

Mennonite Creation Care Network Annual Report 2009

Overview

Caring for God's creation has been a part of the Mennonite Church's official agenda since 1977, when it passed a resolution on Christian Stewardship of Energy Resources. In 2005, MC Canada and MC USA appointed representatives to the Mennonite Creation Care Network.

The vision statement of MCCN is as follows: Christ, who created the world in peace and sustains all things, calls us to be stewards of the earth and to bring rest and renewal to the land and everything that lives on it. In response to this call, we will equip lay people and leaders with tools, resources and models that will educate, encourage, and inspire the church to care for creation, which is an expression of God's love.

MCCN is a network for Mennonite people and agencies actively engaged in the care and restoration of God's creation. Its goals are to encourage the Church to:

- Claim our 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.

This bi-national council of volunteers meets twice per year (once in person and once via computer and phone conference). Staff from the Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center of Goshen College and from Mennonite Mutual Aid (MMA) provide continuity between meetings and manage a web-site for MCCN. With its stewardship emphasis, MMA is a natural partner and our major financial supporter. MC Canada and MCC Canada help defray partial travel costs of the two Canadian members.

The Mennonite Creation Care Network promotes environmental stewardship activities with regional grassroots groups and institutional agencies as a way of inspiring people to be agents of change at home and in the global context. MCCN's current activities include: developing communications materials, collecting stories of Mennonites who care about the environment and building a network among those in our constituency for whom the environment is an ongoing concern.

The Council:

Canadian members: David Neufeld (Winnipeg, MB), Joanne Moyer (Winnipeg, MB)

USA members: Nekeisha Alexis-Baker (Elkhart, IN), Greg Bowman (Bally, PA), Karla Detweiler (Iowa City, IA), Luke Gascho (Goshen, IN), Dave Hockman-Wert (Corvallis, OR), Jennifer Halteman Schrock (Goshen, IN), Jim Smith (Goshen, IN).

To join the growing network or get more information: www.mennoncreationcare.org.

Activities in 2009

- **Council Transitions:** The Council said farewell to Amy Thut of Goshen, IN, in October 2008, and welcomed Nekeisha Alexis-Baker of Elkhart, IN, and Karla Detweiler of Iowa City, IA, in March 2009.
- **Council Meetings:** We held a face-to-face meeting on March 13-14, 2009, in Goshen, IN. We held our second annual virtual meeting on October 17, 2009, in Pennsylvania, Indiana, Iowa, Oregon and Manitoba. The four members who would otherwise travel long distances (from Oregon, Pennsylvania and Manitoba) to get to Goshen Indiana, avoided creating over 5,000 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions as well as saving significant travel costs and approximately 100 person hours of travel time.
- **Website:**
 - Blog software provided our web site with a way to archive stories and our collection of creation care stories continues to grow. Over 50 stories have been featured on our web site so far.
 - Web-based resources from our Resource Library are now annotated and listed in a user-friendly fashion on our blog.
 - A new addition to the Congregations page is a Congregational Directory featuring congregations actively engaged in creation care.
- **Network Building:** At our March meeting, we decided to focus our activities on building our network. This includes exploring the capacities of various technologies, such as Facebook, Twitter, Google groups, etc. We are also continually developing connections with other church agencies.
 - **100 Shades of Green:** In October 2009, MCCN launched an ad campaign aimed at identifying 100 congregations actively engaged in the care of creation. Ads with the tag line, “100 Shades of Green” ran in *The Mennonite*, *Mennonite Weekly Review* and the *Canadian Mennonite*. All Mennonite pastors in the USA received mailings via the MC-USA Equipping Packets in April and October. The latter mailing included the Green Congregation Score Sheet. In July, all MCCN members received an e-mail inviting them to serve as Creation Care Advocates within their congregations. As of October 17, 15 congregations had creation care advocates.
- **Congregational Resourcing:** Developing practical creation care resources for congregation is an important emphasis for MCCN in 2009-10.
 - One step toward networking with interested congregations was the inclusion of a MCCN brochure and cover letter that appeared in the Equipping Packet (MC-USA) for all pastors this past April and October.

- Another tool to help initiate conversation, promoted within the 100 Shades of Green initiative, is the Green Congregation Score Sheet available on MCCN web site. The score sheet is based on the Christian Education curriculum, *Creation Care: Keepers of the Earth*: available through and MMA (Mennonite Mutual Aid), (www.mma-online.org) and Mennonite Publishing Network (<http://www.mpn.net/>).
- **Resource CD:** MCCN's "Volume-One: Green Congregation Stewardship Resources, Volume One" CD became a bi-national (MC-USA and MC-Canada events) and international (Mennonite World Conference) resource for congregations beginning in June of 2009. The CD provides a wide range of stewardship of creation resources for congregations, including: historical and theological statements, congregational creation care assessment tools, and leadership aids (e.g. worship leading, teaching, music, children's talk, and Christian education materials). The materials on the CD include PDF files, PowerPoint presentations, music and video files; all these files are available on the MCCN web site. Volume Two of the CD is in development.
- **Bi-national Conference Presence:** MCCN had a presence at the church-wide assemblies in Canada and the USA during the summer of 2009. MCCN booths at these events were busy with discussion about ways for congregations and individuals to engage in creation care activities in their local churches, communities, schools, and businesses. The assemblies provided a chance for participants to add their names and congregations to the creation care network and receive a congregational copy of the "Volume One: Green Congregation Stewardship Resource" CD. Conference attendees collected MCCN pamphlets to take back to their congregations to encourage participation in the network of creation care stewards.
 - *Introducing MCCN stamps!* Rubber stamps with the MCCN logo and website were created for our display tables as a fun alternative to handing out cards or pamphlets.
 - *Mennonite Church Canada Youth Assembly, Caronport, SK:* Two youth volunteers from Home Street Mennonite Church in Winnipeg took the MCCN display to the conference.
 - *Mennonite Church USA Assembly in Columbus, OH:* MCCN members offered 4 workshops at the biennial convention. All were well attended with packed rooms. They included:
 - Creation care: A call to regenerative stewardship – led by Luke Gascho
 - Greening the church experience – led by Luke Gascho
 - Environmental justice: A “natural” fit for Mennonites? – led by Ryan Sensenig
 - Churches Going Green: an overview of Mennonite congregations who are working on creation care in one way or another – led by Jennifer Halteman Schrock

MCCN also had a booth at the convention. This proved a good venue for disseminating a CD of resources for congregations and gathering e-mail addresses from over 100 new members. Another resource offered was instruction for a natural history prayer walk in a nearby park.

- ***Mennonite World Conference in Asuncion, Paraguay:*** An International Planning Committee for the Care of Creation was formed at the recommendation of Mennonite World Conference. Luke Gascho, of the Mennonite Creation Care Network, joined six others from various continents in the planning work as well as in leading activities. The purpose of the committee was to prepare four workshops and provide activities to increase the awareness of environmental stewardship as a church-wide goal at the 2009 Mennonite World Assembly in Asuncion, Paraguay. The workshops were titled: 1. The Earth is the Lord's; 2. Voices from the Margins; 3. All Creation is Groaning; and 4. Creation Waits for Us with Eager Longing. In total about 270 people participated in the workshops.
 - To increase the contact with Assembly participants a Care of Creation display was organized in the Global Village. The need for good Care of Creation resources was highlighted by visitor's enthusiasm and requests for materials in additional languages. About 300 people visited the display with over 100 taking materials offered (DVDs, pamphlets, etc).
 - Members of the committee were able to present to the General Council and interact with Alfred Neufeld, chair of the Faith and Life Commission. Several potential opportunities/projects emerged for follow up within the context of the Global Mennonite Church.
 1. A Book on Creation Care for the Global Anabaptist Bookshelf
 2. A Compilation of Creation-Oriented Songs from MWC Churches
 3. A Global Consultation on the Care of Creation

- ***Food and Farming Conferences: Iowa Sustainable Foods and Farming Event***

On March 7, 2009, Crooked Creek Christian Camp, Washington, Iowa hosted a Sustainable Foods and Farming conference. The original Sustainable Food and Farming event was held at Laurelville Mennonite Church Center in 2008. In the interest of building on vital local relationships, Laurelville has partnered with other Mennonite camps in North America to hold similar events. Fifty-six people gathered at Crooked Creek to explore the theme, "Living from Holy Ground: Growing in Harmony, Eating in Faith" through worship, workshops, and keynote addresses. Gary Guthrie, a Community Supported Agriculture farmer in Nevada, Iowa, provided inspiration and challenged participants as he spoke about *Fidelity and Fecundity: Exploring the Fruits of Faithfulness* and *Preparing for the Return from Collapse*.

The gathering also featured a delicious lunch and snacks using locally-grown vegetables, meat, milk products, wheat and apples. The table fellowship, informational sessions, and times of worshipful reflection nurtured a sense of hope that joyful restoration of Creation is possible through small yeses that add up to a big difference. Karla Detweiler, member of the MCCN Council served on the planning committee and presented a workshop entitled "Where does your food come from? Examining your Foodshed."

- ***MCCN Intern:***

- At its March 2009 meeting, the Creation Care Council agreed to provide internships as a way of maintaining the web site and introducing youth to faith-based creation care endeavors. We developed an internship proposal that was circulated to Canadian Mennonite University.
- Heidi Martin, a recent graduate of Bluffton College, served as MCCN's first intern from July – September 2009. Heidi researched and wrote articles, sought out stories from other sources, annotated web-based materials for the resource library and performed a variety of editorial and administrative tasks.

- ***Council Member Activities:***

- Joanne Moyer and David Neufeld represented MCCN with our display at Canadian Mennonite University's Mission Day and at Steinbach Mennonite Church's Mission Sunday. They are also working to collaborate on creation care issues with the Manitoba branch of A Rocha, a Christian conservation organization.
- Jim Smith has helped support the creation care agenda as a MMA (Mennonite Mutual Aid) stewardship emphasis in congregational educational resources available to over 1,600 volunteers in MMA advocate system, congregations, and MMA church relations managers.
- Greg Bowman: 1) led the visioning, planning and implementation of God's Acre@BMC, an organic community garden at Bally Mennonite Church during 2009. The designed horticultural space included private and family garden plots, public space features meant for everyone's enjoyment (butterfly garden, compost zone, children's sunflower circle, fellowship benches around a fire ring and a Three Sisters' Garden), and "share plots" meant for donation to members of the congregation and a local social services center with a feeding program. 2) Participated in a visioning group from Franconia Mennonite Conference which concluded two years of planning by starting Living Hope Farm in the fall of 2009. He serves on the LHF board which has hired Jill Landes to establish an organic market farm (marketing through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares and direct-to-institution routes) starting in 2010, then expanding into other Creation Care education, social justice, social entrepreneurial and food access ministries.