

## 5. Creation Care

### Origin of the Study

In response to “Query: Continuing the Study of Our Christian Responsibility to Care for God’s Creation,” the 2016 Annual Conference authorized Standing Committee to appoint a Creation Care study committee “to work, in consultation with Brethren Benefit Trust and other relevant organizations, to develop ways to support and extend our knowledge of renewable energy production with our financial investments and involvement in community projects to reduce our contributions to greenhouse gas concentrations and reduce our dependence on fossil fuels.”

### **Query: Continuing the Study of Our Christian Responsibility to Care for God’s Creation**

**Whereas:** two statements issued by the General Board of the Church of the Brethren – “Resolution on Global Warming and Atmospheric Degradation” (1991) and “Resolution on Global Warming/Climate Change” (2001) – calling on staff to give priority to the issue of the earth’s climate and thereby provide models and educational resources for congregations, institutions, and members to study the issues and take responsible actions, have had only modest impact on our congregations, communities, states, and nation;

**Whereas:** we in the United States are among the nations with the greatest consumption of nonrenewable sources such as fossil fuels, and our own leadership is not responding with sufficient urgency to stem this inevitable crisis for the earth and its people;

**Whereas:** reductions to greenhouse gas concentrations from our dependence on fossil fuels can occur through socially responsible investments and community projects;

**Whereas:** there are renewable energy sources and energy efficient methods that do not produce greenhouse gas emissions such as carbon dioxide and methane which are contributing to the warming of the earth’s ecosystem;

**Whereas:** God who created the Earth along with the heavens called it good, and continues to love all of creation – (Genesis 1, Psalm 24, John 3:16-17, Jonah 3:8, 4:11 and others) – God commissioned us to be caretakers of all his earthly creation: plants, animals, seas, skies, and ecological systems, as well as all our neighbors (Genesis 2:15);

**Whereas:** to value God’s creation, the scriptures teach us we must be mindful of over-consumption, to seek justice for the weak and powerless, reflect God’s light to the world (Leviticus 25; the Book of Ruth; Luke 18:18ff; 12:13-31; Matthew 5-7; and others); and

**Whereas:** showing care for God’s gift of the earth and its inhabitants may well be a most effective way to bring the Gospel to our neighbors;

**Therefore:** We, the Polo (IL) Church of the Brethren gathered in Council on May 2, 2015, petition the Annual Conference through the Illinois/Wisconsin District Conference meeting at Peoria, IL, November 6-7, 2015: What can we, the Church of the Brethren through our denomination, districts, and related agencies, do to promote and model creation care? What ways can we support and extend our knowledge of renewable energy production with our financial investments and involvement in community projects to reduce our contributions to greenhouse gas concentrations, and reduce our dependence on fossil fuels?

Bill Hare  
Moderator

Evelyn Bowman  
Church Clerk

**Action of the Illinois/Wisconsin District Leadership Team:** At its August 1, 2015, meeting, the Leadership Team approved the “Query: Continuing the Study of Our Christian Responsibility to Care for God’s Creation” for consideration by the Annual Conference meeting in 2016 at Greensboro, North Carolina.

Amanda Rahn  
District Leadership Team Chair

Carol Novak  
Acting District Leadership Team Secretary

**Action of the Illinois/Wisconsin District Conference:** Approved by action of the Illinois/Wisconsin District Conference meeting at the First Church of the Brethren, Peoria, IL, on November 7, 2015.

Dana McNeil  
District Moderator

William Williams  
District Clerk

**Action of the 2016 Annual Conference:** Illinois-Wisconsin District executive Kevin Kessler presented information about the origin of the query from the Polo congregation. Standing Committee member John Willoughby from Michigan District presented Standing Committee’s recommendation.

*The 2016 Annual Conference adopted Standing Committee’s recommendation that a Creation Care study committee be appointed to work, in consultation with Brethren Benefit Trust and other relevant organizations, to develop ways to support and extend our knowledge of renewable energy production with our financial investments and involvement in community projects to reduce our contributions to greenhouse gas concentrations and reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. The study committee shall consist of 3 members elected by Standing Committee.*

Secretary’s note: In the weeks following Conference, Standing Committee elected the study committee members: Sharon Yohn, Laura Dell-Haro, and Duane Dearthoff.

## **2017 Report of the Creation Care Study Committee**

The Creation Care Study Committee first met via online video conference on September 1, 2016. We continued our digital meetings every two weeks, and will continue to do so throughout the course of our study term. After careful examination of our committee’s charge and previous statements and publications,\* we felt there was already a comprehensive theological examination of the biblical directive to care for God’s creation and people. We determined that it would be redundant for our committee to write yet another similar statement. Therefore, we resolved to focus our attention on catalyzing action in the individuals and congregations of our denomination that feel called to do this work.

In December, we issued an online survey to better understand what the denominational body would find most relevant and helpful. This survey was publicized in *Newsline* on December 9, and was emailed to all attendees of the 2016 Annual Conference. Over 450 people responded to the survey, from almost every district. We believe that the breadth of responses represents the

diversity of congregations and individuals in the denomination, and we are grateful for everyone who answered our questions. The results of the survey indicate that the most useful resources that the denomination can provide include specific recommendations, trustworthy information, and consultation from Brethren with expertise.

In January we met in Elgin, and held meetings with Brethren Benefit Trust, Brethren Press, the Conference director, and the denominational offices. We presented our preliminary survey data and brainstormed ways that these agencies and offices could provide long-term creation care resources, with the smallest possible financial investment.

We are optimistic. There are many ways for individuals, congregations and the denomination to meaningfully act on the conviction of caring for God's earth and people. We plan to provide informational resources, grounded in Brethren values, that will increase the collective efficiency of our energy use and increase our use of renewable energy. We believe this can be done while strengthening our communities and spiritual life.

From the 2017 Annual Conference, we request one more year to complete our work.

Sharon Yohn, chair

Laura Dell-Haro, recorder

Duane Deardorff

\* References:

2013 "A Study Resource on Climate Change" (Church of the Brethren Office of Public Witness)  
(<http://www.brethren.org/peace/documents/climate-change-study-resource.pdf>)

2001 General Board "Resolution on Global Warming / Climate Change"  
(<http://www.brethren.org/about/statements/>)

1991 General Board "Resolution on Global Warming and Atmospheric Degradation"  
(<http://www.brethren.org/about/statements/>)

1991 Annual Conference Statement "Creation: Called to Care" (1991 Minutes [1990-1994], 319-330)  
(<http://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/>)