

Every Creature Singing: Embracing the Good News for Planet Earth

A curriculum produced by Mennonite Creation Care Network



Unit 1: Biblical & Theological Foundations

Theme & Content	Resolution Questions Addressed	Regional Questions
<p>1. Don't Be Afraid Scripture: Matthew 1</p> <p>A Christian perspective on our current environmental problems includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A God that cares passionately about the earth • The presence of the Holy Spirit, with us no matter what. • Resurrection hope <p>This session introduces an ecological lens (hermeneutical method) for reading the Bible in ways that illuminate the three-way relationship between humans, the earth and God.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is caring for creation part of the holistic good news of Jesus Christ? • How can we integrate our theological and biblical commitments to creation care into spiritual practices [such as Bible study?] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What towns, rural areas and bodies of water are within a five-mile radius of your congregation? A 25-mile radius? • What urban areas do your members draw upon for goods and services? What rural areas provide for urban areas? • Which parts of these circles do you visit frequently? Which parts do you ignore, or know little about?
<p>2. Jesus and Creation</p> <p>Scripture: Colossians 1:15-20, John 3:16, Luke 9:58</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A whole Gospel includes salvation for <i>all of creation</i>, not escape from creation. • Jesus of Nazareth spent much of his time outdoors and had an intimate relationship with the natural world. • The risen Christ is portrayed as creator and center of all things. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is caring for creation part of the holistic good news of Jesus Christ? • How do biblical understandings of Jesus guide us in discovering the ties that link all created beings to each other and to God? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What watersheds are part of your region? • What roadways and bike paths connect or sever communities in your circle? Whom do they serve best? How do they affect wildlife or natural areas? Do they allow for biking and walking?
<p>3. Biblical Views of Nature Scripture: Psalm 104</p> <p>Creation is more than just a backdrop for human activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God is at work in the processes of nature. • Nature is a form of revelation. • The Earth belongs to God and has its own relationship with God independent of human beings. • Nature is part of our community. Other species are covenant partners with us. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do biblical understandings of creation guide us in discovering the ties that link all created beings to each other and to God? • How can discipleship incorporate ecological learning so that the church grows in its wisdom and delight regarding creation? • How can we integrate our theological and biblical commitments to creation care into our communal worship, prayer, spirituality, and Sabbath-keeping? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What biome¹ is your community in? Where else in the world is this biome found? To what extent are the plants and animals characteristic of this biome present in your community and healthy? • What plant and animal species inhabit your church property? Learn their names and a little bit about them.
<p>4. Finding Our Place in Creation Scripture: Genesis 1 and 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misunderstanding our relationship to creation has caused much harm. • Genesis 1:26-28 needs to read in the context of our own times and the larger biblical story, which highlights failed dominion. • Seeing ourselves as the image of God is an invitation to relationship and a lifelong quest to understand the One we represent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the call to care for creation mean for the Mennonite Church USA vision and mission and our responses to the current environmental crisis? • How can church practices and spiritual disciplines teach us about creation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where, within your 25-mile circle do participants exercise "dominion" over the land, water or other natural resources in any way? • What entities within your circle exercise the most decision-making power over the landscape? What do they do?

Unit 2: Pursuing Peace and Justice

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<p>5. Slow Violence and the Gospel of Peace Scripture: Matthew 25:31-46</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> God’s vision for the earth and human life is shalom: peace and wellbeing in all aspects of life. Environmental damage is a form of “slow” violence: unfolding over a longer period of time, but with similar effects on victims. The poor and minorities are disproportionately affected by environmental hazards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How is caring for creation part of the holistic good news of Jesus Christ? What does a commitment to peace mean for the MC USA vision and mission and our responses to the current environmental crisis? What do our sisters and brothers in the global church teach us about creation care issues? How will this understanding shape our commitments? How can we ensure clean water, clean air, healthy food systems and quality shelter for all? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What forms of environmental damage or potential hazards are you aware of within your circles? What do you know about income distribution within your five-mile circle? Is ethnic or racial segregation a part of your circle? Where do minorities live? Can you see any relationships between low income or minority communities and potential environmental hazards such as landfills and factories?
<p>6. Environmental Disasters, Ancient and Modern Scripture: Jeremiah 18:1-17</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Climate change is real and human-induced. We do not yet realize the enormity of its consequences. We are losing the world as we know it. The defining incident that shaped the Hebrew Bible is also an environmental catastrophe: loss of land understood to be due to human behavior. Is there wisdom for us in this narrative? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What does climate change mean for the MC USA vision and mission? How can we ensure clean water, clean air, healthy food systems and quality shelter for all? In what ways can we cultivate our witness to governing structures and decision-makers at the local level? At state and national levels? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the primary sources of CO2 in your 25-mile region? How is your electricity generated? If fossil fuels are used, where do they come from? How is climate change expected to affect your region? Where in your region are people planning for climate change? Are there business or government leaders who are concerned about this and thinking through responses?
<p>7. Hearing from the Global Community Scripture: Ephesians 2:11-22</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Global perspectives often surprise and intrigue us. Reflection on what walls divide us from our global brothers and sisters and from our nearby neighbors with different world views with regard to the environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do our sisters and brothers in the global church teach us about creation care issues? How will this understanding shape our commitments? How can we ensure clean water, clean air, healthy food systems and quality shelter for all? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are you in contact with other congregations of different ethnic backgrounds or theologies within your circles? How do you think these congregations would answer the questions in this study? What kinds of goods are <i>not</i> produced in your region and are shipped in from international locations? Can you find out where your winter vegetables, petroleum or electronics come from?
<p>8. Claiming our Citizenship Scripture: Luke 19:1-10</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are citizens of particular geography as well as of governments. We are citizens of God’s household, and thus have a special bond with our fellow nonhuman citizens. We can each find an authentic way to witness to our governments on behalf of creation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In what ways can we cultivate our witness to governing structures and decision-makers at the local level? At state and national levels? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What organizations within your circle are responsible for overseeing the environmental health of the area? What do they do? How does one gain input into these groups?

Unit 3: Choosing a Sustainable Lifestyle

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<p>9. Rethinking the Market Economy Scripture: Matthew 6:25-33</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The goods and services humans produce are not ends in themselves; they are tools that enable us to bring God's kingdom. We need to reshape our economy in ways that do not externalize the costs of our behavior. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does our theology shape our view of economics and management of resources? How should the corporate church pursue a simple lifestyle? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What industries are part of your circles? Where do their raw materials come from? What wastes are created and where do they go?
<p>10. Simple Abundance Scripture: Psalm 23</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A simple lifestyle is rooted in a vision of abundant life. A simple lifestyle can reorient us in the direction of God's purposes and our own best interests. A sustainable lifestyle should prioritize reducing fossil fuel consumption and meat consumption. Limits train us to recognize abundance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How should we, as individuals in the 21st century, pursue a simple lifestyle? How should the corporate church pursue a simple lifestyle? How can we be good stewards of energy resources? As North Americans inhabiting diverse economic, cultural and racial contexts, what opportunities and challenges do we face as we seek simpler lifestyles? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where does your drinking water come from? Where does your wastewater go and how is it treated? Where does food come from in your community? How much is grown within your circles?
<p>11. Creating Accountable Communities Scripture: Acts 2:1-4, 43-47; I Cor. 11:17-34</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breaking bread together was the practice that unified the first followers of Jesus. This was not just a spiritual exercise; it was a way of sharing food so that everyone had enough to eat. Building a diverse community with an alternate economy was at the heart of the Early Church. It is the presence of Christ that enables this to happen. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can we practice the sharing of goods in our church communities? How can we ensure clean water, clean air, healthy food systems and quality shelter for all? As North Americans inhabiting diverse economic, cultural and racial contexts, what opportunities and challenges do we face as we seek simpler lifestyles? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What native peoples originally inhabited your region? What waves of immigrants followed and when did they arrive? How did they relate to the land? Are remnants of these groups still present? What natural or community resources do members within your congregation share? How can the relationships you already have with each other be an asset in caring for these natural resources?
<p>12. A Spirituality that Sustains Scripture: Ephesians 3:14-21</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can we remain rooted in the love of Christ so that long-term change is possible? What habits and practices must we cultivate to be faithful earth keepers? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can we integrate our theological and biblical commitments to creation care into our communal worship, prayer, spirituality, and Sabbath-keeping? How can church practices and spiritual disciplines – such as biblical interpretation, worship, prayer, and social action – teach us about creation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What soil types are common in your community? What kinds of plants grow best in these soil types? What does it mean to be rooted in this community? What bonds people to this particular locale? How is a sense of place expressed? How has your relationship with God been shaped by this place?
<p>13. Wrap up No new material is added in this session. Groups may use the time to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> catch up on missed material review and cement learnings plan future actions or take a field trip 		