

*Following is a brief summary of the Creation Stewardship Task Force report prepared by the CRC Office of Social Justice. This summary has been endorsed by the synodical task force as an accurate and helpful summary introduction. The summary, however, should not be a substitute for reading the full synodical report. In order to understand the conclusions and recommendations regarding creation stewardship, please take the time to carefully read and study the full task force report.*

## **A Brief Summary of the Creation Stewardship Task Force Report to Synod 2012**

The Creation Care Stewardship Task Force submits that the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC) adopt a position statement on climate change that affirms it is indeed occurring, and most likely due to human activity; that it is a moral, ethical, and religious issue; that it poses a threat to future generations and the vulnerable, and is a challenge to us all; and that urgent action is required of us to address it. Making a statement, though important and powerful, is not enough. We must move forward in prayer and action (churches and individuals will find Appendix E of particular use for creation care steps and actions to take).

As Christians, we joyfully proclaim that our world and everything in it belongs to our creator God. We are also blessed with the task of caring for God's good creation and aim to act as responsible stewards for a world that reflects the glory of God from mountaintop to valley; rainforest to arid steppe; and from the smallest and most humble of organisms to the largest, most magnificent beasts.

Today's world, however, presents special challenges to its caretakers. What does it mean to be a steward of creation when that creation is threatened daily by a host of environmental degradations? What does it mean to be a witness and good neighbor when multitudes of people are at risk from environmental problems? And, as reflections of our creator God and caretakers of the works of his hands, how do we break through the noise and controversy to respond to the particular challenge of climate change?

The CRC (particularly through many of its individual members) is not new to the pursuit of responsible care for creation. Already thirty years ago, the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship produced the book *Earthkeeping*, and since the 1990s, several synods have addressed creation care issues. Most recently, Synod 2010 instructed the Board of Trustees to assemble a Creation Stewardship Task Force to "identify a biblical and Reformed perspective of our position on creation stewardship, including climate change" (*Acts of Synod 2010*, pp. 871-72).

The task force, composed of scientists working in climate and environmental studies, theologians, educators, youth, and other lay people, offers its report with hope that the CRC will respond with a more corporate, unified response to the threats against God's creation, including the threat of climate change.

In considering the responses that we as Reformed Christians can and should take, the task force first examines biblical principles that guide our understanding of care for creation.

*Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony* provides a wonderful framework to explore the following principles: We affirm that the world, which was created good, belongs to God, and that we are its caretakers. Because of our sin and disobedience, we have been corrupted, and we exploit and dominate our neighbors and the earth. We know, however, that God took on flesh in Christ, and came into our fallen world to redeem all things, and to make all things new. As disciples of this reconciling Christ, we repent of our damaging actions, and aim to become “salt in a spoiling world.”

The report expands upon the biblical principles expressed in a creation-fall-redemption-new creation framework and explores basic earthkeeping principles that we can glean from Scripture. Among them, we understand that as the Lord keeps and sustains us, we must sustain creation; we should enjoy but not destroy the fruitfulness of the earth; we must provide Sabbath rest for creation; and we must seek first God’s kingdom, rather than striving after material wealth.

Responding to the mandate from synod, the task force focused in particular on the issues presented by climate change, and how we should respond to them. Sections VII and VIII (Appendix A is the expanded, more detailed version of these sections) of the report are worth careful reading and discussion. The task force examined how the earth’s climate system works and the role of carbon in that system. They explored the evidence for climate change, both from observable phenomena, such as melting glaciers and arctic ice, and from temperature data collected over time. The task force looked at the evidence collected by the scientific community for human-driven climate change. (When studying this portion of the report, it is recommended that the reader keep section III in mind, in which the report briefly discusses how scientific knowledge is obtained, analyzed, and reviewed and how necessary it is as a complement to the revealed Truth in Scripture.)

A warming world is one in which sea levels rise, the ocean becomes more acidic, agricultural zones shift, deserts get larger, and rainy areas get even wetter. The reality of climate change will be a challenge for all people, but it will be the people of poorer nations that lack the money and infrastructure to adapt to the challenges of climate change, who will bear the brunt of its effects.

As Christians called to care for creation and for the least among us, how are we to respond to the degradation of our environment and the serious challenges posed by climate change?

It is our hope that this report will help deepen our conversation on these critical issues and motivate us to prayerful, careful, restorative actions.