

GS08 CLIMATE JUSTICE COMMITMENT

Origin: General Secretary

1. What is the issue?

The voices of Indigenous peoples and global partners have longed raised the concerns about an impending climate crisis now a climate catastrophe. Manifest in very tangible ways in communities, there is no denying the grave threat to our planet and the need for emergency action. This accelerating catastrophe deepens existing social and economic vulnerabilities, through insidious strategies such as environmental racism. The devastating impact is felt not only on humanity, but on the very web of creation God loved into being.

2. Why is this issue important?

In “such a time as this,” (Esther 4:14), the integrity of our theological commitments to care and live in respectful relationship with creation require bold, daring and public action. The United Church of Canada is required to put its own house in order. We are called to collaborate deeply with Indigenous peoples, global partners, the ecumenical community, civil society and governments in change strategies. We are invited to robustly reflect Indigenous self-determination, renewed eco-spirituality, youth engagement, and sustained advocacy.

The United Church of Canada has a particular responsibility as a religious institution to dramatically reduce our carbon footprint. The focus of these efforts must be our buildings where heat and light continue to be the largest contributor to emissions. [Faithful Footprints](#) has been successful in offering congregations, along with United Church camps, education centres, and community ministries, opportunities to improve their building’s energy and carbon performance. The emergency nature of this crisis requires this work be expanded with a more ambitious emissions reduction target for the church as a whole. As the pandemic draws to a close, transportation emissions may present another important place for sustained emissions reduction. [United Property Resource Corporation’s](#) (UPRC) commitment to net zero redevelopment should be affirmed as a contribution to sector and system change.

As well as buildings, denominational green spaces offer opportunities for reconnecting with the earth and deepening ecological commitment with opportunities to strengthen biodiversity protection and local food security. Further opportunities exist to deepen relationships with species who are our relatives, more strongly locating communities of faith as disciples in their watersheds.

We have spoken out on environmental and climate issues for more than 40 years adjusting and revisioning our commitments over time. The current climate catastrophe and the launching of a new strategic plan call us to once more articulate the work that we are doing and more consistently engage all parts of our church.

3. How does this proposal help us to live into our church’s commitments on equity?

Facing up to this moment includes acknowledging the interconnections between ecocide and genocide and Christianity’s collusion in both. We are required to recognize the role of historic

biblical interpretations in ecological degradation and the repression of the wisdom and spirituality of Indigenous peoples through generations. We must seek to participate in a climate movement with a particular responsibility to be guided by Indigenous peoples around the globe who have been consistently faithful in the care and protection of creation, based in deep knowledge and relationship. This is one way of living into our commitment to the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and *The Calls to the Church* as we strive to renew our ecological understandings and commitments in gratitude for God's gift of a creation that is very good.

4. How might the General Council respond to the issue?

As part of the General Council Office [strategic plan](#), the General Council Executive adopted the following strategic objective: **amplify and integrate current initiatives in a bold, hopeful denominational climate strategy that accelerates reductions towards the goal of an 80% decrease in emissions by 2030**; with a commitment to measure, report and adjust based on learnings.

The General Council could make this a **whole church commitment**. We could strive to make a faithful and ambitious contribution to the climate movement, as part of the necessary transformation required to protect God's living world.

We could face this emergency through deepened commitment to reducing our carbon emissions, robustly integrating this goal across programs, services, and operations, with continued emphasis on lowering the energy footprint of our buildings from which the majority of our carbon emissions come, as well as an increased focus on transportation related emissions.

- We could invite and support United Church communities of faith to spearhead church-wide climate action including in our buildings. We could encourage members and adherents to embolden commitment in their own households and across their communities.
- We could encourage ongoing learning, particularly as offered by Indigenous communities and Nations, and right relations between people and the land. This could facilitate reconnection to the earth, and exploration of the intersections between eco-spirituality and social justice.
- We could support strategies of camps and outdoor education centres to be a resource to living with respect in creation and a model for carbon emissions reduction.
- We could intensify our historic commitment to climate justice through stronger denominational advocacy and investor action.
- We could build solidarity support for environmental anti-racism and for land, water and climate protection, particularly as led by Indigenous communities, in Canada and globally.

- We could support adaptation, building local community resilience to climate impacts by strengthening the vital role that local United Churches play in grass roots "neighbors helping neighbors" support networks. This is especially urgent in marginalized communities where the impact of climate destabilization is devastating.
- We could strengthen collaborations with Indigenous communities, global partners, and ecumenical bodies, deepening movement building for climate justice. One opportunity is a renewed faith-in-action campaign--*For the Love of Creation*—which offers new possibilities for United Church communities to collaborate in climate action.
- We could leverage the unique regional infrastructure of the United Church to work in partnership with provinces/territories and municipalities to support Canada's legislative climate targets.
- We could build relationships with young people, whose moral leadership has been unparalleled, amplifying their advocacy.

We could integrate the call to live with respect in creation across all our operations and ministries and intensify church-wide participation in bold, daring, and hopeful climate action.

5. For the body transmitting this proposal to the General Council:

The United Church of Canada has a long record of commitment to ecological conservation, environmental activism, and advocacy for climate justice. In 2015, General Council 42 [approved a carbon emission goal](#) consistent with the Paris agreement and took bold investor action. In 2018, during General Council 43, *Faithful Footprints* was launched through a public commitment of 80% reduction by 2050 and a public goal of engaging 500 United Church congregations in the program by 2025¹. The climate catastrophe requires a bold, daring whole church commitment with an expedited timeline and strengthened effort.

¹ See GS 81 [https://unitedchurch.sharepoint.com/w:/r/sites/UnitedChurchCommons/PublicDocuments/Shared-Publicly/Governance/General%20Council%20Executive/GC43%20Executive%20\(2018-2022\)/Meeting%20Documents/2020-11-20-21/Background%20Documents/Faithful%20Footprints%20-%20148-149%20GS%2081%20Proposal%20Reducing%20Carbon%20Emissions.docx?d=web18659cbb74453e83500fed06e07806&csf=1&web=1&e=a6kpMr](https://unitedchurch.sharepoint.com/w:/r/sites/UnitedChurchCommons/PublicDocuments/Shared-Publicly/Governance/General%20Council%20Executive/GC43%20Executive%20(2018-2022)/Meeting%20Documents/2020-11-20-21/Background%20Documents/Faithful%20Footprints%20-%20148-149%20GS%2081%20Proposal%20Reducing%20Carbon%20Emissions.docx?d=web18659cbb74453e83500fed06e07806&csf=1&web=1&e=a6kpMr)