



**Mennonite
World Conference**
A Community of Anabaptist
related Churches

**Congreso
Mundial Menonita**
Una Comunidad de
Iglesias Anabautistas

**Conférence
Mennonite Mondiale**
Une Communauté
d'Eglises Anabaptistes



Teaching Resource

Date Approved: Pending approval of the General Council
Approved By: MWC Executive Committee (December 2024)

God so loved the cosmos...

The environmental crisis and our mandate to care for creation

A word of encouragement from the MWC Faith & Life Commission and the Creation Care Task Force.

“Creation care” is taking on ever-increasing urgency.

The news reminds us daily of alarming changes in our climate. As the Creation Care Task Force’s survey shows, our sisters and brothers in our global family of faith suffer drought, floods, destructive storms, fire, famine and the devastation brought by war. Diverse species are endangered or even going extinct.

We are witnessing terrible violence against God’s beloved creation. And we are increasingly aware of how much we share in the harm, both as sinners and as sinned-against.

How do we respond?

Our answers will surely vary depending on where we live, on our resources, the depth of our faith, our theology and on our willingness to respond to the call of the moment. However, respond we must, whether we live in the Global North, which bears a disproportionate share of responsibility for the crisis, or in the Global South, which bears a disproportionate share of its impact.

We live in a world that has borne the effects of human sinfulness since Eden. It has broken our relationship with God, with each other, and with creation in all its diversity. But we also live in a world in which the gracious and liberating Spirit of God is bringing about “new creation” in and through Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

What is that Spirit saying to us at this time?

The Shared Convictions and Creation Care

One way the Spirit speaks to us is by reminding us of our MWC Shared Convictions. With all our many differences, they remind us that we already share a basis for us to respond as a family of faith to the environmental crisis.

Here are some implications of the convictions we share:

Shared Conviction #1: God is known to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Creator who seeks to restore fallen humanity by calling a people to be faithful in fellowship, worship, service and witness.

In a biblical understanding, God’s restorative action in Conviction #1 encompasses “all things in heaven and on earth” (Ephesians 1:10). God desires to restore not only “fallen humanity,” but also ecosystems that are suffering from the effects of our fallenness.

Indeed, God desires to save us from our callous and violent abuse of God’s beloved creation, so we can join God in truly caring for creation in distress. We will not be saved *by* our work as stewards of

creation; but we are “saved by grace” for the good work that includes care of creation (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Shared Conviction #2: Jesus is the Son of God. Through his life and teachings, his cross and resurrection, he showed us how to be faithful disciples, redeemed the world, and offers eternal life.

When Conviction #2 speaks of Jesus Christ “redeeming the world,” it is a “world” that includes all of creation. It is because God loves the cosmos (John 3:16) that God is in Christ “gathering up all things” in heaven *and on earth* (Ephesians 1:10). It is this cosmos-loving Jesus who teaches us how to be cosmos-loving disciples.

Shared Conviction #3: As a church, we are a community of those whom God’s Spirit calls to turn from sin, acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, receive baptism upon confession of faith, and follow Christ in life.

We hear the Spirit calling us to respond to the suffering of creation by repenting, by turning from greed and selfish ambition. To acknowledge the lordship of Christ is a rock-solid basis for our missionary calling to care for creation.

Because Christ is Lord, the entire cosmos is the field of God’s mission to reclaim, redeem and recreate. To follow Christ in life is to join in on that mission, living simply, reducing the impact of our consumerism on our environment, advocating for those most vulnerable, and responding practically to their suffering.

Shared Conviction #4: As a faith community, we accept the Bible as our authority for faith and life, interpreting it together under Holy Spirit guidance, in the light of Jesus Christ to discern God’s will for our obedience.

The Jesus Christ we meet in the Bible is the one through whom all things are created – *everything*, not just people (John 1:3 and Colossians 1:16). He is indeed the “light of the cosmos” (John 9:12). That profound mystery must shape our discipleship (John 3:21).

Shared Conviction #5: The Spirit of Jesus empowers us to trust God in all areas of life so we become peacemakers who renounce violence, love our enemies, seek justice, and share our possessions with those in need.

We recognize that violence is an implicit part of the exploitation of natural resources, where the powerful lay claim to land and resources, seeking to silence voices raised in opposition. Those who protect and defend the environment are being persecuted and killed in unprecedented numbers all around the world.

Care for creation in our day calls for us as the body of Christ to call out injustice and violence in solidarity with the vulnerable. Creation care and seeking justice are inseparable.

Shared Conviction #7: As a worldwide community of faith and life we transcend boundaries of nationality, race, class, gender and language. We seek to live in the world without conforming to the powers of evil, witnessing to God’s grace by serving others, caring for creation, and inviting all people to know Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

In this conviction we together clearly state that creation care is at the very heart of the church’s mission to “witness to God’s grace.” Moreover, as a “worldwide community of faith and life,” transcending boundaries of geography, politics, and economic resources, we are presented with countless opportunities to collaborate in responding to the critical need for creation care.

We give thanks for the collaboration already taking place.

The MWC Tagline and Creation Care

Not surprisingly, the MWC tagline “*Following Jesus, Living Out Unity, Building Peace*” echoes the *Shared Convictions*. The Spirit can use it to aid us in our environmental faithfulness.

Following Jesus

The tagline gives first place to “following Jesus.” The Jesus we have pledged to follow is not only the healer and teacher of the Gospels, but also the Christ who creates and holds all creation together in his transforming and re-creating embrace (Colossians 1:17). We cannot follow Jesus without sharing in the Creator’s redeeming love for this world—all of it! We cannot follow him without loving care, simplicity, and generosity.

Living out Unity

The second item is “living out unity.” The heart of Jesus’ prayer for us as his followers in John 17 is that we may be one. With whom are we to be one? With whom are we to live out unity?

Jesus’ **first** concern is that we be one with him as he is one with his (and our!) Father (John 17:21-23). Unity with God means that we share in the love of the Creator for the whole cosmos* (John 3:16, 17). We too are to be the “light of the cosmos,” as Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:14, John 3:21).

As the body of that creating and redeeming Christ we are to participate as caretakers, custodians, and guardians of creation. Just as the sabbath was God’s great act of creation care (Leviticus 25), we honour the sabbath when we allow creation to rest from our ceaseless and careless exploitation of earth’s bounty.

Second, we are to be one with each other, sparing no effort to maintain the unity the Spirit creates (Ephesians 2:18; 4:3). We live out this unity in active solidarity with those in the body of Christ who are suffering the effects of the environmental crisis (1 Corinthians 12:26). This solidarity extends to all of humanity, and will be tested more and more as the impact on vulnerable populations increases.

We live this unity out also by praying for each other to have the courage to stop harming creation, and thereby each other. We have much to confess, much to forgive and much to change as we walk in unity as the body of Christ.

Third, God’s “gathering up all things in heaven and on earth in Christ” (Eph 1:10) reminds us of our deep unity with the whole of creation, a unity of all things in Christ. We rejoice in creation’s beauty and its bounty. But we also share in God’s grief when creation suffers, especially when it is at our hands.

So we confess and repent of our refusal to listen to the suffering of creation and our failure to live up to Jesus’ mandate to us as disciples, namely, to proclaim the gospel of salvation to all creation (Mark 16:15).

Fourth, we are not only in unity with God, but God is in unity with us. We are not alone. The Spirit, the breath of life the Creator lends to all creation, indwells us, guiding, sustaining, and empowering us in our resolve to be faithful (Romans 8:9-27, 1 Corinthians 12, Galatians 5:22-25, Ephesians 4:4, Phil 2:12, 13). We dare not quench or grieve this Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19) by neglecting to join in the Creator’s love and care for our earthly home.

Building Peace

The third element in the tagline is “building peace.” The Hebrew word for peace is *shalom*, which above all means “wholeness” and “well-being.” *Shalom* best characterizes that first sabbath when God looked upon creation in all its material reality and called it “very good” (Genesis 1:25; 2:2-3).

To commit ourselves to “building peace” is to do all we can to turn from our ruinous ways and to engage as co-creators with God in the “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:16-21, Colossians 1:20), including care for creation in all its diversity. Building peace is working at restoring creation to wholeness, where peace and justice will once again embrace and kiss each other (Psalm 85:10).

The Ground of Our Hope

We struggle with troubling questions: Is there hope for this world? Can we really make a difference with our limited knowledge, energy, and resources? Or will this world pass away soon, regardless of our efforts? What should we hope for?

The *Shared Convictions* conclude with these words:

“We seek to walk in [Jesus’] name by the power of the Holy Spirit, as we confidently await Christ’s return and the final fulfillment of God’s kingdom.”

“Confident waiting” is one way to speak of hope. This hope in God’s future must, however, never be an escape from our responsibility here and now. Hope propels us to act now, where we are. Such hope is not optimism, nor does it rest on our resilience or inventiveness. It rests fully on God’s faithfulness.

The love that the Creator pours into our hearts through the Spirit (Romans 5:1-5) empowers us to act with hope as the body of the Christ who gave his life to save this cosmos. We work with hope even as we wait in faith. All creation is groaning in eager anticipation of us putting our hope-filled faith into practice (Romans 8:22; Hebrews 11:1; 12:12-15).

Today we might thus restate the concluding sentence of the *Shared Convictions* as follows: “We seek to walk by the power of the life-giving Spirit in the name of Jesus Christ through whom all things are created, redeemed and sustained, as we eagerly and *actively* await the *shalom* that the final fulfillment of God’s kingdom will bring.”

Let us ask the Spirit for clarity and vision to help us respond faithfully to the challenge of our day.

Let us pledge to practice loving care and patience with each other as we walk this challenging path together.

Let us prayerfully support the Creation Care Task Force and all the many efforts to respond to the crisis we face together.

That is our prayer for the MWC family of faith.

The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it. Psalm 24:1

Along with the members of the Faith & Life Commission and the Creation Care Task Force:

Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld is chair of the Faith and Life Commission (at time of writing). He is professor emeritus of Religious Studies & Theological Studies at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, and a member of First Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ontario, Canada.

Anicka Fast is secretary of the Faith & Life Commission (at time of writing). She is a specialist in church history and missiology for Mennonite Mission Network and a visiting researcher with Boston University School of Theology. Anicka Fast is a member of Doopsgezind Gemeente Bussum-Naarden, Netherlands.

Doug Graber Neufeld is chair of the Creation Care Task Force (at time of writing). He is professor of biology at Eastern Mennonite University and a member of Community Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Virginia, USA.