

GLOBAL MISSION

48. The Stewardship of Creation Panel, under the convenership of Rev John Hanson, has begun its work of responding to last year's General Assembly resolution "That the Stewardship of Creation Panel be encouraged to develop a Biblical position on the causes and effects of climate change and report to the 2017 General Assembly."

49. Significant progress has been made, but rather than provide an incomplete report to this year's Assembly, it was agreed to provide an interim response outlining *The Biblical Basis for the Stewardship of Creation*. This report is attached as Global Mission Appendix 1 and forms the context in which the Panel will address all other issues relating to creation care, including climate change.

50. Further, the Panel was tasked with drawing up a checklist of environmental considerations for the Congregational Consultation Process. This has been done.

51. Finally, the Panel reviewed PCI's relationship with Eco-Congregational Ireland. The contribution of Joe Furphy over the years was noted with gratitude. The importance of ensuring that resources produced by ECI are biblically based was also highlighted.

APPENDIX 1

The Biblical Basis for the Stewardship of Creation.

1. The Christian Church in general and the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in particular derives its authority from the Bible, the Word of God. The Bible from beginning to end, witnesses to God's glorious purposes in creation and redemption.

THE BIBLE

2. The Old Testament, in all its diversity, bears witness to the sovereignty of God over all aspects of His good creation, and in particular in the history of Israel, His covenant people. In the New Testament, the sovereignty of God finds definitive expression in the Lordship of Jesus Christ, thus giving His new community, the Church, the missionary mandate to proclaim this good news to all people in the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is both the incarnation and the inaugurator of God's new creation in which redemption, reconciliation, restoration and eternal life is established in triumph over evil's manifold forms.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

3. CREATION: The most comprehensive context for God's loving purposes is the entire creation in all its wonder, beauty, intricacy and diversity. This is reflected in the first verse of the Bible, one of the most majestic statements ever made: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Genesis 1 v1.

4. HUMANITY: To be sure, humanity is the special recipient of God's blessing (Genesis 1:26; Psalm 8:5) but the first human being is given the name 'Adam' which means 'of the dust' (Genesis 2:7), indicating his kinship with God's good earth as well as God.

5. STEWARDS: While human beings are given the subordinate role of dominion of the earth (Genesis 1:26, 28) this is not to be construed as domination or exploitation but stewardship demonstrated in tending and cultivating what is essentially a divine gift. The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. (Genesis 2:15). The Hebrew word for care is 'shamar' and can be translated as keep, tend, guard, take care of, look after – essentially, the stewardship of creation.

6. THE FALL: The fall of humanity which ensues (Genesis 3) is contrary to God's will yet its evil consequences affect every dimension of creation, human and extra-human (Isaiah 24; Hosea 4:1-3).

7. LANDLORD AND TENANT: The unfolding of the biblical narrative involves the mutual involvement of two great realities: divine sovereignty and human responsibility expressed in Psalm 115:16 "The highest heavens belong to the Lord; but the earth He has given to humanity." In effect, God remains the landlord of the earth while human beings are the tenants not the owners and therefore ought not to defy God's commands by doing as they please without regard to the consequences (Leviticus 25:23).

8. **RENEWAL OF ALL CREATION:** The promises, visions and actions of God to save and renew are therefore articulated in terms of creation as a whole and not just humanity in isolation.

9. Leviticus 25 is a command for Israel to renew its corporate life by letting the land rest every seventh year (the Sabbath Year) and then having a celebratory year of restoration every fiftieth year (the Year of Jubilee).

10. Psalms 8, 19, 65, 67, 104 and 148 express the glory of how God ordains and sustains the intricate interactions of humans and the rest of creation to their mutual benefit and blessing.

11. Job witnesses to the awesomeness of God's handiwork in the often overwhelming powers of nature's intriguing features and strange creatures, above and beyond human comprehension or utility.

12. Hosea 14 and Amos 9 articulate God's promise to restore human happiness in conjunction with earth's replenishment.

13. Isaiah writes with prophetic insight and poetic sensibility in the artistry with which he conveys God's stupendous visions of comprehensive blessing for humanity as part of a new creation in all its fruitful splendour (Isaiah 35, 55, 65).

THE NEW TESTAMENT

14. **INCARNATION:** The New Testament reveals how God's plan of renewal, restoration and salvation reached its climax in the incarnation. God's words and works of re-creation were now embodied in divine/human form on the earth. As John put it, The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. (John 1v14)

15. **JESUS:** Before Jesus began His ministry, He spent 40 days and nights in the primal purity of the wilderness, in the company of wild animals but unaccompanied by humans.

16. In His summary of the Old Testament Law, He indicated that "loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength", and "loving our neighbour as ourselves" are both necessary for entry into the Kingdom of God (Luke 10v25-28). Jesus taught that the responsibilities of God's people to both God and fellow human beings are continued from the Old Testament era to the New.

17. His parables and other teachings about the kingdom of God make use of analogies from nature at large as well as human actions in natural settings. He even refers to Himself as the true or real vine (John 15) and the bright morning star (Revelation 22) a chapter in which He is also called the Lamb.

18. **PAUL:** Paul speaks about 'the whole creation groaning' as it awaits its sure redemption in Christ Jesus: human salvation to be sure, but not without the rest of creation (Romans 8). The Apostle opens his letters to the Ephesian and Colossian churches with doxologies to Jesus Christ through whom and for whom creation has been made; kept together and brought to final completion.

19. **JOHN:** And John's great vision brings the Biblical witness to a fitting climax in his vision of a new heaven and a new earth in which God dwells with His servants in a setting where human beings, city streets and nature's garden all conjoin (Revelation 21-22).

20. The Biblical narrative is therefore concerned, first, last and indeed, throughout, with God's will to bless, renew and perfect creation as a whole.

STEWARDSHIP OF CREATION

21. Given the above Biblical meta-narrative it is therefore incumbent upon the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to respond appropriately and positively to ensure the well-being of God's good creation.

22. Human behaviour affects the state of the earth for good or bad so that greedy humanity leads to a suffering earth which in turn leads to a suffering humanity.

23. In following the example and command of Jesus to love your neighbour as yourself (Luke 10v27) His followers are to be a voice for the voiceless; human yes, animal too, creation..... all of it. After all, The earth is the Lord's and everything in it. (Ps 24v1)

24. God is actively redeeming creation and His followers are to erect signposts towards the ultimate destiny of a completely restored creation by protecting God's world, by recycling, re-using, reducing, by living sustainably, by being responsible and loving towards neighbours both near and far. Now is the time to prepare for Jesus' return to earth to complete the work of re-creation.

25. The Good News is that ultimately creation is reconciled to God in and through the saving power of the Cross.

26. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (Colossians 1v19,20)