

---

# Thirty Years Later: The Growth of the Creation Care Movement

Stan LeQuire

---

In this personal retrospective, the author reflects on thirty years of growth of the evangelical creation care movement. The various factors contributing to the growth of the movement are highlighted: leadership, ownership, program development, global reach, and spiritual depth. The article concludes with personal spiritual reflections on leadership and hope.

---

I have always loved Eugene Peterson's book title, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* (Intervarsity Press 1980). That evocative phrase alone communicates a lifetime of my own experiences. I suspect that many laboring in development and advocacy work may well understand what Peterson is talking about. It is a challenge to lead a Christian organization that attempts to glorify Jesus in innovative ways. The work of advocacy for justice and social change is trying, exhausting, and filled with many challenges.

My own calling has been in the area of environmental advocacy or what many of us prefer to call "creation care." I was the founding director in 1993 of the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN) and steered the work for its first five years. The network was always a tiny group of leaders who understood the comprehensive nature of the gospel and that God's reign and love extends to all corners of creation and culture. Hate mail and opposition were plentiful, but so were small steps forward.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, I never could have imagined what happened on June 7, 2023 when the EEN hosted a banquet in Washington, DC for about one hundred well-wishers and supporters. We celebrated the retirement of our third director, the Rev. Mitch Hescox, and the commissioning of our fourth director, the Rev. Dr. Jessica Moerman. It appears that the "creation care" movement is alive and well. I could not be more amazed, humbled, and encouraged. From small beginnings, an organization now thrives and carries the ministry forward into the future. I have long

felt that the creation care movement was making slow but steady progress over the past years, but the June 7 event offered physical and tangible proof.

What are some of the factors that may lead an organization through thirty years of ministry? Here are a few personal reflections on factors leading to this milestone for the EEN and for others in the broader creation care movement.

## Gifted Leadership

The creation care movement is blessed with leaders who have devoted many years to this novel and worthwhile cause. There are too many to name, but here are just a few examples. Scott Sabin, founder and director of Plant with Purpose (formerly known as Floresta)<sup>2</sup> was an early supporter of the Evangelical Environmental Network. Plant with Purpose predates the EEN, has a forty-year history of its own, and has experienced significant growth of staff and programming under Scott's leadership. Plant with Purpose now works in nine countries with forty-two employees. It mobilizes some 80,000 families in various countries for agroforestry projects. I must also mention the army of faith-filled science professors on Christian college campuses. These professors have labored semester by semester over long years so that, slowly but steadily, new generations of students learn that caring for creation is a viable part of our faith as well as a professional opportunity. In fact, the number of young PhDs and scientists joining the movement is an encouragement to all of us who labored to get the

---

<sup>1</sup> For a thorough history of evangelical involvement in the environmental movement, see Gish (2020).

<sup>2</sup> For more information on this innovative organization, see [www.plantwithpurpose.org](http://www.plantwithpurpose.org). Any recent annual report will provide an overview of their powerful ministries.

movement up and running! One of these scientists is the new president and CEO of the EEN, Rev. Dr. Jessica Moerman.<sup>3</sup> At her June 7 commissioning, Moerman told the audience, “This is a marathon, not a sprint... We will take up the baton.” Such leaders build hope in all of us.

### **Ownership by Increasing Numbers of Evangelicals**

In the early days of the creation care movement, we wondered how we could get on anyone’s radar! How do we let followers of Jesus know that caring for creation is not a political stance, but a life of faithful obedience to the Creator? It seems that the message is now accepted by many. David Bookless, the theology director of A Rocha International, travels globally with the message of the Bible’s mandate for creation care. Bookless notes a growing response and openness to his message. “The vast majority of the time now—and it was less so 30 years ago—people are lapping it up. People are quite excited by it... I find it right around the world; I find there’s a huge appetite for it” (Bookless 2023). Ben Lowe, newly appointed director of A Rocha USA, reports that A Rocha cannot keep up with the number of inquiries coming from churches. Lowe also notes a “significant switch” over the past few years from having to persuade audiences of the basics of creation care to the need to equip their audience for specific action. As Lowe says, “there is enough of a critical mass now,” which “is a fundamental shift in posture and mission” (Lowe 2023). Even the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), which took many years to embrace the care of creation, is now actively supporting creation care as a gospel-centered issue. NAE leadership has issued bold and robust statements on such topics as creation care and climate change, stating among other things that...

As evangelicals, we believe that caring for creation is part of our calling as stewards of God’s creation. We also believe that caring for the most vulnerable is central to the way of Jesus (NAE 2022).

I believe that under the capable and visionary leadership of Walter Kim, the NAE will provide even more direction in addressing the degradation of God’s creation. It is reasonable to say, in summary, that the creation care movement is growing, even though, undoubtedly, additional progress and growth are needed. It can also be said that there have been setbacks

over the past seven or eight years, particularly from the association of broader evangelicalism with extreme right-wing ideology and a hostile stance toward secular culture. Nonetheless, progress has been made over the past thirty years and hope abounds.

### **Breadth of Programming**

An additional and observable sign of strength for the creation care movement is that evangelicals are able to relate the care of creation to diverse issues and situations. Over the past 30 years, other organizations have been born such as YECA, Young Evangelicals for Climate Action, which takes bold action in the area of addressing climate change from practical and biblical perspectives. Another organization addresses mountaintop removal and other issues in Appalachia. Christians for the Mountains, directed by Allen Johnson, was founded in 2005. One additional area of growth is the connection between creation care and (traditional) missionary endeavors. Such a connection was only dreamed of and prayed for in the mid-1990s, when EEN was first getting started. While such creation care missionaries are certainly not numerous, they now exist and have begun to do good work. For example, TEAM, The Evangelical Alliance Mission, mentions creation care as valid missional activity. Such statements would have been unimaginable a few years ago. In a 2017 blog post highlighting several missionaries engaged in creation care, the author states that “missionaries around the world are shining light on God’s handiwork through creation care ministries.” The reader is encouraged to “pray with us for creation care ministries.” Finally, I might point to your own work as I suspect that many of the readers of this article may be engaged in the care of creation without even knowing it or calling it such. There is a high likelihood that if you are engaged in agricultural ministries, clean water supply, or just about any kind of community development, you may be doing creation care work! There is, however, one area of programming that I long to see added to the creation care movement. The EEN, and other organizations, need to take bolder stands in the area of environmental justice. Many disadvantaged communities have been on the receiving end of pollution and degradation from wealthier Americans. There is much work to be done in this area. Care must also be taken not to appropriate the work of environmental justice from those who have labored for decades in this arena. Therefore, this work must begin with humble listening to the voices coming from these stressed communities.

---

<sup>3</sup> Moerman holds a PhD in Earth and Atmospheric Sciences from Georgia Tech and has held a variety of research positions. Before joining the EEN, Moerman was an AAAS Science and Technology Policy Fellow at the US Department of Energy.

## Global Reach

While much of this commentary is focused on the work of evangelicals in the United States, it would be helpful to mention that the creation care movement is thriving around the world. A Rocha International is one example already mentioned. In many instances, the global movement surpasses our own engagement as these sisters and brothers do not face the same political and social issues that we do in the United States. Researcher and author Melanie Gish observes,

Beyond the nation's borders, however, a transnational creation care 'reformation' seems to be making progress indeed, enabling leaders... to speak out on pressing global environmental threats while remaining deeply anchored within the core tenets of the evangelical faith (Gish 2020, 110).

One of the high points of this global movement came when the Lausanne Congress, founded by Billy Graham, adopted creation care as a core issue.

The 3rd Lausanne Congress, Cape Town 2010, was significant in seeing 'creation care as a gospel issue within the Lordship of Jesus Christ.' This helped spark the global creation care movement now known as LWCCN (the Lausanne / World Evangelical Alliance Creation Care Network) (Lausanne-4 2023).

## Spiritual depth

All of us engaged in Christian ministry and advocacy take steps to remain faithful to our biblical calling, and this is just as true for those working in the area of creation care. It is fascinating and encouraging that all four of the past and present directors of the Evangelical Environmental Network are ordained clergy.<sup>4</sup> We are not development professionals nor experts in non-profit leadership. Nonetheless, we want to see the lordship of Jesus proclaimed and the church moving forward in including creation care and justice advocacy in the discipleship of God's people. I continue to be convinced that care of creation and creation itself are vital, yet often overlooked, parts of our faith which—if embraced—could lead to great revival and even another spiritual awakening among our churches.

To that end, I close with a devotional thought from God's word that I hope will encourage your ministry (and invite your further involvement in creation care).

"Here is my servant, whom I uphold,  
my chosen one in whom I delight;  
I will put my Spirit on him,  
and he will bring justice to the nations.  
He will not falter or be discouraged  
till he establishes justice on earth.  
In his teaching the islands will put their hope."  
Isaiah 42:1, 4<sup>5</sup>

This passage reveals the heart and mind of Jesus Christ, God's servant. He desires justice in all corners of his creation, and he is utterly dedicated to bringing justice to fruition. Please do not give up hope. Jesus will not falter, and he will send his Spirit that we too might do our work for him, be that creation care or the many other works of justice and advocacy.

Finally, some words by Plant with Purpose's director, Scott Sabin, one who has labored faithfully to care for creation:

There is hope in Jesus, and hope is desperately needed at this moment— not so we can sit back and wait for the end, but so we have the courage to keep contending for what is good. Jesus is redeeming all things, and there is hope in that, even though we don't know exactly what that will ultimately look like.

Armed with that hope, we can begin by contributing what we can, all any of us can, and that is the little that we have. As I have written elsewhere, much like the little boy in the story of the feeding of the five thousand, anything we have to offer is hopelessly inadequate. However, it is what we have, and that is the point. If you remember the story, the five loaves and two fish contributed by the boy are ridiculous in the face of the need. Given in faith, they become the raw material for a miracle.

When I see what is being done by our partnering farmers in Tanzania, with tens of thousands of people gathering annually to celebrate voluntarily planting millions of trees as an expression of their faith and purpose, or when I talk with a former guerilla fighter excitedly talking about regreening his watershed and discovering purpose as an emissary of peace,

<sup>4</sup> In chronological order, these are Rev. Stan LeQuire, Rev. Dr. Jim Ball, Rev. Mitch Hescocx, and the next director, Rev. Dr. Jessica Moerman.

<sup>5</sup> See also Isaiah 42:9, in which God promises to declare "new things." Could creation care be a new ministry for you and your organization? Isaiah 61 is another encouraging passage.

I realize that God has been able to use my five loaves and two fish in ways I never anticipated all those years ago, when “planting trees for Jesus” seemed like such a foolish way to spend a life. (Sabin 2021).

## References

- Bookless, David. N.d. <https://www.howgodworks.org/podcast/season-4/god-is-green>. Podcast interview accessed June 13, 2023.
- Gish, Melanie. 2020. *God's Wounded Earth: American Evangelicals and the Challenge of Environmentalism*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press.
- "Lausanne-4-is-coming." 2023 (March 13). *The Pollinator: Creation Care Network News*. <http://news.lwccn.com/index.php/2023/03/13>.
- Lowe, Ben. March 10, 2023. Interview with the author.
- National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). 2015. "NAE Issues Call to Action on Creation Care." [NAE Issues Call to Action on Creation Care - National Association of Evangelicals | National Association of Evangelicals](http://www.nae.org/creation-care).
- National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). 2022. "Loving the Least of These." <https://www.nae.org/loving-the-least-of-these>.
- Peterson, Eugene H. 1980. *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Sabin, Scott. 2021 (June 3). "The Journey of an Accidental Environmentalist." Blog post.
- TEAM blog posting. N.d. See <https://team.org/blog/pray-for-creation-care>. Accessed February 25, 2024.

---

**Rev. Stan LeQuire** is the founding director of the Evangelical Environmental Network. Rev. LeQuire has also served as a pastor, missionary, and educator in sustainable development and spiritual formation. In addition, he has researched best practices of community-based ecotourism as a model for development.

Author email: [stan.lequire@gmail.com](mailto:stan.lequire@gmail.com).

---