

A Science-Faith Dialogue in the Indiana Heartland

***Report on a Public Science Engagement Program
with support from the AAAS/Dialog on Science, Ethics, and Religion***



Led by

Concerned Scientists @ IU

*Michael Hamburger
Professor of Geophysics
Department of Earth & Atmospheric Sciences
Indiana University*

*Adrienne Keller
Ph.D. Candidate, Ecology
Department of Biology
Indiana University*

in collaboration with

*Dr. Robert Whitaker
Lead Pastor
Evangelical Community Church
Bloomington, Indiana*

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Summary

Over a three-week period in September-October 2019, the advocacy group *Concerned Scientists @ IU* developed and conducted a coordinated series of workshops that brought together scientists and members of several local faith communities to address the scientific, ethical, and religious dimensions of climate change and environmental stewardship. Participants included members of the scientific community involved in climate change research and advocacy, paired with religious leaders and congregants from five Evangelical churches in the area. The three workshops involved some 120 participants, culminating in a field-based workshop and celebration conducted at McCormick's Creek State Park. The project helped lay the groundwork for future collaboration and science-faith dialogue in our local community.

Background

With support from the *American Association for the Advancement of Science's* (AAAS) *Dialogue on Science, Ethics, and Religion* (DoSER) program, the science advocacy group *Concerned Scientists @ IU* developed, in collaboration with several local religious congregations, a coordinated series of workshops focused on the issue of climate change and environmental stewardship. The three workshops addressed the confluence of scientific, ethical, and religious issues surrounding this salient, timely, and controversial topic. The program was led by Prof. Michael Hamburger, a geophysicist in Indiana University's *Department of Earth & Atmospheric Sciences*, who served as a Senior Advisor at the State Department's Office of Religion and Global Affairs, and Adrienne Keller, a Ph.D. candidate in IU's *Department of Biology*, a leader of science advocacy initiatives on campus and in the community. Our primary collaborator from the faith community was Dr. Robert Whitaker, lead pastor of the *Evangelical Community Church*.

The proposal expanded on the momentum built by several parallel efforts in our community. These include the organization of *Concerned Scientists @ IU* (and its student affiliate, *Advocates for Science @ IU*). CSIU is a non-partisan science advocacy group with more than 1100 members. Over the past decade, multiple faith-based organizations in Bloomington have led or participated in dynamic programs on environmental stewardship and creation care. Although there are numerous local faith-based efforts aimed at addressing the climate crisis, few of these efforts have involved members of the Evangelical Christian community. We therefore decided to focus our project specifically on the local Evangelical Christian community. Our project sought to build on the general momentum built by interfaith collaboration, but also seek to bring in new members of the faith community who have largely been left out of this developing environmental coalition.

The project centered on a series of moderated dialogues focused on understanding and responding to climate change. The program involved two formal workshops focusing, respectively, on moral/ethical/religious and scientific aspects of climate change and environmental stewardship. These two formal workshops were followed by an informal field workshop, conducted at McCormick's Creek State Park in Spencer, Indiana. This outdoor experience allowed us to reframe an examination and discussion of climate change in the context of southern Indiana's beautiful natural environment, where participants

were encouraged to share scientific and spiritual observations of the changing landscape surrounding the park.

Workshop Planning

The workshop series was designed to bring together leaders from the local religious community with members of the Concerned Scientists group and other members of the IU academic and climate science community for a combination of formal presentations and informal discussion. At all stages, the workshop planning was a collective effort, involving close collaboration between leaders and participating presenters. At each stage of the workshops, leaders attempted to project a clear message of collaboration, communication, and mutual respect, fostering an open and respectful dialogue throughout the workshops.

In planning our workshop program, we elected to develop a relatively short, focused series of three public workshops, conducted in September-October 2019. The workshops were focused on congregants from five local Evangelical congregations, with the leadership of Pastor Robert Whitaker, with Bloomington's Evangelical Christian Church. Participating congregations included:

- *Evangelical Christian Church* (Pastors Robert Whitaker, Dan Waugh)
- *Sherwood Oaks Christian Church* (Pastors Brad Pontius, Jeremy Earle)
- *InterVarsity Christian Fellowship* (Sam Boldenow)
- *Reformed Presbyterian Church* (Pastors Rich Holdeman, Philip McCollum)
- *FX Church* (Pastor Matt Shockney)

In planning the workshops, we decided to conduct two formal workshops followed by a more informal gathering in a natural setting. The two formal workshops, conducted on September 25 and October 2, respectively, were designed to foster discussion of (1) the moral/ethical and religious dimensions of climate change and environmental stewardship, and (2) the scientific aspects of climate change. We elected to begin with the faith-focused event in order to better motivate interest and comfort with the topic among the religious members of the audience. In inviting participants, we sought to develop approximate parity in participants from scientific and religious communities (recognizing, of course, that there is significant overlap!) to allow for engaging small-group discussion. We included in each of the workshops, a relatively formal process of moderated discussion, led by facilitated by Dr. Krista Hoffmann-Longtin (faculty in Communications Studies at Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis). The discussions were structured first with general group icebreaker questions using electronic polling software, followed small group discussions at tables and general reporting-out discussion. The third workshop was designed as an informal culmination of the first two and took place at McCormick's Creek State Park, one of southern Indiana's most dramatic natural settings. The park provided an ideal environment for both structured discussions and informal conversation in a beautiful natural setting. Funding from AAAS/DoSER allowed us to provide funding for presenters' travel, rental of park facilities, and refreshments for the three workshops. The DoSER funding was augmented by generous in-kind contributions from the Evangelical Community Church. The workshop announcement is presented as Attachment A.

The structure and content of three workshops are described in greater detail below. Detailed agendas are presented in Attachment B.

Workshop 1 – September 25, 2019: Religious Perspectives on Creation Care

The first workshop focused on faith-based aspects of environmental stewardship using the faith-oriented term ‘creation care’. The workshop was moderated by Pastor Whitaker, with discussions facilitated by Dr. Hoffman-Longtin.

Dr. Jessica Moorman, an evangelical Christian who is also a climatologist and environmental scientist with the U.S. Department of Energy, was invited to provide a keynote presentation linking science and faith perspectives. Her presentation, entitled “Permission to Care: God’s call to Stewardship” was followed by panel discussion with four members of the Bloomington faith community and a representative of the organization *Young Evangelicals for Climate Action*, listed below:

- Kyle Meyaard-Schaap, director, *Young Evangelicals for Climate Action*
- Mike Bowling, Pastor, Englewood Christian Church
- Brad Pontius, Pastor, Sherwood Oaks Christian Church
- Ashley Inselman, World Vision & Evangelical Community Church
- Madeline Hirschfeld, Congregation Beth Shalom

The overarching goal of the discussion was to explore moral, ethical and spiritual aspects of climate change and environmental stewardship. The formal meeting was followed by a structured discussion, led by Dr. Hoffman-Longtin, including both small-group dialogue between scientists and members of the faith communities and group discussion among all ~100 participants. The workshop was structured through handouts to workshop participants, including (1) the workshop agenda (Attachment B); (2) a lexicon of climate change terminology (Attachment C); (3) ground rules for table discussion (Attachment D); and (4) resources for further inquiry (Attachment E).

A video recording of the workshop is available (in two parts) at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oTZUGR4QX3U> (Part 1: Introduction & Keynote)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bsnPUp0zw1M> (Part 2: Panel & Discussion)

Workshop 2 – October 2, 2019: “Our Changing Planet: Scientific Perspectives on Climate Change”

The second workshop focused on scientific and technological aspects of climate change. The workshop, attended by about 80 participants, featured an overview presentation by Ben Brabson, Professor Emeritus of Physics, followed by a panel discussion with four members of the climate science community. Participants included:

- Dr. Paul Staten, Assistant Professor of Atmospheric Science (Climate Modeling)
- Dr. Kim Novick, Associate Professor of Public & Environmental Affairs (Environmental Sciences)
- Dr. Ellen Ketterson, Distinguished Professor of Biology (Impact of Environmental Change on Birds)
- Dr. Gabriel Filippelli, Professor of Earth Sciences, IUPUI (Impacts of Environmental Change on Public Health)

Once again, the formal meeting was followed by a structured discussion, led by Dr. Hoffman-Longtin, and included both small-group table dialogue between scientists and members of the faith communities and group discussion among all participants. The workshop agenda is presented in Attachment B.

A video recording of this workshop is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvxGmsF4pW0>.

Workshop 3 – October 6:

The culmination of our program was an ambitious ‘plein air’ workshop, conducted on a rainy but beautiful fall afternoon at McCormick’s Creek State Park in Spencer, Indiana. This beautiful natural setting, overlooking the gorge created by McCormick’s Creek, allowed for a rich conclusion of the workshops. The field workshop included discussion of aesthetic, scientific, and humanistic aspects of the natural world alongside spiritual and religious interpretations. We started with a welcome from Park Ranger Wyatt Williams, an opening benediction, led by Pastor Whitaker, a musical interlude by a small choir led by composer Malcolm Dalglish and a bird-banding demonstration led by members of Dr. Ketterson’s ornithology lab.

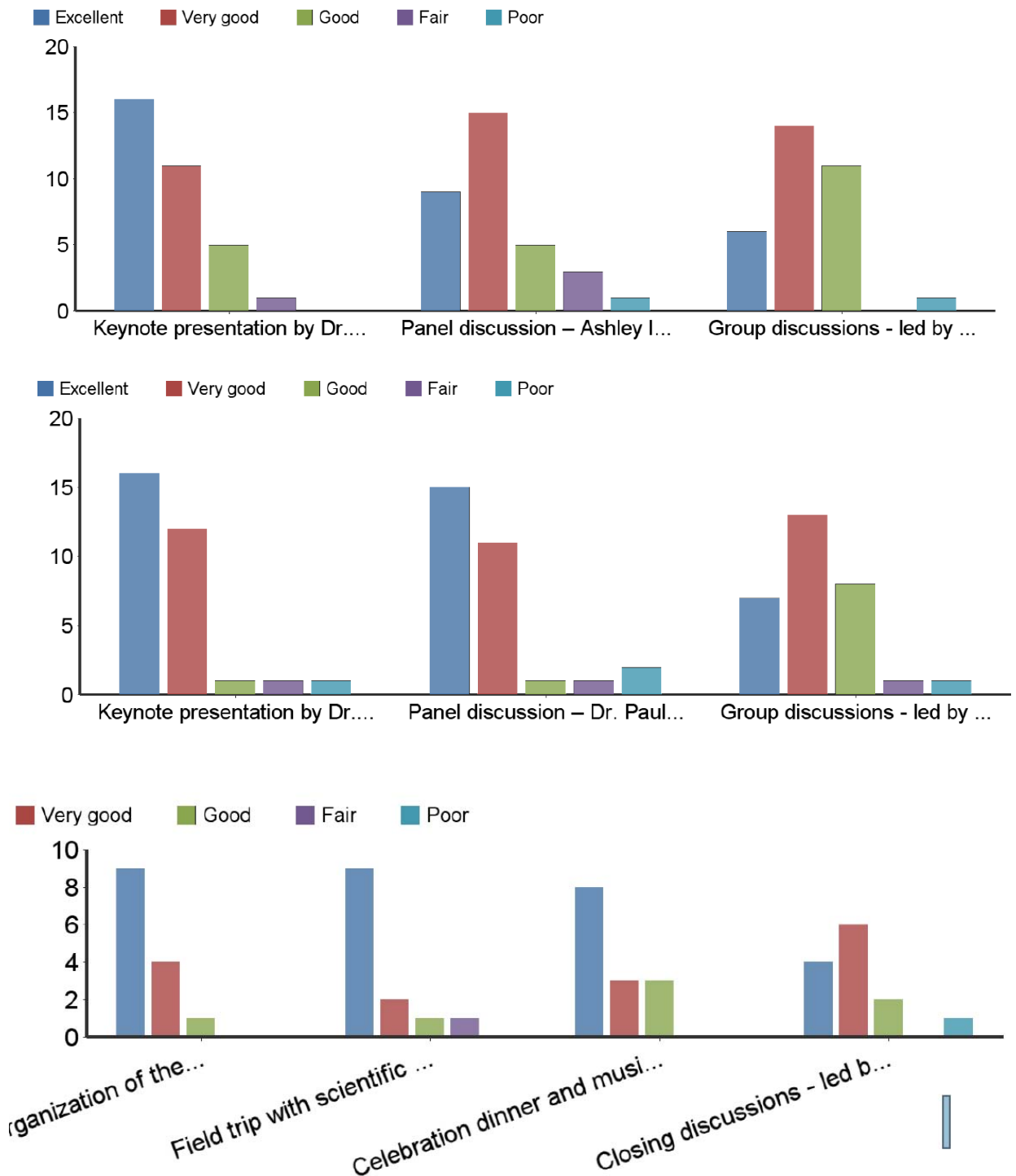
The afternoon’s dialogue centered on a shared ~2 hour field excursion that allowed us to jointly explore geological, ecological, and spiritual aspects of the remarkable McCormick’s Creek canyon. Following the field trip, we shared a picnic dinner at a park pavilion, to celebrate the growing communion between scientists and members of the faith communities. The meal was followed by a closing discussion with reflection on observations from the three workshops and a “where do we go from here” discussion of possible actions to address the climate change challenge. The detailed agenda is presented in Attachment B.

Post-Workshop Survey

In order to obtain feedback from workshop participants, and to lay the groundwork for future engagements, we developed a post-event survey. The survey, conducted under the leadership of Dr. Hoffmann-Longtin, sought both general information about participants’ attitudes about environmental and climate issues and specific feedback about the workshop content and impact. The survey received IRB approval from IU’s Office of Research Compliance and was distributed via email (using the Qualtrics survey tool) to all participants in the workshop within about ten days of the workshop conclusion. Survey questions examined participants’ pre- and post-workshop attitudes and impressions of the workshop. The survey received a response rate of 36%, providing a formal statistical basis for assessing workshop success.

Overall, the survey confirmed generally positive impressions from discussion with workshop participants and provided specific comments and feedback on workshop presenters and elements. Participants’ responses were strongly positive overall, with 80-90% of respondents reporting “Very Good” or “Excellent” on most evaluation questions. Assessment of the group discussions was somewhat lower (60-75%), perhaps reflecting variability with the timing and quality of small-group discussions at individual tables. A

broad range of individual comments were provided, ranging from specific suggestions about workshop organization and content to ideas for follow-up activities.



Summary of respondents' assessments of the value of various components of Workshop 1 (Top), Workshop 2 (Middle), and Workshop 3 (Bottom)

programs. We also plan to make materials available via the Concerned Scientists @ IU and interfaith environmental websites. We worked with our local newspaper, the *Bloomington Herald-Times* to do an extended story on the workshops (Attachment F). [*Note: we were disappointed with the article, but it helped generate some additional contacts in the community.*] Over the course of the next few months we anticipate several written articles to document our work in these workshops. These include (1) op-ed article(s) on the importance of science-faith dialogue; (2) research articles on communication between academic scientists; and (3) editorial pieces intended for the scientific community. Perhaps most important, we view these three workshops as a ‘down-payment’ on a longer-term program of engagement and communication between local scientific and religious communities.

Faith community participants have initiated several projects for continuing conversation and action items. Congregation Beth Shalom and Evangelical Community Church (ECC) have come together in a workshop that is designed to reduce energy consumption in our individual households. This was done at a group meeting where the homeowners signed a covenant that included specific action items. ECC has established several new forums for ongoing conversation that include further education in the context of small group meetings and Sunday morning study groups. One of the scientists from our workshop (Ben Brabson) has agreed to provide several presentations on the subject from a faith perspective. Additionally, a new organization has been established named “Creation Care Partners” for the purpose of encouraging environmental stewardship among Evangelical and Jewish congregations. Currently we are in the process of seeking grants to encourage these congregations to move in the direction of solar power. Later this month, as part of our community’s Martin Luther King Day events, the Evangelical Community Church, in joint sponsorship with Creation Care Partners, will sponsor a renewable energy fair, with contributions from members of the faith community.



Images from Workshop 1 (Top). The assembled audience of ~100 participants for the first workshop; Pastor Whitaker offers a welcome to the participants; Dr. Jessica Moerman with a keynote presentation; (Middle) audience listening to keynote presentation; panelists add perspectives and respond to audience questions; (Bottom) Ellen Ketterson introduces herself during small-group discussions; Michael Hamburger listens during small-group discussion.



Images from Workshop 2. (Top) Michael Hamburger welcomes the assembled audience; Ben Brabson delivers the keynote presentation; (Middle) audience listening to Dr. Brabson's keynote; panelists offer their perspectives on climate change models and impacts; (Middle) panelists Kim Novick, Paul Staten, and Ellen Ketterson share their perspectives; (Bottom) share-out discussion following perspectives from small groups.



Images from Workshop 3. (Top) The group gathers for an opening benediction and welcome from Park Ranger Wyatt Williams; (2nd row) Ecological perspective from biologist Adrienne Keller and an introduction to bird banding by ornithologist Abby Byrd; (3rd row) Scientific and spiritual discussions in the McCormick's Creek gorge, including scriptural readings; (Bottom) a closing dinner with musical entertainment from Malcolm Dalglish and choir.

A DIALOGUE ON SCIENCE,
FAITH, AND EARTH STEWARDSHIP



CREATION
CARE &
EARTH'S
CHANGING
ENVIRONMENT

Hosted by:

Concerned Scientists @ IU and Evangelical Community Church

in collaboration with:

Trinity Fellowship, Sherwood Oaks Christian Church, Foot of the Cross Church,
and InterVarsity Christian Ministry

CREATION CARE & EARTH'S
CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

A DIALOGUE ON SCIENCE, FAITH, AND EARTH STEWARDSHIP

Fostering a conversation among Bloomington's rich academic and faith communities to share scientific and religious perspectives on environmental stewardship. We seek to generate discussion raised by scientific information, scriptural and theological wisdom, societal realities, and pastoral insight.

We encourage participants to take part in
all three sessions if possible.

Session 1: Sacred Ground | Environmental Perspectives on Creation Care

Wednesday, Sept 25, 7:00-9:00 pm, Evangelical Community Church

Speaker: Dr. Jessica Moerman

Evangelical Christian, AAAS Science Technology and Policy Fellow.

Followed by a panel, refreshments, and small group discussions.

Session II: Our Changing Planet | Scientific Perspectives on Climate Change

Wednesday, Oct 2, 7:00 - 9:00 pm, Evangelical Community Church

Speaker: Dr. Ben Brabson

Professor Emeritus, IU Department of Physics

Followed by a panel, refreshments, and small group discussion

Session III: A Shared Appreciation of Creation

Sunday, Oct 6, 2:00-6:00 pm,

McCormick's Creek State Park, Trailside Shelter

Guided field trip, dinner, and open discussion

REGISTER ONLINE
[HTTP://SCIENCEANDRELIGION.NET](http://SCIENCEANDRELIGION.NET)

*Funded by a grant from the American Association for the
Advancement of Science's 'Dialogue on Science, Ethics &
Religion' (DOSER) program.*

Creation Care and Earth's Changing Environment
A dialogue on science, faith, and earth stewardship
Workshop agendas

Session I: Sacred Ground: Evangelical Perspectives on Creation Care
Wednesday, September 25, 7:00 – 9:00 PM, Evangelical Community Church

7:00 – 7:15 Welcome & Introductions:

- Michael Hamburger, Professor, IU Department of Earth & Atmospheric Sciences
- Robert Whitaker, Lead Pastor, Evangelical Community Church

7:15 – 7:30 Icebreaker Discussion:

- Dr. Krista Hoffmann-Longtin, moderator

7:30 – 7:50 Keynote Speaker:

- Dr. Jessica Moerman, Climate Scientist (and Evangelical Christian), Department of Energy

7:50 – 8:20 Panel Discussion with Q&A:

- Kyle Meyaard-Schaap, Young Evangelicals for Climate Action
- Mike Bowling, Pastor, Englewood Christian Church
- Brad Pontius, Pastor, Sherwood Oaks Christian Church
- Ashley Inselman, World Vision & Evangelical Community Church
- Madeline Hirschfeld, Congregation Beth Shalom

8:20 – 8:50 Small-group discussion

- Dr. Krista Hoffmann-Longtin, moderator

8:50 – 9:00 Closing Reflections

Session II: Our Changing Planet: Scientific Perspectives on Climate Change
Wednesday, October 2, 7:00 – 9:00 PM, Evangelical Community Church

7:00 – 7:15 Welcome & Introductions:

- Michael Hamburger, Professor, IU Department of Earth & Atmospheric Sciences
- Robert Whitaker, Lead Pastor, Evangelical Community Church

7:15 – 7:30 Icebreaker Discussion:

- Dr. Krista Hoffmann-Longtin, moderator

7:30 – 7:50 Keynote Speaker:

- Dr. Ben Brabson, Climate Scientist, Professor Emeritus, IU Department of Physics

7:50 – 8:20 Panel Discussion with Q&A:

- Dr. Paul Staten, Assistant Professor, Department of Earth & Atmospheric Sciences [*climate models and future projections*]
- Dr. Kim Novick, Associate Professor, O'Neill School of Public & Environmental Affairs [*impact of climate change on biosphere*]
- Dr. Ellen Ketterson, Professor of Biology and Director, Environmental Resilience Institute [*birds and environmental change*]
- Dr. Gabe Filippelli, Professor of Earth Science, IUPUI [*public health implications of climate change*]

8:20 – 8:50 Small-group discussion

- Dr. Krista Hoffmann-Longtin, moderator

8:50 – 9:00 Closing Reflections

Session III: A Shared Appreciation of Creation

Sunday, October 6, 2:00 – 6:00 PM, McCormick's Creek State Park

2:00 PM Participants arrive

2:15 – 3:00 Welcome and Introductions

- Invocation by Pastor Whitaker
- Welcome and introduction to the park, Ranger Wyatt Williams
- Introduction to bird-banding activities, Allison Byrd, IU Dept. of Biology
- Summary of plans for afternoon, Michael Hamburger, IU Dept. of Earth & Atmospheric Sciences

2:45 – 3:00 Musical celebration

- Malcolm Dalglish and Ooolite singers

3:00 – 4:30 Optional activities

- Group 1: Hike through canyon to waterfall with scientific and theological discussion
- Group 2: Walk to waterfall overlook
- Group 3: Bird banding activity
- Group 4: Citizen Science Activity with Kim Novick

4:45 – 5:30 Fellowship dinner

- "Peace of Wild Things" with Malcolm Dalglish and Ooolites
- Grace with Pastor Bob
- Singing Hymn

5:30 – 6:00 Closing discussion

- Krista Hoffman-Longtin, moderator
- Madi Hirschland, Ashley Inselman, opportunities for action

Creation Care and Earth's Environment

Our shared lexicon for compassionate communication

Biodiversity – the richness of biological life, represented by variability among living organisms and the environments they are a part of (includes diversity within species, between species and across environments)

Creation care – idea emphasizing the biblical mandate concerning humanity's role as stewards of God's creation (taken from Genesis 2:15, human beings are to "cultivate it and keep it" or "tend it and watch over it" as if it were a gift from God)

Climate change – a long-term (occurring over multiple decades) alteration of large-scale (global or regional) climate patterns, including temperature, precipitation, wind and cloud patterns and other measures of climate

Climate modeling – use of quantitative (and typically computer-based) methods to simulate the interactions of the important drivers of climate, including atmosphere, oceans, land surface and ice. They are used for a variety of purposes from study of the dynamics of the climate system to projections of future climate.

Ecological services – the many and varied benefits that humans freely gain from the natural environment and from properly-functioning ecosystems such as agroecosystems, forests, grasslands and aquatic systems.

Environmental justice – providing all people equal access to opportunities to survive and thrive, independent of economic or social status; environmental justice seeks to address disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority and low-income populations.

Global warming – a long-term increase in overall temperature of the earth's atmosphere and oceans

Resilience – the ability to prepare and plan for, absorb, recover from, or more successfully adapt to actual or potential adverse events

Stewardship – careful and responsible management of something, such as an organization or property—or of the planet we share

Sustainability – societal development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This includes ensuring biological systems remain healthy, diverse and productive over time.

Tippling point – point at which small changes can have dramatic consequences (e.g. small changes in global temperatures have large changes on environmental processes) or point in time when a group rapidly and dramatically changes its behavior by widely adopting a previously rare practice

Ground Rules for Informal Discussion

(adapted from the University of Michigan Intergroup Dialogue Program)

- (1) **Take this opportunity to get to know one other.** Introduce yourself to those sitting near you. Refer to one another by name and make eye contact.
- (2) **Confidentiality.** We want to create an atmosphere for open, honest exchange. We encourage you to talk about your own new ideas and understandings after our dialogue. Allow others to own their own feelings and perspectives by not sharing them without their permission.
- (3) **Our primary commitment is to learn from each other.** We will listen to each other and not talk at each other. We will seek to understand and honor our differences.
- (4) **Listen respectfully.** Don't interrupt, engage in private conversations, or turn to technology while others are speaking. Use attentive, courteous body language.
- (5) **We will not demean, devalue, or "put down" people** for their experiences, lack of experiences, or difference in interpretation of those experiences.
- (6) **We will trust that people are doing the best they can.** We will try not to 'freeze people in time' but leave space for everyone to learn and change through our interactions with one another.
- (7) **Understand that there are different approaches to solving problems.** If you are uncertain about someone else's approach, ask a question to explore areas of uncertainty. Listen respectfully to how and why the approach could work.
- (8) **Challenge the idea and not the person.** If we wish to challenge something that has been said, we will challenge the idea or the practice referred to, not the individual sharing this idea or practice.
- (9) **Speak your discomfort.** If something is bothering you, please share this with the group. Often our emotional reactions to this process offer the most valuable learning opportunities.
- (10) **"Step Up, Step Back."** Be mindful of taking up much more space than others. On the same note, try to speak up when others are dominating the conversation.

DIGGING IN DEEPER – SOME RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INQUIRY

Books on Faith & Environment

Katharine Hayhoe and Andrew Farley (2009). *A Climate for Change: Global Warming Facts for Faith-Based Decisions*. Faith Words Press.

Mark Stoll (2015). *Inherit the Holy Mountain: Religion and the Rise of American Environmentalism*. Oxford University Press.

Douglas and Jonathan Moo (2018), *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*. Zondervan Press.

Colin Bell and Robert White, eds. (2016), *Creation Care and the Gospel*, Hendrickson Pubs.

National Association of Evangelicals: *Loving the Least of These* (<https://www.nae.net/loving-the-least-of-these/>)

Steven Bouma-Prediger (2010), *For the Beauty of the Earth*, Baker Academic

Ellen Davis (2011), "Knowing Our Place: Learning Environmental Responsibility from the Old Testament," in *The Green Bible*, HarperOne.

Chris Doran (2017), *Hope in the Age of Climate Change: Creation Care This Side of the Resurrection*, Cascade Books.

Resources on Climate Change

TED talk – Katharine Hayhoe:

https://www.ted.com/talks/katharine_hayhoe_the_most_important_thing_you_can_do_to_fight_climate_change_talk_about_it

American Association for the Advancement of Science - *What We Know*

http://whatwewknow.aaas.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/whatwewknow_website.pdf

National Academy of Sciences and Royal Society – *Climate Change: Evidence and Causes*

<https://www.nap.edu/catalog/18730/climate-change-evidence-and-causes>

Skeptical Science – John Cook (George Mason University)

<https://www.skepticalscience.com>

“Global Weirding with Dr. Katharine Hayhoe” Youtube channel (PBS Digital Studios)

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCi6RkdaEgRVKi3AzidF4ow>

NASA resources on climate change: <https://climate.nasa.gov/effects/>

Indiana Climate Change Impacts Assessment Program: <https://ag.purdue.edu/indianaclimate/>

Indiana University Environmental Resilience Institute: <https://eri.iu.edu/>

Evangelical Creation Care Groups

Evangelical Environmental Network: <https://www.creationcare.org>

Young Evangelicals for Climate Action: <https://www.yecaction.org>

Climate Caretakers: <https://climatecaretakers.org>

Creation Care Mission Blog: <http://www.creationcaremissions.org>

Interfaith Creation Care Groups

Bloomington Earth Care: <http://www.earthcareindiana.org/>

Hoosier Interfaith Power and Light: <https://hoosieripl.org/>

Greenfaith: Interfaith Partners in Action for the Earth: <https://greenfaith.org/index.html>