

# Introduction: Creating Sustainable Events

**You are part of creating an exciting new chapter!** United Methodist Women has a proud history. Since 1869, we've been putting faith, hope and love into action for the sake of women, children and youth. In the 21st century we know that our planet is threatened by an unsustainable, unjust and wasteful economic system in which we're all a part. Some people and cultures have benefitted from the past 150 years of this system. Others have not. But one thing is for sure: we can't continue business as usual. **How we're living is unsustainable.** Sustainable practices are a key to today's women, children and youth's needs and a way to put faith, hope and love in action.

We believe one way to help us move in this direction is by systematically and full-heartedly paying attention to such "minor" details as the food for an event or our transportation arrangements or whose on the planning team. Through our choices as we plan and implement our United Methodist Women meetings, and model these very important practices, we begin to shift our and others' consciousness—across the church—to more concretely build a sustainable economy, develop right relationships and help repair and preserve the ecological wonder of this world.

## **The 13 Principles**

to be just, be green

Accessibility  
Affordability  
Carbon Footprint  
Healthy Food and Beverages  
Just Economic Opportunities  
Local Solidarity  
Multigenerational Inclusion  
Paper Use  
Racial Justice  
Toxin Reduction  
Waste Reduction  
Water Use  
Well-being of Participants

As you'll see in this manual, there are many ways we can increase our commitment and become more sustainable. With 800,000 women across the United States committing together to more sustainable practices and having our meetings be models of sustainability, we hold a tremendous amount of transformational power, not only for our attendees but for everyone they also influence! We believe we can be the change we want to see in the world today, not only for ourselves but for the world of our children and grandchildren!



United  
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Women

FAITH • HOPE • LOVE IN ACTION

# What Is Sustainability?

*I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live.*

—Deuteronomy 30:19

God calls us to “choose life.” In Deuteronomy, Moses speaks about God’s expectations of the covenant with the Israelites. Most of what God had asked for in Deuteronomy is summed up in Jesus’ great commandment: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and soul and love your neighbor as yourself.” God says to the people—whether in the Hebrew Bible or the New Testament: Choose love. Choose care. Choose those things that make for life by loving God and loving neighbor with all the complexities and commitment of heart and soul and mind that involves!

In the 21st century, one way we can live out loving God and loving neighbor is found in practices of “sustainability.” Sustainability is all about Love. It’s about hope. It’s about reflecting and recognizing that the ways we’ve been accustomed to short term conveniences and individual gains in our economy and excessive waste is truly not Love and often supports hopelessness. Practices that enhance sustainable relationships between people and the earth is Love. Acknowledging where we’ve been indifferent and selfish and turning to this new life together is faithful, hopeful Love.

In sustainable practices,

- We recognize that habits formed by and reinforcing injustice and inequity is simply not Love and we determine to commit to more just and equitable ways.
- We learn, relearn, prioritize the practices that honor and love God’s whole work in the Creation.
- And in this way, we restore the damage we’ve caused to the earth and its communities, prevent future harm and preserve natural resources, species, cultures, languages and ecosystems for future generations.

**Sustainability is all about choosing life, choosing care, choosing Love.** It is about living wisely, justly and joyfully in each decision we make so that all of us may live with dignity to our full potential, now and for generations to come.

# Why Hold Sustainable Gatherings?

When we plan a gathering using sustainability principles, we create the conditions that repair social, biological and spiritual brokenness.

There are many reasons to practice sustainability in all that we do. Because we're Methodists, let's look through the lens of our Wesleyan quadrilateral, a tool that John Wesley developed so that we could discern the call of God in our time. The quadrilateral's four lenses are scripture, tradition, reason and experience.

## Scripture

As Christian women, we want to live in alignment with our faith, informed by scripture. The Hebrew people had a belief in a God who was setting before them the things that make for life, but following that God of life meant a daily choice to live in relationship with the God of love and liberation. Once they moved into the Promised Land, they were threatened with both power and plenty. Now they had very impactful decisions to make every day and at every level of society.

In the New Testament God empties Godself and walks *into* the world as Jesus. Then Jesus reinvigorates this ancient request from God by pointing out the difference between what seems to be valued in the society and what God's love is like. Jesus communicates this love by referring to the ordinary things around him— vineyards, bread, lilies, rivers, sparrows, wells, outcasts, women, children. Jesus uses whatever is around him to talk about the love of God *in* this world, and he uses the relationships around him to interrupt how humanity has broken relationships and dishonored God and the love asked of us.

Did you know that if 10 percent of United Methodist Women members (80,000 women) used a reusable water bottle for 365 days this year rather than buying water in a bottle, we would save at least enough energy to power an average household for 552 years?

We, too, are given that same task. "Greater things shall you do than I," Jesus said. What must we do as we walk into this world today?

How do we partner with God in the healing of what is broken and live a life of love that defies the current injustices around us? One way is together to learn practices that help heal our polluted water ways, our carbon-heavy sky, our historical and current social, political and economic injustices.

## Tradition

As United Methodist Women, we are inspired by our Wesleyan tradition. Many of us know John Wesley's deep desire and methods by which he ministered and had a passion for social justice. But many of us have not heard of his love of the natural world! Here is a poem published by Charles and John Wesley written for Pentecost

(Whit-Sunday). In it you will see a God whose Holy Spirit vibrates through the created order of nature on an equal footing with the created order of God's grace.

Author of every work divine,  
Who dost through both Creations shine,  
The God of Nature and of Grace!  
Thy glorious steps in all we see,  
And wisdom attribute to Thee,  
And power, and majesty, and praise.

Thou didst Thy mighty wings outspread,  
And brooding o'er the chaos, shed  
Thy Life into the impregn'd abyss,  
The vital principle infuse,  
And out of Nothing's womb produce  
The earth and heaven, and all that is.

That all-informing Breath Thou art  
Who dost continued life impart,  
And bidd'st the world persist to be:  
Garnish'd by Thee, yon azure sky,  
And all those beauteous orbs on high,  
Depend in golden chains from Thee.

Thou dost the earth anew,  
(Its Maker and Preserver too,)  
By Thine almighty arm sustain:  
Nature perceives Thy secret force,  
And still holds on her even course,  
And owns Thy providential reign.

Thou art the Universal Soul,  
The plastic Power that fills the whole,  
And governs earth, air, sea, and sky:  
The creatures all Thy breath receive,  
And who by Thy inspiring live,  
Without Thy inspiration die.

From *Songs of the Spirit: Hymns of Praise and Prayer to God the Holy Ghost* edited by William Henry Odenheimer and Frederic M. Bird (A.D.F. Randolph, 1871).

The theology in this poem seems to indicate that God is in all of nature and that the creation is God's child. If we take this theology seriously, then what is at stake when our way of life destroys ecosystems and we continue to even defy the secret force that holds creation in her even course? When we spew greenhouse gasses into the air or pollute waterways with discharge, which creates dead zones for other creatures and

sacrifice zones for our brothers and sisters? What does this theology require of our care of one another—each one, each plant and animal, also from the womb of God?

### **Reason**

The United Methodist Church provides a strong, reasoned foundation and framework to guide our actions through a powerful statement by our bishops, our Social Principles and many General Conference resolutions as well as United Methodist Women policies. These all are the *considered, reasoned* reflections of The United Methodist Church and its leadership. These reasoned statements are some of the most principled statements of any Christian denomination. Our intentions are powerful. Our actions, however, often fallen behind them. We need to structure ourselves anew. We need structures that encourage us to put these principles into practices deep in the ways we live. That's why "Be Just. Be Green" exists.

In addition, "Be Just. Be Green" when it comes to energy conservation, producing less waste, using less or not being excessive with packaging—all of this actually makes economic sense, too!

### **Experience**

We learn from the latest weather-related tragedies linked to climate change to disturbing unemployment and poverty statistics the consequences of our economic and environmental policies. Displacement of persons from coastlines, floods and droughts, hurricanes and typhoons around the world and the impoverishment that results from these disasters is overwhelming. Repressive immigration policies and cutbacks in national social spending policies don't help. People are increasingly desperate. Violent conflict erupts over water, food and energy. Trying to get food on the table means desperate measures for some people. It is impossible to continue on this trajectory. It is simply unsustainable.

Although these economic and environmental policies often seem like those people "over there" are responsible and we are not, we have tremendous power in our decisions and lifestyles. Our decisions and lifestyles, our practices as United Methodist Women members, can begin a movement to a new way of life, encouraging not only our small circles of influence but into the work of the world.

We must consider this new way a moral call to us. We must learn and live more fully by the ethic of care that God intended. "Be Just. Be Green" is a way to do that.

# Getting Started

In order to help build understanding, enthusiasm and support for making your event more sustainable, your very first step may involve some education!

- Look over all sections of this manual to see what might work for your context and group size.
- Consider offering an ethical or biblical reflection with other members of your planning team
- Show one of the short video reflections found on the United Methodist Women website in “Why Do We Need Sustainable Gatherings?”
- Provide some “fun facts” that will illustrate the positive impact you can make.
- Review and share some of the United Methodist policies that are listed at the end of each principle in the “Planning Guidelines and Tips for the 13 Principle Areas” section. These are fantastic support systems for you!
- Call your jurisdictional guide and ask her for some exciting program ideas, or if you have one, share it with her! She is a resource for you!

Keep in mind that the goal is to take *one step forward* in order to become a more beloved community. We advise the following:

- Pick one step in this process that is relatively easy to do.
- Build positive momentum over time, then try another one.
- Remember that this will be a process of many phases and some missteps, and it will be a lifetime journey because we’ve learned and are hemmed in by so many bad habits developed over our economic and political history.
- Try. And try again.
- Stay focused on what *is* happening and not on how much more there is to do.
- Inspire, incentivize and love your people even in our resistance!

## Leadership

If you are reading this and have the passion to be a sustainability leader, we recommend you find a sustainability buddy! The two of you can think through how you go forward. Remember, if you want to influence an event that is large and complex, sustainability happens best when the whole planning group is oriented to the rationale. Make sure people have sufficient information and commitment to do the task well. Organize. If you are working with others to plan a large gathering, every member of the planning team should access the environmental justice page on United Methodist Women’s website or have copies of parts of this guide related to her responsibility(ies).

## Getting Commitment

You will need to assess the degree to which people involved in planning, conducting and attending the gathering share the goal of becoming more sustainable.

- How aware of this issue are the event's leadership and participants?
- How open are they to the changes we need to make?
- Will the people in charge of the activity be resolute in the face of inconveniences or resistance?
- Is there a local or regional issue you can link to your goal of greater environmental and social responsibility so that people will more easily see the relevance and necessity of setting new standards for the event?

While you are assessing the commitment atmosphere for trying some sustainability measures, think about how you might build support through various forms of education and promotion, in advance of and during the event. For example, build interest and excitement among participants by advertising in advance of the event that you will be doing things in a way that better loves the world around you. Maybe offer special sustainability incentives or rewards. Go slow. Be strategic. Think through the steps. Be positive. And celebrate your step-by-step commitments! Do not think you're going to accomplish the whole list in a day, and be patient with yourselves and your people. Love them and love the small steps forward!

## Tips: Getting Support for Sustainability

- Find one or more (at least two—Jesus had a reason for sending out his disciples two by two) enthusiastic people to be on the planning team for events that you'll be having who also desire sustainability.
- Encourage the planning team to think about the importance of sustainability. Communicate, without preaching, how wonderful it is when we do things well and with love. Use positive messages, such as “Let's try this” or “How about ... ” The shock of climate change often debilitates and disempowers us, so instead share about the impact we could have if 800,000 women and all their networks across the country commit to sustainable practices. Be inspirational!
- If you have a Charter for Racial Justice committee, a group working to attract young adults or an environmental justice committee, recruit them to help champion these new sustainability guidelines and invite them to help interpret and implement them. These important principles directly relate to the lives of those most impoverished. This has to do with race, class, age and gender.
- Meet objectives and objections positively and creatively. (For example, one conference wanted to discourage the use of disposables, but there was no dishwasher where they held their event. Instead of succumbing to disposables, the program committee volunteered to wash dishes.)
- Make the change convenient. (For example, have recycle bins clearly marked and in handy locations.)
- Make the change joyful—it is a joy to live expressing and being God's love for all of creation! When we do so, we're really being the change we want to see!
- Ask for assistance from businesses and organizations or ask for sponsorship when appropriate. (Some environmentally friendly companies are willing to lend or donate products or services or make them available at a discount.)
- Get samples of preferred products in advance to show to the planning team or facility manager. Determine availability, cost and shipping times. Often, seeing is believing.
- If someone objects because it seems too expensive, talk about the real (total) costs, including the health, social and environmental costs of not making the change. Talk about extra expense in terms of investing in a better future. It is a mission expense—the costs of living out one's faith.
- If you are serving food, make signs or table tents with photos and facts about who grew the food, environmental and working conditions in the field and factory to bring the sustainability issues “alive”.