

Creation Care Ministry

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We serve as a catalyst for care of God's creation and commitment to its related justice work which includes environmental justice, climate justice and racial justice. We endeavor to achieve this by equipping and empowering local churches and the groups within them with resources and support for this work. We also connect local churches and the groups and individuals within them to the ideas, best practices, resource development, and inspiration of others as we learn from one another and multiply our impact through collaborative action and witness.

We focused much of our energy over the past year expanding creation care activity in the legacy Memphis Conference. We hosted two launch events in October – one in the northwest corner of the conference and one in the southwest corner. The first gathering called "Celebrating Creation, Restoring Our Communities" was held in Kentucky on the creation-friendly farm of United Methodist pastors John and Nancy Varden. Clergy and lay persons, including students from Murray State Wesley Foundation, were led by Rev. Pat Watkins in reflecting on the biblical foundations of creation care. The second gathering took place at St. John's United Methodist Church in Memphis focusing on the intersection between creation care and justice. Rev. Justin Pearson presented on the devastating impact of pollution on the local African American community. Dr. Yvette Blair-Lavallais spoke on the intersection of food insecurity and creation care. Both gatherings have been followed-up with quarterly planning sessions to map out a vision for creation care ministry in the respective community areas.

We also launched our project grant funding program. Local churches are encouraged to apply for small grants to assist in funding creation care projects. Two projects have been funded so far. The first was awarded to Cumberland Furnace United Methodist Church in White Bluff. They will be planting a butterfly and perennial pollinator garden at their Vacation Bible School this summer. The second was to Mullins United Methodist Church in Memphis for sanctuary LED lighting upgrades.

We continue to engage in service projects such as our annual recycle day at West End United Methodist Church, which brings together members from around twenty congregations to recycle electronic equipment and other items.

Our ministry team has also engaged in advocacy in coalition with groups like Tennessee Interfaith Power and Light. This has included encouraging the Tennessee Valley Authority to steadily decarbonize our energy grid. We have seen success in that Tennessee has become a leading state in rates of decarbonization. This has served the economy well as Tennessee also leads the nation in green jobs.

A major emphasis in the upcoming year will be in assisting local congregations regarding buildings and grounds. This will include helping them develop plans for energy efficiency upgrades to both help protect the environment and to save money for congregational ministry. We will be hosting workshops in several communities to provide training in such initiatives. We also will continue our focus on church grounds – including assisting congregations with community gardens and planting native trees.

Finally, members of our ministry provide leadership in the national United Methodist creation justice movement. This includes providing creation care tips which are sent to over 2,300 people nationwide each month and helping formulate model creation justice resolutions that were presented to annual conferences across the connection in 2023. We have also helped plan a Vigil for Creation held on Earth Day for participants in General Conference in Charlotte.