Environmental Sustainability in the Mennonite Community: An Analysis of *Canadian Mennonite* (2003–2021)

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Statements and programs promoted by faith leadership organizations provide one window into a faith community's commitment to environmental sustainability. Among Mennonite churches, the earliest statement is the General Conference Mennonite Church's (GCMC) 1977 resolution entitled "Christian Stewardship of Energy Resources" (MCCN 2023). Responding to the energy crisis of the 1970s, the resolution recognized the social and environmental costs of energy use and established a theological basis for responsible stewardship. This is one of the earliest environment-related resolutions by a faith community in Canada, preceded by a few statements by the United Church and the Canadian Unitarian Council, the first of which was released in 1967 (Moyer and Brandenbarg 2021). The Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) followed in 1984 with a "Statement on the Christian and the Environment," and in 1989, the Mennonite Church and GCMC General Boards adopted "Stewardship of the Earth: Resolution on Environment and Faith Issues," which led to the creation of the Mennonite Environmental Taskforce (ETF). The ETF spearheaded environmental awareness work

binationally from 1991 to 2001. Its accomplishments included planning a Creation Summit in 1995 and publishing a book of essays about Anabaptist theology and the environment (Redekop 2000). The ETF was replaced by the Mennonite Creation Care Network (MCCN) in 2006, which has promoted recent environmental resolutions within Mennonite Church Canada (MC-CAN) and Mennonite Church USA, supported congregational greening, and created educational materials (MCCN 2023). MCCN was dissolved in 2023, and its work was distributed to Mennonite Church USA and MC-CAN. Within MC-CAN, the work will be continued by the Sustainability Leadership Group, which convened in 2020, the part-time Climate Action Coordinator, who was hired in 2022, and regional working groups.

This brief history demonstrates a degree of commitment to environmental sustainability from leadership within the Mennonite community, particularly through resolutions and educational activities. It does not, however, demonstrate how profoundly environmental sustainability is embraced across the Mennonite community, within institutions, among congregations, and by individual members. This project investigated the breadth of environmental engagement among Mennonites in Canada by conducting a content analysis of *Canadian Mennonite* (*CM*) magazine.[1] *CM* is a primary forum for nationwide conversations for members of MC-CAN, and the research provides a longitudinal window into environmental activities, theological conversations, and opinions and debates from multiple facets of this community. Specific research questions included: (1) What are the trends over time? (2) What areas of environmental concern are addressed? (3) What types of activities are described? (4) Which actors and organizations are involved? (5) What ethical or theological motivations and justifications for environmental engagement are discussed?

Faith-Based Environmentalism

Faith-based environmentalism began alongside the secular environmental movement in North America in the 1960s and 1970s, as faith communities struggled to respond to increasing environmental threats. Among Christians, the movement was further catalyzed by critiques such as that of Lynn White Jr. (1967), who argued that Judeo-Christian beliefs created the historical roots of the current ecological crisis, and recommended rethinking biblical and theological interpretations. Over the ensuing decades, many theologians accepted this challenge and worked to articulate theological

interpretations that support environmental stewardship, ecojustice, and creation care (e.g., Bouma-Prediger 2010; Dula 2020; Francis 2015; Hallman 1994; Santmire 1985; Schaefer 1970; Wilkinson 1980). The ETF's Creation Summit and subsequent book (Redekop 2000), discussed above, were part of this process. Simultaneously, faith-based organizations working on justice issues at home and abroad encountered the intersections between the environment and social justice, and engaged in advocacy and other activities to stand in solidarity with Indigenous Peoples defending their lands, sustain agricultural and water systems in the Global South, protect marginalized communities from pollution, and call for climate justice (e.g., Gould and Kearns 2018; Gunn 2018; Kerber 2014; Moyer 2018; Spaling and Vander Kooy 2019).

Research investigating faith-based environmental engagement has identified both strengths and shortcomings. Some prominent Christians, such as those supporting the Cornwall Alliance, confirm White's (1967) thesis that Christian attitudes were instrumental in generating the ecological crisis. Surveys tracing correlations between pro-environmental attitudes and faith frequently find that Christians, particularly in the United States and within specific denominations, have lower levels of environmental concern and commitment than broader society (e.g., Clements, Xiao, and McCright 2014; Taylor, Van Wieren, and Zaleha 2016), though the results of these surveys are both contested and sometimes ambivalent (Djupe and Hunt 2009; Kidwell et al. 2018).

Other research has involved more qualitative studies on the faith groups that are actively engaging environmental issues, describing their range of activities and considering their motivations, their unique ways of functioning, their theological, political, and practical limitations, and their unique strengths (e.g., Biviano 2016; Ellingson 2016; Jenkins 2008; Kearns 1996; Kidwell et al. 2018; Lysack 2014; Moyer and Sinclair 2022; Zaleha and Szasz 2015). While environmentally active groups are typically a minority within their larger faith communities, these studies identify several unique roles that faith communities can play within the environmental movement. Faith communities can exert moral authority, shape worldviews, motivate action, and possess infrastructure, expertise, and institutional and economic resources that can be applied to environmental mobilization (Bomberg and Hague 2018; Caniglia, Brulle, and Szasz 2015; Ellingson 2016; Gottlieb 2006; Koehrsen 2021; Veldman, Szasz, and Haluza-DeLay 2014). While this body of research is growing, these qualitative approaches have been criticized for being normative and anecdotal, and there is need for studies that provide more breadth of perspective (Caldwell, Probstein, and Yoreh 2022;

Taylor, Van Wieren, and Zaleha 2016; Veldman, Szasz, and Haluza-DeLay 2014).

Research investigating faith-based environmentalism has been conducted around the world, but in North America, apart from a few exceptions (e.g., Caldwell, Probstein, and Yoreh 2022; Haluza-DeLay 2008; Lysack 2014), the majority of studies come from the United States. This study fits into a broader research program working to address this gap, which began with broad studies to establish what is being done and by whom (Moyer 2018; Moyer and Scharper 2019; Moyer and Brandenbarg 2021; Moyer and Sinclair 2022) and is now shifting to more focused inquiries. It will also contribute to a small but growing body of literature about environmental engagement within the Mennonite community in North America (e.g., Dula 2020; Harder-Gissing 2019; Kreider 2020; Loewen 2005; Unrau 2001; Werner 2015; Wiebe 2017).

Methods

The study employed qualitative content analysis to identify and analyze all environmental sustainability content published by *CM* between 2003 and 2021. We define environmental sustainability broadly to include all concerns about ecological communities and their members, related social responses, personal connections to natural places, the beauty of creation, the place of humans in nature, and the role of Christians in the environmental crisis, encompassing both environmental and climate justice.

Prior to initiating this study, a rough record was made of environmental articles appearing in *CM* to share with MCCN to identify content for its website.[2] The first step in our research, therefore, was to develop a complete and systematic list of articles. We read through all digital issues published between 2003 and 2021, looking for environmental sustainability content in titles and articles, and searched specific keywords, which included: *stew*: steward/stewardship; *environ*: environment/environmentalism; *creation*; *sustain*: sustainable/sustainability; *climate*; *agri*: agriculture; *natur*: natural/nature; *ecol*: ecology/ecological; and *land*.

All pieces with environmental content were entered into an Excel file that identified descriptive details (year, issue, title, author, length, etc.). We also noted whether articles contained a mention of environmental sustainability—e.g., climate change included in a list of topics of concern—or if the entire article focused on an environmental topic. The final list contained 1860 pieces, of which 1298 had an environmental sustainability focus, and 562 contained mentions.

The pieces included letters to the editor, news articles, personal reflections, features, photo captions, feature articles, advertising supplements, and online articles and blogs.

All articles with an environmental focus were analyzed using NVivo qualitative coding software to identify patterns and themes, and to code content according to categories such as area of concern, action responses, actors, and theological motivations. The coding structure was built using categories developed in previous projects (e.g., Moyer and Brandenbarg 2021), categories in the literature (e.g., Dula 2020), and themes arising from the data. Recurring themes were identified and summarized in analysis tables.

Findings

The following sections discuss trends over time in *CM*'s coverage of environmental sustainability, areas of concern, action responses to those concerns, and biblical, theological, ethical, and cultural foundations that motivated action. In presenting these findings, we have prioritized breadth over depth.

Trends

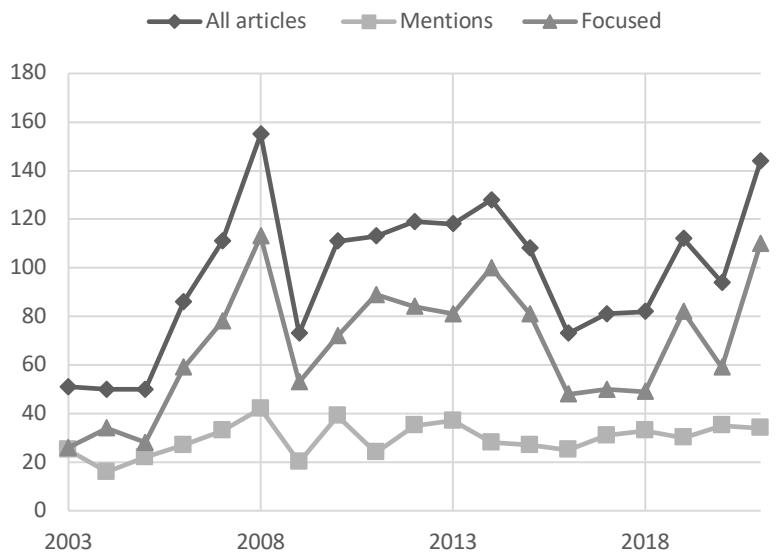

Figure 1. Number of environmental sustainability items

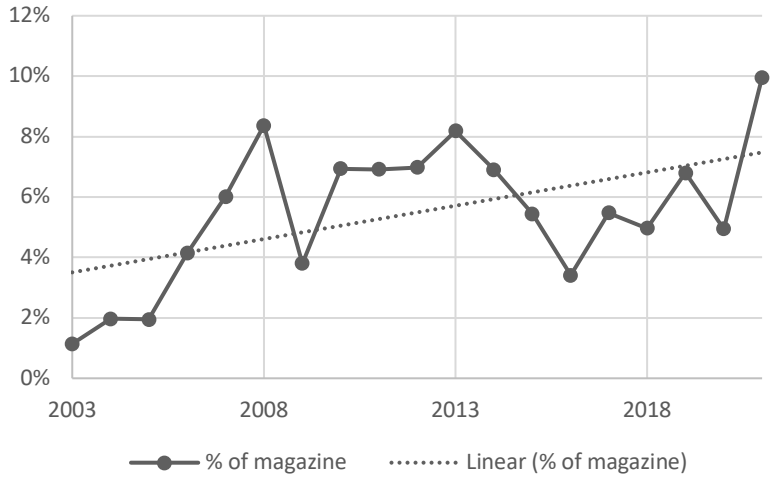

Figure 2. Percentage of magazine content

Figure 1 shows the number of environmental sustainability articles we identified over the research period, indicating a sustained trend of article content with some fluctuations and a recent increase. Figure 2 depicts the percentage of magazine content per issue over time, to ascertain how much attention environmental issues were getting compared to other content. These numbers are estimates because some items are less than a page. It is notable that while 2008 had the highest number of articles, 2021 had the highest volume percentage at almost 10%, further indicating a general trend of increasing interest in environmental sustainability over time. The average percentage of content was 5.5%.

The fluctuations seen in both graphs can be explained by both broader societal trends and events occurring within MC-CAN. The increase from 2005 to 2008 may reflect broader societal conversations about climate, coinciding with the release of *An Inconvenient Truth*, Al Gore's documentary about climate change, in 2006. This is also the period in which MCCN was formed, and MC-CAN adopted several creation care resolutions and hosted a summit with an environmental theme, all of which were reported in the magazine. The peak in 2014 coincides with internal proceedings such as Fossil Free Menno, a movement calling for divestment within the church, and broader societal conversations about divestment and anticipating the important United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 21) in Paris in 2015. The subsequent dip likely relates to two significant decision-making processes that culminated at the national gathering in 2016: the Being a Faithful Church process about sexuality, and

the Future Directions Task Force, which resulted in the restructuring of MC-CAN. Both conversations consumed significant energy within the community for several years. Once they were completed, interest in environmental sustainability articles began to increase again, with a small blip at the onset of the pandemic.

Several other characteristics were considered to account for trends. Over 600 different authors contributed environmental content. The top ten authors were all staff writers, mostly regional correspondents from different parts of the country, who wrote extensively for the magazine. This indicates that environmental sustainability was coming from across a broad swath of the community, and not just a small fringe. On the other hand, several regular columns frequently contributed environmental content, especially New Order Voice (2005–2016), Mind and Soul (2019–Present), and the Living within Limits series in 2008. These represented stronger voices in the community that were often pushing the edges of the environmental sustainability conversation.

Areas of Environmental Engagement and Concern

Table 1 shows the categories for environmental concern that emerged from our analysis. They are listed in order of frequency, from highest to lowest. The sub codes column shows more fine-grained categorization, with high frequency codes in bold. We will provide some commentary on how these concerns were discussed for the highest-frequency categories.

Table 1. Areas of environmental engagement and concern

Primary thematic codes	Sub codes
Food and agriculture	**Agricultural programs** **Food** - 100 Mile Diet - Factory farms - Food policy - Food waste Plants and gardening - Community gardening Urban-rural - Germinating Conversations
Climate change and energy	Climate politics Climate programs Climate science Energy

Indigenous concerns	Grassy Narrows Kinder Morgan Leon's Island Northern Gateway Shoal Lake UNDRIP Wet'suwet'en
Humans in nature	Connection to God - Worship ritual Eco-anxiety **Nature experience** - Birds - Connection to place - Nature therapy
Consumer culture	—
Ecology	Biodiversity and conservation Evolution Forests
Water	Scarcity and quality
Mennonite identity	Environmental history
Transportation	—
General degradation	Pollution Waste
Planetary capacity and limits	—
Mining	—
Ozone depletion	—

Together, *food and agriculture* were the highest-ranking areas of concern by number of articles, and largely included reports about research projects, conferences, and community events. *CM* articles in this category addressed the issue from the perspectives of local and global producers and consumers. Articles focusing on producers discussed harmful farming practices and the consequences of larger-scale farming operations, such as the reliance on fossil fuels, synthetic chemicals, and monocultures. Many articles focused on agricultural programs created by MCC, the Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFGB), and Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) for farmers in developing countries. Critiques of farming practices elicited responses from farmers who affirmed the importance of sustainability but also identified significant challenges associated with consumer attitudes and biases. Producers expressed a perception that consumers do not appreciate the steps

they have taken towards sustainably and the challenges and complexity of farming sustainably.

Articles from the consumer perspective also wrestled with their failures and the challenges of eating sustainably and ethically within the North American food system. Recommended solutions focused on personal choices, generally promoting a transition to supporting local food production, and supporting companies and organizations that uphold environmental and social standards for producers to ensure that plentiful, sustainable, and healthy food is available to all.

One of the largest themes that emerged in the discussion of food and agriculture in *CM* is the need for direct connection between producers and consumers. This was the focus of the Germinating Conversations initiative organized by MCC, Canadian Mennonite University (CMU), Food Matters Manitoba, CFGB, and A Rocha. In this series of dialogues, producers and consumers from diverse backgrounds listened to the issues facing each group with the intention of building connection and mutual understanding.

Climate change and energy were a close second to food and agriculture in terms of frequency and importance. Articles discussed the causes of climate change, projected social and ecological consequences, and commonly recommended solutions, such as carbon taxes and renewable energy. Most contributors demonstrated a commitment to and competence with climate science, routinely citing statistics from sources such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. For example:

> Carbon dioxide, along with other greenhouse gases, makes it harder for infrared radiation, which heats up the planet, to escape from the Earth. Climate change, or global warming, results in severe weather—like hurricanes Katrina and Rita, droughts and floods, and the melting of the poles and glaciers. The melting of the poles means higher sea levels, which means more displaced people and refugees. (Matthies, *CM* 2007, 11:9, 10)[3]

Based on the evidence of articles and letters, climate change evoked strong emotional responses from *CM* readers and the most prominent voices in the community believe that climate change is real and see an urgent need to address it. While occasionally letters questioned climate science and human causes of climate change, these were met with passionate, corrective responses in the following issues. For example, Will Braun, a regular columnist who routinely wrote about the importance of climate action, offered a column attempting to engage with climate dissenters to introduce nuance to the discussion (*CM* 2016, 20:5, 17). He was accused of misrepresenting data, disrespecting the people around the world who

are experiencing the effects of climate change, and irresponsible journalism. In a subsequent column, Braun noted that the previous column about climate change had "elicited more response than anything I have written for this publication" (*CM* 2016, 20:19, 16), and reflected that people really care about climate but missed the point of his attempt to examine assumptions about contentious issues.

CM contributors prioritized mitigating climate change by reducing reliance on fossil fuels and curbing general energy use, rather than focusing on adaptation. Articles also indicated the perception that there is an ideal balance between scientific solutions, such as transitioning to alternative forms of energy, and embracing the cultural and spiritual challenge of reducing overall energy use. Various forms of alternative energy were discussed as solutions, including solar, hydropower, biofuels, geothermal, and wind, and while most contributors approved of the adoption of at least some form of alternative energy, many were concerned that an overemphasis on alternative energies detracted from the most important solution: reducing energy use. For example,

> The pipeline is not the problem; rather, it is our consumption of, and reliance on, petroleum. To protest the construction of a pipeline serves as a distraction from the main task, which is to curtail oil consumption. (Peters, *CM* 2018, 22:17, 7–8)

The third most frequent area of engagement was *Indigenous concerns*. The just treatment of Indigenous Peoples and their ability to freely access their traditional lands was a major theme in *CM* content. Our analysis included articles that dealt specifically with the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the land. In general, the analysis revealed that *CM* contributors wrestle with their community's participation in colonialism, empathize with Indigenous Peoples, assert that Indigenous Peoples' treatment in Canada is unjust, and want to contribute to the reconciliation process, including with respect to land and resource extraction issues.

Coverage of Indigenous concerns in *CM* increased over time and spiked with controversial events reported in secular media. These events included logging blockades in Grassy Narrows, the Keeyask Dam, and several pipeline projects, notably Trans Mountain, Northern Gateway, and Coastal GasLink. In all these cases, many *CM* contributors expressed outrage at the disrespect of Indigenous rights demonstrated by these projects. Various forms of activism were reported, including protests and civil disobedience, which received both support and critique. For example, in 2018, while protesting the Trans Mountain pipeline, Steve Heinrichs, then director of

Indigenous-settler relations for MC-CAN, was arrested. At his trial he said:

> "I chose to act because at the centre of the Christian faith lies the conviction that the Creator suffers with the oppressed; that God takes sides with the victims over against the dominant powers; and that the people who see the issues of our day most clearly are those pushed to the sociopolitical margins." (Dueckman, *CM* 2018, 22:16, 24)

The responses in *CM* were mixed; while some suggested that his actions were ill-conceived or meaningless, others called him a "modern-day prophet" (Wiebe and Wiebe, *CM* 2018, 22:16, 8–9) and his actions "a prophetic witness" (Manske et al., *CM* 2018, 22:14, 10).

Humans in nature is a broad category that describes people interacting with ecological communities. The bulk of these items fell into the *nature experience* sub-code, which includes articles about various ways of encountering nature, including at camps and retreat centres, and through worship in and/or celebrating creation. Many of these articles contain references to the wonder, peace, and perspective that people experience in nature. For example,

> All kinds of people find joy in the outdoors. There is a natural connection between ourselves and the world. Part of it is surely the sense of smallness and mystery experienced by Job. And part of it, for me at least, is the way it points to something beyond, something transcendent, something infinite and peaceful. (Siegrist, *CM* Blogs, "A consistent, everyday joy," Aug. 5, 2021)

Others referred more specifically to the way that nature facilitates connection with God:

> But it is by the river that my soul finds rest and my mind feels most clear. It is in nature that we see God's glorious beauty and feel his calming presence. It is amazing how God's creation—whether a rushing river, a tree to sit under or a mountain to climb—can gather us into the presence of God and fill us with his peace. (Barkman, *CM* 2020, 24:1, 9)

This category also captures emotional responses to nature and its destruction, including direct references to eco-anxiety, and broader expressions of grief and frustration, as well as articles about how people are seeking and finding hope.

The final major area of concern was *consumer culture*. From the perspective of many *CM* contributors, Western consumerism is the root of almost all environmental problems. The climate crisis, pollution, waste, poor stewardship of resources, injustice, and violence were all often framed as outcomes of greed. For example,

> In reflecting on poverty and the environment, Ugandan Bishop Zac Niringiye says that the problem is not poverty but greed, and the global North's excessive use of earth's resources. He calls us in the North to change the slogan "Make poverty history" to "Make greed history." (Pritchard, *CM* 2012, 16:18, 10)

> In its simplest form, gluttony is about too much. Too much eating, too much drinking, too much indulging. It's about excess. While we often associate it with food and drink, it can include misuse of other resources. In our context, that might mean too much waste and misuse of the earth's resources, like air, water and fossil fuels. (Miller, *CM* 2014, 18:3, 8)

CM contributors expressed concern about the environmental, social, economic, and spiritual consequences of over-consumption, asserting that consumer culture and material possessions have taken the place of God in the spiritual lives of the community. For example, Gareth Brandt compares the mall to the "abomination of desolation" in the book of Daniel (*CM* 2007, 11:12, 8).

The broad response to the problem by *CM* contributors is a call to individual action to reduce or avoid excessive consumption, such as thrifting, making things by hand, and adopting a "Buy Nothing Christmas." These exhortations reflect the prosperity Mennonites have achieved in North America and the tensions that consequently arise in relation to traditional teachings about simplicity (Bender, van der Zijpp, and Krahn 1959; Kroeker 2009). Some contributors identified the capitalist economic system as the root cause of the problem, while others wrote letters affirming themselves as proud capitalists that recognize small changes are needed.

The ranking of areas of concern remains fairly consistent over time. Given the agrarian roots of ethnic Mennonites in Canada, it is not surprising to find food and agriculture as the highest area of concern (Werner 2015). The high ranking of climate change reflects the Mennonite commitment to justice and protecting the vulnerable, discussed more below, and mirrors a similar focus of environmental concern within broader Canadian society. For example, in the 2021 federal election, about a third of the Canadian population ranked climate change as its highest concern, despite the ongoing pandemic (Yang and Arhonditsis 2022).

Action Responses

We divided action responses into three different scales of actors: individuals, internal organizations that serve the Mennonite Church Canada community (e.g., congregations, conference institutions, schools, and camps), and external organizations that provide relief

and other services both within and beyond the Mennonite community, in Canada and internationally (e.g., MCC).

One action approach—education and dialogue—cut across all three categories of actors. *CM* articles recorded individuals seeking and reporting on information gained about environmental concerns and engaging conversations with others about sustainability, often by attending conferences, workshops, and other events facilitated by organizations. At the same time, gatherings intended to increase the community's knowledge of environment sustainability issues or to engage such discussions were one of the most common actions taken by Mennonite organizations, as reported in *CM*. Events ranged in size from a small presentation at a university to theme discussions at national MC-CAN gatherings. Notable recurring events included the Germinating Conversations series hosted by CMU, MCC Manitoba, A Rocha, and CFGB, and the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary's (AMBS) "Rooted and Grounded" conference.

Individual Action

As hinted several times above, individual action emerged as a significant theme in the activities and approaches described within *CM*. Individual actions can be divided into two primary approaches: mindful consumption and activism. The term "mindful consumption" summarizes an action approach characterized by reducing consumption and making choices intentionally to match key values such as stewardship, justice, simplicity, and peace. Discussions featuring the mindful consumption approach addressed decisions about what and how to consume, including whether to buy something new, meditations on cheap, unethical, and unsustainable production processes, and dilemmas about product disposal. For example,

> We all need to think more about our spending habits and the choices we make. This applies to where we buy gas; whether we should have a car or two, or a boat or all-terrain vehicle; where to make our investments or even whether to have investments; and where to buy our groceries. (Peters, *CM* 2008, 12:13, 10)

Mindful consumption practices were the most common individual action appearing in *CM* articles, and examples include buying less, thrift shopping, buying ethically made, fair trade, or sustainable products, fixing broken items, composting, and reusing materials bound for landfill.

These activities were both practical and ethical. Many contributors acknowledged the negligible impacts their individual

behaviours have for problems like climate change, recognizing that "simple lifestyle changes are only a piece of the puzzle" (Haluza-DeLay, *CM* 2012, 16:16, 5) because there are many other social and economic forces at play. Regardless, such acts were considered important personal practices and essential to living out their faith. For example:

> The reward from each little act of stewardship may not be a world saved, but our own faithfulness confirmed. My little act of reverence may not change the world much, but it will change me. I will be remade. Our acts of faith may not yet heal the earth, but they may awaken us. And having been transformed, we become the salt that pervades a world grown musty. Dare we dream what our Creator might make of that? Finally, then, from our trivial acts of faithfulness comes hope. (Janzen, *CM* 2008, 12:12, 6)

Activism refers to activities undertaken by individuals within social contexts to address broader social systems. *CM* articles described individuals pursuing organized political activism such as participating in protests, marches, and letter writing campaigns. Campaigns addressed both local issues, such as a uranium refinery or water contamination in local communities, and more global concerns, such as climate change. The coverage of activism activities in *CM* increased over time, and some of the most significant examples recorded were recent protests about climate change and recent pipeline projects, such as Trans Mountain, Northern Gateway, and Coastal GasLink.

Internal Organization Actions

The primary action responses among internal organizations observed in *CM* were aimed at making organizational operations more environmentally sustainable, including both technological and behavioural approaches. Faith leadership organizations also employed changes to policy.

Mennonite Church Canada and its regional church conferences have adopted a variety of action approaches, according to the record in *CM*. While the first article in the dataset announced the demise of the Mennonite Environmental Taskforce as a consequence of conference restructuring, this was followed by reports on the formation of MCCN and creation care resolutions passed in 2007, including a Creation Care Affirmation Statement and a commitment to reduce energy consumption at national assemblies. In 2008, MC-CAN hosted a summit in conjunction with its annual gathering which addressed ecology as one of its foci.

CM articles reported on the greening progress of the 2008 gathering, as well as subsequent gatherings, celebrating reductions in waste and local travel impacts and wrestling with challenges related to food, the cost of reusable dinnerware, and the inevitable travel required to attend, with the conference ultimately deciding to move to biennial assemblies. Other operational energy reductions included installing energy-efficient lighting in offices and minimizing air travel by staff. In 2020, a new volunteer Sustainability Leadership Group (SLG) was established to "make suggestions to improve sustainability of programs and ministries across MC Canada" (Braun, *CM* 2021, 25:1, 20). Educational resources produced by MC-CAN initiatives, such as *Every Creature Singing* (MCCN) and *God's Green Church* (SLG), were also promoted in *CM*. As mentioned above, conferences and events facilitating education and dialogue were featured across the action levels, including MC-CAN, and this was the focus in most articles about the regional churches.

MC-CAN has also engaged in more active advocacy. As executive director, Willard Metzger (2010–2018) was reported speaking several times on climate justice, including an address to senators and members of Parliament. He also attended the United Nations Climate Change Conferences in Durban, South Africa, in 2011, and in Paris in 2015. In 2014, the grassroots "Fossil Free Menno" campaign initiated a conversation about divestment of MC-CAN funds from fossil fuels, including reflections on its pension programs. This conversation elicited critiques of the depth of MC-CAN's commitment to addressing climate change, and the working group that was formed to consider divestment ultimately recommended against it, recognizing both the global justice implications of a warming world and the complications of pursuing divestment.

Universities and congregations embraced similar technological and behavioural action approaches and are therefore discussed together. Transitioning to alternative energy was a popular goal, with several reports of congregations installing solar panels. Solar panels were also installed at Conrad Grebel University College. Other examples of technological greening include the use of geothermal heating and cooling systems in residences at CMU and AMBS. The library at AMBS received a gold certification from the United States Green Building Council in 2009, and CMU became Climate Smart certified in 2020.

Congregations and universities also created community gardens, citing food production, connecting with the community and with God, or reaping the psychological benefits of gardening as their motivations. Another common behavioural strategy among universities and congregations was commuter challenges, which asked

participants to use alternative methods of transportation to church or school. There were also a few examples of churches engaging in activism, through writing letters to the government about climate change, and protesting pipelines and nuclear waste.

The analysis revealed that most articles about summer camps did not mention or contain an environmental sustainability focus of any kind. Of the minority that did include some environmental content, many focused on sustainable food production and managing food waste. Some technological strategies were also employed, such as building sustainable infrastructure and an electric vehicle charging station at the Shekinah Retreat Centre. Many camps also focused on environmental sustainability by providing experiences in nature, as discussed above. A few contributors talked about how nature experiences can develop environmental consciousness, but links between nature experiences at camps and sustainability were rarely made explicitly.

External Organization Actions

The external organizations that appeared in this analysis were relief, development, and/or justice organizations including MCC, MEDA, and CFGB. As part of their justice and development work, they designed projects intended to lessen the impact of environmental problems in other countries, such as specialized dams and plans for drought-tolerant agriculture practices. Most projects dealt primarily with either water scarcity or agriculture, often with the secondary goal of mitigating or adapting to climate change.

MCC's projects and programs were featured the most frequently in *CM*. In its 2019 strategic plan, MCC included climate change as one of its key priorities. Reporting on MCC's international programs included stories about disaster response, aid and emergency supplies, reforestation, conservation agriculture, water security, and advocacy on behalf of communities. MCC thrift stores, which raise money for programs and help divert and repurpose waste, were frequently celebrated. Publishing projects of MCC, such as *Earth Trek: Celebrating and Sustaining God's Creation* (Moyer 2004) and the *Simply in Season* cookbook (Lind and Hockman-Wert 2005) provided environmental education and practical suggestions for individuals engaging in mindful consumption. In the late 2000s, MCC Ontario had a Creation Care Coordinator, who worked on greening projects with congregations. MCC Ontario also invested in green technologies when building its new office.

Other external organizations exhibited environmental sustainability actions, though they appeared less frequently in *CM.* CFGB

provided reports about emergency food assistance and agricultural development, including sustainability strategies such as conservation agriculture and sand dams, and in 2013, CFGB created a Climate Fund to support farmers impacted by climate change. MEDA projects included carbon offset programs and sustainable agriculture. Community Peacemaker Teams (formerly Christian Peacemaker Teams) (CPT) has worked in solidarity with numerous initiatives involving environmental elements around the world. In *CM*, articles mostly discussed CPT's work with Indigenous Peoples, such as Asubpeeschoseewagong Netum Anishinabek First Nation, who were blockading forestry operations and protesting the contamination of their waterways with mercury. CPT's involvement with Wet'suwet'en land defenders protesting the Coastal GasLink pipeline generated some controversy, with contributors both questioning and defending CPT's choice to side with the protesters in a divided Indigenous community. *CM* contained multiple reports of Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) responding to and helping rebuild communities after extreme weather events, but links between the intensity and frequency of these events and climate change were essentially absent.

Across these action responses, education and dialogue, development and relief work, and individual "mindful consumption" were the most prominent in the magazine. Activism and advocacy were reported with more frequency in recent years, and also generated the most controversy. In an archival exploration of Mennonite activism, Harder-Gissing (2019) notes that historically, Mennonite activists engaged environmental issues through agricultural issues, and waste management by developing recycling programs. She also notes that while activists were a minority within the Mennonite community in the last few decades of the twentieth century, their activities were a profound expression of their faith and values and generated reflection within the community about its role in broader society.

Individual and community behaviour change were more frequently described or recommended than working to transform societal systems, though calls for systemic reform were also present. At the same time, the depictions of both individual and collective action occurring within the context or through the support of church organizations underscores the importance of the infrastructure faith communities can provide to facilitate action (Caniglia, Brulle, and Szasz 2015; Veldman, Szasz, and Haluza-DeLay 2014). While many articles described action being taken, there was also significant emphasis in calling readers to more committed and profound action and change, indicating a sense of urgency among some contributors

that the community response was insufficient. Finally, there were several areas of activity, particularly camps, thrift stores, and disaster relief, which could have been linked to environmental sustainability much more than they were.

Motivations: Biblical, Theological, Ethical, and Cultural Foundations

The final question concerns the theological and ethical motivations and justifications for environmental engagement discussed in *CM*. This analysis builds on common typologies of Christian environmentalism, such as Kearns (1996) and Jenkins (2008), and specifically Anabaptist analyses, including Dula (2020) and Kreider (2020). We found five primary Mennonite motivations for environmental sustainability that have biblical, theological, ethical, and cultural aspects: stewardship, ecojustice, simplicity, eco-pacifism, and radical discipleship.

Stewardship is a biblical and theological approach to environmental sustainability that is common among Christians, particularly more evangelical and conservative groups, often called "creation care." Stewardship is a very scripturally grounded theological motivation, with roots in the creation stories of Genesis, pointing to God the Creator and the mandate of human creatures to care for creation (Kearns 1996). These quotations illustrate how contributors expressed a stewardship theology or ethic, and the variety of biblical passages used to support it:

> "The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof" (Psalm 24:1), and God placed us in the garden "to till it and keep it" (Gen. 2:15). Creation reflects the love and provision of the Creator. Our respect and care for creation reflects in turn our love for the Creator. (Pritchard, *CM* 2012, 16:18, 10)

> One of the first commands God gives to people in the creation story is that we should rule over the earth and subdue it (Genesis 1:26–28). This is often interpreted as meaning that people have authority over plants, animals and the environment, and, to a certain extent, I agree. However, this passage is using authoritative language to talk about the relationship between humans and the rest of creation. We are to be as rulers over it, acting out of a desire to see justice and longevity throughout the world God created. (Krause, *CM* 2014: 18:19, 34)

> My understanding of stewardship includes the idea of efficiency. A great example of stewardship is making the most of a resource, like land, water or nutrients, so we reduce the amount that is needed. (Krahn, *CM* 2021, 25:19, 13)

Dula (2020) observes that stewardship is prominent in early Anabaptist theological work but has been replaced by other approaches more recently; however, this analysis indicates that stewardship or creation care approaches are still strong within this Mennonite community.

Ecojustice "focuses on linking environmental concerns with church perspectives on justice issues such as the just sharing of limited resources and the real cost of environmental problems" (Kearns 1996, 57), and is most commonly found among mainline Protestant churches. Within *CM*, most discussions of ecojustice looked at the unequal distribution of environmental consequences globally. Specifically, many articles discussed how the impacts of Western consumption are felt first and most powerfully by those who are most vulnerable and least responsible for those impacts. Specific attention was also paid to the justice implications of climate change and food production, as discussed above. Ecojustice asserts there is enough for all when resources are distributed properly.

> The West has operated under a growth model, as if the world and its resources were infinite, [Willard Metzger] said, suggesting that Christians need to begin to think about how they can "love their neighbour as they love themselves," providing all with enough. "What kind of world have we developed that the poor must gather in the presence of the rich and beg for survival?" he asked, referencing the pleas by a minister from Grenada at the 2011 UN Climate Change Forum in Durban, South Africa, as his country is swamped by rising ocean levels. (Rogalsky, *CM* 2013, 17:7, 30)

> We're talking warming of the planet (an increase of 3 degrees Celsius predicted by 2050) that is not only bringing extreme weather to Canada, but, more importantly, to the developing world, where drought and flooding are bringing untold suffering to the poor and underprivileged, ruining much-needed crops for food and destroying homes at a rate unknown in the past. (Benner, *CM* 2014, 18:9, 2)

Simplicity is a cultural ethic within the Mennonite community that emerged in the analysis as an important motivator for environmental sustainability, and the centrality of simplicity within Mennonite life is presented as a given by many *CM* contributors. Despite its centrality, *CM* contributors acknowledged that it is practiced imperfectly, wrestling with simple living within a culture of excessive consumption. For example:

> "We like the benefits [of the fossil fuel industry]. We know that our lifestyles should be evaluated. We know simplicity is a good thing for us, but it's hard to say no to the things we've grown to enjoy. These are

> uncomfortable conversations, but we need to stay in them. If we try to make them comfortable, we're never going to get engaged." (Neufeld, quoting Willard Metzger, *CM* 2015, 19:10, 19)

In spite of these challenges, contributors exhorted readers to consider embracing simpler lives, for their spiritual health, the wellbeing of the planet, and as an act of justice toward those who have less.

Eco-pacifism is another Anabaptist ethic motivating environmental sustainability, following the argument that "nonviolence pertains not just to human others but to all of creation" (Dula 2020, 17). Therefore, "eco-pacifists stress that the scriptural vision of *shalom* includes the harmonious flourishing of nature" (Kreider 2020, 55). Eco-pacifism is a broad motivation that has evolved and deepened over time, encompassing the environmental causes and effects of human-human violence and the ways in which violence is committed against creation. Violence is often caused by a multitude of complex factors, which means that living in non-violence requires carefully considering daily life choices.

> Wealth and conflict have long gone hand-in-hand. So it is now with oil in Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Sudan, Angola. Being a pacifist can no longer just mean not being willing to go to war. To refuse to use a gun is a relatively straightforward position. However, wars are fought for complex and subtle reasons, and frequently fought in complex and subtle ways. To be a committed pacifist must also mean to live in such a way as to prevent the need for using a gun from arising in the first place. (Fieguth, *CM* 2008, 12:10, 12)

Eco-pacifist arguments also connect with stewardship and ecojustice perspectives:

> Peacemaking and earthkeeping must go hand in hand. Peacemaking must include care for the earth and just access to the earth's resources. The apostle Paul promises that in God's good time, God will bring healing to a broken creation (Romans 8:19–20). Human sin and violence, and the curse they cast upon the land, will be overcome. In the meantime, Christian peacemakers are called to live in ways that participate in that healing. (Epp-Tiessen, *CM* 2004, 8:2, 11)

And later contributors push eco-pacifism further, exploring discussions of non-violence in our relationships with the earth and other creatures:

> We need Mennonites to take Christ's call to peacemaking and apply it with risk-taking abandon to the earth and this land we live in. We need to prevent the expansion of the Tar Sands, and shut that whole thing

> down. We need to stop the industrial train in its tracks. And we need to do it now. (Heinrichs, *CM* 2012, 16:21, 9).

> Nonviolence isn't limited to relationships between individuals or communities, but encompasses individual and community relationships to the environment as well. Not victimizing the land means guarding forests against clearing and burning, caring for water sources, and teaching young people to treat birds and animals with kindness. (Giesbrecht, *CM* Blogs, "What is nature to you?," June 4, 2020)

At the end of the twentieth century, Klaassen (2000) wrote that while Mennonites had thought carefully about pacifism and nonviolence since the Second World War, "we had done *no* thinking about the resources of our tradition of nonviolence in the human war against mother nature" (140). The *CM* record shows that in the intervening decades, more application of Anabaptist peace traditions to environmental matters has occurred.

The Anabaptist emphasis on radical discipleship (Werner 2015) emerged in this analysis as an ethic that was used to encourage and support environmental sustainability. Contributors affirmed that living as radical disciples was a part of their cultural legacy, and recognized how discipleship rooted in community provides power in numbers. For example:

> Let us be remembered as the people who had the courage to change our lives and the society around us to come in line with the will of God. Let us be part of the great cloud of witnesses who mean it when we pray "thy kingdom come." (Ninomiya, *CM* 2009, 13:3, 11)

Radical discipleship is also connected to countercultural living, including pursuing sustainability. For example:

> The Anabaptist commitment to discipleship has allowed Mennonites a willingness to be counter-cultural in the societies in which they have lived. (Haluza-DeLay, *CM* 2012, 16:16, 6)

> We need to be prepared to let go of the status quo—not in a reluctant sort of way, but in a joyful or celebratory way—to release ourselves from [consumer culture's] bondage. (Fieguth, *CM* 2008, 12:12, 13)

These theologies and ethics are flexible and interconnected, with many contributors using more than one at a time. For example:

> Simple living and good stewardship of resources are foundational parts of my Mennonite faith heritage, one that I hold dear even when inconvenient. In the face of the climate emergency, all of us need to make

> choices that are inconvenient as we commit to following Jesus with costly discipleship. In true relationship with God, we are transformed by God's grace and love in our lives, and cannot help but share that love with the world. (Reesor-Keller, *CM* 2021, 25:24, 9)

It is therefore important to view these approaches as different colours that are distinguishable within a larger pattern, rather than as mutually exclusive categories. Stewardship was cited the most frequently. Some of the other approaches identified by Dula (2020) and Kreider (2020), such as bio-regional/watershed discipleship and agrarianism/agrarian virtue were less prominent. The absence of the latter is interesting, given the volume of articles about food and agriculture. Agrarianism/agrarian virtue celebrate "places where humans are engaged in mutually constituting relationships with ecosystems," especially in farms and gardens (Dula 2020, 24), and can include "a belief in the moral superiority of rural people, and a harsh critique of urban life" (Kreider 2020, 46). It is this moral stance in particular which was largely absent from *CM*. In contrast, simplicity, which is not included in Dula's and Kreider's analyses, was discussed frequently. As a whole, these theologies and ethics are clearly undergirding and guiding the actions and concerns described above, motivating both individual acts of faithfulness to the Creator and collective environmental sustainability projects.

Cross-Cutting Themes

We conclude with a few observations that emerged across the analysis. In terms of the overall attitudes and orientation to environmental sustainability, contributors to *CM* overwhelmingly showed support for and interest in environmental topics. Only a very small minority asserted that environmental concerns should not be considered a Christian issue. Across nearly twenty years, there was a total of eight pieces that objected to the coverage of environmental content within the magazine, arguing that other priorities, such as salvation, were more important, or expressing concern that society valued the environment above human dignity or Christian values. One letter writer, who argued that the Bible does not support environmental sustainability and that it should never take priority over achieving social goals, received criticism and correction from several other letter writers. This response demonstrates the general conviction of most contributors that environmental concern and care belong within Christian and Anabaptist belief and practice.

In some Christian circles, distrust or skepticism toward science can be a significant barrier to environmental engagement (Kearns 2011; Taylor et al. 2016), while trust in science can strengthen environmental commitment (Biviano 2016; Chung et al. 2019). *CM* readers and contributors appeared to be scientifically literate, and implicitly trusted scientific explanations of environmental phenomena. While the science was not always discussed directly, a significant number of articles referred to the underlying science of climate change and did not generate controversy or debate by doing so. At the same time, *CM* contributors did not view science and technological fixes as simple, blanket solutions to environmental problems, but rather called for individuals and organizations to embrace necessary behaviour changes to pursue sustainability, as evidenced by the attention paid to consumer culture and the emphasis on simple living. While the MC-CAN community does not avoid new technologies the way some in the Anabaptist family such as the Amish do, their kinship with these groups might influence this attitude, while their emphasis on discipleship encourages the focus on behaviour change.

Finally, the overall atmosphere of articles about environmental sustainability was hopeful and did not reflect the doom and gloom that frequently dominates these discussions (e.g., Kelsey 2020). While contributors did not shy away from alarming realities, and articles described the real consequences of the environmental crisis, fear was not employed as the primary motivator to promote action, nor did it permeate the articles in *CM*. In part, this is because most articles ended with action suggestions, providing a pathway to prevent or change the negative outcomes. Christian hope also provided a foundation that countered fear. This hope shaped the emotional tone of the environmental content in *CM* and inspired a sense of responsibility to action that was evident across the articles analyzed. Henry Janzen provides a summary of this approach:

> That, in the end, is our greatest joy and most urgent mandate—conveying hope to an anxious, troubled world. Despite all the ominous signs, all the wringing of hands and voices of gloom, there is hope—for we are not in this alone. We are stewards for the Creator, who, we believe, is intent on restoring what he has created and we have abused. We share the aims of the Creator, whose unrelenting plan, it seems, is to redeem, to reclaim, to resurrect. (*CM* 2008, 12:12, 6)

Conclusion

Previous research indicated that MC-CAN fits into the second tier of faith-based communities engaging in environmental sustainability work in Canada, alongside Anglicans, Lutherans, Christian Reformed, and Bahá'ís, and behind the United Church of Canada and the Unitarians, who have been the most active (Moyer and Brandenbarg 2021). This analysis aligns with that assessment, demonstrating a sustained, though fluctuating, trend in the number of environmental sustainability items in *CM*, and a currently growing level of interest. There are few empirical studies about Mennonite/Anabaptist environmental activities in Canada or North America to provide a comparison to our analysis. However, Curry-Roper (1997), in a study of several rural religious communities in Iowa, concluded that while Mennonites tended to express a utilitarian relationship between humans and nature, their practices were more sustainable than the worldviews and theologies that guided them. Mennonite academics writing in the same period (e.g., Klaassen 2000; Redekop 1986) also noted a lack of robust ecotheology within the Mennonite tradition. By the 2000s and beyond, however, it is evident from our data that environmental concerns of various types were firmly on the radar of the community in Canada, and that both a theology and a practice of environmental sustainability were established. At the same time, there was some disagreement about what environmental sustainability and related action should entail, especially with respect to more radical activism, and there was also a strong message from some contributors that the community response was insufficient in the face of the crisis at hand.

This work provides a foundation for further research into environmental engagement within the Mennonite community in Canada. The analysis is high level, providing a view of the landscape and a foundation for more in-depth studies, which are better done through archival research and interviewing the people involved. There is opportunity to delve deeper into the work that has been done, the theological expressions that motivated it, and the individuals and organizations who performed it.

Notes

[1] The research discussed in this publication was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

[2] Moyer has volunteered with MCCN as a Canadian Council member since 2006. She also served on the Climate Change Working Group in 2015, and currently serves with the MC-CAN's Sustainability Leadership Group. She thus has a position of both researcher and participant in this study, while the other authors provided an outside perspective.

[3] All *CM* content can be accessed at https://canadianmennonite.org/. Given the bulk of materials cited, we have not provided a bibliography listing each article, but have rather cited the data to facilitate accessing it. Print articles include the author, year, volume, number, and page number, and can be browsed in the Past Issues section of the website. Blogs and other online content can be harder to find, so titles are provided in cases where searching the title is the easiest way to find them.

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