**A Methodist Way of Life service outlines**

**Before using this service outline,
read the notes on** [**how to use the sessions**](https://www.methodist.org.uk/mwoloutlines)**.**

**Service**

The Methodist calling to ‘Service’ contains three practices: challenging injustice, serving others, and seeking the flourishing of all creation. These practices relate to how we commit to serve people and the world around us, both near and far.

**Flourish**

**“We care for creation and all God's gifts”**

**Key themes**

* The universe is an expression of God’s loving, creative nature.
* We are part of the earth as well as the universe, lovingly woven from the same fabric.
* We are currently in a **climate emergency** requiring urgent action, but the good news is that by learning about God’s love for creation and our place within it, we can learn to take care of the world we live in.

**Relevant Bible passages**

Genesis 1:26-28

**Background reflection**

The universe is an expression of God’s loving, creative nature. From the very beginning of the Bible to the very end, we see that creation is at the heart of God’s story. Throughout scripture we are told that creation and everything within it remains God’s (eg Deuteronomy 10:14; Job 12:7-10). This is very different to many other ancient religious texts, where creation is often birthed out of violence, bodily secretions, or seems to be a completely unimportant afterthought in the stories of petty gods.

Genesis 1:26-28 is one of two biblical accounts of the creation of the first humans. The term ‘dominion’ might suggest that human beings are the most important of all God’s creations, and they have been given the job to rule over and subdue creation and can treat the environment as they wish. But this diminishes the importance of creation, making it seem to be important only in service to humanity, not for its own self. If treated in this way it is clear that our environment will suffer, to the detriment of all. There are still some Christians who have this focus within their theology, but it is much less common now.

Instead, we are meant to care for God’s creation; to make sure that it is looked after well and flourishes. This is clearly a much better attitude, and quite a common view today. It ensures that the world is taken better care of; that endangered species are protected and habitats preserved. It’s the reason we grow bee friendly flowers in our gardens, or campaign to protect the rainforest.

That still leaves room for a view of creation as separate from us; that we are cultivating it as though it were an asset.

Key to this is our understanding of being made in the image of God. This is what sets us apart from the rest of creation. To be made in God’s image means that we represent God in our world; that we act towards the world in the same way God does. Remember, God called creation ‘good’ before humans appeared on the scene.

If we are to be like God, we need to understand what God is like. The Bible relates how God brings restoration and healing to all of creation (Isaiah 65:25, 66:22; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 8:22-23). God cares for, nurtures and loves. God doesn’t give up on creation when things look dismal, but instead finds a way for re-creation. Therefore, our job is to look at how we can restore creation and help creation to flourish. This brings glory to God, and also helps us live restored lives.

So, what next? The way people respond to this is deeply personal and depends on their current involvement, as well as their resources, time, gifts and talents. Everyone can start somewhere, even if it’s as simple as switching from a bath to a shower, or how and where we do our weekly grocery shop. Start small, and build up from there.

*Ask a discussion question about how people can respond to this.*

**Further notes**

* Human beings as co-creations: instead of emphasising the uniqueness of humanity, we should focus on how we are part of creation. The Hebrew *v’yirdu* can mean ‘dominion with’, but never ‘over’, so we are meant to be alongside creation; our well-being is intrinsically linked with creation, not separate from it. God looked at all of creation and saw that it was good. But this still begs the question what Genesis means when it tells us that God mandated us to have ‘dominion’ (Genesis 1:28).
* It is easy to feel despondent about the state of the environment; that it is too big a problem for us to make a real change. It is important to uphold our belief that God’s purposes will prevail in the end. There are many stories of ecological hope to draw on, including these three (you may want to do further research to find out more): Humpback whales are coming back from the brink of extinction; Iceland is transforming from coal reliance to sustainable energy; A million seagrass seeds have been planted off the Pembrokeshire coast to combat carbon emissions.
* Although there is a specific MWOL commitment for creation care, it is inextricably linked to the commitment to challenge injustice, particularly racial injustice. [The “Olive Agenda”](https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/news/the-methodist-blog/missional-discipleship-and-justice/) is a complementary mix of the "Green Agenda" (predominately a white middle-class agenda focused on protecting green spaces and animals) and the "Brown Agenda" (predominantly a majority world agenda focused on the effects of climate change on racial injustice and poverty). The “Olive Agenda” is concerned with the ecosystem, biodiversity and redemption of the whole cosmos: human, animal and environment.

**Song and hymn suggestions**

Big yellow taxi – Joni Mitchell

For the fruits of all creation (*StF* 124)

For the healing of the nations (*StF* 696)

God the maker of the heavens (resoundworship.org)

Let us build a house where love can dwell (*StF* 409)

O God who set the stars in place (raise.org)

The world God imagines (*StF+)*

Touch the earth lightly (*StF* 729)

We follow the Lord along the gradual road to heaven (*StF* 730)

**Creative activity suggestions**

* Collect a variety of objects from the natural world: an acorn, a leaf, a flower, a piece of fruit, a bird’s feather, etc. As much as possible, collect things that have fallen from the ground rather than picking them off trees or flowers. Ask people to hold the objects and picture the greater ecosystem it has come from. Imagine that ecosystem flourishing – what does that look like? Where is humanity in the picture? Where is God? You may wish to ask people to draw this picture, or describe it through written or spoken words.
* Use the carbon calculator (see “Ways to respond” below) to consider ways to improve as individuals and a community. Mark your action commitments by creating a poster, or writing on the back of [MWOL postcards](https://www.methodistpublishing.org.uk/books/EGMWOLPC23/a-methodist-way-of-life-postcard-set).

**Discussion questions**

* How are you caring for creation?
* How might God be asking you to go further to be part of a flourishing creation?
* What is your biggest challenge in responding to the climate emergency?
* **What would you do about care for creation if you knew you couldn’t fail?**
* Have a conversation about the three areas listed under “Ways to respond”: grow in love, financial decisions, and lobbying for change. What are some simple actions you could take personally? What could you do as a church?

**Prayer ideas**

Create a PowerPoint presentation with images of endangered species (animals and plants) and landscapes across the world impacted by climate change. You could include a short sentence explaining how they are at risk, or any organisations campaigning for their protection. Pray for protection of people and planet. Pray for wisdom for organisations and people campaigning to protect them. Pray for discernment from God on the parts we can all play to help all creation to flourish.

*Explore creative ways to pray with all ages, using the Methodist prayer cards, available as*[*a printed pack*](https://www.methodistpublishing.org.uk/books/EGIPC22/intergenerational-prayer-cards)*for meetings and events,*[*a PowerPoint*](https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/28465/intergenerationalprayercards-smaller.pptx)*for church services and meetings or*[*as a PDF*](https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/28466/digital-prayer-cards-131222.pdf)*for digital use.*

**Ways to respond**

* Explore [methodist.org.uk/Flourish](http://methodist.org.uk/flourish) and resources for [Action for Hope](https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/environment-and-climate-change/), the Methodist Church’s project to become a net-zero carbon emissions church by 2030.
* Look for others who are on this journey, such as community groups tackling local or global issues (many international charities have local groups), or by creating a team to engage with [ecochurch.arocha.org.uk](http://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/) on behalf of the church.
* Grow in our love of creation: go for walks; grow some herbs on our window ledge; learn the names of trees, plants and wildlife in our area; plant trees to mark special events.
* Support creation with our financial decisions: let ecological considerations affect our spending and living; buy local produce; try to shop organically; consider animal welfare and fair trade; consider your investment in pension schemes or company shares; reduce water and energy use; find alternative transport to cars.
* Lobby for change where we can: write letters to our MPs supporting recycling, green transport, and renewable energy initiatives. Joining local ecological groups can help in discovering what action we can take.
* Use this [carbon footprint calculator](http://carbonfootprint.com/calculator.aspx) to raise awareness of your own impact on the carbon levels in the atmosphere, and therefore on global climate change.