



Creation Justice Legislation at General Conference 2024

Study Guide

Written & Edited by
Rev. Richenda Fairhurst



How to Use This Study Guide

This Creation Justice Legislation at General Conference 2024 Study Guide is designed as a 1 - 6 week adult group study. The guide includes 6 chapters that can be completed at the pace of one each week. Each of the items of creation justice legislation in this study guide is now part of the governing documents of The United Methodist Church.

The chapters focus on one piece of legislation at a time. Each chapter offers a summary and goal of the legislation, and a bio of the legislation author, as well as a Scripture reflection, prayer, and opportunity to brainstorm and work through next steps in context.

Interspersed between the chapters are stories about the legislation and the people who wrote and submitted that legislation for consideration. Also included is a story about the creation justice effort in The United Methodist Church, including Caretakers of God's Creation and The United Methodist Creation Justice Movement.

Learn more about the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement
at umcreationjustice.org

Look for a companion study guide upcoming with a focus on netzero legislation
also passed in Charlotte during General Conference.

Creation Justice Legislation at General Conference 2024 Study Guide
written and edited by Rev. Richenda Fairhurst, May 2024.

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Bible quotes from the CEB.





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Photos from General Conference, 2024, in Charlotte, North Carolina. Top: Across from the Conference Center was “the green,” an open park where attendees were invited to re-connect with the creation using a guided prayer in 6 different languages, put together by Rev. Nancy Blade in partnership with Upper Room Ministries.

Bottom: Jaydee Hanson, of Caretakers of God’s Creation; Mittie Quinn, with Love Your Neighbor Coalition (LYNC); Karen McElfish, EarthKeeper and Virginia Delegate; Cathy Velasquez Eberhart, EarthKeeper and leader in the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement; and Rev. Pat Watkins, EarthKeeper and Caretakers of God’s Creation President, celebrate together during a North Carolina BBQ hosted by LYNC.



ONE

Establish a Network – Caretakers of God's Creation

LEGISLATION TITLE:

Establish a Conference Caretakers of God's Creation Coordinator in Each Annual Conference

VOTE COUNT!

This legislation passed with overwhelming approval both in committee, and in Plenary, at the 2024 General Conference:

Committee approval:
35 to 2
Plenary Approval:
667 to 54

LEGISLATION SUMMARY:

This legislation asks the Board of Church and Society, bishop, or other appropriate entity in every annual conference to name a lay or clergy leader to the position of "Caretakers of God's Creation Coordinator." This Coordinator's responsibilities include helping to develop green and sustainable programs and practices, and support environmental justice in the conference, local churches, and in the denomination.

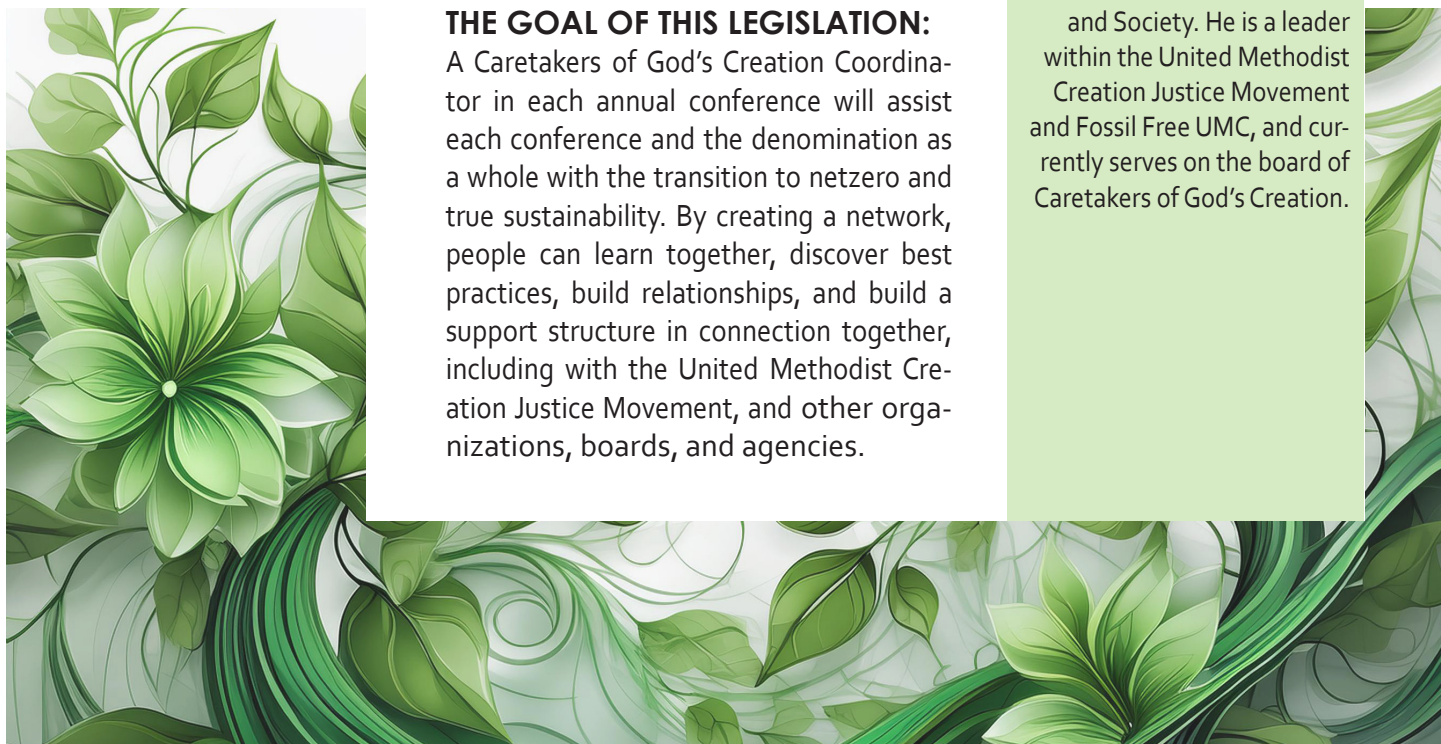
THE GOAL OF THIS LEGISLATION:

A Caretakers of God's Creation Coordinator in each annual conference will assist each conference and the denomination as a whole with the transition to netzero and true sustainability. By creating a network, people can learn together, discover best practices, build relationships, and build a support structure in connection together, including with the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement, and other organizations, boards, and agencies.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

This legislation was submitted by Jaydee Hanson for Caretakers of God's Creation.

Jaydee Hanson is the policy director for Center for Food Safety. He is a member of Mount Olivet United Methodist Church, Arlington, Virginia, and the former staff executive for environmental justice, at the General Board of Church and Society. He is a leader within the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement and Fossil Free UMC, and currently serves on the board of Caretakers of God's Creation.



Reflection

QUESTIONS:

God brought the Hebrew people out of Egypt, "lifting them up on eagles wings" and out of danger. Moses is chosen to lead. In what ways does Moses work to bring faithful change to his community? How does he need to bring them together materially as well as spiritually to build anew?

What life lessons might we draw today in reading about that day of renewed covenant long ago. How can we imagine how new leaders can faithfully live out a renewed attention to earth caretaking and environmental justice in your local church and conference? What material and spiritual actions might be needed?

READ EXODUS 19:5-8, right, and the reflection, below. Share the questions, left, together.

In this Scripture, we are in the midst of the story of the Exodus. Earlier in the story Aaron, Miriam and Moses, by the power of God, encouraged the people to leave the oppression of slavery in Egypt and to strike out to a "promised land" where they might live together in peace.

We are reminded in this reading that both the people and the earth—including every mountain, every spring, and every plant in every area through which they travel, belong to God, as God says, "the whole earth belongs to me."

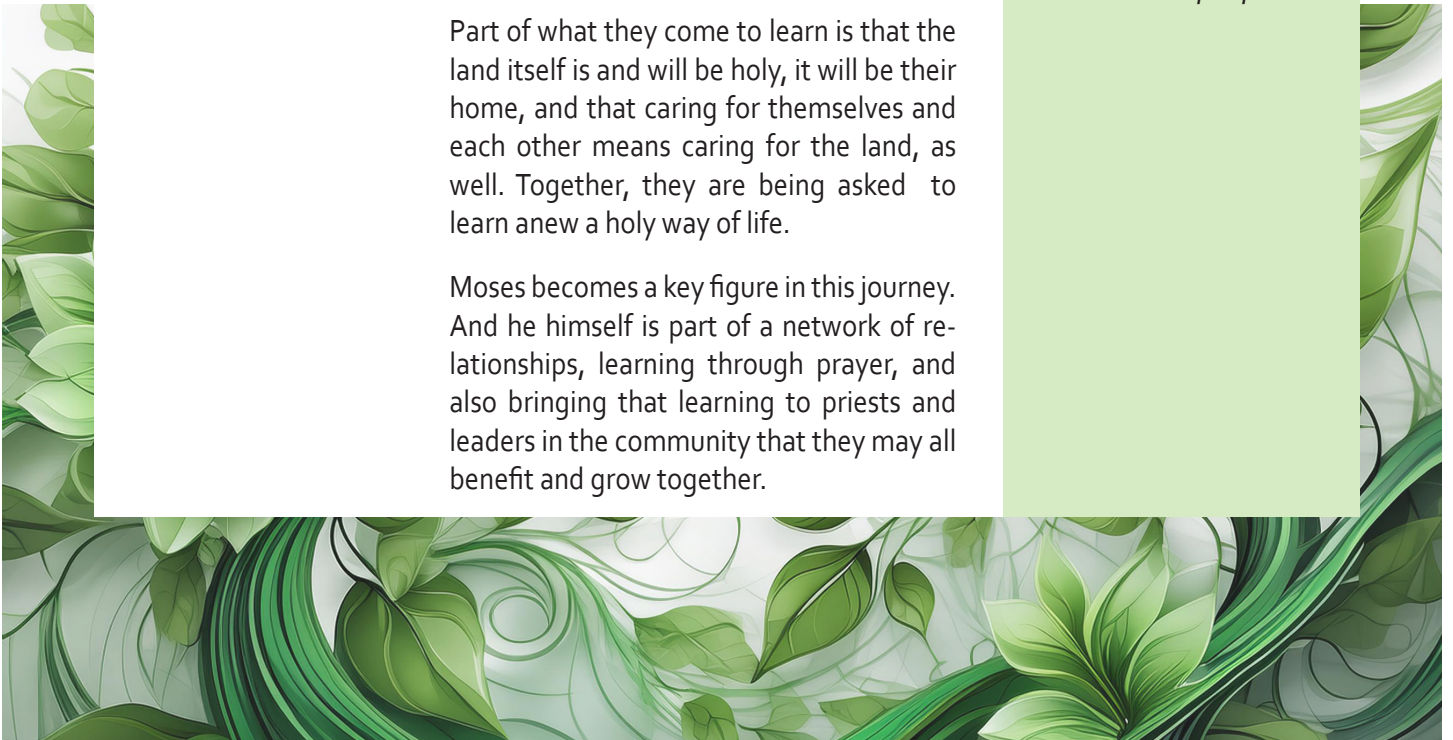
In order to establish this new life together, they have to reestablish their relationship with God. They must learn again that everything belongs to God, that they are a people precious to God. As Moses leads them, he shares the promise that they are being led to a place of peace and safety.

Part of what they come to learn is that the land itself is and will be holy, it will be their home, and that caring for themselves and each other means caring for the land, as well. Together, they are being asked to learn anew a holy way of life.

Moses becomes a key figure in this journey. And he himself is part of a network of relationships, learning through prayer, and also bringing that learning to priests and leaders in the community that they may all benefit and grow together.

EXODUS 19:5-8

"So now, if you faithfully obey me and stay true to my covenant, you will be my most precious possession out of all the peoples, since the whole earth belongs to me. You will be a kingdom of priests for me and a holy nation. These are the words you should say to the Israelites." So Moses came down, called together the people's elders, and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. The people all responded with one voice: "Everything that the Lord has said we will do." Moses reported to the Lord what the people said.



Brainstorming

Even as Moses and his community are journeying to a promise of peace and holiness, so are we learning and networking to do the same. Take a minute to brainstorm around what these new Material and Spiritual actions might be in your context, and how a network would be helpful.

Next Steps

Some conferences have already named a Caretakers of God's Creation Coordinator. Others are getting started. Where is your church and conference in this process? What might your church and conference do next to begin or strengthen the emerging network?

What do you need?

What might your church and conference need to do to help ensure the newly appointed Caretakers of God's Creation Coordinator is successful? What can you ask your bishop, Church and Society Board, and/or conference staff for in terms of funding, as well as educational and study resources to support actions for success?

Prayer:

God of promise and hope, you give us new journeys and call us to new holiness in our lives as we grow in faith together. Bless this our next journey. Bless our new Caretakers of God's Creation Coordinator, and the team or taskforce they will be part of. Let their efforts be fruitful as we learn together. Amen.



A Revival for Creation at General Conference

Article One.

The United Methodist Creation Justice Movement burst into life as a great spark from a creation care summit in Nashville, Tennessee, in 2019. At the summit, a group of long-time United Methodist climate advocates and Earth-Keepers from across the denomination gathered to address both the climate crisis and the frustrating inaction of The United Methodist Church.

At that summit it was decided: they could no longer wait for action from the church. They needed to start a grass-roots revival movement. And they did.

The movement formed with people who had in many cases spent decades in the work of creation justice in the church. It was 1980 when the church first acknowledged global warming, yet it would be 2009 before a pastoral letter from the Council of Bishops called for Hope and Action.

Still, in 2009 the bishops spoke, and in 2010 Bishop Sally Dyck published *A Hopeful Earth: Faith, Science, and the Message of Jesus*. In 2024 the now retired bishop called again for creation justice, affirming it as an urgent missionary priority of the church.

Little by little, big things happened in the church. The first class of UM Earth-Keepers was commissioned in 2016, and that same year the first conferences voted to divest from fossil fuels.

In 2016 also, Rev. Pat Watkins, a Global Missionary for the Earth, published *Climate Justice: A Call to Hope and Action*, which would become a seminal teaching text for United Methodists. Then, Caretakers of God's Creation was incorporated in 2017.

When the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement took root, it brought these dedicated leaders together and grew exponentially. With video conferencing came interconnected organizing with United Methodists gathering from Florida to Minnesota, New England to Montana, Oregon to North Carolina, Texas to Virginia and more, organizing for urgency and the convicted Spirit that we must take action for God's people and creation.

Agencies began to respond. Rev. Jenny Phillips at Global Ministries worked for netzero commitments, which were made by the Council of Bishops and Boards and Agencies in 2021. Then, in 2023, four annual conferences followed suit, and at the 2024 General Conference, so did the denomination.

The United Methodist Creation Justice Movement continued its mission, creating work teams to tackle priorities of advocacy, education, and annual conference organizing. The rapid growth of the movement meant rapid additions. Zoom accounts were enabled, webinars scheduled, the Movement Café launched, and more teams, for Solar, Worship, and Wild Church.

The United Methodist Creation Justice Movement also developed collaborative partnerships with United Women in Faith, Discipleship Ministries, and Global Ministries as well as joining coalition organizing. They joined the Love Your Neighbor Coalition in 2023 and stood together to cheer the transforming actions of the 2024 General Conference.

Find more information:
umcreationjustice.org

TWO

Forming Teams - Mobilizing for Action and Witness

LEGISLATION TITLE:

Green Team Formation

VOTE COUNT!

This legislation passed with overwhelming approval both in committee, and in Plenary, at the 2024 General Conference:

Committee approval:
33 to 1
Plenary Approval:
686 to 36

LEGISLATION SUMMARY:

This legislation strongly urges the establishment of green teams / creation care teams in local churches and conferences for the purposes of education, worship, mission, advocacy and practices of sustainability toward creation care and justice locally and globally. This legislation calls on conferences to equip and support these teams to carry out this work, including in connecting beyond the church for community impact. These teams will lead the transformation of the local church and beyond to faithfully address the environmental crisis in every community.

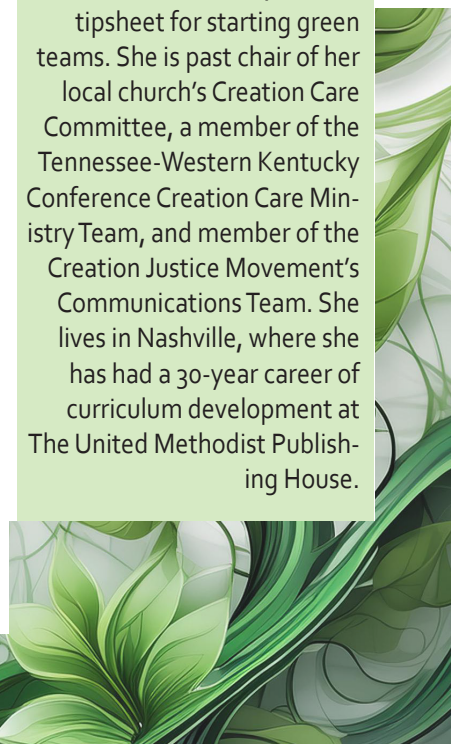
THE GOAL OF THIS LEGISLATION:

The climate crisis is already impacting every community. This legislation calls on people of faith to mobilize to meet those impacts, by insisting on policies that will prevent the worst outcomes, and supporting the most vulnerable. With teamwork for creation justice, creation care will be lifted up in all areas of ministry and practice, including preaching, liturgy, communications, education, outreach, advocacy and witness of loving God and neighbor.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

This legislation was submitted by Crys Zinkiewicz.

Crys Zinkiewicz is grounded both theologically with a Masters in Christian education and practically with a background in communications. She is the writer of the Creation Justice Tips (her EarthKeepers project), the Green Team Formation resolution, and the tipsheet for starting green teams. She is past chair of her local church's Creation Care Committee, a member of the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference Creation Care Ministry Team, and member of the Creation Justice Movement's Communications Team. She lives in Nashville, where she has had a 30-year career of curriculum development at The United Methodist Publishing House.



Reflection

QUESTIONS:

In Hebrews, the community is encouraged to practice a faithful readiness through teamwork: showing up and circling up together to address challenges, take action, and praise God. What climate impacts might your community need to be ready for? How might circling up and praising God strengthen you? What similarities do you see in the Scripture to build a three-
ply team that meets your challenges?

Proverbs 27:17 reads "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens a friend." Teams must work through challenges without breaking apart. Team members need to know they can count on each other in order to learn and grow together through challenges. How might practices of encouragement help sustain the work as the team learns, grows, and faces new possibilities and challenges together?

READ ECCLESIASTES AND HEBREWS, right, and the reflection, below. Share the questions, left, together.

The go-to Scripture when addressing teams and teamwork is usually Ecclesiastes 4:9-12. The wise practicality of the Ecclesiastes verses here is very helpful! Team work means that whether you are faced with a task, mission, celebration, or challenge, you do not have to do it alone. Biblical leaders are part of a team. Noah, Moses, Jesus, Paul—no leader in the Bible leads alone, all have teams standing alongside them.

Teams are mentioned also in Hebrews. Adding this reading gives us some more nuance on the ideas of teamwork we might find in the Scriptures. In the Book of Hebrews, a group of faithful people find themselves in new circumstances. They can no longer continue the practices and ways of their heritage. After suffering war and, for many, expulsion from their homeland, they now live in new cities with new foods, new languages. They are also developing new relationships.

Yet they are not alone, and their task is not a lonely one. In this time of so much change, God remains present and faithful. God sends new teachers and these teachers lead in a new Way, with a new understanding of what faithful practices and relationships can look like. As such, the community finds new hope!

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ECCLESIASTES 4:9-12

Two are better than one because they have a good return for their hard work.

If either should fall, one can pick up the other.

But how miserable are those who fall and don't have a companion to help them up! Also, two lie down together, they can stay warm. But how can anyone stay warm alone? Also, one can be overpowered, but two together can put up resistance. A three-ply cord doesn't easily snap.

HEBREWS 10:24-25

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

When Paul visits the Hebrew communities, he not only encourages them to take new steps for new ways of living out faithful practices, worship and witness, but also that there is urgency to do so. In this biblical time, many believed the “Day of the Lord” would come very soon.

Today, we recognize urgency also, the urgency to be ready and the need to come together as we

equip ourselves to address the reality of the climate crisis.

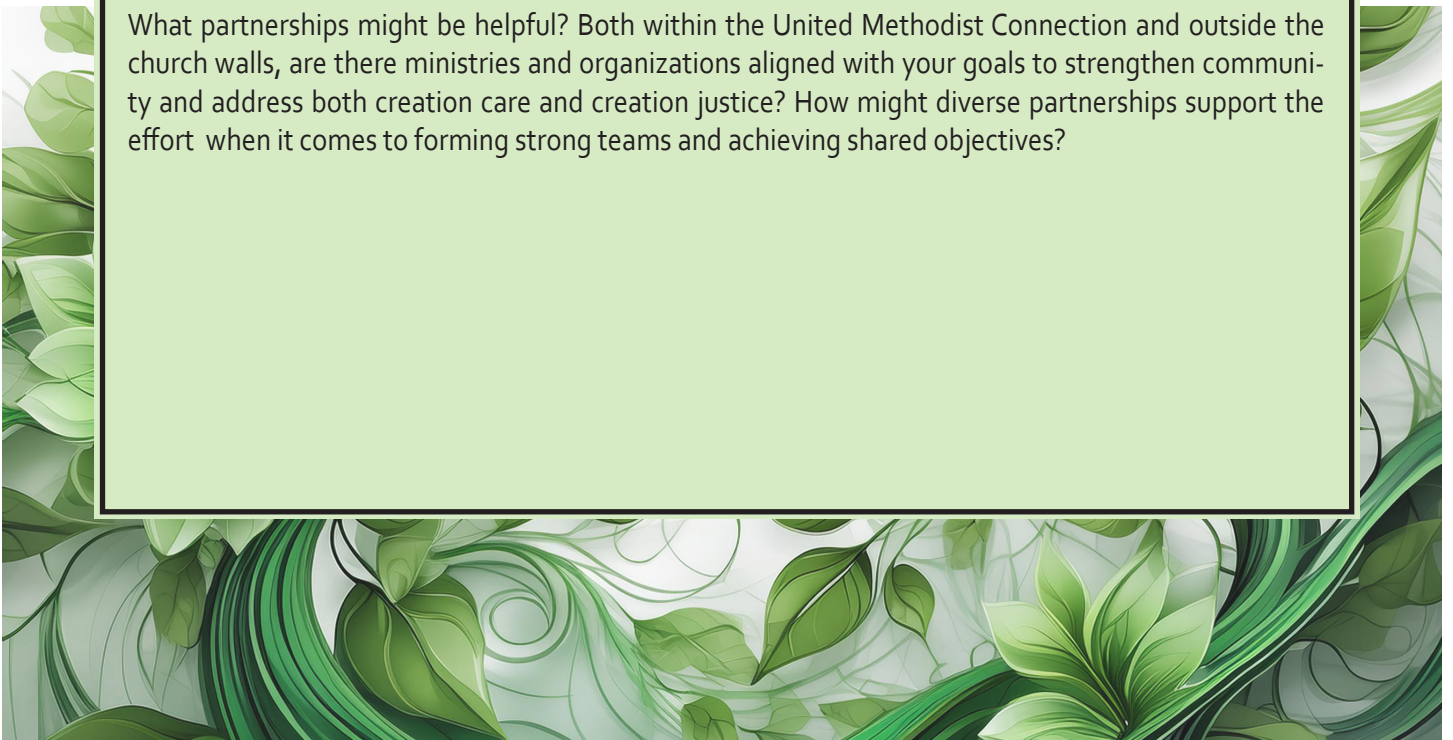
Finally, it is good to include a word from Proverbs 27:17, which tells us that one aspect of good teamwork is that we sharpen each other. Good teams are continually learning, adapting, and gaining strength together. And that is what we need for such a time as this.

Brainstorming

Take a minute to brainstorm around what a green team / creation care team might be called to do in your context. What challenges from the climate crisis does your local community and wider region face? (If you already have a green team, think about what you are doing, and how to build on that effort.)

Partners

What partnerships might be helpful? Both within the United Methodist Connection and outside the church walls, are there ministries and organizations aligned with your goals to strengthen community and address both creation care and creation justice? How might diverse partnerships support the effort when it comes to forming strong teams and achieving shared objectives?



Next Steps

How can your team be faithful in witness and action to address the challenges you identified above? What might mobilization in your context look like, and what will you need to get started?

What do you need?

What might you need from your local church and conference in fellowship and leadership in order to ensure the success of both team development and goals?

Note

Note. As part of bringing Green Team Formation into United Methodist Polity, the General Conference passed a short but related piece of legislation. This related legislation makes a small change to ¶ 254 of the Book of Discipline. In this section, the Discipline speaks to ministry groups of the local church, and that the coordinators of these groups are named at the local church charge conference. The change for ¶ 254 is that under the heading "Other Ministry Group Coordinators," the new legislation adds "green teams" as a ministry group. This legislation was submitted by Crys Zinkiewicz with the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement, and was adopted by committee 43 to 4, and passed on the consent calendar with a plenary vote of 663 to 60.

Prayer:

Gathering God, we praise you that you made us a community of people. We share community together in worship, action, and as people of faith. Bless our green team and creation care efforts. Let us learn together, be sharpened together, and find our new way together. Let us face our challenges in the assurance of your everlasting Love. Amen.

“The Power of a Team”: Green Teams Legislation Passes at General Conference

Article Three.

Green Teams are popping up everywhere—in both faith-based and secular organizations. In The United Methodist Church there are now green teams and/or creation care teams in a number of churches and conferences across the denomination. Many of those teams are doing great work; others are seeking more support and a greater commitment for their efforts.

Crys Zinkiewicz submitted a petition to General Conference on behalf of the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement that calls for the formation of green teams in churches, districts, and conferences. She hopes the legislation, which passed at General Conference by a good margin, will offer that support. The core language of this legislation reads:

That every local church, charge, cluster, or district is urged to create a “green team” or strengthen an existing one for action in four areas each year—Worship, Education, Practice, and Advocacy—providing children, youth, and adults of all ages with inspiration, knowledge, encouragement, and practical means for caring for creation and justice. ... The annual conference will assist churches with resources and mentors, as needed....

Crys Zinkiewicz credits the Creation Care Summit at Scarritt-Bennett Center in Nashville, TN, in 2019 with helping her “grasp the scope and urgency of the climate crisis.” Following the Summit, she became a UM Earthkeeper and helped birth the United Methodist Cre-

ation Justice Movement. As a leader in that movement, she has volunteered with a number of working groups, including the team that put together the Lay Servant Ministries course, *Loving People and Planet in God’s Name*.

Also in 2019, Zinkiewicz became chair of her local church Creation Care Committee in Nashville. Next step was to connect to her annual conference’s green team, known as the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference Creation Care Ministry Team.

“Along with my experience in the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement, I recognized the power of a team. When the idea came from the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement to write model resolutions for annual conferences, I knew where my best contribution could be,” Zinkiewicz explains. “I hope ordinary people will find extraordinary power by working with others to make a difference right where they are.”

For Zinkiewicz, the legislation is about faithful teamwork that multiplies the efforts given for creation, while also caring for team members in the work.

“What sustains me in this work is 1 *Corinthians* 3:6 where Paul is helping the developing church understand the importance of a team connected to faith: ‘I [Paul] planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.’ With a team, I take turns sometimes ‘planting,’ sometimes ‘watering’ what others have done or are doing, always trusting God will give the growth, whether I see it or not.”



“Power of a Team” (cont.)

In addition to this legislation, Zinkiewicz also writes the monthly United Methodist Creation Justice Tips for the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement.

“My EarthKeepers project was to write monthly ideas that local churches could pass along to parishioners for individual or corporate action. The Tips also help people see how taking care of God’s Creation and addressing the consequent justice issues are connected to faith.”

She has now crafted and shared over 550 tips. She explains that “researching and writing the Tips has kept me attuned to big and small things that people and groups can do. All of these experiences have widened and deepened my understanding and commitment.”

In all of what she has learned and this new legislation, Zinkiewicz sees God at work. Already the green team opportunities are expanding, and she has a related project in development, an online mini-course titled, *How to Develop an Effective Green Team*.

“I’m finishing up the preparation, and the Be a Disciple course will be ready in mid to late summer,” she says.

The course allows her to share what she has learned and will be structured so participants can be a “team of learners who will enrich the webinar with their own experiences and insights, as well.”

THREE

Sacred Ground – Caring for the Church Land & Grounds

LEGISLATION TITLE:
Church Land Use

VOTE COUNT!

This legislation passed with overwhelming approval both in committee, and in Plenary, at the 2024 General Conference:

Committee approval:
33 to 1
Plenary Approval:
686 to 36

LEGISLATION SUMMARY:

This legislation resolves that all land held by church entities—including camp and retreat centers, local churches, districts, boards and agencies, all—should be stewarded faithfully according to God’s order, established in Genesis, for the harmony of creation. This legislation recognizes that where there has been degradation of the church yard and grounds, life has been diminished.

THE GOAL OF THIS LEGISLATION:

Degradation of land is not always visible. Some of our church yards look beautiful to the eye. Yet this artificial landscape of grass and daffodils harms the natural ecosystem, and as such, our church lands are not being kept according to God’s intention. This legislation calls the church to re-understand what makes church land beautiful, to plant native plants that feed native birds, bugs, and ecosystems, and return the land to its native and sacred harmony.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

This legislation was submitted by Kimberly Richmond.

Kim Richmond is a commissioned United Methodist EarthKeeper who is passionate about care for God’s creation. She founded and continues to lead the Creation Care Ministry team in her local church, and she is presently the coordinator of the Creation Care Ministry team for the Western North Carolina Conference. Kim finds peace and joy when spending time in God’s creation, and greatly enjoys watching and advocating for the amazing birds with which God blessed this world. She also enjoys being active in the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement in various capacities and sharing in the fellowship and the good work that is ongoing!



Reflection

QUESTIONS:

Our church yards reach beyond our properties. They are upstream of the lakes and rivers that God intended to be full of life. As the rain falls, soil is nourished, plants draw up nutrients and the run-off fills the local waterways. Where does the run-off go in your community? How could your church be part of an effort to stop pesticide and herbicide run-off into the water?

Healthy plant and animal populations are part of what the Lord requires of us. On the sacred ground of our churches and denominational properties that means our land is part of the native ecosystem. How can we learn more what native plants and trees should be growing where we worship? How can we transform our properties to multiply life?

READ GENESIS, right, and the reflection, below. Share the questions, left, together.

We are all pretty familiar with the words of Genesis and the story of Creation. We know that God not only created the sun and moon, and heaven and earth, but also every single living creature.

I want to focus on two of the commandments given by God concerning the animals in this reading. The first commandment is one that God gives to the animals themselves, telling them "be fertile, multiply and fill the earth." The second commandment is one God gives to humanity. God says that, as we humans are made in God's image, we are to take charge. Who are our charges? These very animals, the ones that fly, swim, crawl, and cover the earth. We are in charge of making sure the creation remains full of life.

Growing up, I was taught that the right way to maintain the church grounds was to have a big parking lot, small, ornamental flowers and bushes, and as extensive a lawn as possible. Somehow, I had come to believe that a large, paved parking lot and extensive grass was a signal that inside the building was a big, busy, successful congregation. All those parking spaces and all that green lawn was a showcase of affluence.

I did not know the harm that green grass and parking lots have caused. Over the last five decades animal populations have

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GENESIS 1:20-26

God said, "Let the waters swarm with living things, and let birds fly above the earth up in the dome of the sky." God created the great sea animals and all the tiny living things that swarm in the waters, each according to its kind, and all the winged birds, each according to its kind. God saw how good it was. Then God blessed them: "Be fertile and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds multiply on the earth." ... God made every kind of wildlife, every kind of livestock, and every kind of creature that crawls on the ground. God saw how good it was. Then God said, "Let us make humanity in our image to resemble us so that they may take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on earth."

plummeted. The earth has lost a third of its birds, and almost half of its insects—including pollinators. Animal habitat, fertility, and many species, are at risk of extinction and pesticides, herbicides, and non-native plantings are part of why.

Non-native, ornamental plants cannot feed native birds or sustain the biodiversity God has ordained. Pesticides, herbicides, toxic fertilizers, all degrade the soil and waterways, further

harming animal and plant life.

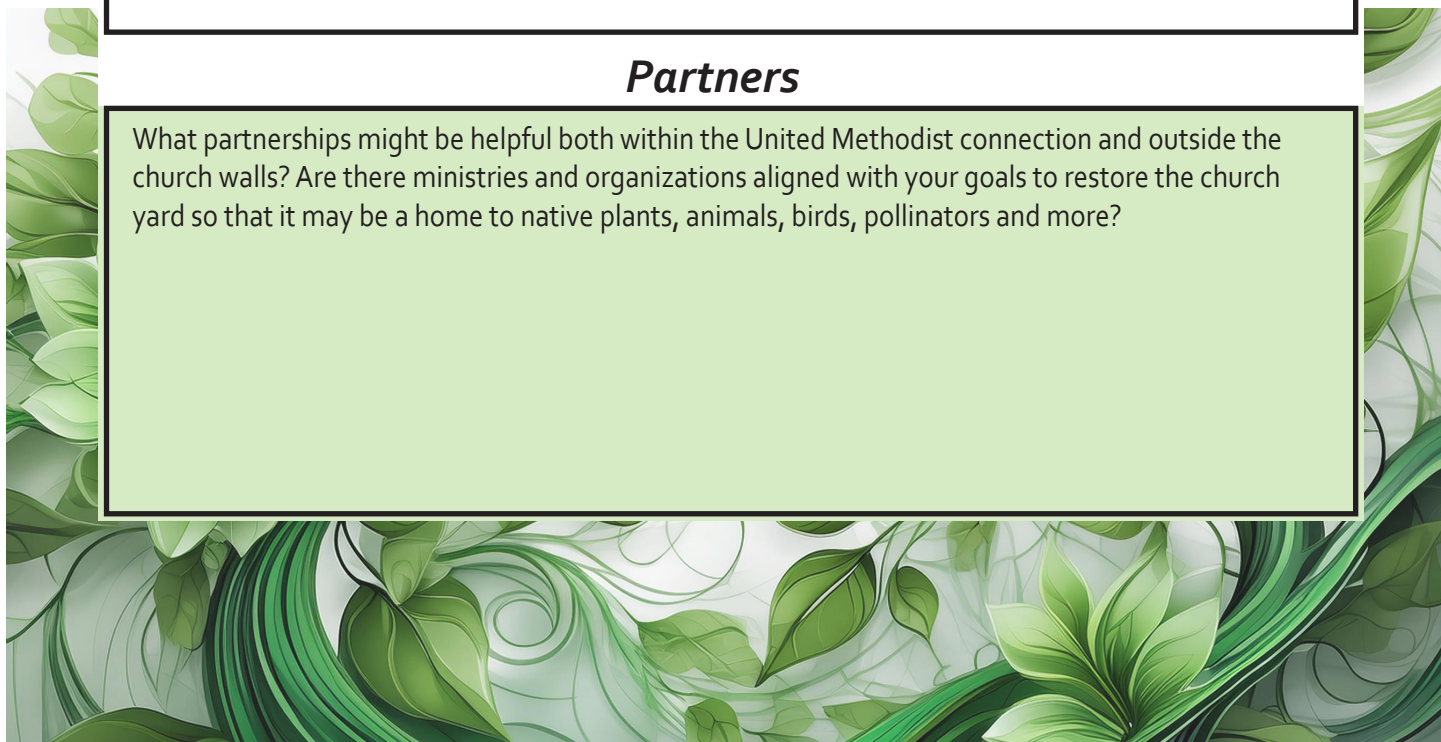
While this sounds dire, the good news is that where humanity has followed God's commandment to safeguard populations and worked to heal and restore the earth and its habitat, these actions have resulted in rebounding habitats! Humanity—just as God stated—has the capability to ensure God's harmony of creation continues for generations to come.

Brainstorming

Take a minute to walk through your church yard, including along the walkways and into the parking lot. What do you notice? Are there any trees? Are any of the trees or plants native? When you return to the Bible study room, create a map of things-as-they-are right now, parking lot and all. This is an opportunity to create a *before* and *after* project. Once your map is created, spend a few moments thinking about *after*. What changes could be made to restore and support harmony on this sacred ground?

Partners

What partnerships might be helpful both within the United Methodist connection and outside the church walls? Are there ministries and organizations aligned with your goals to restore the church yard so that it may be a home to native plants, animals, birds, pollinators and more?



Next Steps

Shifting from “church yard” to “sacred ground” might be a big project for your church—especially if you have a lot of parking lot and few trees. Big journeys, as they say, start small. Write down three possible next steps.

What do you need?

What support will you need for these first next things?

Prayer:

God of all the earth, and every living thing. We praise you for raspberries, for sweet, soft pears, and for the smell of honeysuckle. Let the rain that falls to nourish the pear orchards and the raspberry brambles be clean and fresh and nourishing. Teach us the holy practices of this good earth. Amen.

Richmond hopes Church Lands Use legislation will “restore the harmony in God’s plan.”

Article Two.

Creation justice emerged as a great spiritual nudge at General Conference. Creation care legislation bubbled up with support through legislative committees, on the plenary floor, and the legislation passed with overwhelming margins.

As the delegates turned to the Spirit-led work of legislative discernment, many creation justice advocates celebrated the success of these petitions. One of those celebrating is Kim Richmond. Richmond is a member of the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement, and she submitted legislation to General Conference addressing Church Land Use.

Kim Richmond is a member of the Western North Carolina Conference. She is a UM Earthkeeper, founder and coordinator of her local church Creation Care Ministry, and current coordinator for the WNCC Creation Care Ministry Team. She is also active in the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement, including encouraging green teams and annual conference organizing.

Richmond was overjoyed when she heard that the Church Land Use petition she wrote had gained the support it needed in the Church and Society 1 Committee, and was going to be heard in plenary. It passed from committee with 33 votes in favor and only one vote against.

Her petition is straightforward. The core language of her legislation is only a single paragraph that reads: “As

United Methodists and persons of faith who wish to promote and sustain life and follow God’s intended order for Creation, be it resolved that all local churches and other holders of church lands, such as camp and retreat centers, as well as offices of general boards and agencies, conference offices and district locations, implement actions in their settings that bring their land back in harmony with God’s intentions and systems.”

In addition to the “therefore” language of her legislation, Richmond also took time to offer theological reasoning, references, and a number of example actions local churches and conferences can take to improve things.

Richmond praises the support and effort of the team at the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement for help with editing the legislation and for adding suggestions for taking action.

The core of the petition, though, arose following prayer. Says Richmond, “I want to be sure to give the glory to God for this resolution. I prayed and the words just flowed.”

While some have worked to bring creation justice into the United Methodist denomination for decades, Richmond is a more recent advocate. She took UM EarthKeepers training and became more active in her local church in 2017.

Says Richmond, “My journey to writing the Church Land Use resolution included lots of reading and researching and learning about things I had never really



Richmond Hopes (cont.)

considered, that were right there before me all the time.”

One inspiration was the work of ecologist Doug Tallamy. Richmond explains, “Doug Tallamy and other ecologists like him explain the interconnections of nature and practical ways we can engage in its renewal and regeneration.”

She recommends his book *Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Yard*. She says, “I love the concept of his Homegrown National Park that promotes every lawn being transitioned to include native plantings.”

Richmond was captivated by Tallamy's teachings about the life-giving impact of native oak trees, and how just a few native trees, including oaks, can be vital in the restoration of land, and especially bird populations.

“I am most definitely a self-professed ‘bird nerd,’” she confesses. “I am not particularly proficient at bird identification, but am totally passionate about watching, feeding, and protecting these beautiful beings.”

Birds offer Richmond peace and joy, but they do even more for an ecosystem. To ensure that birds flourish, attention has to be paid to habitat. Bugs must be allowed to overwinter in fallen leaves, for example, so that there are plenty of fat caterpillars to feed to hatchlings.

Richmond also advocates outside the church walls for the restoration of ecosystems. “Right before the pandemic began, my husband and I became members of our local Audubon chapter

where I then became involved in advocacy at the state and local level, speaking up with legislators about protections related to healthy habitat and bird safety concerns.”

She continues, “I love meeting other people who have similar values and passion - that is what makes this work so enjoyable. And I definitely see the applicability of these values on sacred-church lands! We can make a loud, visible statement to our communities by converting our lands to oases for all life forms.”

When asked how this resolution may be applied by local churches and the denomination as a whole, Richmond speaks of hope.

“I hope this resolution will inspire all those holding lands associated with The United Methodist Church to look at their lands as places of life.... I hope they will look for ways to transition lawns of turfgrass and non-native ornamentals or invasives into healthy ecosystems that promote and sustain the life of God's creatures, insects, earthworms, fungi, plants, humans, and all other forms of life that will thrive together with a little work and intentionality from us.”

And, Richmond hopes the resolution will offer connection, as well. “I am feeling this remarkable connection with others around the US and around the world through our shared concern for God's creation” she says. “We can all actively participate in the renewal and regeneration of creation, by planting one native tree or bush at a time.”

FOUR

Plastics & Environmental Holiness

LEGISLATION TITLE:
Use of Plastics

VOTE COUNT!

This legislation passed with overwhelming approval both in committee, and in Plenary, at the 2024 General Conference:

Committee approval:
35 to 2
Plenary Approval:
686 to 36

LEGISLATION SUMMARY:

This legislation addresses the widespread use of plastic, especially single use plastic, in United Methodist activities of both the local and international church. The legislation names especially the prevalence of plastic in United Methodist conferencing from Annual Conferences through Jurisdictional and General Conference and calls for a two-fold strategy for United Methodists to avoid plastic and reduce its use. It further calls for all conference delegates to set the example by avoiding/reducing their own use of plastic.

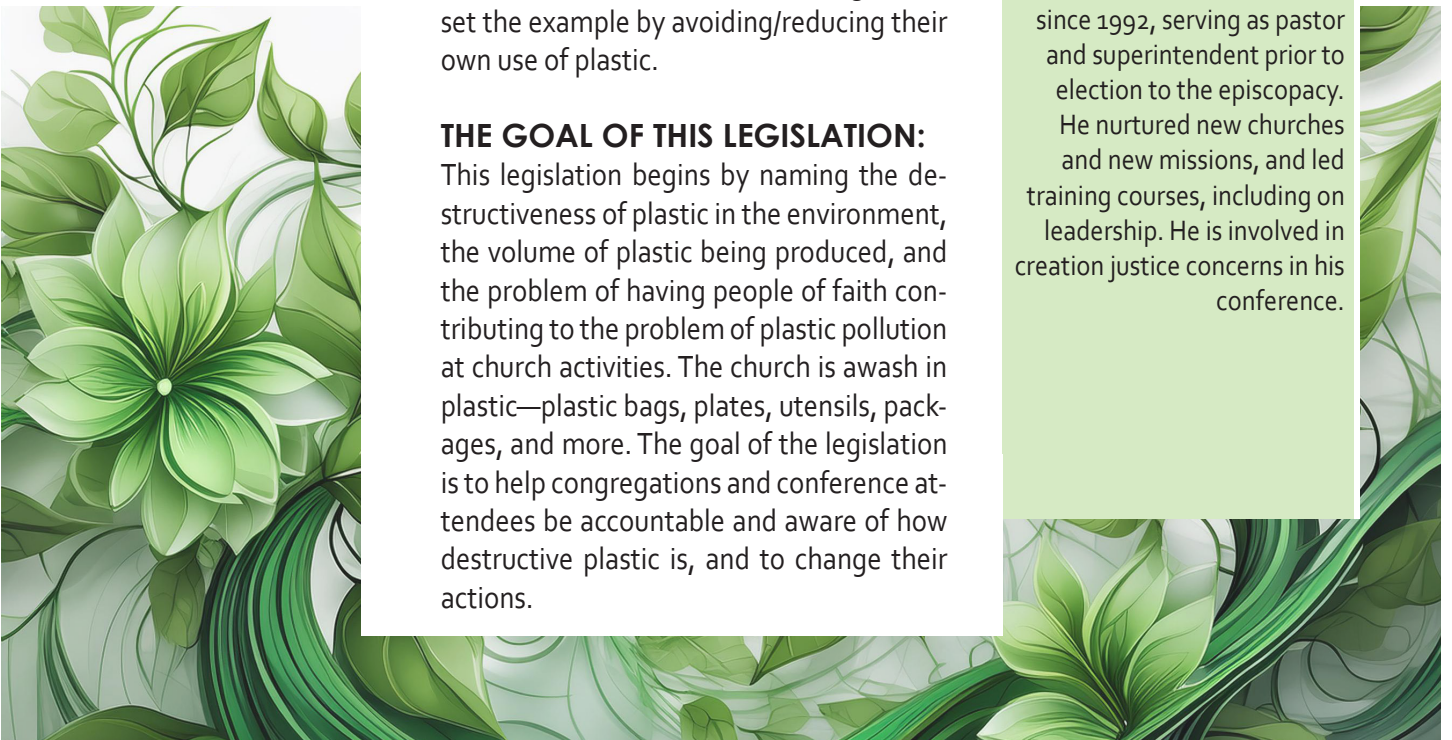
THE GOAL OF THIS LEGISLATION:

This legislation begins by naming the destructiveness of plastic in the environment, the volume of plastic being produced, and the problem of having people of faith contributing to the problem of plastic pollution at church activities. The church is awash in plastic—plastic bags, plates, utensils, packages, and more. The goal of the legislation is to help congregations and conference attendees be accountable and aware of how destructive plastic is, and to change their actions.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

This legislation was submitted by Harald Rueckert.

Harald Rueckert is the Resident Bishop of the Germany Area, elected in 2016 and including the Germany Conference in the Europe Central Conference of The United Methodist Church. He has been a member of the Germany Central Conference since 1992, serving as pastor and superintendent prior to election to the episcopacy. He nurtured new churches and new missions, and led training courses, including on leadership. He is involved in creation justice concerns in his conference.



Reflection

QUESTIONS:

When you think of creation as God intended it, what would it look like? What might you write if you were the Psalmist in praise of God? What aspects of creation—forests, or beaches, or ripe blueberries—might you set apart as an example that shows God's love for this earth, its creatures and its people?

What does "environmental holiness" mean to you? How can we understand United Methodist activities to be times when our actions reflect not only our heartfelt worship, but also our respect for God's creation?

READ PSALM 1:1,3 AND JEREMIAH 12:10,13, right, and the reflection, below. Share the questions, left, together.

The Psalms are filled with poetry, history, wisdom and prayer. They can be poetic, but they speak with a straightforward voice, for the speaker is not ashamed to address God directly and assuredly. The Psalmist's voice can call directly for God's justice and fury when speaking to human wickedness. Then at other times, this same voice speaks longingly, often joyfully, when speaking of the earth—God's creation. In the Psalms, as in Psalm 1, the earth as creation is a treasure that is filled with life!

Always, when the Psalmist needs examples of life overflowing, or an example of God's goodness and God's promise, those examples are words of mile-high harvests, rich soil, roosting birds, playful dolphins, and trees filled with fruit. Conversely, when there is wickedness to decry, that wickedness is depicted as destruction of the environment, with words of wastage, fear, drought, and hunger.

In the Prophets, this same duality occurs. In Jeremiah, when the armies lay waste to Judah, the prophet describes the wickedness and loss in its impact to the environment—causing the loss and destruction of fields, soils, wilderness and harvest.

When we think about the harm of plastics, and the sheer volume of plastic pollution, it

Continued next page

PSALM 1:1,3

*The truly happy person
doesn't follow wicked
advice,
doesn't stand on the
road of sinners,
and doesn't sit with
the disrespectful.
Instead of doing those
things...*

*They are like a tree
replanted by streams of
water,
which bears fruit at
just the right time
and whose leaves
don't fade.
Whatever they do
succeeds.*

JEREMIAH 12:10,13

*Many shepherds have
destroyed my vineyard;
they have trampled
down my field; they
have reduced my trea-
sured field to a desolate
wilderness...They have
sown wheat and reaped
weeds; they have worn
themselves out for
nothing. They will be
ashamed of their har-
vest on account of the
Lord's fierce anger.*

is not hard to hear the Psalmist decry the destruction in biblical images of harm to the environment. In the modern day, in just a few decades, plastics have become a pollution on earth beyond the scope of imagination, how can we even tell such a story?

With plastics in our bodies, in the soils, filling God's oceans and defacing God's creation, how would the Psalmist speak about plastic in the rain and in the milk we feed to our babies?

In 2009 The Council of Bishops released the pastoral letter, *God's Renewed Creation: A Call to*

Hope and Action. In the letter, the bishops addressed climate change and environmental degradation, including the detrimental environmental effects of plastic. The bishops called for action.

The bishops also reminded us of the hope of our tradition. They spoke to Wesley's words, that we are to be persons of holiness of heart. And, the bishops said, as Wesley speaks of social holiness, so we can understand this also to include environmental holiness.

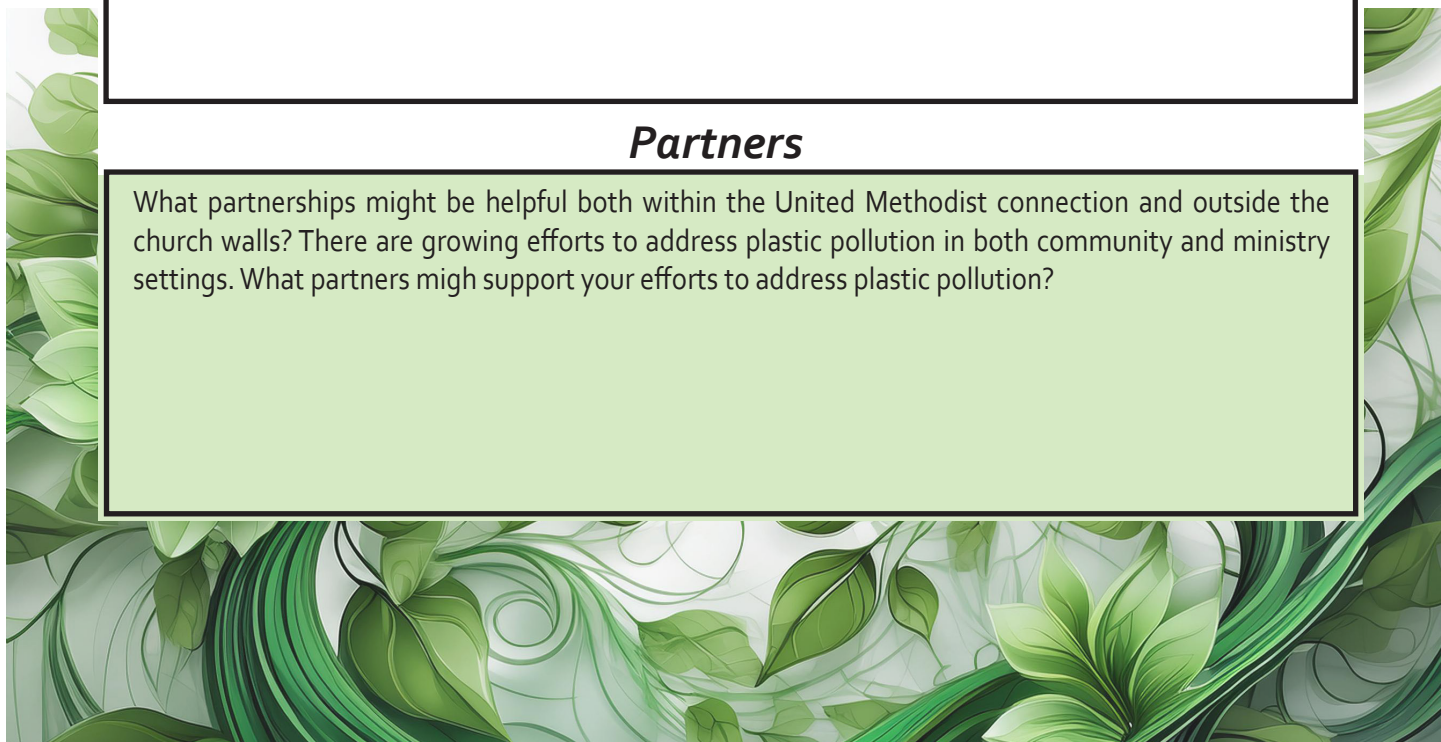
By our actions, our testimony, our witness, and how we live our lives, we can be a people of hope.

Brainstorming

While "environmental holiness" can seem like a big concept, it has some very practical applications. In your local church activities, what are the ways church leaders and your community can reduce and avoid the use of plastics as an expression of care for God's creation?

Partners

What partnerships might be helpful both within the United Methodist connection and outside the church walls? There are growing efforts to address plastic pollution in both community and ministry settings. What partners might support your efforts to address plastic pollution?



Next Steps

Sometimes next steps can be as simple as observation. Plastics have become so ever-present in daily life, that in some ways they have become invisible to us. What if the first next step is simply to spend a week noticing how much plastic you come into contact with every day? Perhaps do the same thing on a Sunday, or at the next church potluck. Sometimes simply an assessment helps with identifying the challenge, then rising to meet it.

What do you need to begin?

During the brainstorming activity, you had a chance to think about practical ways to reduce plastic. Then, for next steps, you were invited to simply notice the plastic you come into contact with every day at home and in church. Now, how to bring those things together. What do you need to bring your practical ideas to avoid and reduce plastic together with what you noticed in terms of how much plastic you encounter, and where?

Prayer:

Holy God, you tell us to keep your teachings with us always, and write them on our hearts. Help us be holy in your sight, willing to walk in faith as a holy people seeking to be holy of heart and action. Guide us as we also seek to a people of environmental holiness, choosing to follow your way and be as trees planted by clear water, filled with fruit. Amen.

General Conference Passes Legislation for Sustainability Practices at Annual Conferences

Article Four

Another one for the history books! Yet another legislative petition written by an active member of the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement passed late Wednesday afternoon at General Conference.

The petition, Sustainable Practices for Annual Conference Sessions, is succinct and its simplicity is its brilliance. And, its subject is something those who work on sustainability can really relate to.

The legislation simply says:

“Amend ¶603 Annual Conference Organization. Add, 4. The annual conference sessions shall be held in places that are accessible to people with disabilities and that have sustainable practices for energy, waste, and consumption.”

The petition passed as part of a group of petitions bundled together in what is called a consent calendar on Wednesday, late afternoon. That bundle together passed with 75% of the votes in favor.

Anyone who has ever tried to address sustainability in the church knows the agony of trying to get folks to stop using plastic utensils and styrofoam cups. U.S. churches have been slow to nowhere when it comes to replacing plastic, toxic, and wasteful items of convenience for every kind of gathering, including devotional studies and the fellowship hour after church services.

The point is, these things matter.

Rev. Nancy Blade, who serves in the Northern Illinois Conference, isn't trying to green-shame anyone. She just knows that plastic is in the rain, in our food, in our brains, and at the rate we are dumping plastics there will soon be more plastic than fish in the ocean.

Rev. Blade's petition speaks to more than plastic—though of course that is an enormous challenge in and of itself. But Rev. Blade is aiming wider even than that. Her effort is the struggle to ensure good practices of sustainability at gatherings for a range of things, including waste, recycling, and attention to emissions and our carbon footprint.

The legislation asks for annual conference organizers to be more intentional about choosing venues where support for sustainable practices is available, such as a recycling program and dishwashing, access to lightrail, or walkability as well as to seek venues that can be enjoyed by people of all abilities.

This part of Rev. Blade's story will be familiar to many:

For seven years, Blade has been trying to get her annual conference gatherings to simply recycle. What she has encountered is excuses.

Says Blade, “At first the excuse was that the city we were meeting in didn't require or have recycling. Because I lived close by, I brought in recycling bins and took them home, only to find that the staff at the hotel was using them for regular garbage.”



Sustainability Practices (cont.)

The next year she tried again. This time the annual conference was meeting at an “upscale venue”—but they didn’t have recycling either.

Year three she brought in reinforcements. She says, “I had our United Women in Faith use their 13 Sustainable Practices document and evaluate the conference. The news wasn’t good—we failed, of course.”

Rev. Blade realized that even with all the heart to do the right thing and all the reasons why, they were still failing. In large part this was because those in power were denying the importance of climate impact and resisting change.

Says Blade, though they now had a documented evaluation from UWFaith spelling out what they needed, “We still had no political power to force the Annual Conference Committee to act on the sustainability evaluation.”

It was that realization that set her determination to go big. She took her concern all the way to the top—to General Conference. Says Blade, “I looked for a way to make sustainability a rule and found that it was already a rule for all General Conference meetings, but not for any annual conference meetings.”

Once she established a path toward remedy, the next step was to bring in allies and friends to support her efforts.

Says Blade, “I brought the idea to our United Methodist Creation Justice Movement General Conference working group meeting, and someone else said

that they too had an issue with their annual conference about recycling.”

Other members of the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement also brought their experiences and skills to the writing effort.

Says Blade, “Writing the petition wasn’t hard, but keeping the rationale short was a struggle. The team’s feedback helped narrow things down for me, and we were able to get it published without re-writes at the Conference.”

The result of all of that effort? Now, The United Methodist Church has new legislation designed to give sustainability-seekers the support they need to get creation-friendly practices implemented during annual conferences.

That is not all that Rev. Blade has gained, however. Simply the process itself of writing a petition for General Conference, sitting in on committees, and experiencing the good push of the effort has been affirming.

Says Blade, “It’s wonderful to be able to participate in the General Church this way. I have learned so much from being on Zoom calls and presenting legislation in webinars. Helping with legislation and brochures and spiritual contributions has made a difference in how I see the church.”

FIVE

Sustainable Practices & Holy Conferencing

LEGISLATION TITLE:

Sustainable Practices for Annual Conference Sessions

VOTE COUNT!

This legislation passed with overwhelming approval both in committee, and in Plenary, at the 2024 General Conference:

Committee approval:

69 to 17

Plenary Approval:

606 to 91

LEGISLATION SUMMARY:

An entire chapter in the Book of Discipline governs how and in what manner annual conference gatherings are to be organized. This legislation adds to this chapter, adding that now, organizing must also include attention to sustainability. In section 4 of ¶603 new language directs an annual conference bishop and organizers when choosing a place to hold annual conference, that they must consider a place where sustainability can be practiced, including with attention to energy use, waste management, and consumption.

THE GOAL OF THIS LEGISLATION:

The goal of this legislation is to raise the priority of sustainable practices when organizers are choosing a location for annual conference. Like the legislation addressing plastic waste, this legislation seeks repentance from wasteful practices and a turn toward sustainability where United Methodist people worship and gather.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

This legislation was submitted by Nancy Blade.

Nancy Blade is a United Methodist Elder serving in rural and town churches in Northern Illinois since 1988. She co-chairs a new Northern Illinois task force focusing on eco-sustainability. Their activity has included resolutions, green summits, hosting Earthkeeper training, coaching local churches, and more recently, net-zero. She is an active member of the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement.



Reflection

QUESTIONS:

If you imagine yourself as a farmer scattering seed, what things might you want to plant? What would you need in terms of soil and sun and water to ensure it would grow? Conversely, what would impede the healthy growth of your seedlings? When it comes to caring for creation, how would you say we are doing when it comes to planting seeds we hope to harvest?

It is not only United Methodists who like to gather together. Garden groups, farmers' associations, all kinds of groups organize opportunities for those interested in gathering to get together and learn from each other. In United Methodism, we get to add an important element to getting together—worship. We get to gather in the name of God and for God's purposes. What ways might a stranger be able to tell, when attending a United Methodist conference, that this was a gathering of holy people? What might holy practices of gathering—including sustainability practices—look like.

READ MARK 4:3-9, right, and the reflection, below. Share the questions, left, together.

In this story, Jesus is again teaching the crowds who had gathered while he visited Capernaum, synagogues and homes with the disciples. His teaching was again in parables, and he shares with the crowds this story of a farmer and the soil and what grew when the farmer scattered the seeds he had saved for planting.

In thinking about the crowds gathered to hear this story, it makes me think of our own Methodist system of conferencing. We, too, like to gather together, and we are quite a crowd!

John Wesley considered gatherings of the faithful, what he called "Christian Conferencing," to be a means of grace.

Today we call it Holy Conferencing. We know that through the crowded hubbub on the Sea of Galilee or at annual conference there is preaching and praying and fellowship and a holiness grows, a holiness that must have also been experienced in the biblical times, as well, right there on the lake near Capernaum.

When we gather together, holiness is everywhere.

This is the invitation of our United Methodist conferences, from the charge conferences on up. Before oil and gas and climate change the faithful gathered in fields and

Continued next page

MARK 4:3-9

A farmer went out to scatter seed. As he was scattering seed, some fell on the path; and the birds came and ate it. Other seed fell on rocky ground where the soil was shallow. They sprouted immediately because the soil wasn't deep. When the sun came up, it scorched the plants; and they dried up because they had no roots. Other seed fell among thorny plants. The thorny plants grew and choked the seeds, and they produced nothing. Other seed fell into good soil and bore fruit. Upon growing and increasing, the seed produced in one case a yield of thirty to one, in another case a yield of sixty to one, and in another case a yield of one hundred to one." He said, "Whoever has ears to listen should pay attention!"

forests and sang and preached and were revived in faith, heart and spirit. Our Methodist ancestors were out in the wilderness, gathered together, and *on fire for God*.

Our conferences are now more staid, but no less holy. We need only refocus our hearts and open our spirits to be again on the lake listening to the words and stories of Jesus, and longing to live a life where we are the seeds cast on the good soil, healthy soil, where our children and children's

children can grow up healthy and full of life.

Jesus doesn't have any stories about what faithful activities at conference should look like. But I am sure he would have something to say about the amount of plastic and food wrappers and beverage cans that are now like the thorns choking out the good seeds and filling the waters of the lake with thorny waste where Jesus said, "Listen to this!"

"Whoever has ears to hear should pay attention!"

Brainstorming

Take a minute to jot down some good things you noticed at annual conference that concern holiness of practice, such as times for prayer practice or choir practice. Think also of what kind of practices at the conference level we might all need to learn in order to reduce waste and improve sustainability.

Partners

In thinking about sustainability practices, annual conference organizers may need to think about what partnerships could look like. The venue where the conference is held is a partner when it comes to minimizing food wrappers, providing water and coffee, and, when there is no option to disposables, recycling. If your conference meets in a city, is the venue accessible by foot or on light rail?



Next Steps

What might be some next steps, starting in your own local church, where you can practice sustainability?

What do you need?

How might you connect with those charged with organizing the annual conference to offer support to them for new sustainability practices? What type of support might you need, and might they need, as well?

Prayer:

Everlasting God, your creation is designed from the beginning to nourish and multiply life. Teach us the life-giving practices of your creation, that we may be the seeds scattered on good soil. Lead us through the changes that increase the yield, that our earth may reflect your abundance in every good thing. Amen.

SIX

Our Stories Together

VOTE COUNT!

Local Church and Conference centered creation justice legislation passed with overwhelming approval both in committee and in Plenary at the 2024 General Conference. Over all for the legislation in this guide:

Committee approval:
91%
Plenary Approval:
92%

Storytelling

In this guide interspersed between the study sections are the stories of those who submitted that legislation for consideration.

Those involved in the legislative effort spent years assessing how best to act on the sacredness of creation, the hopes of their fellow United Methodists, and the urgency of the climate crisis. They worked to better understand what we face and what is needed to address our hopes and challenges together.

For this final chapter, read (or re-read) the stories included as articles in this study guide. After reading, reflect on the questions on this page in the green column, right.

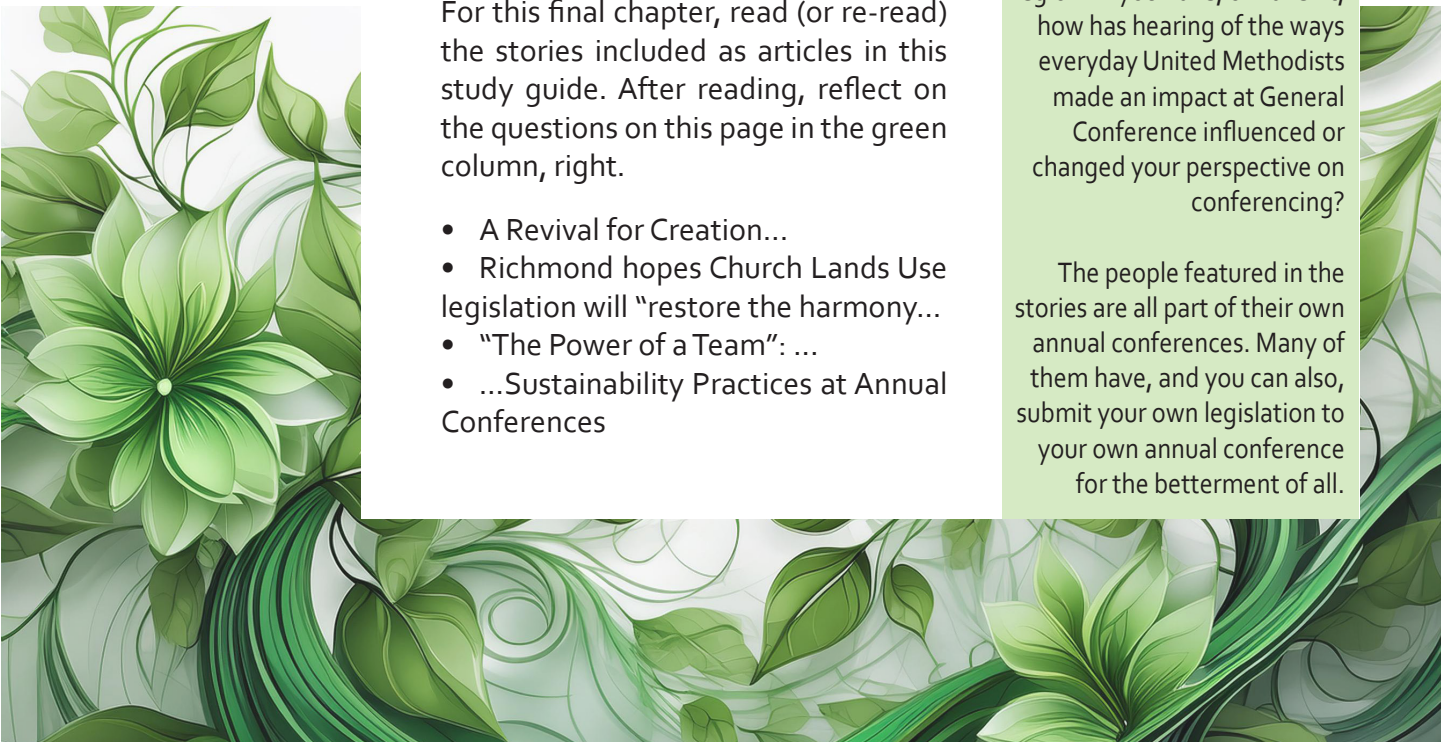
- A Revival for Creation...
- Richmond hopes Church Lands Use legislation will “restore the harmony...”
- “The Power of a Team”: ...
- ...Sustainability Practices at Annual Conferences

LEADERSHIP & TEAMS:

Taking action for the creation is an experience that brings personal conviction together with a group of people willing to brainstorm and work together. In the stories, where are there examples of personal conviction, and where does teamwork become an important part of the process?

Have you ever attended Charge Conference in your local church, or Annual Conference in your larger episcopal region? If you have, or haven't, how has hearing of the ways everyday United Methodists made an impact at General Conference influenced or changed your perspective on conferencing?

The people featured in the stories are all part of their own annual conferences. Many of them have, and you can also, submit your own legislation to your own annual conference for the betterment of all.

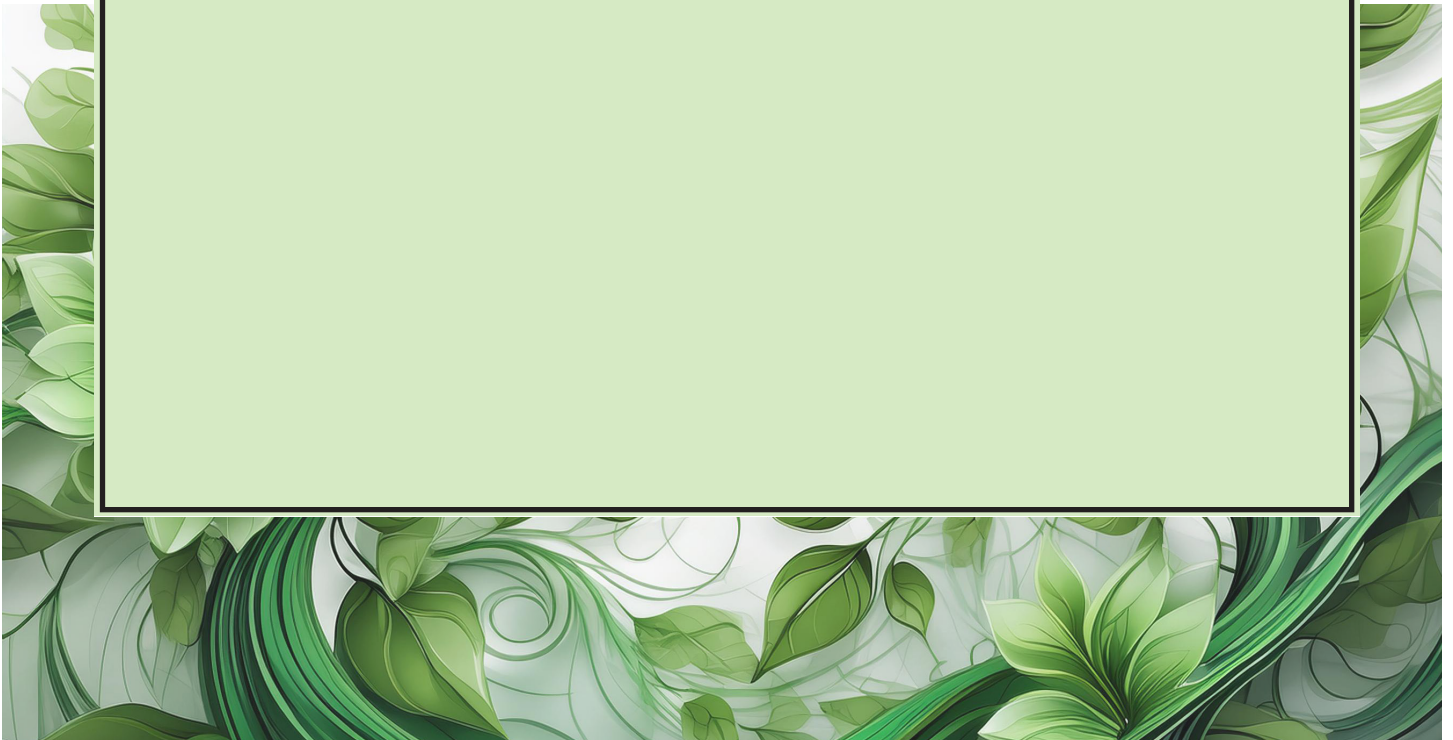


Brainstorming

Over the last few weeks, this guide has offered opportunities to think more about God's creation, the climate crisis and the church. Your opportunity in reflecting this section is to brainstorm around what you have learned and what opportunities you might see for taking action for God's creation in your local church and conference. Note down some of those things, as you reflect.

Partners

As you moved through the reading and worked with the legislation over these few weeks, it has probably become very evident that we cannot meet the challenges ahead of us alone. Even as leaders emerge, they look for likeminded fellowship and those who share their conviction to work for change. As you, your church and your community seek to build hope, who do you see as potential partners inside and outside of the church?



Next Steps

On reading and reflecting, what might your next immediate goal be? Can you write a single sentence that summarizes and/or names this goal?

What do you need?

What do you need to achieve this goal? (*Perhaps think of things like leadership, teamwork, education, funding, support, a potluck!*)

Prayer:

Eternal God, of heaven and of earth, we pray the prayer taught to us by your son, Jesus. We pray as a people re-energized to act in caring for this creation, this life you have created, and this place we call home:

Our Creator, who is in heaven, holy is your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done, here on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread, food from this earth, which the earth provides and you have made, and forgive us when we sin, as we forgive others when they sin against us.

And do not tempt us to leave the path of righteousness and become unjust, and deliver us from wickedness. For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for all eternity. Amen.



The Legislation - Full Text

Establish a Conference Caretakers of God's Creation Coordinator in Each Annual Conference

Submitted by Jaydee Hanson
Submitter Organization Caretakers of God's Creation

¶ 629. Conference Board of Church and Society—1. The annual conference shall organize a board of church and society or other structure to provide for the functions of this ministry and maintain the connectional relationship between the General Board of Church and Society and the conference, district, and local church, as well as for church and society responsibilities related to the objectives and scope of work of the General Board of Church and Society as set forth in ¶¶ 1002-1004.

2. The conference board of church and society or equivalent structure shall be composed of those persons as determined by the annual conference, including, by virtue of their offices, the mission coordinator for social action of the conference United Methodist Women and members of the General Board of Church and Society from the annual conference who shall serve within limits set by ¶¶ 610.6 and 710.6. **The conference board of church and society or equivalent structure shall also name a conference Caretakers of God's Creation Coordinator who will be responsible for helping the conference develop programs to help it become more ecologically sustainable and to address environmental injustices** and shall name a Peace with Justice Coordinator who will be responsible for administering the conference Peace with Justice Special Sunday Offering receipts and for coordinating peace and justice ministries. Guidelines for inclusiveness in the membership shall be followed (¶ 610.5).

Church Land Use

Submitted by Kimberly Richmond
Submitting Organization The United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

When God created the heavens and the earth, God put into place systems and cycles that would be life promoting and sustaining and made humans caretakers of all life on earth.

God gave the earth water, which is essential for all life, and created a cycle of cleansing, renewal, and release that makes the water that God gave us in the beginning usable and life-supporting still today.

God gave the earth soil where life abounds, filled with microorganisms vital to the health and fertility of the soil; where life can grow and thrive, taking nutrients and water from the soil to support the growth of plants; and where life is renewed when microorganisms perform the process of decay following death and bring forth new, fertile soil through the process.

God gave the earth plants that grow from the combination of nutrients in the soil, the sunlight, and the water, and that are used as food and shelter by other life forms on earth. These plants absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen, which cleans the air and provides humans and other animals with oxygen they require to live. Through transpiration, these plants release water into the air that cools the air and becomes the basis for precipitation that releases water back to the ground for use, once again, by plants and other animals.

God created humans, animals, creatures of the sea, and birds of the air, to live upon the earth.

And God created all these things, and more, to work together in harmony in a manner that promotes and sustains all life on earth.

When we work together as our Creator intended, God multiplies the fruits of our labors and brings forth more and more blessings.

At present, humans are not working together in harmony with the rest of Creation as God intended. We are in the midst of a biodiversity and wildlife crisis that is so extreme it is often referred to as the Sixth Extinction. According to the Center for Biological Diversity, more than 30,000 species go extinct annually. Other wildlife studies reveal that mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fish have seen a devastating 69% drop in numbers, on average, since 1970, with populations in Latin America and the Caribbean suffering far worse with an average decline of 94%.

While prior mass extinction events in history were due to natural causes, this one is being caused by humans through land conversion, habitat destruction and fragmentation, use of chemical pesticides and biocides, as well as other harmful synthetic chemicals that persist in the environment known as “forever chemicals,” water pollution, and air pollution, including excessive release of carbon dioxide and methane into the atmosphere from the burning of fossil fuels, which is causing the climate crisis.

The good news is this: Since human actions are the cause of these problems, they can also be the solution. And, because God created the earth to incorporate life-promoting and life-sustaining systems, we humans can follow God’s intended order and renew the life-giving abilities of these systems that we have been harming.

Therefore, as United Methodists and persons of faith who wish to promote and sustain life and follow God’s intended order for Creation, be it resolved that all local churches and other holders of church lands, such as camp and retreat centers, as well as offices of general boards and agencies, conference offices and district locations, implement actions in their settings that bring their land

back in harmony with God’s intentions and systems.

The following are examples of such steps:

- Evaluate the vegetation on your land and identify the species that are present. Determine which of those are native to your location, which are non-native, and which are non-native invasives. Plants and wildlife have evolved over time to complement and depend upon each other, so plants that are native to a location are required to promote biodiversity of species and support pollinators and other wildlife. Additionally, only certain pollinators will fertilize certain species, so location-specific (native) pollinators are needed to continue certain plant species.
- Plant at least three native trees in a cluster so that they will support each other through storms, much as we humans support each other through the storms of life. It has been determined that trees and other plants form below-ground connections that help promote the health of the group and strengthen each other against strong winds. Additionally, trees provide shade in hot weather, cool the air with their transpiration, slow down the rain hitting the ground during downpours, facilitate water absorption versus runoff and flooding, clean the air by absorbing carbon dioxide, and release oxygen that wildlife and humans require to live.
- Remove non-native invasive species because they will often out-compete the native species, causing a decrease in biodiversity for the area and using more water than do native species.
- Replace at least 50% of the lawn, over time, with native plant species. Lawns promote water runoff rather than absorption, are often a place where chemical fertilizers and pesticides are used that runoff into and pollute nearby water sources, need to be mowed and trimmed using fossil fuel powered machinery, and do absolutely nothing to



support pollinators, insects, birds, other wildlife, or healthy soil, water, and air.

- Discontinue the use of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, and other biocides to promote soil health and fertility.
- Include edible native species in these plantings to make the landscape supportive of humans as well as wildlife while they clean and cool the air and slow the rain. Food forests or forest gardens are one version of this, where they more closely mimic the ecosystems and patterns already found in Creation.
- Work with an agricultural extension agency to create a teaching garden or farm if the church has sufficient acreage. Restoring the land by using regenerative agricultural techniques provides education and a witness to congregation and community.
- Plant a rain garden in areas where water runoff from hard surfaces flows into storm drains or nearby creeks and rivers. A rain garden will serve to absorb some of the runoff, slow down the flow, and even clean the water before it hits the storm drain or closest stream.
- Convert to renewable energy sources some, or all, of the facility's energy needs and let the sun, wind, and water provided by the Creator supply the power. Often the change will be financially beneficial, as well.
- Curtail the destruction of existing forests, wetlands, peatlands, and grasslands by identifying and supporting projects and organizations that will. These areas, which are vital for absorbing the carbon dioxide causing climate change, are also essential for halting the destruction and fragmentation of habitat that is needed to maintain the biodiversity of the species on earth.
- Restore wildfire-damaged and degraded forests, wetlands, peatlands, and grasslands by identifying and supporting projects and organizations that will. Restoration will increase carbon absorption and habitat needed for improved biodiversity.
- Avoid purchases that contribute to

deforestation. Commit to purchasing lumber, food, building materials, and paper products that are sustainably sourced and produced, or reduce the use of paper products, for example, by forgoing the use of disposable plates and cups for church events.

Green Team Formation

Submitted by Crys Zinkiewicz

THEOLOGICAL IMPERATIVE

Whereas,

Scripture proclaims God created all—from Earth's hospitable atmosphere, mighty seas, abundant forests and other plants to nutrient-rich soil, from majestic whales to the tiniest microbes and all sentient and non-sentient beings in between; Scripture also proclaims God called humans to be caretakers of creation (Genesis 1–2). Jesus declared the Greatest Commandments are to love God and to love neighbor, especially the most vulnerable (Luke 10:25–37). Persons living in poverty, persons of color, and indigenous people in this country and throughout the world are harmed first and most by the degradation of creation, and these same groups have the fewest resources to recover from that harm. Care for creation is clearly a matter of justice. Creation, including all people, is already or will be affected by the current and coming level of danger from climate change and its consequences that intersect with multiple expressions of injustice. It follows that loving God, the Creator, means loving God's Creation and that loving neighbors in distress requires stopping harm and righting wrongs, in other words, working for justice.

Tradition for United Methodists includes John Wesley's Three Simple Rules for living faithfully: First, do no harm; second, do all the good you can; and third, stay in love with God. Our proposed 2020 Social Principles begin with "The Community of All Creation,"

outlining the care and justice work that is needed in the midst of the crises upon crises that are adversely affecting God's creation and our neighbors. The 2009 Pastoral Letter of the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church, *God's Renewed Creation: Call to Hope and Action*, pledges leadership in addressing the work of renewal. The 2016 Book of Discipline (Paragraph 254) includes an Earth Advocacy ministry group as a way "to fulfill the mission of the local church." It follows that the church provides both a mandate and guidance for doing what is needed.

Reason is a God-given gift. Our reasoning capabilities are informed by modern scientific research and practices. The scientific community has given clear warning that creation is under tremendous strain due to the polluting of air, water, and land; habitat destruction; the unsustainable consumption of earth's finite resources; and the rapidly accelerating extinction of species. Scientists have sounded the alarm of catastrophic harm to creation if global warming and associated climate change are not halted and reversed. They point to how rising temperatures have already intensified wildfires, hurricanes, drought, and sea-level rise throughout the world with devastating impacts. Our reasoning capabilities are also informed by the examples of indigenous peoples whose traditional wisdom and practices honor living in harmony with nature. It follows that, globally, humans have the capacity for understanding the damage and danger and for stopping or mitigating the effects. Individuals and congregations have access to trustworthy knowledge and the reasoning ability to discern what is needed and how to carry out plans in their local situations.

Experience is honored by United Methodists as a way of recognizing lifetime gains of knowledge, understanding, perspectives, and practices of individuals, which they all bring to the work before them. Functioning as a team, they become stronger in their efforts (Ecclesiastes 4:12). Experience is also honored as the varied ways in

which humans encounter God. For many people that meeting is through God's gift of the natural world. It follows that a group of people who care about creation and justice, working together can use their wisdom and passion to create faithful and meaningful experiences that help others love God and neighbor.

BE IT RESOLVED:

That every local church, charge, cluster, or district is urged to create a "green team" or strengthen an existing one for action in four areas each year—Worship, Education, Practice, and Advocacy—providing children, youth, and adults of all ages with inspiration, knowledge, encouragement, and practical means for caring for creation and justice. These actions include:

One or more occasions of worship, celebrating God's grace, glory, and beauty in creation and connecting creation care and justice to the scriptural call to love God and neighbor. (For example, observing Earth Day (April 22); creating an outdoor worship service; integrating creation care and justice in sermons and liturgy.)

One or more educational opportunities, held within and for the congregation and/or community, related to some aspect of creation care and justice. (For example, facilitating nature experience events for various age groups and groupings, including walks in the woods, wildflower walks, "I spy" challenges, trip to a beach or waterway, a zoo, and so on to help people love and learn to protect creation; leading a Bible study and programs on creation care and justice; arranging for speakers with environmental expertise, especially about local issues.)

One or more positive changes in the practices of the church's life and/or to the church building or grounds. (For example, stopping the use of Styrofoam and plastic plates and cups for meals; adding native



trees to church property; placing recycling bins where needed and visible; reducing energy consumption.)

One or more actions that advocate for change in systems that perpetuate injustice and harm to creation and communities either locally, regionally, nationally, or globally. (For example, researching an issue, identifying the change-makers, and communicating with them; informing the congregation on local issues related to creation justice and encouraging them to communicate their values to the appropriate decisionmakers.)

That creation care and justice will be lifted up in all areas of ministry and mission, including preaching, liturgy, communications, education, outreach, and advocacy so that the church will become an increasingly effective witness of loving God and neighbor.

That these actions are to be communicated as an idea exchange and inspiration throughout the connection. They can be reported at charge conference and should be celebrated locally, in the conference, and beyond.

That the annual conference will assist churches with resources and mentors, as needed, particularly—but not exclusively—through the conference’s Creation Care/Justice Team.

Other Ministry Group Coordinators

Submitted by Crys Zinkiewicz
Submitter Organization United Methodist
Creation Justice Movement

¶ 254. Other Ministry Group Coordinators—In order to fulfill the mission of the local church, the charge conference may elect annually a coordinator or ministry group chairperson for any or all of these areas: Christian unity and interreligious relationships, church and society, community

volunteers, education, evangelism, higher education and campus ministry, missions, prayer advocacy, religion and race, status and role of women, **earth advocacy/green teams**, stewardship, worship, advocacy for persons with special needs, and church media resources. Every local United Methodist church may have a campus ministry coordinator, who may have membership on the church council. A primary responsibility of the campus ministry coordinator shall be to report the names and contact information (i.e., addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses) of all college students from their local church each semester to the appropriate United Methodist campus ministry, such as the Wesley Foundation. The campus ministry coordinator shall be encouraged to contact every college student from their church each semester by letter, e-mail, or phone and encourage the student’s active participation in United Methodist student ministry. The campus ministry coordinator in every church shall also promote financial and other support of United Methodist campus ministries, such as the Wesley Foundations, within their local church.

Sustainable Practices for Annual Conference Sessions

Submitted by Nancy Blade

Amend ¶603 Annual Conference Organization by addition

4. The annual conference sessions shall be held in places that are accessible to people with disabilities and that, **when possible, have sustainable practices for energy, waste, and consumption.**

Use of Plastic

Submitted by Harald Rueckert

The whole earth is God’s good creation and has as such an inherent value. We are aware that the current utilization of energy resourc-

es threatens this creation fundamentally. As members of The United Methodist Church we are committed to caring for creation and, especially, to responsible handling of its resources.

In its call to action “God’s Renewed Creation”, the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church calls for the practice of environmental holiness to conserve natural resources including the use of only renewable resources in every gathering and every ministry of our congregations and church. An important expression of this is to reduce the amount of plastic we use during our church’s meetings.

This issue has a global impact, not only because of the pervasive presence of microplastic, including in our oceans and in our food. Plastic production and disposal also cause the emission of greenhouse gases. In 2019, the volume of such emissions to mid-year alone was 850 million tons. Across the globe, church and unchurched people are reducing their use of plastic because of its impact on the climate. Resolution 1031 (“Resolution on Global Warming,” The Book of Resolutions, 2012) resolves “that (church-)members should make an effort to learn about human production and release of greenhouse gases and evaluate their own lifestyles to identify areas where reductions in production and release of greenhouse gases can be made. [...] [and] that members should also work to make their own congregations more aware of the issue of global warming and create policies and practices, which reduce greenhouse gas emissions from congregational infrastructure.” This includes not only church buildings, parsonages and vehicles but also single use dishes, plastic bags, wrapping material. Building on the experience of communities worldwide and of annual and central conferences (e.g., Germany) who have started the journey toward comprehensive mandatory concepts reducing the use of plastic in daily life and especially at church events, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church resolves

1. that for all church activities of local, annual, central, jurisdictional, and General Conference bodies, a twofold strategy of avoiding (avoiding plastic where possible, replacing single-use plastic items such as dishes, coffee cups, or bags with items made of recyclable, preferably naturally occurring material) and reducing (e.g., using dishes that can be washed and reused) is to be pursued;

2. that all delegates commit to personal action of the same kind, modeling a change in behavior for the sake of environmental protection.

Jesus, Lord of all Creation

Charles Wesley

Jesus, Lord of all creation,
Pure, unbounded love thou art ;
Visit us with thy salvation,
Enter every waiting heart,
Breathe, O breathe thy Holy Spirit
Into every troubled breast ;
Let us all thy grace inherit,
Let us find the promised rest.

Finish, now, thy new creation ;
From our sins O set us free :
May we find thy great salvation
Come, with healing power, from thee.
Lord, we would on earth adore thee,
Till in heaven we take our place ;
Till we cast our crowns before thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.

umcreationjustice.org

