The United Church of Christ has a long history of being a leader in Environmental Justice. Dating back to the 1980’s when they coined the phrase “environmental racism” and published a comprehensive report on the same. Since that time, they have been denominational leaders in passing resolutions calling for divestiture from fossil fuel companies and endorsing the Green New Deal. They leverage a digital platform to share ideas and call on churches to become Creation Justice Churches.

Since 1993, the Cornerstone Fund has been a partner with congregations on making improvements to their buildings, that honor this focus and care for creation. There have been previous loan programs focused on “Eco” projects, but we never had the ability to make those projects even more affordable through subsidized loan rates, until now. Our hope is that the incentivized rate will generate more projects, both small and large.

This July 2021, at the 33rd General Synod, we will formally be launching the Creation Care Loan Program. The creation of a pool of specially priced investments, specifically dedicated to this purpose, is what will allow us to offer the lower subsidized loan rates. Our Founding Investors will include the National Setting and United Church Funds, along with several key Conferences including… And the ability to invest in this Creation Care Investment pool will be available to all, including individuals who are looking for a conscious investment.

Is Conscious Investing Right for Me?

More frequently you are hearing about investment opportunities that are identified as socially responsible” or “impact” investments. Or you may have heard about the investor focus on “ESG” (Environmental, Social and Governance – investing in companies identified as values-based). Quite simply, if you want to align your investing with your moral, social and ethical values, SRI (socially responsible investing) is for you. Socially responsible investing is a merge between financial gain and making a positive impact – every investment is made with the end goal of reallocating funds to a conscious cause.

How it Works:

Investors who care deeply about Creation Care and addressing the detrimental effects of climate change, will make an impact investment in the UCC Cornerstone Fund. Investors will agree to a 1% rate of return on their investment, giving up some short-term gain, for an investment that will yield a long-term gain for our planet. These investment funds then will be loaned at 3.5% to churches and other faith-based organizations to fund projects specifically aimed at improving their properties impact on the environment and reducing their carbon footprints.

Our goal is to raise $3,000,000 initially, but we will periodically check in on progress, and we will not stop there. We will also periodically report back on progress and the impact that the loans are having on caring for creation.
**Investment Specifics:**

**Term:** 36 months

**Interest Rate:** 1% for the first 3 years, after that at the then prevailing rate

**Minimum Investment Amount:** $500

**Founding Investors** today include: National Setting/UCF, Wisconsin Conference, CHHSM

**Loan Specifics:**

**Eligible Projects:** Projects that are considered are those that reduce our carbon footprint:

- Solar/wind/turbine and other renewable energy projects.
- Any HVAC (heating/air conditioning), insulation, rewiring or waterproofing project which improves the efficiency of the building.
- Any LED lighting, window improvement, etc., which improves energy usage.
- Green roofs, water run-off, reclaimed water garden, and other projects which foster care of the environment.
- Some of these projects may be eligible for and receive grant funding from outside public or private sources, in which case, Cornerstone Fund would lend the balance of funds required to complete the project or may just bridge the cost of the project, until the grant funds are received. Over time, we expect to grow our knowledge base of other programs and become a resource for churches contemplating these types of projects.

**Loan Type:** 3-year adjustable-rate term loan, fixed for 3 years, then adjusted to the then prevailing rate; a three year balloon note will also be available

**Amortizations:** 3 through 30 years available

**Maximum Loan amount:** $100,000 however, if the total project exceeds the maximum loan amount a blended rate may be available, first the first $100K or the amount related to ecological impacting work receives the Creation Care pricing of 3.5% and the balance of the project receives our prevailing loan rate, currently 4.525% (or 2.5% over the rate of our 36-month investment/upper tier rate). The client may also have two loans.

**Minimum Loan amount:** $10,000

**Application Process:** Use the special Creation Care Loan Application (this customized application asks the borrower to quantify the impact of the improvements, examples will be provided.)

**Collateral:** Typical Cornerstone collateral requirements apply. Smaller unsecured loans may also be available

**Application Fees:** None – The only fees that are passed on to borrower are the actual fees incurred in the loan approval and closing process: e.g., title & legal fees
Payments: Interest-only payments are available during construction for up to 12 months, after that principal and interest. Automated payments via ACH are required.

Carbon Neutral Resources available for Congregations:
- Carbon Neutral Web Resources for Congregations - United Church of Christ (ucc.org)
- ENERGY STAR Action Workbook for Congregations | ENERGY STAR

A warming Earth disturbs weather, people, animals and much more

1. More heat alters ice, weather and oceans- making water more acidic and exacerbating weather events like hurricanes, droughts, and wildfires

2. Human life & Prosperity suffer – climate change is a major threat to agriculture; warmer polluted air affects our health; infrastructure and transportation are at risk

3. And Natural Habitats become hostile – Arctic animals are struggling; Coral and shellfish are suffering; Forests are more prone to deadly infestations

- Environmental Defense Fund

“Think about the essentials of life such as air, water, and food. One could say that often these divine gifts of creation are taken for granted as they are abused by our society in countless ways, especially in ways detrimental to low income, communities of color. Churches can do a lot to challenge this status quo that disconnects us from God, our neighbors, and our surrounding world.”

- UCC.org/Environmental Justice Ministries