

FROM A&P 2010, pp. 440-446

ADDITIONAL MOTION RE THE COST OF HOLDING A CARBON NEUTRAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY (A&P 2009, p. 42)

We hold in reverence the whole creation as the theatre of God's glory and action. God rules the lives of individuals and nations yet does not negate our freedom and responsibility....Though life is a gift from God, human life depends on the created world. Our care for the world must reflect God's care. We are not owners, but stewards of God's good earth. (Living Faith 2.1.2 and 2.4.1)

Matters of economic and environmental justice are not only social, political and moral issues: they are integral to faith in Jesus Christ and affect the integrity of the church. Being faithful to God's covenant requires that individual Christians and the churches take a stand against current economic and environmental injustices....[We are called] to hear the cries of people who suffer, and the woundedness of creation itself, over-consumed and under-valued by the current global economy. (Accra Confession, World Alliance of Reformed Churches⁶)

Introduction

This report is the response to the 135th General Assembly additional motion requesting that Justice Ministries report "on the cost of holding a carbon-neutral green General Assembly" (A&P 2009, p. 42).

Without specific data, it is impossible to give a full and conclusive report on the carbon footprint, and the cost of offsetting the carbon footprint, of a General Assembly. This report defines the term "carbon neutral" and provides background information about this definition; highlights the ethical and theological dimensions of environmental stewardship; defines and discusses carbon offsets; takes some preliminary steps to measure the carbon footprint of the 136th General Assembly (2010) and recommends further initiatives for General Assembly's consideration.

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change

Since the industrial revolution (1750), human activity, primarily the combustion of fossil fuels and land use changes like deforestation, has produced increasing amounts of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide called greenhouse gases (GHGs).⁷ In the atmosphere, GHGs absorb and reflect heat. Earth has a finite capacity to absorb greenhouse gases. An unprecedented increase in atmospheric GHG levels, caused by human activity, are responsible for a global warming trend that is changing the earth's climate and profoundly harming people and the environment. The report of the International Affairs Committee to the 136th General Assembly reports on this in detail (see p. 390-405).

In this report the term “carbon emissions” refers only to GHG emissions released as a result of human activity.

The term “carbon footprint” is a measurement (usually given in tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalents) of all the GHGs released by the combustion of fossil fuel during an activity (like flying) or by a specific item (like a refrigerator). Carbon dioxide is the most harmful greenhouse gas because it is contributing the most to global warming.

The term “carbon neutral” (or “net-zero carbon footprint”) describes human efforts to reduce carbon emissions, and to increase the earth’s ability to absorb carbon emissions (through certain kinds of offset programs). Human efforts to attain carbon neutrality fall into two categories: (1) reduction of overall carbon dioxide emissions, and (2) balancing or offsetting emissions by purchasing carbon offsets. This is explored in the “Carbon Offsets” section (see p. 443).

Statements from Previous General Assemblies

The 116th General Assembly (1990) acknowledged that global warming is one of the most serious global environmental challenges to the health, security and stability of human life and natural ecosystems, and recommended ways courts of the church could promote and be involved in environmental stewardship. Of particular interest is a statement made by the 117th General Assembly (1991) which commented on human carbon emissions: “...the reduction in fossil fuel use in order to limit carbon dioxide emissions that contribute to global warming, needs to be a Canadian priority....Funding [of] research and development of clean, renewable energy resources must be increased by redirecting it away from conventional fossil fuel and nuclear energy.” The 120th General Assembly (1994) stated that natural resources should be recognized as “capital” to be sustained for future generations (A&P 1991, p. 286, 289).

The 134th General Assembly (2008) approved the recommendation that The Presbyterian Church in Canada become a signatory to the Carbon Disclosure Project (A&P 2008, p. 41). The CDP is an investor coalition representing over \$57 trillion in assets from 385 institutional investors. It is an independent, not-for-profit organization. These investors include private and public pension funds and faith communities in the USA, Canada and a number of other countries. The CDP seeks full disclosure from corporations regarding the opportunities and risks they face due to climate change. Publishing the results of the responses informs shareholders how corporations are responding to the opportunities and risks posed by climate change. The Conference Board of Canada serves as the Canadian Secretariat for the CDP.

A four page summary of General Assembly reflections, policies and statements is available from Justice Ministries.

Ecumenical Organizations Involved in Ecological Justice

The Presbyterian Church in Canada is a member of three ecumenical organizations that study and promote ecological justice: KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives (www.kairoscanada.org); World Council of Churches (www.oikoumene.org) and World Alliance of Reformed Churches (warc.jalb.de). Please visit the websites of these organizations for detailed information on their ecological justice programs.

Theological and Ethical Reflections

Caring for creation implies that we have a responsibility to live in a way that neither harms our local and global neighbours nor future generations. Striving to reduce our carbon footprint is not just a moral or ethical issue about the environment, it is a faith issue concerned with our relationship with “God’s whole, wondrous creation.”⁸

Christians seeking to understand the need and implications of sustainable living are embracing a theology of caring for creation sometimes called eco-theology. Such a theology is based on the belief that all parts of creation are interconnected and interdependent, and includes examining anew:

1. The relationship of God with creation.
2. The broken relationships within God’s creation.
3. The human responsibility to serve God and care for creation.

1. The relationship of God with creation

The “Accra Confession: Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth” was adopted by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches 24th General Council in Accra, Ghana, 2004. The Accra Confession was endorsed by the 134th General Assembly (2007). The confession includes theological reflections on the relationship between God and creation, including:

“We believe in God, Creator and Sustainer of all life, who calls us as partners in the creation and redemption of the world. We live under the promise that Jesus Christ came so that all might have life in fullness” (John 10: 10). Guided and upheld by the Holy Spirit, we open ourselves to the reality of our world.

We believe that God is sovereign over all creation (Psalm 24:1).

We believe that God has made a covenant with all of creation (Genesis 9:8-12). God has brought into being an Earth community based on the vision of justice and peace. The covenant is a gift of grace that is not for sale in the marketplace (Isaiah 55:1). It is an economy of grace for the household of all of creation. Jesus shows that this is an inclusive covenant in which the poor and marginalized are preferential partners and calls us to put justice for the “least of these” (Matthew 25:40) at the centre of the community of life. All creation is blessed and included in this covenant (Hosea 2:18ff).

2. The broken relationships within God's creation: between humans who have abundant resources and humans who have not; between humans and the environment; between humans and God

Sin is seen "in the breakdown of human relationships, revealed in the unjust distribution of resources which creates a chasm between rich and poor. Sin also lies in the loss of connectedness between human beings and the environment, which has brought about the crisis of global warming. And in all this there is, too, the breakdown of the relationship between us and God."⁹ Humankind's refusal to acknowledge this brokenness and inaction to heal this brokenness is sinful.

3. The human responsibility to serve God and care for creation

Gordon Aeschliman, president of the Christian organization, Target Earth International, says "Serving God's creation and doing justice for the poor are inseparable missions in today's world".¹⁰ Climate change is undermining the poverty reduction and environmental sustainable development objectives of the Millennium Development Goals.¹¹

Eco-theologian, Sallie McFague, of the Vancouver School of Theology, argues for a new economic model believing that "in order for the whole household of the planet to flourish, the earth's resources must be distributed justly among all its inhabitants, human and [non-human] on a sustainable basis. The three basic economic rules for all to thrive in this household are: take only your share; clean up after yourself; and keep the house in good repair for those to come."¹²

A theology of care of creation is inconsistent with an individualistic view of human life or a consumer-based economy built on:

- unlimited resource development;
- the belief that bigger and more are better than smaller and less;
- monetary measures of development rather than human and environmental measures like life expectancy, child mortality, clean water, forest reserves, biodiversity.

Locally we have seen the environmental impacts of our actions (e.g. smog, polluted water). Are we also responsible for the unseen, often unknown impacts – that is, the environmental and human injustices experienced by the poor and particularly by people in the South?

Jesus' idea of faithful living is not just revealed in one particular action, but is embedded in everything a person is and does. In Matthew 25:31-46 neither the sheep nor the goats knew what they had done right or wrong, but ignorance was no excuse. The "righteousness" of the sheep was declared because of the way they had lived serving others, unwittingly, day by day. More than once Jesus spoke to his disciples about a life of service mattering above all else (Mark 9:37, Matthew 23:11-12, Matthew 20:26-28,

Luke 22:26). The occurrence of service mattered more than the personal traits of the doer (Mark 9:38-41).

From a theology of care of creation, these four themes emerge:¹³

- God's declaration that all creation is "very good" (Genesis 1:31);
- Jesus' new commandment "to love one another as I have loved you" (Luke 10:25-37);
- The biblical prophetic tradition to speak truth to power in the cause of justice (Isaiah 58:6);
- Christianity's commitment to transform the world (Acts 10:34-43).

These themes direct Christians to faithful actions to bring about a just and sustainable way of life.

Organizational Energy Policies

A number of organizations provide resources on ways to reduce carbon emissions. Some organizations have audited their carbon emissions and established baseline carbon emission information. Other organizations have established energy policies and set reduction targets. These initiatives are relatively new.

Amnesty International Canada established a set of venue criteria as a part of a strategy to reduce the environmental impact of its meetings. It plans to regularly evaluate its progress in reducing the environmental impact of its meetings, and has declined using carbon offsets.¹⁴

KAIROS has developed an energy policy that includes calculating carbon emissions from staff travel, building heating, electricity usage and waste production, and sets targets to reduce its carbon emissions.

The Anglican Church of Canada set up the Task Group to Reduce Carbon Emissions of the Partners in Mission and Ecojustice Committee in 2007 to explore ways to support Anglican churches in reducing their carbon footprints.¹⁵

The United Church of Canada has examined its General Councils (held every three years) with respect to electricity, heating, air conditioning, ground transportation, air travel, paper materials, venue, registration, accreditation, transportation, offices, food and beverage services, procurement, production.¹⁶ One third of the trips made by the current moderator will be by train. ¹⁷

Carbon Offsets

A carbon offset is an emission-reduction credit generated from another organization's project that results in a reduction of GHGs. These reductions must be over and above

any reductions that would have occurred without the project. Carbon offsets are traded or bought.

The quality of offsets is determined by the organization offering the offsets and how they are used. This report outlines some of their limitations.

Offsets rely on the assumption that carbon emissions can be neutralized. They should never replace conscientious attempts to reduce overall carbon emissions. Critics of carbon offsets have noted the ethical dimensions of commodifying the impetus of climate change mitigation. Offsets may be purchased by individuals wishing to respond to a personal sense of responsibility for climate change mitigation. It is crucial to emphasize that offsets should never be a replacement for overall reductions.

Organizations offering carbon offsets are part of a larger, emerging carbon trading market.

The most important point to consider when evaluating offsets and the organizations that offer them, are the projects they invest in. There are three main types of offset projects:

1. emission-free energy generation (e.g. wind or solar energy);
2. energy efficiency projects (e.g. compact florescent lamps, energy efficient motors and appliances);
3. sequestration (e.g. planting trees).¹⁸

The first two categories reduce emissions. Sequestration projects absorb emissions that have already been released.¹⁹ A best practices approach to climate change mitigation is to avoid the emissions in the first place.

A growing number of organizations offset their employees' travel and this trend is expected to grow.²⁰ Because offsets are an intangible commodity, it is important, the David Suzuki Foundation argues, to set clear ownership guidelines to ensure that carbon offsets are not "double counted," that is to ensure that a credit purchased by one person is not then sold, again, to someone else.

The voluntary offset market in Canada, as in many countries, is not regulated by the government. For this reason, it is important that industry standards exist to help consumers evaluate the quality of an offset organization, and the credits they sell. As of 2008, there were 14 carbon offset standard bodies in Canada, and over 100 globally.²¹ The Pembina Institute and the David Suzuki Foundation name the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and The Gold Standard as the two of the most widely used and recognized standards.²²

Standards will generally evaluate for additionality (ensuring that projects offer offsets that wouldn't have otherwise been available in the absence of a project, that is a new project), accurate quantification²³, auditing²⁴, unique ownership²⁵, permanence²⁶, leakage²⁷, sustainability considerations²⁸, stakeholder consultation, and timing^{29, 30}.

Carbon Neutral General Assemblies

Before calculating the cost of a carbon neutral General Assembly, all sources and amounts of event-related carbon emissions need to be identified. These would include:

- Travel to the event venue (including, flying, train and driving)
- Local travel during the event
- Energy consumed by the event venue (e.g. heating, cooling, lights, computers, etc.)
- Food and beverage consumption (including quantity of meat and vegetables, emissions generated during processing and transportation of food to the venue)³¹
- Travel and energy consumption during the event planning process (not just the event itself)
- Paper use
- Waste

Carbon Emissions from the 136th General Assembly

Calculating the carbon footprint of a large gathering, such as a General Assembly, is complicated. There is an ecological impact (which very often includes carbon emissions) to virtually every part of our daily lives (i.e. the energy needed to light and heat buildings, transportation, waste, food, etc.). The scope of this report is limited to calculating the CO₂ emissions for commissioners' flights to and from the 136th General Assembly (2010).

About flying

Aviation is the fastest growing source of greenhouse gas emissions.³² Aviation has a disproportionately large carbon footprint because burning jet fuel at high altitudes concentrates the impact of CO₂ emissions.

Calculating Carbon Emissions

There is no standardized methodology for calculating carbon emissions. Some methods are more comprehensive than others.

Illustrating Differences in Carbon Calculators

Air Canada has a partnership with Zerofootprint, a Toronto based organization. Zerofootprint calculates that one, roundtrip flight from Toronto, Ontario to Sydney, Nova Scotia emits 0.4 tonnes of CO₂. The German-based organization Atmosfair calculates 0.8 tonnes of CO₂ for the same trip. The Pembina Institute is a Canadian not-for-profit organization that provides policy and education information on climate change and energy issues. It evaluated the different methodologies used by a number of air travel CO₂ calculators to determine CO₂ emissions. At the Pembina Institute's

suggestion, Justice Ministries used the Atmosfair calculator to measure the CO2 emissions of flights to the 136th General Assembly (2010).³³

Methodology for Calculating the Aviation CO2 Emissions of the 136th General Assembly (2010)

The roll of Assembly for the 135th General Assembly was used to determine the number of commissioners attending the General Assembly, and their departure points. Calculations were limited to CO2 emissions from direct flights to and from Sydney, Nova Scotia (as the closest airport to the University of Cape Breton). Calculations do not account for stopovers and connecting flights. Calculations exclude CO2 emissions from driving to and from airports. It was assumed that commissioners from Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick would drive to General Assembly. Their emissions have been excluded from these calculations. Distances were calculated from one of 25 departure airports from across Canada to Sydney Airport, Nova Scotia. Departure airports were selected based on their nearness to a commissioner's home, and the availability of flights to Sydney through two major airlines (Air Canada and Westjet).³⁴

Preliminary Results

- It will take an estimated 444 (direct) flights to fly 222 commissioners to and from the 136th General Assembly (2010). This does not include resource people or General Assembly guests.
- On average, commissioners will fly 4,508 kilometres (roundtrip) to attend the 136th General Assembly. Commissioners (collectively) emitted 271.5 tonnes of CO2 to fly (roundtrip) to the 136th General Assembly (2010).
- On average, one commissioner emitted 1.2 tonnes of CO2 to fly (roundtrip) to the 136th General Assembly (2010). The average citizen of India emits 0.9 tonnes of CO2 per year (not including industry and commercial emissions).³⁵
- 14 Life and Mission Agency staff will attend the 136th General Assembly (2010). This staff will collectively emit 12 tonnes of CO2 to fly to and from the General Assembly.
- The Canadian Council for International Cooperation reports that, per capita, Canadians emit 13 times the amount of CO2 compared to a citizen of India.³⁶
- The European Economic Social Committee recommends an annual, personal cap of 2 tonnes of CO2, to keep the rise of the average surface temperature to less than 2 degrees Celsius (the threshold of dangerous climate change)³⁷
- The Conference Board of Canada reports that in 2005, on a per capita basis, Canada emitted 22.6 tonnes of CO2 (including individual, industry and commercial sources). Canada ranked 16th out of 17 Organization for Economic and Co-operation Development (OECD) countries on GHG emissions per capita.³⁸

For Comparison

- 1 litre of gasoline produces about 2.4 kg (.0024 tonnes) of CO₂.³⁹
- On average, Canadians produce half of their annual CO₂ emissions from driving.
- Canada uses more energy than all 760 million inhabitants of Africa.⁴⁰

Air Canada has a Carbon Offset Program offered through the organization Zerofootprint. Zerofootprint has several ways of generating carbon credits including reforestation, tire recycling programs. Credits purchased through the Air Canada program are generated from a forest restoration project in Maple Ridge, British Columbia. The program reports that as of November 2009, 14,513 tonnes of CO₂ emissions had been offset by the planting of 2,903 trees.

Westjet's website has no information on its current Carbon Offset Program.

The 134th General Assembly (2007) endorsed "The Accra Confession: Covenanting for Justice in the Economy." The Accra Confession is a plea from our brothers and sisters in the global south to be wiser stewards of creation. Understanding the impact we have on the planet is a first step to responding to the call to "hear the cries of people who suffer, and the woundedness of creation itself." Measuring our carbon footprint is one way to do this. Documenting the carbon footprint of General Assembly will assist the church in developing policies and strategies to reduce the carbon footprint of holding a General Assembly. For these reasons the following recommendations are presented.

Recommendation No. 8 (adopted, p. 36)

That commissioners and resource people record their air and automobile mileage on travel reimbursement forms to generate baseline data of the General Assembly's carbon footprint.

Recommendation No. 9 (adopted, p. 36)

That the baseline data be used to assist the church in developing policies and strategies that will reduce the General Assembly's carbon footprint.

General Assembly generally occurs at a university campus. A growing number of universities have introduced environmental sustainability programs to reduce GHG emissions.

Recommendation No. 10 (adopted, p. 36)

That in the criteria for evaluating potential General Assembly sites include questions about the energy efficiency and environmental programs and policies of potential sites.

These questions would not dictate the outcome of an evaluation process nor determine final acceptance of a venue, but provide information for consideration. Justice Ministries will develop a checklist to assist this process.

Recommendation No. 11 (adopted, p. 36)

That this be the response to the additional motion re General Assemblies and carbon footprint.

Conclusion

With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It is like the mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade. (Mark 4:30-32)

Face-to-face gatherings like General Assembly cannot be carbon-neutral events without the purchase of carbon offsets. Efforts by General Assembly to reduce its carbon footprint are valuable learning opportunities that make a tangible contribution to responding to climate change.

Resources Consulted

“Engaging in God’s Mission”, The Anglican Church of Canada website, accessed March 8, 2010, online at www.anglican.ca/v2019/pdf/v2019-mission-study-printer-spreads.pdf.

“The Global Challenge to End Poverty and Injustice”, Canadian Council for International Co-operation, Ottawa, 2008, p. 14, online at www.ccic.ca.

“Greenhouse gas emissions per capita”, The Conference Board of Canada, October 2008.

“Kyoto Protocol: Canada’s Emissions”, The David Suzuki Foundation website, www.davidsuzuki.org, accessed January 21, 2010.

“Purchasing Carbon Offsets: a guide for Canadian Consumers, Businesses and Organizations”, The David Suzuki Foundation and The Pembina Institute, August 2009, www.davidsuzuki.org, accessed online February 2, 2010.

The Contribution of Working Group I to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Solomon, S., D. Qin, M. Manning, Z. Chen, M. Marquis, K.B. Averyt, M. Tignor and H.L. Miller (eds.) Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA, Chapter 10 “Mean temperature”, accessed online March 8, 2010.

“Theology of Climate Change”, The Micah Challenge, Frenchs Forest, Australia, May 2009.

“Livestock impacts on the environment – Spotlight 2006”, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations website, accessed March 8, 2010, online at www.fao.org/ag/magazine/0612sp1.htm.

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Kollmuss, Anja and Benjamin Bowell, “Voluntary offsets for air-travel carbon emissions”, Tufts Climate Initiative, December 2006.

Monbiot, George, *Heat: how to stop the planet from burning*, Doubleday Canada, 2006.

“The Green Bible”, New Revised Standard Version Bible, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., New York: Harper Collins, 1989.

“Climate Change and the Millennium Development Goals”, United Nations Development Programme website, accessed March 8, 2010, online at www.undp.org/climatechange/cc_mdgs.shtml.

“The Accra Confession: Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth”, World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), adopted at the 24th General Council in Accra, Ghana, 2004.

End Notes

6. The Accra Confession was endorsed by the 133rd General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, A&P 2007, p. 263, 20, “Accra Confession”, A&P 2005, p. 282-86.
7. IPCC, “Changes in Atmospheric Constituents and in Radiative Forcing”, np.
8. “Globalization We Can Grasp: The Covenanting for Justice Online Curriculum”, developed by the North American Working Group for Covenanting for Justice, associated with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches; “Accra Confession,” np.
9. Quoting Paula Clifford of Christian Aid in “Theology of Climate Change”, p. 11.
10. The Green Bible, p. 91
11. “Climate Change and the Millennium Development Goals”, np.
12. “Theology of Climate Change”, p. 8.
13. “A Theology for Climate Justice”, p. 2-3.
14. Email correspondence with Gloria Nafziger, Amnesty International, Toronto office.
15. “Engaging in God’s Mission”, p. 2.
16. See The United Church of Canada’s website for further details, online at www.gc40.united-church.ca/en/about/green.
17. *The United Church Observer*, January 2010, p. 36.

18. Sequestration projects are the most controversial projects because, according to the Tufts Climate Initiative, they must be considered in light of their “additionality”; a project must reduce emissions above and beyond what would have happened if that credit had not be purchased. Establishing a method for doing this is difficult.” Kollmuss, p. 5, 10.
19. Ibid, p. 5.
20. Ibid, December 2006, p. 3.
21. “Purchasing Carbon Offsets”, p. 8.
22. Ibid, p. 36.
23. Ensuring that offsets can be accurately measured in terms of the CO₂ they claim to offset.
24. Independent evaluation of a carbon offset program ensuring that it’s doing what it’s supposed to be doing.
25. Ensuring that carbon credits are only sold once, to one consumer.
26. Planting a tree, for example, would not ensure permanence in an offset; if the tree dies, the carbon is released back into the atmosphere.
27. Ensuring that carbon reductions in one region do not result in carbon emissions in another region. For example, if a carbon credit is purchased to protect a tree in one region, the logging industry may just move its activities somewhere else.
28. Ensuring that carbon offset projects do not harm either people or the environment.
29. Ensuring that carbon offset projects are offsetting at the time of purchase. For example, if a credit is purchased for a wind farm that has not yet been built, the effect of the credit is delayed. If something should happen to the project itself, it may never come to fruition.
30. “Purchasing Carbon Offsets”, p. 29-37.
31. Eating meat has been identified as an activity contributing to GHG emissions. While livestock production is not a major CO₂ emitter, the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has estimated that direct emissions (i.e. methane and nitrous oxide) from livestock production account for about 18% of the world's total GHG emissions. “Livestock impacts on the environment”, np.
32. Monbiot, p. 174.
33. Email correspondence with Alex Doukas at The Pembina Institute, January 19, 2010.
34. All flights were routed to Sydney Nova Scotia, with the exception of flights from Grand Prairie to Halifax, as Westjet only flies to the Halifax airport in Nova Scotia.
35. Information provided by Atmosfair’s emission calculator, online at www.atmosfair.de.
36. Canadian Council for International Co-operation, p. 14.
37. IPCC, np.
38. “Greenhouse gas emissions per capita”, np.
39. “Fuel Consumption Calculator”, Natural Resources Canada website, accessed March 8, 2010. Online at www.oee.nrcan.gc.ca/publications/transportation/fuel-calculator/index.cfm.
40. “Kyoto Protocol: Canada’s Emissions”, np.