

SUMMER 2019 | NEWSLETTER

SUMMER NEWSLETTER



CENTER FOR
Sustainable
Climate Solutions

PREPARED BY
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DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Living in the renowned Shenandoah Valley, surrounded by the storied Appalachian Mountains, provides plenty of fodder for reflecting on the relationship between humans and our natural environment. For eight days this summer, my sons and I trekked an isolated trail in West Virginia, meeting not a soul for the entire week as we followed game trails and bushwhacked through the forest and meadows. The beauty of the forest tempted us to think that we were in pristine conditions, but we knew the forests were heavily impacted by a history of resource extraction. So we walked with a mix of emotions, as we noted not only the thin soil and thick understory of invasive plants, but also the myriad native species that have rebounded. The resilience of that forest offered us a lesson in hope.

Can we see hope in the world given the increasingly obvious human impacts not only on climate, but also other critical issues like biodiversity and soil health? Hope and reconciliation in a broken world – this is the work of our congregations, at the frontlines of the church's work. CSCS works to equip churches to be a point of hope and resilience in the world.

A flagship effort in reaching our mandate to 'move the needle' in the Anabaptist community on climate issues is our pastoral retreat program, run by Doug Kaufman in collaboration with Mennonite Creation Care Network. In this newsletter, he talks about his efforts to engage with the emotions around climate change that can act as barriers to empowering congregations to take action. We estimate that the pastoral retreats have reached nearly 10% of MCUSA churches in its first year, and a set of more retreats is planned for the current year. We continue to develop resources which can support congregational efforts to inspire people to change. For instance, at MCUSA convention, we were struck by how many people asked for Sunday School materials that relate to climate change, and are gratified to respond by offering a curriculum that has been developed our Climate Futures Fellows of last year, based on their Shifting Climates podcast.

On one of the last days of our hike, in a remote hollow, we found the largest native chestnut tree we've ever seen. Given that the chestnut is a keystone species that has essentially disappeared from Appalachian forests, this buoyed our spirits. We should likewise recognize and cultivate the work of the church that provides a unique point of hope to a breaking planet, and enables action that responds to the challenge represented by climate change.



Refocusing: Congregational Engagement

This year, the Center is reinvigorating our focus on congregations and pastors through two new research projects which focus on sustainability in the church.

The first project is part of the Center's second year of the Climate Futures Fellowship program, which encourages recent graduates to submit proposals for a year of full-time work with the Center. This year's Fellow is Katie Isaac, who has worked previously with the Center as a Faith Outreach Intern, and a Campus Ambassador. She will be spending her year-long fellowship "developing creation care plans for Mennonite Churches interested in introducing sustainable practices to their congregations, or taking their current practices to the next level."

Katie's interest in strategic planning for churches stems from her senior research, in which she conducted a series of interviews to evaluate the recommendations of environmentally active Mennonites for introducing other Mennonites to environmental stewardship. She modeled their recommendations and found that balancing theological reframing and relationship building in environmental stewardship conversations were the most likely to encourage Mennonites to environmental action..

Katie hopes that churches will be able to use the plans she develops to move the needle in their congregations, and take them from their current level of engagement up to the next. She has been working with professionals from a wide variety of academic backgrounds to develop the plans, including pastors, theologians, social scientists, and biologists.

Katie's work represents an important refocusing for the Center, as we shift more of our resources to congregations and pastors, in an effort to meet our mission of "moving the needle" on climate change in the Mennonite church. In addition to her work, the Center is funding a new research project this year in collaboration with Goshen College and Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS).

The research, which is being conducted by a group of Goshen College and AMBS faculty, hopes to understand how conversations develop and grow in congregations around topics like sustainability. By studying the development of conversations, the researchers hope to be able to develop a methodology which can be used for engaging with congregations meaningfully.

Both the plans being developed by this year's Climate Futures Fellow, and the research being done at AMBS and Goshen College will be invaluable tools for the Center's congregational engagement work. As we strive to empower pastors and congregations to address climate change, the steps taken by Katie Isaac towards strategic planning, and by the research team at Goshen College and AMBS will be essential to our work.

We are thankful for the initiative that has been taken by both Katie Isaac, and the faculty involved in research at Goshen College and AMBS, and look forward to disseminating their research when it is complete.



Pastoral Responses to Climate Denial and Despair



This past year I met about 60 Mennonite pastors and leaders in four retreats throughout North America called "Who Cares about Climate Change: Pastoral Response to Denial and Despair." I led groups from Kansas to Ontario, and I am dialoging with leaders in California, Pennsylvania, and Manitoba about retreats in the coming year.

The retreat's focus on the climate conundrum. Climate change brings devastating consequences yet many North Americans do not seem to care very much about it. That seeming lack of care can mask a deep care and anxiety about climate change.

While media focus on the outright denial of some conservatives, a more prevalent problem is what Kari Norgaard identifies as implicatory denial. We know the climate crisis is a grave problem but we don't want to discuss it. It is too threatening. So we remain silent.

I believe that congregations have a special capacity to talk about these feelings, to pray through them, and work towards alleviating them through finding hopeful practices in worship and formation. By simply giving people space to talk we engage climate denial.

Lurking beneath that denial is despair in the face of this massive problem. How do we find hope? Paradoxically, through lament and grief. Christians have practice in grieving through memorial services and through the laments found in the Bible.

I find hope from meeting so many engaging leaders who care deeply about making a difference in their

congregations and communities. Some congregations have not talked about climate change and so just to open a conversation is risky for the pastor. Others have worked at this for years. No matter where we are in our climate journey, each leader can take an additional step.

The two most common outcomes from the retreats were sermons and Sunday School classes about climate change. Others made changes in property maintenance or engaged in political advocacy. One congregation worked towards restitution to Native peoples and another leader led a Lament for the Earth on Holy Saturday, re-engaging an earlier practice.

The retreats always include an element of climate justice, recognizing that those who have emitted the least carbon are often those facing the starkest consequences sooner. We learned about Mennonite Central Committee climate responses in Zimbabwe, El Salvador and Nepal. At another retreat we learned how the rising sea in the Chesapeake Bay both harms historic African-American communities but also stimulates their resilient responses.

Mennonite climate response means re-invigorating both peacemaking to confront climate violence and simple living to prevent carbon emissions. I have also found courage in a little known teaching of early Anabaptists called "the gospel of all creatures," that Christ suffers not just with humans but with all creatures. Christ too brings to all creation resurrection resilience in the midst of crisis.

WHO IS UNDER (Y)OUR CARBON FOOTPRINT?

Reflections by Rachel Bellerose, Project Coordinator for the 2019 Global South Voices speaking tour.

Dr. Sibonokuhle Ncube stands in a church basement before about thirty people. Her voice is strong and steady, but she holds both hands wide open as if carrying a burden she'd like us to share.

Dr. Ncube is sharing a story with us about a farmer living in Zimbabwe, her home country. This farmer has had many children, but every year, one of them goes off to the city seeking better jobs, more money to send home to their families. Many times, they return to her in coffins, wrapped up and long ready to be buried.

This is no mere analogy, no trite story to illustrate a point. This is a real woman who Ncube encountered while community organizing in rural Zimbabwe. Her children are forced to leave home because farming is an increasingly tenuous livelihood; their land has been depleted by consistent droughts for the last three years. The farmer looked out on her fields and said, "I feel like I am burying these seeds in their graves."

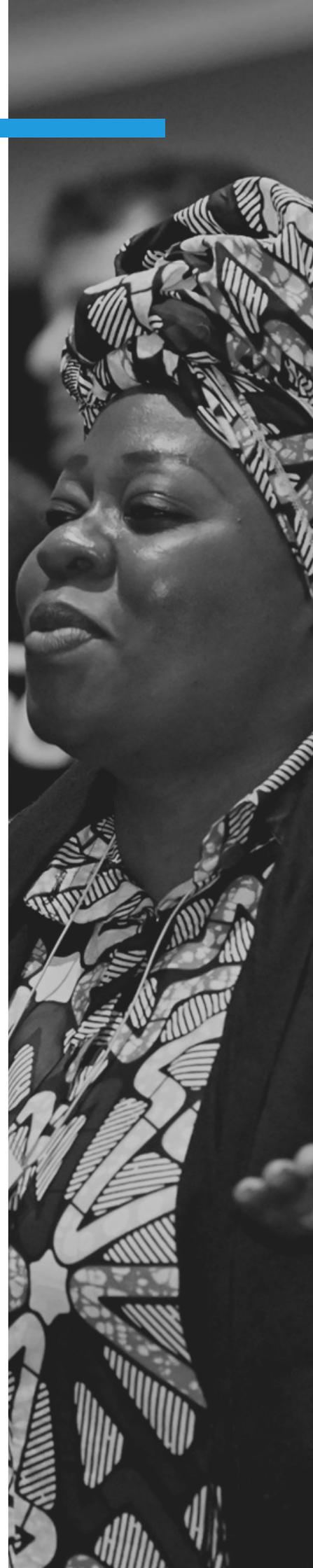
Ncube's lecture tonight is titled "Who is Under (Y)our Carbon Footprint," a sobering question when paired with a story like this. It's also the reason she asks us to share the burden which has been unfairly apportioned to developing countries. Wealthy countries have largely contributed to the current

climate crisis, but Ncube says that it is our shared responsibility to do something about it. It is your/our carbon footprint, and it is creating problems no matter who started it.

Ncube encourages us to engage in non-binary dialogue, to treat each other with dignity. She also says that we must unite in a "global dance," joining together to make a moral, spiritual, practical, political, and policy-based response to climate change. "Mobilize from the pulpit," she says, "mobilize from the pews." She calls for action from every one of us. "Pluck the low-hanging fruit available to you. Remember the three R's - Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. That's one of the easiest places to start."

Join Dr. Ncube in this global dance: Find out more ways you can reduce your carbon footprint here ([insert link to CSCS page](#)).

The Global South Voices program is a collaboration of CSCS and Mennonite Central Committee. It brings together participants from throughout the "Global South" to speak to groups around the United States about the impact of climate change on their home country. This year, we brought back Dr. Sibonokuhle Ncube from Zimbabwe to speak with diverse groups, from local churches, to the United Nations.



UPDATE:

CAMPUS AMBASSADORS



(Left to right) Dhiraj Adhikari (Tabor College), Erika Enomoto (Fresno Pacific University), Mandira Panta (Goshen College), Levi Geyer (Hesston College), Wade Banks (Eastern Mennonite University) at the training retreat in Hesston, Kansas.

This August marked the second annual training retreat for the newly named Campus Sustainability Ambassadors program. The retreat brought together students from five different Mennonite colleges and universities, with two students who were unable to make the retreat engaging remotely.

Student programs are an essential piece of the mission of the Center, and we were excited to be able to offer this important program for the second year in a row. The Ambassadors program provides a paid opportunity for student leaders on Mennonite campuses to learn about how to better engage in campus activities, navigate difficult climate conversations, and get experience that will be valuable for the future.

At the training retreat, students come together to learn about a variety of topics, from climate communications, to local ecology. Students have the opportunity to listen, discuss, and plan for the year ahead. One of the most valuable pieces of the experience, and the program throughout the year tends to be the connections that are made during the retreat, and the support system that is formed. It can be difficult at times leading clubs on campus, and being able to talk with others who are going through a similar experience is powerful.

This year, students are excited to begin planning their events, and have already developed exciting plans for the year. Several campuses will be focusing on waste reduction, while others will be working on developing traditions within campus clubs, and reinvigorating students interested in sustainability on campus.

NEXT YEAR'S RETREAT

Next year's retreat will be held in Harrisonburg, Virginia, at Eastern Mennonite University. If you would like to get involved in the training, by offering a seminar, or hosting an activity, please email Daniel Bellerose at daniel.bellerose@emu.edu.

THIS SUMMER'S NEW RESOURCES



SHIFTING CLIMATES SUNDAY SCHOOL

Last year's Fellows, Harrison Horst, Michaela Mast, and Sarah Longenecker, created a two season, fifteen episode podcast in which they had conversations with people from diverse geographies and generations about climate change. The podcast is a powerful resource, and has already been used in discussion groups around the country. Many of these groups desired some kind of format for their discussions, especially one that could be used in a church setting. In response, the Fellows created two Sunday school curriculums, one that goes for 10 weeks, and one for 5. These curriculums will be available on the CSCS website soon, but if you are currently interested you can email Daniel Bellerose at daniel.bellerose@emu.edu.

SUMMER INTERN MATERIALS

We were so blessed this summer by another group of inspiring interns, who created a variety of resources, both for print and to be used on our website. Clara Weybright, our Climate Advocacy Intern created a Voting Guide, and an Introduction to Carbon Pricing. Christin Li, our Environmental Impact Investing Intern created a guide to green strategies in investment. Olivia Smucker, our Faith Outreach Intern, created bulletin inserts for churches based on our Global South Voices speaking tour. And Emily Griffioen, our Communications Intern, led the visual design for each resource. All summer resources will be available soon on our resources page.



RESOURCES PAGE

One of the biggest questions we get asked when tabling is, "where can I find resources?" This summer, we decided to respond to that question with a web page, dedicated to all the resources created by, or promoted by CSCS. The page features resources "for you", "for your church", and "for your community". Find it here: [your <https://www.sustainableclimatesolutions.org/resources/>](https://www.sustainableclimatesolutions.org/resources/)

CSCS NEEDS YOUR HELP

"I am moved by the quantity and quality of CSCS projects underway. In particular, many young minds are focusing on the present and future good of the larger community - discipleship in its most productive form."

*– Ben Brabson, Emeritus Professor of Physics at Indiana University
CSCS Board of Reference Member*

JOIN US IN BECOMING A CLIMATE SOLUTIONS PARTNER.

Climate issues need action now, and your financial support is needed to match the urgency of the challenge. Make an impact by contributing towards:

Ensuring the continued impact of our programs training students, engaging congregational leaders, and developing innovative solutions

Scaling up our impact by

- Offering more opportunities for students
- Giving voice to more of those affected by climate change
- Scaling up our communication outreach
- Expanding our staff capacity to match program need
- Ensuring financial sustainability through an endowment



Make an impact by donating at: sustainableclimatesolutions.org,
or by contacting Doug Graber Neufeld at: neufeldd@emu.edu