

Ideas for
Christians to
help them
care for
God's
created
world

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Laying the groundwork

In 2014, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in NSW asked the G,S&C Committee to publish a resource paper on climate change. The Committee presented their work to Assembly in two stages. The first, in 2015, was a paper on Creation Care. The goals of that paper were to present the biblical and theological basis for creation care, and also to identify some of the relevant issues.

In receiving the report, Assembly made affirmations regarding creation care, including that “a Christian perspective offers a basis for creation care missing from all other religious and philosophical positions in that it affirms the creation as the good gift of the Triune Creator”, and it is “the responsibility of humanity before him to care for his gift and God’s plan to restore his creation to his glory.”

The second paper investigated more deeply the science related to climate change. That report was received by the 2017 Assembly. It can be found on the G,S&C Committee website, along with the Creation Care Report from 2015, and the Assembly Affirmations. Follow the links in the credit box at the end of this paper.

This third paper presents a framework for assessing our everyday activities, and offers some ideas for action from of individuals and communities.

Hey kids!! Try this at home

As we live out our human purpose to glorify God and enjoy him forever, it will be helpful at regular intervals to pray, take stock of how we are living, and examine areas of our life where we fall short of God's glory to which we aspire. We all have some primary function or capacity in which we pass our days or earn our keep and we are rightly occupied with the question of whether that function is indeed God-honouring and how, in the performing of it, we might improve our own signposting of God’s glory.

We recognise that functions like accounting, medicine, window cleaning, and teaching all contribute to the general injunction on Christians to rule God's creation well and to love our neighbour. Indeed, we would recognise that to rule God's creation well is to love our neighbour, e.g. the good ordering of society, care for the ill, and the careful shepherding and sharing of God's given resources.

We necessarily spend less time considering the common functions of humanity, e.g. cooking and washing. If we focus on ourselves as a western culture, we could be more specific: brushing teeth, showering, charging devices, cooking dinner, commuting to work, communicating with family and friends around the world, washing clothes.

These things don't attract much attention from us. We do them because we can, because we have to, and because they are the culturally accepted fundamentals of life. Otherwise, they're boring. We don't make

decisions about them. They aren't even the things we do in our spare time. In our spare time, we read, swim, and play board games.

This is important because whatever we see as our top priority, we still do all these other things. You might be an accountant who is a keen evangelist. You will do your work as an accountant and you will prioritise, in your spare time, telling your friends about Jesus. You will also still brush your teeth and wash your clothes. You may be a church pastor who considers sermon preparation to be the most essential use of your time every week. You will also shower and charge your phone. As a church, our priority might be high quality programs that connect with our community, e.g. well run church meetings, engaging toddler music time, gospel-centred kid's club. You will also pay for power and water and printing.

These activities are ubiquitous and, for that very reason, in aggregate, they constitute a major component of our general call to shepherd God's creation, steward God's resources, and love our neighbour.

Therefore, in order to fulfil our purpose, these are some of the very activities about which we will want to start making decisions. Where do you get your electricity? Where does your food come from? Where do the chemicals in your phone come from? Where do they go to when you've finished with them?

Changing the way we do those kinds of activities can be disruptive and rather annoying, at least at first. Fair enough. On the other hand, if there are changes we can make to those background activities of life that will honour God and love our neighbours, both near and far, then let me appeal to you that you should consider making those changes. Why wouldn't you?

In order to make thinking on such changes more concrete, here is a list of three criteria you could use to evaluate your activities, the satisfying of which should be a strong exhortation to make the change.

- First, will the change mean a more sustainable use of God's creation resources?
- Second, will the change save money entrusted to us by God for his work?
- Third, will the change love our neighbours by either better sharing of and access to life-giving resources for our neighbours or better opportunities to engage our neighbours with the life-giving message of Jesus?

If the answer is “Yes” to one of those, the change is likely to be worth it. If the answer is “Yes” to all three, it would seem perverse to *not* make the change.

The columns in the table on the next two pages correspond to those criteria, but the categories have been broadened because those narrow criteria are not the only good reasons why churches and individuals could want to make these kinds of changes.

Loving neighbours (near and far)

- creating relationships with individuals or organisations in your local community who are outsiders to the church and the gospel
 - ▶ individuals in the neighbourhood
 - ▶ shopkeepers
 - ▶ environmental groups
 - ▶ council staff and councillors
- conserving practically limited resources where others can benefit from what we save
 - ▶ water
 - ▶ fisheries
 - ▶ forests
- reducing our energy use and wastage of other resources where others are harmed if we don't
- encouraging the saints in living with respect for and oversight of God's creation entrusted to us

Shepherding God's creation (becoming better gardeners, fulfilling God's purpose in Christ for humanity)

- making the earth more fruitful, rather than less
- using resources in a manner that doesn't privilege our generation over future generations
- leading and equipping the saints in living with respect for and oversight of God's creation
- entrusted to us

Stewarding God's resources

- using less, instead of more, to achieve desired ends
- saving money that can be spent on gospel proclamation
- optimising use of building and land
 - ▶ maximise community engagement
 - ▶ reduce environmental footprint

Ideas for congregations	Loving neighbour near and far	Shepherding God's creation	Stewarding God's resources	Notes
Water				
Install rainwater tanks		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Use rainwater to flush toilets and water garden
In-ground watering system		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Any more efficient watering system
Fix leaking taps		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Fix leaking toilets		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Power				
Use 100% renewable energy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>		Either a company that only uses renewables, or use coal companies but choose their renewable products
Install solar cells	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Install solar hot water	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Buildings				
New construction made water and energy efficient	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Get an energy audit of your buildings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Land				
Plant natives species		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Attract native fauna	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>		
Make the grounds interesting	<input type="radio"/>			Use food bearing plants
Host a community garden	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>		
Operations				
Dishwasher		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Glass communion cups		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Insulation in walls and roof	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
100% FSC approved paper		<input type="radio"/>		
Recycling system		<input type="radio"/>		
Reduce consumables		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Ceramic mugs for morning tea
Turn appliances off at the walls	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Electronic church bulletins	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Plan for leftovers from church functions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Carpool for transport to events	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	

Ideas for communities	Loving neighbour near and far	Shepherding God's creation	Stewarding God's resources	Notes
"Clean Up Australia" days	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>		
Awareness of environmental issues		<input type="radio"/>		
Letter writing and petitions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>		
Public seminars on creation care	<input type="radio"/>			

This list is just the beginning of ideas for becoming a better gardener under God and honouring Him in His world. You can search the internet to find more and longer lists.

You may like to find someone in your church who is naturally thinking along these lines, get them to take stock of the current situation at your church, develop a few ideas for changes that could be made, and then ask them to present the ideas to the Committee of Management.

Happy gardening!

This paper is a companion resource to earlier publications of the Gospel, Society and Culture Committee of the Presbyterian Church in NSW. These can be found on the Committee's website:

Creation Care: A Report to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in NSW, 2015
<http://gsandc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Creation-Care.pdf>

Climate Change: A Report to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in NSW, 2017
<http://gsandc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/GSC-Climate-Change-report.pdf>

For more information about The Gospel, Society and Culture committee see www.gsandc.org.au

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& Culture**

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