

COMMUNITY OF ALL CREATION

PREFACE

The great lesson that our blessed Lord inculcates here...is that God is in all things, and that we are to see the Creator in the glass of every creature; that we should use and look upon nothing as separate from God...who pervades and actuates the whole created frame, and is, in a true sense, the soul of the universe.²

We affirm that all creation belongs to God and is a manifestation of God's goodness and providential care. Human beings, nonhuman animals, plants, and other sentient and non sentient beings participate in the community of creation, and their flourishing depends on the care of all God's creation. Rather than treating creation as if it were placed here solely for humanity's use and consumption, we are called to practice responsible stewardship and to live in right relationship with the Creator and with the whole of God's creation (Gen. 1:26–31; Matt. 6:26–30; Rom. 8:22–24). We are also called to honor the role of every part of creation in healing the whole; thus we praise God with the whole of creation (Ps. 148) and recognize that we are part of complex ecosystems, all valued by God.

We affirm our sacred calling to be responsible stewards and to lovingly tend all that God has wrought. We recognize the inherent worth of God's creation, celebrate earth's abundance and diversity, and, along with the entirety of the cosmos, give praise to its Creator. We recognize we are interconnected members of complex ecosystems, intricate webs of life, all of which have their origins in God's gracious act of creation.

CREATION IN PERIL

We acknowledge that unsustainable human activities have placed the entirety of God's creation in peril. Further, we confess that the degradation and wholesale destruction of the natural environment threatens unprecedented harm, bringing danger to human and nonhuman life alike.

A. Destruction of Ecosystems

Whether human beings are conscious of it or not, we are participants in and beneficiaries of complex natural ecosystems made up of myriads of symbiotic relationships between living organisms such as animals, plants, insects and microorganisms, and the physical environments they inhabit, including air, water and soil.

Overconsumption, shortsighted policies, poor management of natural resources, and other unsustainable practices have severely impacted the fragile, natural ecosystems on which all of life depends. Too often, humankind has treated the rest of the created world as if it were disposable and allowed the destruction of other living organisms and their natural habitats to go unchecked. Further, the experiences and voices of people most at risk have largely been ignored.

B. Global Warming and Climate Change

Global warming and climate change are already creating extreme conditions that threaten the entirety of life on earth. Over industrialization, widespread deforestation, and

²John Wesley, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount."

overreliance on fossil fuels are but some of the human activities that have contributed to the buildup of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide in the earth's atmosphere.

A sharp upsurge in greenhouse gases over past decades already has resulted in a steady rise in sea levels, growing acidification of the world's oceans, increased droughts and famines, and the intensification of extreme weather events. Climate scientists warn that the window of opportunity for reversing the negative effects of global warming and climate change is rapidly closing. Without concerted action by individuals, churches, communities, shareholders, businesses, governments, and international organizations, the negative effects will become irreversible.

C. Dependence on Fossil Fuels

The burning of fossil fuels, including coal, oil and, to a lesser extent, natural gas, is the greatest single contributor to the buildup of greenhouse gases and the consequent warming of earth's atmosphere. To reverse the current trajectory of global climate change, increased investments are needed in the research, development, and distribution of alternatives to fossil fuels, including, but not limited to, solar, wind, geothermal and hydrogen-based energy sources.

In pursuing alternatives to fossil fuels, it is critical to avoid solutions that would worsen current problems or create new, unforeseen environmental challenges. Reliance on nuclear energy, for example, raises considerable concerns regarding the safe storage and containment of radioactive waste.

Similarly, recent proposals to reduce the buildup of greenhouse gases by geo-engineering earth's biospheres, including its land, air and water, risk unpredictable side effects and the further destabilization of the natural ecosystems on which all life depends.

Inevitably, transitioning from an overreliance on fossil fuels will have adverse impacts on individuals and communities whose livelihoods are still heavily dependent on the production, sale and distribution of these commodities. To the greatest extent possible, plans for developing and deploying alternative sources of energy should minimize negative financial impacts by investing in strategies that support people in successfully transitioning to new employment, strengthen the social safety net to deal with the loss of jobs and income, and provide ample educational and retraining opportunities.

STEWARDSHIP OF CREATION

In Genesis 1, we read that God declares creation good (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 25, 31), and we read in Genesis 2 that God "took the human and settled him in the garden of Eden to farm it and to take care of it" (Gen. 2:15). The goodness of God's creation, and the value given to every part of it, call people to respect, protect, and care for the creation and all interrelated aspects of it.

A. Environmental Racism

We confess that the negative impacts resulting from the degradation of the natural world have fallen disproportionately on marginalized communities, including indigenous tribes, religious and ethnic communities, people living in poverty, and other vulnerable groups. We, therefore, pledge to resist all forms of environmental exploitation, neglect and inequality. These practices condemn impoverished communities and developing countries to

bear the brunt of hazardous environments, industrial pollution, toxic waste dumps and urban decay. Such behaviors constitute environmental racism. We oppose policies and practices that relegate marginalized communities to a permanent underclass status and ignore indigenous and other sources of communal wisdom, which call for air, land, and water to be treated with profound respect.

Additionally, these groups suffer disproportionately from higher rates of asthma, cancer, birth defects and other preventable medical conditions. These health problems are associated with pollutants and other chemicals in soil, water and air that affect our drinking water, foods and physical environment. We urge governments, businesses, and civic institutions to give priority to increasing access to prevention and treatment services.

We call for the institution of environmentally just principles, policies and practices. We affirm the wisdom and agency of indigenous peoples and marginalized populations to determine for themselves practices and policies that best provide for their basic human needs, including food, water, shelter, and land free from toxic wastes. Self-determination entails, among other things, access to all pertinent information and significant decision-making power over industrial, agricultural, and other developments that have potential to wreak significant harm on land, air and water.

B. Sustainable Policies and Practices

Sustainability is crucial to the development of ecologically sound policies and practices that seek to restore balance to the natural world and end the disruptive relationships between humanity and the rest of God's creation.

Sustainable policies and practices aim to meet present human needs while ensuring that future generations have the resources they need to thrive. Sustainable policies and practices prioritize the protection of all forms of life and natural ecosystems, while supporting human beings to live in healthy balance with the earth.

We urge United Methodists to adopt sustainable habits and practices, including refraining from overconsumption, repurposing and recycling materials, avoiding products that pollute or otherwise harm the environment, and reducing the carbon footprints of individuals and families by reducing overall reliance on fossil fuels for heat, transportation and other goods.

Recognizing that simply changing our personal habits will not be enough to reverse decades of environmental damage, the church supports local, regional, national, and international cooperative efforts aimed at redressing the ecological harms humans have wreaked on a global scale. Such cooperative efforts must include the development and enforcement of policies and practices that protect all sentient beings, and the promotion of sustainable economic development. We also encourage responsible consumption and urgent action against global warming and climate change.

C. Food Justice

Food systems that are ecologically sustainable, locally oriented, and equitably distributed are urgent priorities. We endorse policies and practices designed to ensure access to healthy nourishment and clean drinking water, especially for communities that have been subjected to environmental degradation or deprived of adequate resources to produce or purchase their own food.

We also affirm food sovereignty, which promotes the rights of all people to healthy, culturally appropriate food, produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods.

We support local control of food production, which entails providing opportunities for local communities to participate meaningfully in decisions about the kinds of livestock to be raised and crops to be grown. We reject agricultural policies and practices that make food inaccessible to agricultural workers and the communities in which the food is produced. We advocate for strong protections of the land, food, and water rights of indigenous peoples.

We oppose the patenting of seed varieties and other organisms traditionally used in farming and agriculture. The rapidly expanding practice of patenting seed varieties and charging farmers for their use has reduced access to traditional crops and increased the indebtedness of subsistence and smaller-scale farms. Consequently, we support cooperative, open-source efforts aimed at making traditional seed varieties available to those who need them.

We also call for the creation of policies that reduce carbon-intensive agricultural methods, which increase climate change. Producers must be responsible for their adverse impact on food packaging, distribution and transport, and seek the safety and well-being of agricultural and food processing workers.

D. Caring for All Creatures

We support the respectful and humane treatment of animals, who are crucial participants in God's ongoing creation and of inherent worth. We embrace biblical teachings that envision a time when humans and other creatures shall live in peace and harmony in a restored creation (Isa. 11:6).

This commitment to respectful and humane treatment of animals means, for instance, putting in place protections to ensure that animals employed in agricultural and other forms of labor are free from cruel or abusive types of treatment and provided with ample rest and nourishment. Additionally, we oppose forcing animals to combat each other.

Animals raised for human consumption should be provided with healthy living conditions and sufficient food and water. Animals raised for human consumption must likewise be reared in humane conditions and slaughtered in a manner that minimizes their overall suffering and pain.

With respect to creatures living in the wild, we urge cooperative efforts by international bodies, governments, civic institutions, churches, and concerned individuals and groups to end poaching and protect endangered and vulnerable species and preserve dwindling habitats. We decry the mass extinctions currently underway and call for the adoption of sustainable policies and practices that allow both animal and human life to flourish.

E. Protecting Space

God's creation encompasses not only the earth but the entire cosmos, including space. Our charge to be responsible stewards thus extends well beyond humankind's immediate environs and encompasses not only our own solar system but also other galaxies. Hence, we reject the exploitation, commodification and militarization of space. We express our hope that the exploration and settlement of space, including the moon and other planetary bodies, take place peacefully and cooperatively, and in such fashion that the benefits and resources of any further exploration and development accrue to all humanity.

F. Affirming Science and Traditional Wisdom

We affirm the value of science and reason in providing deeper understandings of the origins and functioning of the cosmos. We also acknowledge that like all human

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endeavors, science can be misused and abused. We, therefore, urge all those involved in scientific investigations to adhere to the highest ethical standards in conducting research and applying their findings.

We also affirm the traditional wisdom found within indigenous communities, particularly the emphasis that native and first peoples have placed on living in harmony and balance with the earth and other animals as well as the need to protect the air, land and water.