

Prayer Companion Guide to Creation Care Path

Station 1: “New Beginnings and renewal”

We welcome you to walk this half-mile Creation Care Path around Harrisonburg Mennonite Church, which is dedicated to Lance Showalter. There are 12 numbered stations, providing *a place to pause, meditate or reflect*. We begin here in the memorial garden with various identified trees planted in loving memory of those who have passed on to the next life. These days are uncertain times, living in a pandemic, where we are physically distanced from many and feeling losses of different kinds as we recognize our need for connection.



Draw us, O God, into your creation, where we can touch or wrap our arms around a tree and feel connected with You in creation and those who have gone before us. We miss those we love and cannot see. Renew us with hope and new beginnings that offer us a sense of your presence. You know where we come from and where we are going. Walk with us on our journey, we pray.

Station 2: “Child’s play and weathering storms”

Meander around Matthew’s Maze with a playful spirit. In the midst of whatever season you walk, notice or imagine this space filled with creative children at play. God loves all his many children with their squeals of delight and their cries over bumps and scrapes. Some of the trees around here, such as the tulip tree, have weathered storms with broken branches and recovered. Children are resilient with their falls and breaks and so also are trees.

Parenting God, listen in to the joys of carefree children with your delight. Embrace those who find themselves threatened, rejected or neglected by others. Protect them from harm, lift them up when they hurt, and grant them safe spaces with shade trees to play. We are grateful for the gift of children and their curious and growing minds, hearts and bodies. Help us as adults to love and not disparage our very selves where storms of life have damaged our spirits, wounded our hearts and degraded our bodies. May your voice of love soften our hearts when they are too quick to judge and too slow to listen.



Station 3: “The blessed ones”

How shall we gather in these strange times when we are asked not to gather or congregate in large numbers to stop the spread of a deadly coronavirus? This pavilion provides tables physically distanced so shift workers and families can come for a meal or coffee break and conversation. Wearing masks in close social gatherings are encouraged when not eating.



Beatitudes for these days

*Blessed are they who wash their hands,
for they shall hold living water;*

*blessed are those who keep their distance,
for they shall draw closer to God;*

*blessed are they who self-quarantine,
for they shall help others;*

*blessed are those who do not hoard,
for they shall feed families;*

*blessed are those who [check in on] sheltering neighbours,
for they shall be members of the heavenly host;*

*blessed are parents who learn to teach at home,
for they shall learn from their children;*

*blessed are they who shop for older folk,
for they shall receive everlasting thanks;*

*blessed are the frontline health workers,
for they shall be called healers of humanity.*

—by Thom M Shuman, *Voices out of lockdown*, ed. Jan Sutch Pickard; used by permission



Station 4: “Stroll...



Sit...

Stroll down the slope past Gary’s Goals basketball court into this secluded shade garden.

Sit for a spell between the witch hazels and look up the hill where the sun rises or notice the sun setting behind you in the evening. Observe the sky and listen for birds in the nearby bushes.

Look and Listen”



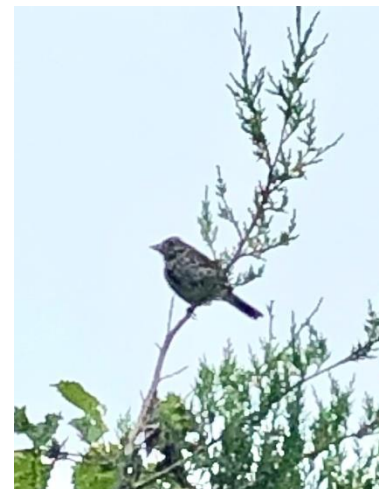
When seated... take a deep breath in... slowly exhale. Do this several more times... Inhale...and exhale....

*Let thoughts go, as you observe more closely what is around you.
Breathe in the fresh air mindfully, and of the smells, sights and sounds close by.
Listen for birds, insects, neighborhood sounds attentive to all of God’s creation.*

What do you appreciate about these awarenesses that you can share with God?

What thoughts are tethered to your mind and soul that are hard to let go? Maybe these, too, can be offered to God.

*Sit silently for as long as you would like and appreciate the gifts of each season.
Close with gratitude to God for this spacious pause on your walk.*



Station 5: “Experiencing resilience” Walk the native wildflower path where late summer sunflowers and aromatic white autumn clematis appeal to the senses. Hover close to the fence to see the beautiful Virginia creeper vine’s blue *nonedible* berries (toxic to humans) but a welcome food source for birds. Note the red cedar trees behind the fence, planted as a wind break and screen from industrialization. On the other side of the path are trees that have been impacted by weather and drought.



Trees have their own life cycle, and some are abbreviated by harsh climate conditions. A few members of Creation Care Path meet regularly to care for the flowers, remove weeds, prune and replant native trees.

Caretaker God, we need your loving touch to prune out the dead wood and remove habitual weeds in our lives to restore us to the beautiful creation you have created us to be. We long to live and flourish in your world according to your purpose.

The LORD’s faithful love is from forever ago to forever from now for those who honor him.

And God’s righteousness reaches to the grandchildren of those who keep his covenant

and remember to keep his commands.” Psalm 103:17-18



Station 6: “Pollinator attractions” Revel in the beauty along this station and especially in the summer with the fragrance of the mountain mint, the beauties of butterflies fluttering on sunflowers and purple ironweed, and the milkweed—the monarch butterfly caterpillar’s exclusive feeding plant. Eighty-nine percent of plant species depend on, or at least benefit from, the services provided by pollinators.



God of all things bright and beautiful, help us stop to appreciate the wonders of how plants and pollinators depend on each other.

Station 7: “Orientation” Sometimes the way seems obvious and God gives clear guidance... and other times the road is less visible or unmarked. We leave the gravel path at the mailbox—with request “*May we pray for you?*” Sometimes we need the prayers of others to assist us with life. Stop and leave us a note if you would like prayers.



Cross the road to get directionally oriented and stop at the signpost 7 which points in the grassy direction of the row of distant pine trees. Behind you and to the left of the driveway looking west across



the train tracks and over the top of Capital Tristate electric supply company, observe Mole Hill, an ancient inactive volcano. Just over the hill and towards the unseen western Shenandoah Mountain are beautiful countryside and rural farmland. Looking to the right and to the north over the pine trees, is the heart of downtown Harrisonburg, an urban multicultural “friendly city” that many call home.

Guiding God, orient us in our faith journey to pursue what is “true north.” Your son Jesus shows us the way and through his heartfelt message and his humble life as shared in scripture, we discover a helpful compass to measure what is true.

Jesus says, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” John 8:12



Jesus, when we feel disoriented or lacking clarity, bring us someone who knows you as friend to companion us.

Station 8: “Pause and reflect”



Between the river birch and white birch is a bench beckoning one to take a break. Pause for some moments and look up into the Paw Paw tree, a native tree in Eastern USA. The fruit resembles a green mango and when ripe tastes like banana custard. Reflect on what fruits you like to eat... and maybe some tree fruits like the paw paw and the persimmon, also on this path, are new to you.



“O taste and see that the Lord is good, Blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.” Psalm 34:8

Gardening God, we relish the taste of your creation and often take the fruits of the season for granted. Help us slow down to savor the flavors and appreciate what is stored in small fruit bearing seeds that hold hope for future generations. Thank you for the gifts of each season of dormancy, springtime blossoms, young fruiting growth and harvest. Help us observe seasons in our own lives where we need rest, and where we are called to bloom, grow and be productive.

Station 9: “Struggle” Roam around the lower-end beyond the spillway for water runoff, protecting the neighborhood community living below this field, and notice weeds like the non-native purple spotted knapweed, pretty as it is, that tenaciously



fighters for turf among the struggling grasses. Come round the bend to signpost 9, and identify the Eastern sycamore, river birch and bald cypress trees, along with the struggling winter berry holly shrub. These have experienced abuse or neglect or effects of climate crisis and have been pruned to allow for regrowth.

One could call these “hard knocks” along the way. Even the bluebird house has seen better days. However, tree swallows have raised their young in barely adequate housing.

God, Creator of all that is, we use your world—no, if we are honest, we [often] abuse your world. We [often] abuse natural resources without much thought about the consequences. We ignore the scientific

warnings and the protests of our far-off neighbours who are suffering right now from the effects of global warming, and we keep on spewing out unnecessary carbon emissions as though there is no tomorrow. Creator God, help us examine our lifestyle and to make all the necessary changes, thereby showing our love and care for your people [and creation] throughout the world.
 –John Dale, *Like Leaves to the Sun: Prayers from Iona Community*, compiled by Neil Paynter 2013, used by permission

Station 10: “Meadow of delight and diversity” As you wander past the hedgerow on the left, a place of shelter for birds, and go up the hill crossing over the paved road, peer through the huge magnolia tree limbs and amble down to signpost 10



where a native dogwood with its fall red berries and 2 redbud trees are planted. Underground are daffodil bulbs resting for the fall and winter season. Stroll the gravel path, appreciating the open meadow and space for birds of the air and creatures of the ground to thrive. Listen for crickets chirping. Follow the bumpy path, making way for water runoff, but also a place of delight for children on bikes to enjoy the ride. Approach the black walnut tree on the left and black gum tree on the right. We celebrate the diversity within

God’s world. In a time of violence and cultural unrest nationally as communities of color seek to be treated fairly, we stand like trees with those who want equal treatment.

*God of grace and God of glory, lead us on within our stories—
 we celebrate with joy your vast creation pulsating with so many forms of life.
 We are grateful for your diversity within your world and within your people.
 And yet, we have let you down when we choose to let our story dominate and
 allow injustice to thrive. Deliver us from our worst selves and equip us to partner
 in caring for creation and, not only our flourishing, but others as well.*

Station 11: “Perennials and Annuals” On the left is the perennial garden with flowers and trees that return to give beauty and shade year after year. On the right is the “community garden” with its 46 lots where neighbors plant annual gardens alongside one another. It is a multicultural garden with Iraqi figs, Mexican tomatillos,



Laotian long beans and many other fruits and vegetables. Cherry tomatoes, okra, kale and Swiss chard are just a few. And here, at harvest time, is retired Pastor Mark Keller with his barrow full of bountiful butternuts! These squashes keep well all winter in cool storage.

*God of the elements—air, water, fire, and earth,
You gave us the land
to feed, delight and sustain us.*

*Jesus, carpenter, human in strength and weakness,
You gave us manual labor
to tend with care your garden and world.*

*Wind of the Spirit, giver of wisdom and growth,
You gave us each other to reach out
and discover and learn from one another...*

how to be community!



Station 12: “Hard times” Walking up the slope to return to the beginning, we take a break at signpost 12, a desert-like place with prickly pear cactus, sedum, and yucca with its sharp leaves and edges. Just nearby is a young native American Chestnut tree planted in memory of Tim Brenneman, who for years cared deeply for God’s creation and this path. These are hard times for many who face loss. It sometimes feels lonely. Have a seat on the large rock here, which could be called a foundation rock. Jesus is seen in scripture as a solid rock, the *Rock of Ages*, the foundation to our faith, and who has deep interest in all we experience—the joys and the sorrows in our yesterdays, today, and tomorrows.



If you would appreciate a conversation with a pastor at Harrisonburg Mennonite, contact the church office at: 540-434-4463 or email: hmc@harrisonburgmennonite.org
www.harrisonburgmennonite.org



We are grateful you walked this path.
You are welcome to come again and again!

*May God, your maker, bless you
each step of your journey.
May you walk and talk with the One
who knows you by name
and loves you forever!*

*Prayer guide created/ compiled
by Sheryl L Shenk
September 15, 2020*

Please return this copy to box

