



Green Congregation Score Sheet Discussion Guides

Use these discussion guides with Mennonite Creation Care Network's Green Congregation Score Sheet.

While the results of your discussion and your scores are mainly for your own benefit, Mennonite Creation Care Network welcomes you to share the information with us, along with any feedback about the score sheet or discussion guides.

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Creation Care Vision

Stewardship of creation is named in the congregation's mission and core values. People understand caring for the earth as a key part of the Christian calling.

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: Appendix 1 contains examples of statements that embrace creation care in a variety of ways. Take a look at pages 10 – 12.

Step 4: 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, how might you change that?

- **Discuss:** is there some aspect of caring for creation that is authentic to your congregation?

- **Plan:** a study and discernment process. This could include a series of sermons, a Christian Education class and/or a plan to rewrite a mission statement.

Step 6: If creation care *is* represented 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 Care Leaders

The congregation includes people with a passion and gifts for guiding the church in stewardship practices. These people are recognized and the congregation has formally blessed their gifts.

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

Step 1: Is there a "Green Committee" or Green Advocate 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 green advocate position, or appoint a committee? What are the costs and benefits?

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

Models: Appendix 2 (coming soon) contains examples of congregations that include a green team. See what they do and how the committee fits within their structure.

Ecological Setting

The congregation has an awareness of its place in the local ecosystems, watershed and foodshed. Local soils, plants and animals are familiar to members and they understand how to be careful stewards in this setting. Members are aware of the environmental issues in their community.

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 your congregation enjoy deepening its ecological awareness? Below are some possibilities.

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 others.
- Native plants on the church grounds minimize mowing and attract wildlife.
- 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.
- An annual retreat in a natural setting encourages members to get outdoors and appreciate creation.
- A bulletin board highlights species that live on the church property.
- A newsletter includes occasional articles about local environmental opportunities or issues.

Creation Care in Worship

The worship experiences of the congregation recognize God's care for all created things. Caring for creation is addressed in sermons and appears in visual elements, in sharing times, in confessions, in song.

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

Many worship services include these elements:

Music	Children's Time Offering
Sermon	Confession
Visual elements	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 earth stewardship. A five indicates that you thought of multiple examples in each of the categories above and have worship planners who routinely think about and discuss how worship might reflect God's love for all of creation.

Step 3: How might greater connection to creation enrich your worship? Discuss.

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 such as climate change.
- A sermon on, say, 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 carefully placed windows, 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 such as river cleanups and their activities turn up in announcements or sharing time.
- During communion, the plants that the elements were made of are acknowledged and are visually present.

Creation Care in Congregational Life

Groups and committees consider environmental 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: Identify several practices you would like your congregation to work on in the next year.

Here are some ways congregations might apply creation care to their congregational life:

- 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.
- Non-toxic cleaning products are used.
- Policies such as recycling are written down and transmitted to new committee members as roles shifts.
- Gifts to youth, new attenders or others are chosen carefully, recyclable or consumable.

Energy Audit

The stewardship of your congregation includes evaluating energy uses in the church building. The facilities committee has 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 all 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. Basic questions include:

- How old is your heating and cooling equipment? Water heater?
- Are they energy star rated?
- Do they receive routine maintenance from a knowledgeable person?
- Are any incandescent light bulbs still in use? How frequently are they used?
- Are items left on or plugged in unnecessarily?

The [U.S. Department of Energy](#) suggests these do-it-yourself versions of an energy audit.

For under \$25, you can buy an electricity usage monitor that will tell you how many kilowatt hours your appliances use and which are energy hogs.

Available from professionals:

Blower door test: This test checks for air leaks around windows, doors, light sockets, etc., 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.

Discuss:

- Which needs are highest priority?
- Are there people in the congregation willing and able to do the work needed?
- How will you finance these projects?

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 Care in Daily Living

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

Don't forget to invite: Pastor in charge of pastoral care, small group coordinator, anyone who is interested.

Step 1: Discuss...

Who in your congregation models environmental responsibility in their daily life? Do their stories reach youth, new members?

How would exercising a greater commitment to creation care in daily living enhance your congregation's daily life? What are the trade-offs?

How are new 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.

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 Eco-justice Locally

The congregation participates in mission activities that promote eco-justice within the local community.

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

- How, if at all, 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 active involvement with at least one local problem.

Examples of Practicing Ecojustice:

A congregation shares its community garden with local residents in high-rise buildings who have no place to garden.

A congregation becomes involved in advocating for a low-income 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.

Creation Care Plan

The congregation has developed a comprehensive plan for reducing the ecological and carbon footprint of all areas of congregational life.

Don't forget to invite: Pastors, elders, those most involved with the previous steps above.

Step 1: Assemble a list of recommendations, plans, ideas generated by working through the previous steps. Look for ways to coordinate efforts.

Step 2: Choose at least three measurable goals to work toward. For example: having at least one Christian education series on environmental issues every two years; reducing the church energy consumption by 20%.

Step 3: What person or group will be in charge of overseeing creation care plans? Write a job description.

Step 4: Summarize your work and send a report to Mennonite Creation Care Network via lukeag@goshen.edu.

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 creation care and provided a job description.
- A congregation resolved to revisit food issues in their Christian education time every three years.

Appendix 1, p. 1

Creation Care Vision: Sample Documents

Below are examples of statements that include creation care:

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. Quotes from the 1995 Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective:

This confession of faith mentions creation and its care in articles 5, 6, 21, 22 and 24. Selections are provided below

4. A congregational Creation Care Covenant:

The Creation Care Committee at Bethel College Mennonite Church, Newton, KS, prepared a Creation Care Covenant after a period of study. It was approved by the congregation in September, 2002. The complete document is provided below.

Appendix 1, p. 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.

(Commentary 1. The biblical concept of peace embraces personal peace with God, peace in human relations, peace among nations, and peace with God's creation.)

Appendix 1, p. 3

Creation Care Covenant

This covenant was adopted by the Bethel College Mennonite Congregation, 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.