

MFSA Plumbline

Net-Zero Greenhouse Gas Emissions



Understanding the Issue

The Net-Zero Greenhouse Gas Emissions recommendation is a call from the United Methodist Climate Justice Movement for us to “DO SOMETHING” about the degradation of our environment caused by global warming and its resulting climate change. To prevent the worst impacts of climate change and preserve a livable planet, global temperature increase needs to be limited to 1.5 degrees C. To meet this goal, emissions need to reach net zero by 2050.

As Christians, we are commanded to care for God’s Creation. We are told in Genesis 1 to rule (as God rules) and in Genesis 2 to keep, guard or provide for our planet. As described by John Wesley, “We are now God’s stewards. We are indebted to God for all we have.... A steward is not at liberty to use what is lodged in their hands as *one* pleases, but as one’s master pleases.” (John Wesley, Sermon 51, “The Good Steward,” §II.1, *Works* 2:283–84)

These responsibilities are recognized by the SOCIAL PRINCIPLES of The United Methodist Church and were addressed specifically in the 2009 Council of Bishops Pastoral Letter entitled *God’s Renewed Creation: A Call to Hope and Action*. The Bishops recognized that “God’s creation is in crisis” and we “cannot remain silent while God’s people and God’s planet suffer.”

The Call was clear, but our response was limited. Finally in 2021, twelve boards and commissions of the church pledged “to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050 across ministries, facilities, operations, and investments and to leverage the gifts of our connection, putting equity and justice at the center as we move toward a net-zero emission economy.” This pledge was endorsed by the Council of Bishops who also supported similar action by annual conferences and local churches. This resolution moves all our conferences and churches towards that goal and puts us in sync with our connection.

Commitment to Net-Zero Greenhouse Gas Emissions

The Net-Zero Greenhouse Gas Emissions recommendation calls for our Conferences and churches to assess current gas emissions, to determine appropriate offsets, and to implement by 2050 with schedules reflecting normal system aging and external incentives to minimize cost. This effort matches similar activities of denominational boards, commissions, and agencies.

Analysis

This is **not** a call to spend money now versus no cost “*business as usual*.” Over the next 27 years, most mechanical systems will wear out and need to be replaced. If plans are in place to use more efficient and sustainable systems when that happens, cost differences will be negligible. Similarly, decisions on transportation, resource commitments, grounds maintenance, and investments will be made as needed, but with an eye toward reducing and/or off-setting gas emissions in socially just decisions planned and executed over time. Churches working alone will not solve the worldwide problem, but it will set an example and show our commitment to stewarding God’s Creation.

Climate change affects geographical regions and various peoples differently, most severely impacting those who have contributed least to greenhouse gas emissions. Climate equity and justice demand that required responses be tempered by accommodation of these factors. As an international church, we should model this accommodation in sculpting our overall net-zero plans for the denomination.

Resources

- United Methodist Creation Justice Movement (umcreationjustice.org) provides examples and information about taking net-zero actions umcreationjustice.org/tag/net-zero-emissions
- [Council of Bishops 2009 Call for Hope and Action](#)
- [Board & Agency Climate Commitment to Net-zero Emissions](#)
- [Council of Bishops Climate Crisis Response](#)

Recommended Action

Vote FOR 20782-CA page 1200 ADCA “Commitment to Net Zero Greenhouse Gas Emissions”:
Confess our failure to properly steward God’s Earth; to ask for God’s help in restoring Creation; and to join our bishops, boards, agencies, and commissions in committing to net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

This document was prepared in collaboration with the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement (UMCJM). MFSA and UMCJM are members of the Love Your Neighbor Coalition. Learn more www.lyncalition.org.