

MCC WASHINGTON OFFICE GUIDE TO THE Environment



The Earth is the Lord's

"For 50 weeks a year, we engage in activities that damage the environment, only to go on a two-week vacation to enjoy it."

This line, taken from an Earth Day mailing to churches several years ago by the National Council of Churches of Christ, captures well the spirit of many North Americans when it comes to the environment. We all want unpolluted water to drink, forests to hike in, and clean air to breathe. But our lifestyles and policy choices do not always reflect this.

The facts are staggering. Twenty percent of the world's population uses 80 percent of the world's resources. The United States produces a quarter of the world's carbon dioxide emissions, despite making up only 4 percent of the world's population. Global energy use has increased nearly 70 percent since 1971. Use of paper products has tripled over the past three decades. Nearly 60 percent of coral reefs are at risk due to human activities. The earth's temperature could rise by as much as 10 degrees Fahrenheit over the next century.¹

These impacts are most severe on persons of color and the poor. In the United States, landfills and hazardous waste sites are frequently located in communities of color or low-income areas. Native reservations are a favorite dumping ground for nuclear waste. Worldwide, poor countries are most at risk from global warming, and least able to respond to it. One report concluded that up to 100 million people in coastal parts of Asia will suffer from the effects of global warming, if trends continue unabated for the next 80 years.

This incredible degradation of our environment is a result of personal lifestyle choices and policy decisions. Tax credits for renewable energies, investments in mass transit, supports for sustain-

able agriculture, protections for clean air and water, and vehicle emission regulations are all positive examples of policies that can help promote stewardship of the environment rather than short-sighted exploitation. These all could be expanded and strengthened greatly.

"O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! . . . When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?"

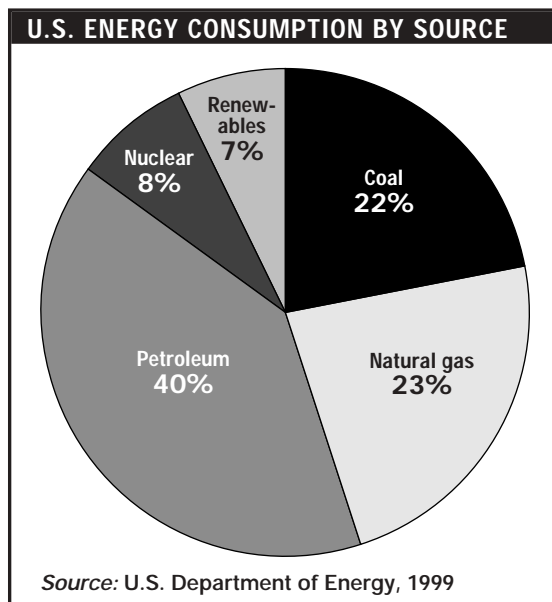
PSALM 8:1, 3-4

Nearly 150 years ago, Chief Seattle is reported to have asked, "how can you buy or sell the sky, the warmth of the land?" Native Americans have long believed that the land does not belong to us. The psalmist echoes this belief: "The earth is the Lord's, and all that is in it" (Psalm 24:1). In Leviticus, we read that the Lord told Moses, "The land is mine . . . you are but aliens and tenants" (25:23).

The land, sky and seas are not ours, to do with as we please. They belong to our Creator. We must be willing to share the world's resources, and not selfishly hoard them ourselves. We must live lightly and sustainably upon the earth. When we do so, there will indeed be abundance for all. ■

1. Sources include World Resources Institute and the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) U.S. Washington Office is a Mennonite and Brethren in Christ presence on Capitol Hill that gives and encourages prophetic witness to the way of Christ on matters of public policy. For additional resources contact the MCC Washington Office at the address on the back page. Compiled by Rachelle Schlabach, May 2001.



Stewards of God's Creation

A biblical reflection

As you read this, look out a nearby window at a patch of blue sky. Or fill a glass with water. Touch the fibers of your clothing, or the paper on which this is printed. All of these things—whether in their pure or processed form—are part of God's incredibly rich gift to us. In the most basic ways we depend on God's creation. We could not live without the food that we get from the soil, rain and sunshine, without fresh water to drink or without air to breathe. Our lives are intertwined with the environment around us.

"The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world."

PSALM 19:1-4

Creation can also inspire and inform our faith. Beside a flowing stream, encountering a tiny flower on the rocky face of a mountain, or hearing a thunderclap, we are reminded of the beauty and power of our Creator God. As God reminded Job, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?" (Job 38:4-7).

In Genesis, we read that God created the heavens and the earth and called them good (Genesis 1). God then entrusted humans with the task of stewarding this environment (Genesis 2:15). Too often we have interpreted our role more as dominating extractors of resources than as loving caretakers of the garden. We have lost sight of the fact that the earth belongs to God (Psalm 24:1).

As Christians, we must repent of our own part in this and make changes that reflect respect for God's creation. That includes individual decisions to recycle, consume less, and buy locally when possible. But it also includes advocating for policies that promote conservation, energy efficiency and renewable energies.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

GENESIS 1:1

The Bible provides us with a vision of a restored creation that can guide us in our efforts. The creation comes full circle from Genesis to Revelation. John writes, "The angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. . . . On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations" (Revelation 22:1-2). There will be a new heaven and a new earth (21:1), an unblemished creation in the final day. But until that time there is much work to do. God has entrusted us with a task. It is our duty to fulfill it. ■

10 SCRIPTURAL THEMES FOR ECOLOGICAL LIVING

1. God's wonderful creation is good (Genesis 1:31).
2. God instructed humankind to tend creation (Genesis 2:15).
3. The land is God's (Leviticus 25:23-24).
4. Humankind has been charged with the opportunity and responsibility of being earthkeepers (Psalm 8:6-8).
5. God owns the earth (Psalm 24:1).
6. God is concerned about and cares for the creation (Psalm 104).
7. God's creation, now disturbed by human sin, will one day be restored (Romans 8:21).
8. Jesus has participated in the creation from the beginning and will be involved in its restoration (Colossians 1:15-16).
9. Since Jesus was with God in creating the world, he is concerned about its proper care (John 1:2-3).
10. All things in creation will be renewed (Revelation 21:5).

—From *Christianity and the Environment: A Collection of Writings*, MCC Occasional Paper by Art Meyer, 1991

Faith that reflects, faith that acts

For further reflection

- What is God's message to Christians regarding care for creation? How should Christians respond?
- How do you interact with the natural world—e.g., farming, hiking, gardening? How can we carry out these activities in ways that sustain the earth for future generations?
- How do your lifestyle choices—foods you eat, products you buy, modes of transportation, etc.—affect the earth? What are some changes you could make to lessen the impact?

Action steps

- **Explore** your natural environment. Learn more about the types of native plants and animals that thrive in your region. Trace your food back to its source. Study the effects of development or pollution in your area. How could these effects be changed?
- **Conserve.** Look for appliances with the Energy Star label on them, which indicates high energy efficiency. Encourage your congregation to become an Energy Star Congregation, part of a joint initiative between the National Council of Churches of Christ and the Environmental Protection Agency to make church buildings more energy efficient. Contact the NCC Energy Star Program for more information at 1-800-288-1346.
- **Consume less.** Figure out what your 'ecological footprint' on the earth is, and resolve to make changes to have less of an impact. Excellent resources include the 28-day devotional *Trek: Venture into a World of Enough*, available from MCC at 1-800-563-4676, the book

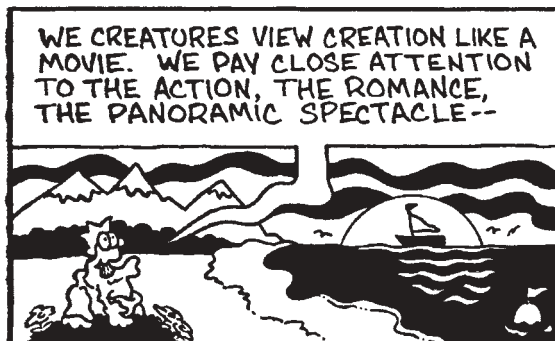
BIBLICAL TEXTS FOR STUDY

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|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| • Genesis 1-2 | • Matthew 6:28-30 |
| • Leviticus 25:18-24 | • John 1:1-5 |
| • Job 9, 26, 37-39 | • Romans 8:18-25 |
| • Psalms 8, 19, 24, 65, 96, 104 | • Colossians 1:15-23 |
| • Isaiah 41:17-20, 55:8-13 | • Revelation 21:1-7, 22:1-6 |

Simpler Living, Compassionate Life: A Christian Perspective, available from Earth Ministry (see back page), and the organization Alternatives for Simple Living at 1-800-821-6153 or www.simpleliving.org. Also, consider the impact of your daily food choices with the *More-with-Less Cookbook*, available from Herald Press at 1-800-245-7894.

- **Choose** the environmental issue that is your greatest passion. Get involved with organizations working on the issue, either locally or nationally. Write letters to your elected officials, organize community events to raise awareness, hold prayer vigils, write letters to the editor.
- **Organize** a worship service that celebrates our Creator God. Include a time for confession of our exploitation of the environment, and empowerment to make alternative choices.
- **Learn more about environmental justice**—the disproportionate impact of environmental choices on poor persons and persons of color. Challenge corporations or government agencies that promote such practices. ■

Pontius' Puddle



Resources on the Environment

Mennonite Central Committee U.S.

Washington Office

110 Maryland Avenue, NE #502
Washington, DC 20002
Phone: 202-544-6564; *Fax:* 202-544-2820
Email: mccwash@mcc.org; *Web:* www.mcc.org

Monitors U.S. public policy for its impact on MCC's domestic and international relief, development and peacemaking work.

Mennonite Environmental Task Force

Co-chair David Neufeld
Phone: 416-314-7049
Email: neufelda@ene.gov.on.ca
Co-chair Melvin Schmidt
Phone: 301-927-7327
Email: melschmidt@msn.com

Mandate is to promote awareness among Mennonite constituents and church organizations of how our Christian commitment necessarily encompasses a concern for God's creation.

Food, Faith and Farming Initiative

504 Main St., P.O. Box 490
Bally, PA 19503
Phone: 610-845-2436
Email: gbowman@fast.net

Works at creating a more sustainable food system from an Anabaptist perspective.

Filipino/American Coalition for Environmental Solutions (FACES)

c/o MCC Washington Office
110 Maryland Ave., NE #502
Washington, DC 20002
Phone: 202-544-6564; *Email:* faces@mcc.org
Web: www.facessolutions.org

Advocates for the cleanup of the former U.S. military bases in the Philippines.

National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture

P.O. Box 396
Pine Bush, NY 12566
Phone: 845-744-8448; *Fax:* 845-744-8477
Email: campaign@sustainableagriculture.net
Web: www.sustainableagriculture.net

Produces monthly newsletter and operates an email listserve.

Union of Concerned Scientists

2 Brattle Square
Cambridge, MA 02238
Phone: 617-547-5552; *Fax:* 617-864-9405
Email: ucs@ucsusa.org; *Web:* www.ucsusa.org

Independent nonprofit alliance of 50,000 concerned citizens and scientists across the country.

Eco-justice Working Group

National Council of Churches
475 Riverside Drive, #812
New York, NY 10115
Phone: 212-870-2385/2386; *Fax:* 212-870-2265
Email: ecojustice@nccusa.org
Web: www.webofcreation.org/ncc/Workgrp.html

Worship resources, information on racial environmental justice, energy stewardship programs and more. Coordinates interfaith state-by-state global climate change campaigns.

Earth Ministry

1305 NE 47th St
Seattle, WA 98105-4498
Phone: 206-632-2426; *Fax:* 206-632-2082
Email: Eoffice@earthministry.org
Web: www.earthministry.org

Produces quarterly "mini-journal" on Christian environmental spirituality, resources for churches, books, videos.

Children's Environmental Health Network

110 Maryland Avenue NE, Suite 511
Washington, DC 20002
Phone: (202) 543-4033; *Fax:* (202) 543-8797
Email: cehn@cehn.org; *Web:* www.cehn.org

Brings together groups working to ensure environmental protection for children.

Evangelical Environmental Network

10 E. Lancaster Avenue
Wynnewood, PA
19096-3495
Phone: 610-645-9392
Email: een@esa-online.org
Web: www.esa-online.org/een/

Initiated by World Vision and Evangelicals for Social Action as part of a growing movement to respond faithfully to the biblical mandate for caring stewardship of God's creation.

There are many other organizations working on environmental issues.

To find out more about specific areas (e.g., clean water, mining or conservation), contact the MCC Washington Office at the above address.