close, personal relationships with one another are essential to the Christian life. We meet for study and nurture in small groups.
- Together we seek spiritual growth by such means as prayer, readings, meditation, Bible study, silence, and retreats.
- Together we build a community that is faithful, open-hearted and whole, welcoming and supporting one another with counsel and correction as love guides us.
- Together we work locally and globally for God's peace and justice through nonviolent, active love.
- Together we practice faithful stewardship of our time, treasure and talent, as a grateful response to God, encouraging one another to use our God-given gifts and abilities.
- Together we honor God, the Creator, by challenging one another and others to live as partners with the creation.
- Together we celebrate and learn from children as gifts of God, cherished individuals in our congregational life. We seek to model our faith in Jesus so that children may freely choose to follow him.

Appendix 2

Selected Statements from the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective (1995)

From Article 5, Creation and Divine Providence

- We believe that God has created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them, and that God preserves and renews what has been made.
- We believe that the universe has been called into being as an expression of God's love and sovereign freedom alone.
- We acknowledge that God sustains creation in both continuity and change.
- We therefore are called to respect the natural order of creation and to entrust ourselves to God's care and keeping, whether in adversity or plenty.

From Article 6, The Creation and Calling of Human Beings

- God formed them from the dust of the earth and gave them a special dignity among all the works of creation. 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.
- As creatures according to the divine likeness, we have been made stewards to subdue and to care for creation out of reverence and honor for the Creator. 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.

From Article 21, Christian Stewardship

- 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.
- As stewards of God's earth, we are called to care for the earth and to bring rest and renewal to the land and everything that lives on it.

From Article 22, Peace, Justice, and Nonresistance

- We believe that peace is the will of God. God created the world in peace, and God's peace is most fully revealed in Jesus Christ, who is our peace and the peace of the whole world.
- The peace God intends for humanity and creation was revealed most fully in Jesus Christ.
- As followers of Jesus, we participate in his ministry of peace and justice. He has called us to find our blessing in making peace and seeking justice.
- The biblical concept of peace embraces personal peace with God, peace in human relations, peace among nations, and peace with God's creation. (From Commentary #1)