

Appendix A

Becoming a UCC Creation Justice Church

Creation Justice Churches

As we learn in the opening pages of Genesis, our first calling as people of faith is to care for God's creation. Whether it is taking on the climate crises or addressing the lead poisoning of children, environmental justice ministries could not have a higher purpose or calling than they do now. If the followers of Jesus today care about the air we breathe, the water we drink, or the world in which we live, then environmental justice ministry should undoubtedly be an integral strand in any church's DNA. The UCC's Creation Justice Church program aims to help you do just that. Here are some of the tremendous features and benefits of doing the



program:

- Congregations collectively discern their high calling to care for creation and seek justice for the oppressed.
- Congregations make a commitment so serious and so sacred that it necessitates talking about God's covenant with us and with all of creation.
- Congregations not only become recognized as "green." They become a part of a larger network of churches and a larger movement to change the world.
- Congregations engage in critical thinking about the socioeconomic dimensions of environmental justice such as race, class, and global inequality.

- Congregations foster a deeper sense of connection: connection to God, to each other, and to the world in which we live.
- Congregations unleash their imagination and creativity as a sense of purpose propels them to make a difference.

[Learn more about how churches can participate in UCC's Creation Justice Church program.](#)

How It Works: Becoming a Creation Justice Church in Six Steps

The UCC's Creation Justice Church program assists congregations in making the ministry of environmental justice an integral strand in the DNA of their faith community. A congregation can be designated as a Creation Justice Church by taking these six steps:

Step One: Create or Designate the Group Which Will Be Your Driving Force

Many green church programs place an emphasis on creating a green team. That is an appropriate step for a lot of congregations, and the UCC offers its [tips for starting a green team](#). In some churches, however, it might be advisable for the governing council or the social justice committee to drive the process of becoming a Creation Justice Church.

[Download the Creation Justice Brochure to share with your congregation.](#)

Step Two: Discern and Implement Ways to “Grow Green”

The intent of the Creation Justice Church program is not to be rigidly prescriptive but instead to assist churches in developing creative and ambitious aspirations that are well-suited for each congregation's particular context as it seeks to stretch itself and “grow green.” To support congregations in their own processes of discernment and implementation, the Creation Justice Church program offers guiding questions to consider along with resource pages that are full of ideas for what can be done. Congregations around the country have gifted to us best practices that might add to

what your church is already doing. The questions and resources are grouped according to “The Four Dimensions of a Creation Justice Church:”

1. Theology and Worship

[Resource: Seven Ways to Jump Start the Greening of Your Church’s Theology and Worship](#)

Questions to Consider: How can your congregation intentionally reflect upon God in relationship to caring for creation? How can it bring theological understandings of creation care and justice into its services of worship?

- 2.

Institutional Life and Practice

Resource: [Doing a Green Church Inventory, Evaluation, and Action Plan](#)

Questions to Consider: How can your congregation integrate care for creation into the life and work of its ministry teams, committees, and governing council? How can your congregation embody care for creation through its building and land use policies and practices?

3. Circles of Awareness and Advocacy

Resource: [Six Ways to Expand Your Circle of Awareness and Advocacy](#)

Questions to Consider: With particular attention to socioeconomic factors such as race, class, and global inequality, how can your congregation research and inform itself about environmental justice issues at the local, state, national, and/or global levels? How can this awareness correspond to congregational advocacy and action?

4. Connections to a Broader Movement

Resource: [Five Ways to Connect to a Broader Movement](#)

Questions to Consider: Within the UCC, what are the ways in which your church can connect with others, whether it is through a conference task force, a UCC campground, the UCC’s environmental justice newsletter, or other points of contact? Outside of the UCC, what are the ways in which your church can connect with interfaith, ecumenical, or secular partners engaged in environmental justice work?

Step Three: Draft a Creation Justice Covenant

In the UCC, the most solemn and sacred commitment one can make is that of a covenant. It marks a serious promise to God on the part of a congregation. A covenant also entails a promise among congregants to each other as they seek “to walk together in all God’s ways” (Constitution of the United Church of Christ). After a prayerful process of discernment, those who have been leading the church in seeking designation will draft a Creation Justice Covenant to be presented to either the congregation or the governing council for a vote. There are no requirements for how it is to be written but

one can read [a sample covenant](#) to begin the process of generating ideas for what should be included.

Step Four: Vote to Adopt the Creation Justice Covenant and Become a Creation Justice Church

The Creation Justice Covenant and the decision to become a Creation Justice Church need to be ratified by either a congregational vote or the vote of the church's governing body. A congregational vote is recommended because it ensures greater ownership and participation on the part of the congregation as a whole.

Step Five: Submit an Application

To become designated, one must simply complete this form which is based on the guiding questions listed earlier for the four dimensions of a Creation Justice Church. To submit the form:

- [Fill out and submit the application online.](#)
- [Download application.](#) The hard copy can be [emailed to the UCC Environmental Justice Program](#) or mailed to:

Environmental Justice Program
United Church of Christ
700 Prospect Avenue East
Cleveland, OH 44115

Step Six: Keep It Up!

Once a church is recognized as a Creation Justice Church, it is the responsibility of that church to maintain environmental justice as a core part of its DNA. While it is not required, it is recommended that each church revisit the four dimensions of a Creation Justice Church on an annual basis in order to measure and evaluate its progress.

Appendix B

Rev. John Sampson's CJC related sermons

Commissioning of the Creation Justice Church Task Force

Rev. John Sampson

May 31, 2020

Will you pray with me? God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable to you, our rock, and our redeemer. Amen.

Today is Pentecost; it's been fifty days since Easter. And God's Spirit keeps pouring out, and drenching the world, and humanity. We hear the story of the coming of God's Spirit to those first disciples, those first followers of Jesus and his commandment of love. It invades them, and has them speak in tongues. It is the day when Peter tells the unbelieving crowd that has gathered to see what all the noise and chaos is about, he tells them that this is the day when those invaded by the Spirit will prophesy, and see visions, and dream dreams.

We tell this story today about an event of long ago. But we tell this story every year, year after year, because this story isn't about one unique event. It is about a truth available to all of us, even here, even now. The story of Pentecost is about the foundation of the church, and the word church doesn't mean a building. The word church comes from the Greek *ekklesia*, which means a group, or a club. Just like we would say The Women's Gardening Club, back in first century Palestine people would have said the Jesus Club. Today is the day when remember the chartering of the first Jesus Club; today is the day when we recommit to our Jesus Club. And it takes two things: a group of humans who try to put Jesus's commandment of love right in the center of their lives, and the presence of God's Spirit. And when these two things meet we too can see visions and prophesy and dream great dreams.

Today is such a day. Because today is the day when we commission our Creation Justice Church Taskforce. Today is the day when God's Spirit invites us to come together and open ourselves to the possibility of embracing God's original purpose for humanity: to care for all of Creation more profoundly – both human, and non- human. But to do so in new ways that respond to the critical moment in which we find ourselves. At a moment when the world as we know it is slipping through our fingers with dire implications for humanity, and every species of life on this Earth.

Now there will be some who look at us, at the step we are making today, and sneer. Who say, in their own way, that we must be drunk, that we're just some lefty liberal tree huggers. If the step we make today is only a product of our own ideological leanings, then yes, our critics might be right. We just might be some lefty liberal tree huggers, which doesn't mean that that is a bad thing.

But the words our spiritual ancestors share this morning call us to enter the path before us from a completely different direction. When those who had gathered around the spirit-drenched followers of Jesus on that Pentecost so many years ago, heard what the disciples were saying they didn't hear a political agenda, nor an environmental agenda. It wasn't an

economic agenda, or even a public health agenda. What they heard were people speaking about God's deeds of power.

At the core of this moment, as we enter into a time of discernment about whether or not our congregation feels invited to become a Creation Justice Church, the experience that will center us, is the deep and essential witness to the fact that Creation, all of creation, is the most beautiful and awe-inspiring of God's deeds of power. Our world is not simply a physical artifact. We are invited to approach it as a sacred expression of Divine love, given to us as a gift to tend and nurture. This is the calling that our sacred scriptures tell us we were made for.

That's what makes our path forward different from other groups that do wonderful and amazing work to conserve and heal our natural world. We come from a place of Spirit, and that makes our voice unique. That's what makes our dreams and prophecies unique. That's what makes our work and advocacy unique.

And what our story this morning tells us is that we should not be afraid to speak from a place filled with spirit. Because the scientists will understand, even as they speak in science. And the environmentalists will understand, even as they speak in environmentalism. And the farmers will understand, even as they speak in farm. And the children will understand, even as they speak in the language of a future world many of us will never see.

So come, let's open ourselves to God's Spirit, let's be saturated by God's invitation to a new future, let us begin our journey of what it may mean for us to become a Creation Justice Church. Let us embrace a new commitment to God's Creation. And let us envision a new sense of what it means to be church, to what it means to be in the Jesus Club.

Amen.

Taking the First Step

Rev. John Sampson – January 17, 2011

Will you pray with me? God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable to you, our rock, and our redeemer. Amen.

When does Jesus become the Christ? When does Jesus become the anointed, the specially marked and embraced one of God? In our Christmas stories the answer is that Jesus is the Christ at his birth. Born in a manger at the edge of Empire to a couple of nobodies Matthew and Luke agree that Jesus is already filled with God's Spirit, he is already chosen by God for great things.

But today we hear a different understanding, because today we hear from the gospel, the good news, according to Mark. This is a gospel we almost never heard from during Advent and Christmas, because it has no story of the birth of Jesus, of the miracles associated to his parents, or to shepherds. No angels. No stars. No magi.

No, for Mark, Jesus is acknowledged as being special to God only after he does something. His specialness isn't tied to his parentage or his birth. He is special because of his actions. And we see the first of them this morning.

The story we begin today, the story of Jesus' ministry, starts with Jesus going to the Jordan river and participating in an act of repentance through a ritual of cleansing. It's called a baptism, but we shouldn't confuse what happens to Jesus with what we call baptism, with our sacrament of initiation into the family of Jesus followers.

We miss the meaning of what happens to Jesus, and what he is proclaiming as he enters the water of the Jordan, if we too quickly pass over the fact that this moment is an act of repentance. Repentance, in its most literal meaning, describes a turning around, or a desire to change the direction of one's life. It is often tied to an idea of releasing sin. But today I don't want to go there. I want to keep our understanding at the surface, even as Jesus plunges into the depths.

Jesus enters the water of the Jordan as a way to say to all of those around him, and to himself, that he desires to change the direction of his life. Maybe Jesus is saying that he wants to release the brokenness of his life. But maybe Jesus is saying that he has simply entered a new phase in his life, and as he has matured he has decided his values have changed, his understanding has deepened, his sense of responsibility to those around him and the world, has become more profound.

It's thought that Jesus was in his early 30s when he entered the Jordan. In a time when life expectancy might only be 35 or so, Jesus entered the water as an old man, a man in the final stages of his life. Think of how you may have changed the direction of your life as you grew

older, and experienced more of what life has offered you. In his older age, Jesus doesn't choose to retire; he chooses to use his final years to change the world. And he enters the Jordan to proclaim the start of his new path of commitment to justice and compassion and ministry to his community.

I'm struck by the idea of changing the direction of one's life, not because one wishes to unburden themselves of sin, but because the experiences of one's life reveal that a new direction is not only possible, but is actually the only way one can fully do justice to the gift of life that God has granted.

I think we have come to such a moment in the life of our congregation. We haven't come here because we're a broken church, or because we've sinned. I think we've come to the shores of our very own Jordan because our experiences have brought us here, our sense of calling by God has brought us here, and what the world has become at this moment in history has brought us here. We've come to a place where we have the opportunity, just like Jesus did, to choose a new path of commitment to justice and compassion and ministry to our community, and to our world.

As you know, our congregation is discerning if we will become a Creation Justice Church. And one of the things that the process asks us to think about, and pray about, is how we will advocate for our world, and for justice for all of God's children, human and non-human.

How will we show up in our public spaces to share the story of a wounded Creation? How will we reach out to politicians, and policy makers to dream together for a new way forward that embraces the rights of all of our brothers and sisters to live in communities where they have access to clean air, and clean water? How will we speak in our newspapers and online news sources to give witness to the suffering of all sentient creatures who cannot speak for themselves? How will we do these things, not as individuals, but as a church, guided by a God who looked over Creation and said that what she saw was not just good, but very good?

And although the Creation Justice Church initiative asks these questions from the perspective of environmental justice, it is really asking us to think about how we engage with the world, and share our collective voice on all kinds of issues where the perspectives of those committed to justice and compassion and the sacred are desperately needed.

This weekend our nation celebrates again the life and ministry of The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the great African American civil rights leader. Last year we read his book *Stride Toward Freedom* in one of the church's book discussion groups. The book is King's narrative of the successful effort to desegregate the Montgomery, AL bus lines. In his account, King's understanding of his faith could not be separated from his work in the public sphere. Following Jesus, for King, meant working for the freedom and equality of all Americans, but especially, black Americans. It meant organizing his community. It meant peacefully protesting in the streets. It meant reaching out to politicians to sway minds and hold them accountable. It meant creating networks of faith communities to collectively support the work of

desegregation. It meant boycotting. It meant writing letters to newspapers. It meant actively encouraging communities of faith not to simply show up as groups of individuals, but as united houses of worship standing up as the moral anchors of their communities.

The Creation Justice Church initiative is asking us to discern the ways we might be more visible and explicit and public in the ways we show up in our community for environmental justice, and by extension, all forms of justice based on the sacredness of life.

I am not saying that our church has never stood up in response to the moral challenges of our time. I think of how we were active in the formation of a group responding to the challenges of refugees settling in our region. But I think this may be a moment to discern again if we wish to take on the mantle of moral leadership in our wider community in new and different and more public ways.

This is something that is being discussed in the Creation Justice Church initiative. But it is a question of vision that is bigger than the CJC process. It goes to the heart of how we understand what it means for us to be joined together in following our teacher Jesus. It goes to the heart of how we respond to the example of MLK today, as something more than a heartwarming artifact of the past. It is a question for each one of us to weigh in on as members and friends of this congregation.

I don't know where God's spirit will lead us in this discernment. I don't know where we will easily come to consensus on how we might move forward, and where the points of contention in this discussion might lay. But as Jesus stood on the banks of the Jordan, I don't think he knew exactly what the future held for him either. As MLK organized the first day of the Montgomery bus boycott, I know he had no idea how long and how hard the road ahead would be for his community.

But it is by taking that first hopeful step – by entering the Jordan, by walking to work instead of taking a segregated bus – that the journey begins. And I fully believe it is by taking this first step that God will look on us and say these are my children, who I love, and with whom I am very well pleased.

Amen.

Appendix C

The Community Speaks

Creation Justice Church Interviews

Fall/Winter 2020

May 2020 the congregation of the Keene Valley Congregational Church approved a Task Force to pursue an initiative to be designated as a Creation Justice Church by the United Church of Christ. We have a few questions of you to help us learn how the Creation Justice initiative is viewed by the community and suggested ways the Task Force can engage the congregation in this initiative.

Participants

Susie Allen (SA)

Monique Weston (MW)

Katharine M. Preston (KMP)

Sandy Robinson (SR)

Interview Questions & Answers

**Q. People in the community have asked the Task Force “What does Creation Justice mean?”
How would you define Creation Justice from a faith-based perspective?**

SA. I believe that Creation is the closest and most tangible revelation of God to us as humans. It is so critical that we understand that we are not separate from the created world – we are interwoven with all of creation as God’s revelation. As residents in the Adirondack Park, we are so blessed to have access to the vast and powerful beauty of creation right at our doorsteps. But there are so many in our world who cannot access creation so easily and powerfully. As well, there are so many whose very lives are at risk because of the impact of climate change. We are witnessing these affects right now with intense and frequent storms ravaging the Gulf Coast and thousands of acres of land and livelihoods burned to the ground in the wildfires. It is critical, essential, for us to understand our part in the web of all creation and know that it is up to each of us to take action to respond – in prayer, in learning, in reflection, in action. As a faith community, we have the capacity to do this critical work together.

MW. I need to leave that to others. But to me most of unspoiled nature is sacred even in a secular sense.

KMP. *Our faith says that we should do justice, love mercy, walk humbly with our God and to love our neighbor as ourselves.*

Do justice: For years, environmental pollution, and now, more specifically, climate change, has affected populations least responsible and least able to cope. This includes most non-human populations. As all beings are loved by God, complicity on our part for harm coming to them is morally wrong.

Love mercy: We can help rectify the wrongs and become givers of mercy to those who need our help.

Walk humbly with our God: We are not God, and have no right to treat Creation as if it was given to us alone. We need to humbly understand that the natural systems of God's creation are facts by which we must abide. (Or, to be blunt, become extinct.)

Loving our neighbors as ourselves: Our human and non-human neighbors are next door, in other parts of this country, in other parts of the world. One planet neighborhood. We are admonished to love them all.

SR. I think it means an awareness of the web of life in which we are embedded and an awareness of how our actions and choices affect that web for good or ill. To be a creation justice church requires that we take actions and support policies that reduce damage to that web of life and that support the well-being of this web as much as possible.

Q. When have you felt a deep connection with nature? How has this brought you closer to God?

SA. From my earliest memories, I have felt deeply connected with nature and, intrinsically, with God. I think it was clear in some deep way that nature and God were one for me. I remember having my own private space in the woods when I was young – a place to retreat to, to sit and take in the dampness of stone, the softness of moss, the warmth of sun, the smell of leaves. Sensual and close. It all felt alive and alight with God.

MW. Nature is part of my sense of awe and wonder.

KMP. *I guess I have always felt this, as I was brought up by parents who had us out in the woods and fields around our home from babyhood. As I grew older and studied environmental science, I realized that "nature" was not separate from me; I was simply one part, and, as a human, a recent addition in the scheme of things. I marveled at the beauty and complexity and heck, the love, behind it all and needed to say "thank you". God was always there to receive my thanks. So, yes.*

SR. I feel a closeness to Spirit innate, but I also feel a great sense of grief, knowing that so much of what I love in nature is going to be destroyed by climate change.

Q. In what ways do you see the two words Creation and Justice affect each other?

SA. Great question! I think these ideas together remind me of the interconnection of all living things. We are interwoven in Creation, and yet each of us is affected in different ways. I/we live in a place of abundance in creation – easy access to so much that creation offers. Others live in places of scarcity, even poverty, of the richness that is creation and their part in it. As well, how

can we – with our abundance and in faith – influence each other and the wider world to take action to heal our climate so that those who live in scarcity are not so vulnerable to the groanings of the Earth as manifest in storms, fires, and lack of access to healthy food, water, air, heat.

MW. Humans should be caretakers of nature and strive to ensure environmental behaviors do not impact poor and minority communities disproportionately. .

Also humans should consider how we relate to and how to protect wildlife.

KMP. *Interesting question. They of course can stand alone, apart from one another, but when put together, they imply a crucial relationship that turns to the human animal to decipher. Squirrels do not do justice. Neither does Creation as a whole. There is cause and effect, predator/prey, heat/cold, CO2 intake/output, etc, etc. But there are no value judgements. Justice is a human construct, that defines how the human animal relates to the rest of Creation.*

SR. Justice affects who and what is actually considered part of Creation. It requires the inclusion of all beings.

Q. Please expand on ways you think the climate crisis is affecting the most vulnerable.

SA. I have probably answered this question in other places, but I think the climate crisis is deepening the scarcity of resources for the most vulnerable – more vulnerable to loss of life and livelihood from storms and fires; more limited access to clean water, fresh food, clean air, safe energy. And perhaps the worst of it is that the most vulnerable are often least able to impact their situation. We need to remember – always – that we are interconnected.

MW. Above all disproportionate impact on physically vulnerable, people of color, and elderly. For example, environmentally threatening infrastructure and fossil fuel transport in and near minority neighbors.

KMP. *For people, resiliency is hard when you do not have enough basic needs: water, food, shelter. You do not have the leeway to change how you conduct your life. You do not have the option to move. Non-human animals are highly adapted to their particular environment. Again – resiliency is not easy, although for some species it is easier than for others. When the habitat no longer supplies your needs, migration is usually the only choice – and that can take generations. Evolutionary adaption can take many generations.*

SR. This is pretty well documented.....all kinds of toxic sites located next to poor neighborhoods, rising seas displacing millions, unbearable heat affecting those laboring out of doors and those unable to afford air conditioning, etc.

Q. The Task Force is conducting an inventory of the day-to-day practices of the Church and recommending ways to become more environmentally friendly.

An Energy Audit is planned, as are events to engage the community in becoming more connected with the natural world, with Creation.

Are you familiar with what the Task Force is doing?

SA. I think so. I am delighted to see that Jim Antal is offering a presentation on September 20. I know Jim a little from his time as President and General Minister of the Massachusetts Conference of the UCC. He is an energetic, passionate and committed speaker on behalf of Creation. I also know about the Forest Bathing, River Walking, and silent canoeing gatherings. It feels so important to create opportunities for people to experience the created world and take time to reflect together. Thank you!

MW. Yes, but I am on the task force.

KMP. Yes.

Q. What suggestions do you have to encourage the community to become more knowledgeable in the Task Force offerings?

SA. Such an important question; and the suggestions made more challenging because of the pandemic. I know I am longing to be with other people in person, and wonder how the Task Force might continue to find ways for people to be together, such as the forest bathing and canoeing. I wonder, too, how the Task Force can continue to invite speakers and disseminate information in a creative way to equip our community with information – about climate change, about actions we can take as individuals, about how we can join together to encourage others. Our unique contribution, as a faith community, is to continue to tell stories and teach others about the interconnection of all creation, and to inspire connection to God/Sacred Presence/One Another through our actions. We can help inspire a spirit of generosity.

MW. Inform the community as to what each household can do as the Church is doing for its buildings and grounds. And inform the community about significant environmental issues in our area, NYS, the nation, even the world.

Hoping CJ church can support environmental initiatives undertaken by others as it deems appropriate.

KMP. *Regular – short column in the newsletter – maybe just one day a week. A “mission moment” or the equivalent during the service.*

SR. There are many ways the task force could offer education that would help people understand ways in which their actions and choices affect the web of life. The following (brochure on Native Plants) applicable, obviously beyond Delaware, is the kind of information that might be shared.

Thank you for your interest and cooperation. Honoring the need to keep us safe during this Covid-19 pandemic, the Task Force is holding virtual events and outdoor activities that can be socially distanced. We hope to see you there.

----- a continuing reflection from Susie Allen -----

I've been reading the Robin Kimmerer article, *Returning the Gift*.

Kimmerer has given me a deeper, more compelling understanding of the idea of creation justice. She says "Recognition of personhood for all beings opens the door to ecological justice. Our laws today are all about governing *our rights* to the land. The shift we need is to include the rights *of* the land: the rights to be whole and healthy; the right to exist." I want to think much more about this idea, and what we can learn from indigenous peoples about the rights of the land.

Feel free to add the above to what I have already written in response to your questions. As I read Kimmerer's article, I felt like what I had written was not enough.