



Resolutions To Action

LCWR Global Concerns Committee

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Reducing and Offsetting Our Carbon Footprint

LCWR Global Concerns Committee

EXPERIENCE

The 2009 LCWR Assembly Resolution calls us to measure and reduce our carbon footprints. The Global Concerns Committee, which had proposed the resolution, agreed to calculate our personal footprints by going to one of the suggested web sites and discussing the results at our fall meeting. It sounded simple enough. We arrived at the meeting and shared our results.

We discovered that some were unable to calculate their carbon footprint because they could not separate out their personal use of energy from the general use of energy in the situations in which they lived. Those who were able to do the calculation found that their carbon footprint was heavier than they had hoped. As we shared our experience, we realized that we learned as much from the experience of doing the carbon footprint calculation as we did from the failed attempts to measure how much carbon our daily activities released into the atmosphere.

Those who travel fairly frequently and/or travel globally, have a heavier

than average footprint. Overall, our carbon footprints were less than the average US footprint, but larger than the average worldwide carbon footprint. The worldwide target to combat climate change is one-half the current average worldwide carbon footprint.

What more can we do to reduce our carbon footprint? Turning off lights, unplugging appliances when not in use, turning down the heat or air-conditioning when not at home, turning off the computer when not in use, car-pooling, using public transportation are actions that do make a difference. When the maintenance staff of one motherhouse was asked to examine the problem, they formed a green team and came up with many simple suggestions: make fewer copies, replace burned out light bulbs with compact fluorescent or LED bulbs, establish energy use policies and practices, replace chemical cleaning supplies with water and vinegar, compost food service waste, etc.

SOCIAL ANALYSIS

Our experience of calculating our individual carbon footprint heightened our awareness and understanding. Conversation generated

options. Many of the actions mentioned are already a part of our lives, yet there is so much more we need to do. A major problem area is transportation. If there is no public transportation, we have to use a car. When our ministry requires travel to distant places to visit members and attend meetings, our carbon footprint increases. Conference calls and Skype can help reduce it, but cannot eliminate it. The question then becomes, "what can we do to offset the carbon we release into the atmosphere?" When we have done all we can to reduce our carbon footprint, what can we do to mitigate the affect of our carbon use and restore a right relationship with Earth?

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We learned from our sharing that we can decide on a visible local action like planting trees or choosing Green Energy options to offset our carbon emissions. Or we can purchase carbon offsets by funding a project that prevents one ton of greenhouse gases from being emitted for each ton that we have caused. Carbon offset providers sell the greenhouse gas reductions associated with projects like wind farms or methane-capture facilities to customers who want to offset the emissions they caused by flying, driving, or using electricity.

REFLECTION

We are reminded of Gerard Manley Hopkins' line, "nor can foot feel now being shod." Our lifestyles have removed us from the feel of Earth under our feet. As we struggle to become conscious of our energy expenditures, can we reclaim the feel of bare feet on the grass, the sands of the ocean coast or fresh mud near the lakeshore? Kinesthetically can we connect the feel of our feet on Earth with sensing our relationship with all of creation?

Formerly, we acknowledged our moral responsibility as stewards of creation, and then we moved into a consciousness of how interdependent all of creation is, including ourselves. Now we are challenged to move to a sense of our unity with all that exists. Realizing that the stewardship imagery sets us over creation, we now have a richer sense of how we are part of this cosmic creation rather than set over it to safeguard it.

There is a price to pay for our ministry lifestyles. Travel, especially by air incurs a cost to Earth. Perhaps now is the time to re-envision "restorative justice" through "cosmic" restoration. Restorative justice requires that we put the victim at the center. Earth is the victim, and restorative justice asks what is needed for healing. Abatements and offsetting what we have taken may be seen as cosmic restorative justice.

Individuals and communities can purchase carbon offsets to mitigate their own greenhouse gas emissions from transportation, electricity use, and other sources. For example, an individual might purchase carbon offsets to compensate for the greenhouse gas emissions caused by personal air travel or related car rental. In 2008, about \$705 million of carbon offsets were purchased in the voluntary market, representing about 123.4 million metric tons of CO₂ reductions.

Offsets are typically achieved through support of projects that reduce the emission of greenhouse gases in the short- or long-term. The most common project type is renewable energy, such as wind farms, biomass energy, or hydroelectric dams. Others include energy efficiency projects, the destruction of industrial pollutants or agricultural byproducts, destruction of landfill methane, and forestry projects. A very visible, local and cost-effective offset could be the planting of trees which absorb CO₂ out of the air and produces oxygen as a by-product.

Discernment has been our way of proceeding in community. We must also discern which choices for ministry are necessary, albeit carbon-expensive, and what creative means we can take to restore a right relationship with Earth. As we grow in understanding the new cosmology, quantum physics and cellular biology, we ask, "What is our place in this living matrix? How do we discern wisely our use of resources and what waste we leave behind? How do we restore the mark we leave on Earth?"

ACTION

1. Access one of the following carbon footprint calculators to determine your individual carbon use.
 - www.nature.org/initiatives/climatechange/calculator
 - www.carbonfootprint.com/calculator.aspx
2. Reduce your carbon footprint impact first.
3. Then study the carbon offset options presented on these websites

and select an action that will offset or mitigate some of the effects of your carbon use. The following may offer some specific restorative justice actions:

- Plant a tree for every 10 ton of CO₂ emissions you generate
- Decide to invest in green energy through your local energy company.
- Share your actions with local area ministries and merchants as a way to encourage others to offset their energy consumption and CO₂ emissions.
- Support Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) projects that have generated Carbon Emission Reduction (CER) credits. These projects are fully verified to Kyoto/United Nations standards via an independent Designated Operating Entity, CDM projects support sustainable development in developing countries through projects such as wind energy, hydro power and biomass.
- Support carbon offsetting projects within North, Central and South America and/or Africa—including reforestation and renewable energy production. (globalcarbonoffset.com)
- Decide which congregational meetings annually could be done through Skype, MW Messenger, video-conferencing, etc. and which meetings need face-to-face contact.

Suggested Readings

- Joelle Novey, "Carbon Offsets Demystified" Green America Publications, Feature Article March/April 2007 (www.GreenAmericaToday.org/pubs)
- Judith Purman, *Tracking Your Carbon Footprint: A Step-by-Step Guide to Understanding and Inventorying Greenhouse Gas Emissions*, iUniverse Books, 2008.
- Joanna Yarrow, *How to Reduce Your Carbon Footprint: 365 Simple Ways to Save Energy, Resources, and Money*, Duncan Baird Pub., 2008