

## 1. Purpose

1.1 The documented, agreed policy is based upon the documented statement of the United Reformed Church's stance towards the environment in which it operates, agreed by General Assembly in 2016.

1.2 It is the cornerstone of our intent, as a body of people committed to seeking God's justice and treasuring God's world, to care for Creation and to live lightly upon the Earth\* in all of our operations.

\*Earth refers to our planet and the interdependent network of plants and animals in the biosphere that it sustains.

## 2. Introduction

2.1 As the East Midlands Synod of the United Reformed Church, we affirm with General Assembly that care for Creation, a just sharing of the world's resources and protecting the environment are fundamental Gospel commitments and central to our Missional Discipleship.

2.2 We believe that God the Trinity is the transcendent and immanent source, sustenance and salvation of all Creation.

2.3 We believe that God calls humanity to be partners in God's ongoing creative, renewing and redeeming activity and commands us to act justly and in righteousness not only towards our fellow human beings and towards future generations but towards all Creation because it is loved by God.

2.4 We acknowledge humankind's culpability for causing grievous harm to Other Than Human Creation (OTHC) and we will work within the wider Church and with partners outside the Church to grow towards justice.

2.5 We believe that degradation of the environment, the unjust distribution of resources and oppressive power structures are inter-linked and limit the attainment of the fullness of life that God wills for humankind and for all Creation. Our involvement in these, even unwittingly, is a sin which we must recognise and repent and for which we must seek forgiveness. As part of the intrinsic injustice in the world, degradation of the environment imposes most heavily upon the poor and upon future generations. We bear witness to the imperative to transform such injustice.

2.6 We recognise the significance and hope of the 2015 Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the imperatives of the 2018 IPCC special report on global warming of 1.5 °C and of the 2019 FAO report on the state of the world's biodiversity for food and agriculture:

See <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/d2hhdC1pcy>  
[www.ipcc.ch/sr15](http://www.ipcc.ch/sr15) and [www.fao.org/3/CA3129EN/CA3129EN.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/CA3129EN/CA3129EN.pdf).

## 3. Vision 2020

3.1 As with the Environmental Policy of the United Reformed Church, this policy is informed by the vision 2020 strategic framework for mission adopted by General Assembly in 2010, which declares that the United Reformed Church 'will be a Church that has taken significant steps to safeguard the integrity of Creation, to sustain and renew the life of the Earth' and states that 'Our churches, reflecting faith in God the creator and sustainer of life in all its fullness, must discover the radical voice of care for the Earth that is supported by the way we live.'

#### 4. 'Hope in God's Future'

4.1 We affirm the view expressed in the 2009 report Hope in God's Future that: 'it is now intellectually and morally irresponsible to fail to acknowledge and address the urgent need for radical cuts in greenhouse gas emissions in order to prevent intolerable damage to human populations and mass extinctions of many plant and animal species.'

4.2 We pledge to respond to the report's call for repentance in the face of our own and humanity's complicity in the sinful structures that are causing wanton damage to the Earth and to many poor communities. We commit to intercede for those threatened by climate change and environmental degradation.

4.3 We pledge to adopt practices and lifestyles consistent with reducing levels of greenhouse gas emissions as rapidly as practicable to net zero by 2050 and to eliminating the pollution of the air that people breathe.

4.4 We pledge to adopt practices and lifestyles consistent with protecting biodiversity in fresh and salt water, on land and in the air from pollution by plastics, pesticides, other chemicals and from other harm such as over-exploitation.

#### 5. Shrinking our carbon footprint

5.1 Mindful of the commitments contained in the vision2020 statement, in the Hope in God's Future report, in a resolution on climate change passed by General Assembly in 2007, in the Lambeth Declaration on climate change in 2015 and mindful of the 2018 IPCC report on global warming of 1.5°C, Synod pledges to seek ways to shrink the Synod carbon footprint (the total greenhouse gas emissions caused by the Church's activities) to net zero as quickly as practicable.

Note: The Lambeth Declaration 2015 on Climate Change, to which the United Reformed Church is a signatory, affirms, 'The demands of justice as well as of creation require the nations of the world urgently to limit the global rise in average temperatures. We have a responsibility to act now, for ourselves, our neighbours and for future generations.'

5.2 Recognising that humanity is responsible for the climate emergency, Synod challenges its own officers and the churches within the East Midlands to bear witness to this kairos moment by adopting both a short term emergency target and a longer term target for carbon reduction.

**5.3 Short term target:** to calculate the annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions that result from running the church, including its buildings, and a manse if appropriate, and rapidly to reduce these to net zero by 2030.

- a) For comparison, the IPCC report on global warming of 1.5 °C sets a target of global net zero CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2055 (with a number of conditions) and the current UK target is for net zero CO<sub>2</sub> emissions within its territory by 2050.
- b) For this purpose, gas and electricity produced from renewable sources are reckoned to produce net zero emissions. Other relevant sources of emissions include provision of water & sewage, transport on church business by petrol or diesel vehicles (but in this context not public transport) and food and drink at meetings and functions.
- c) The national Task Group and the Synod JPIC group are requested to provide data to enable churches readily to calculate the figures for their carbon emissions.
- d) Electricity exported to the grid from PV panels constitutes an equivalent negative value of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.
- e) As a short term expedient in order to attain net zero, churches may offset their residual emissions through Climate Stewards: [www.climatestewards.org](http://www.climatestewards.org)

**5.4 Longer term target:** to reduce Synod consumption\* emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> to net zero by 2040.

- a) \*consumption emissions include the carbon embodied in the manufacture and transport of products used by the church for which the church therefore has a moral responsibility. The embodied emissions can be reckoned across the notional life of the product. For example: in the case of a building, the carbon embodied in the building materials can be reckoned at 2% per year for 50 years. In the case of a car at 10% per year over ten years.
- b) churches are encouraged to 'carry one another's burdens' because reduction will be harder for some than others.

5.5 Synod recognises that shrinking the total Synod carbon footprint calls for both conversion on the part of its individual members, transformation of its internal structures and co-operation between churches. Synod will endeavour to work ecumenically whenever possible and appropriate as Synod acts upon this policy.

5.6 Synod will carry out a systematic audit of Synod offices and the activities of Synod staff in order to establish strategies to reduce their carbon footprint and will encourage United Reformed Churches and L.E.P.s in the East Midlands to:

a) carry out a systematic environmental audit of their buildings and follow the strategies outlined below for reducing their carbon footprint,

See for example 'Greening Church Buildings' produced by Eco Congregation Scotland:  
[www.ecocongregationscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Greening-ChurchBuildings.pdf](http://www.ecocongregationscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Greening-ChurchBuildings.pdf)

b) raise awareness, through prayer, preaching, Bible study, teaching and discussion, of the need for confession, repentance and forgiveness in relation to the causes of climate change, and of our calling, as God's redeemed people, to sustain and renew the life of the Earth,

c) ensure that energy is used efficiently and that their buildings, including manses, are environment friendly through the use of energy-saving technologies and by using electricity and gas produced from renewable sources,

- a) 'Green Journey' offers a free Energy Survey and bulk buying of 100% 'green' gas and electricity  
b) it should be possible to achieve financial savings [contact the Green Apostle(s) for information]

d) reduce, where practicable, car and air travel for meetings through the use of videoconferencing. With due regard for distances and costs involved, individuals will be encouraged to use transport with minimum impact – to walk, cycle, use buses and trains, car-share and use electric and other energy-efficient vehicles where possible,

Note: Where there is no alternative to flying and the benefits out-weigh the environmental harm (e.g. young people working alongside disadvantaged people abroad), members will be encouraged as a temporary expedient to adopt the practice of carbon off-setting with respect to essential travel by making payments supporting sustainable projects, e.g. through Climate Stewards  
[www.climatestewards.org](http://www.climatestewards.org)

e) help members of their congregation to make adjustments in the carbon emissions associated with their lifestyles by supporting them in a personal audit and in finding appropriate strategies,

f) engage their local political representatives, urging them to support policies that take effective steps towards realising the commitment to a rapid reduction in carbon emissions to net zero by 2050,

g) support campaigns and peaceful popular action around climate change issues promoted by Christian Aid, Tearfund and other responsible organisations,

1. Mission Council recommended in May 2019 that the URC disinvest from fossil fuel companies.
2. Peaceful and lawful campaigns serve to raise public awareness and to persuade key players such as government and industry to instigate rapid change, such as the campaign for churches to disinvest from companies with a significant interest in fossil fuels (except for token shares held in order to engage with companies).

h) support URC Youth in developing a strategy responding to the challenge of climate change

## 6. Restoring and Protecting Biodiversity

6.1 Mindful of the commitments contained in the vision2020 statement and the United Reformed Church Environmental policy and of the 2019 FAO report on biodiversity, Synod pledges to seek ways to protect and restore biodiversity, including mitigating global warming, eliminating single use plastic and implementing the recommendations below.

6.2 Synod commends Churches in the East Midlands to encourage their members and adherents to make time, and to support others in making time, to enjoy Nature as part of discipleship.

Note: It is not a burden to protect and care for what we love and cherish. With appropriate attention to issues of safeguarding, Synod commends congregations to promote a love and appreciation of Nature by 'getting out into the wild', rambles, prayer walks, holding pet services (e.g. around 4<sup>th</sup> October), promoting gardening or 'community farms', etc.

6.3 Synod recognises that protecting biodiversity calls for both conversion on the part of its individual members and transformation of church activities. Many individual members will already be taking some of the actions listed under (6.4). Churches are commended to build on the existing practices of individuals and to endeavour to work ecumenically in transforming church activities whenever possible and appropriate.

6.4 Synod will carry out a systematic audit of the operation of Synod offices and the activities of Synod staff in order to establish strategies to protect biodiversity and will encourage United Reformed Churches in the East Midlands to:

a) carry out a systematic audit of the operation of their buildings, the use of their grounds and of their activities and follow the strategies outlined below for protecting and promoting biodiversity.

See for example <https://theunfoldingearth.com/10-things-you-can-do-to-protect-biodiversity/>

b) use eco-friendly, palm-oil free (or sustainable palm-oil) cleaning materials and implement the Rs:

REFUSE: before acquiring any item consider whether it is really needed in order to glorify God.

REDUCE: minimise purchases and only purchase new when this is necessary; no single-use plastic;

REUSE: avoid single-use cups and plates, refill containers, upcycle used items, find new uses;

REPAIR: where practicable repair items rather than discarding them. There may be a local 'repair cafe' which can help;

RECYCLE: as a last resort redundant or used items should be taken to a recycling facility.

c) ensure that any church-owned land, however small, is used in ways that encourage an enjoyment of nature by members and the wider community and tend to enhance and protect the environment,

Note: With appropriate attention to issues of safeguarding and following organic principles, children, young people and adults can cultivate plants (in planters and pots if necessary) that help native pollinators and encourage insects, birds and small mammals on sites, including leaving wild areas where practicable. If the church has only a little land it may be possible for the congregation to participate in community farm projects.

d) when catering, reduce consumption especially a substantial reduction in the consumption of meat and dairy and follow the principles of LOAF:

Locally produced food (to support local businesses and reduce food-miles)

Organic (to minimise the use of pesticides and artificial fertilisers and avoid GM)

Animal friendly (to encourage good husbandry and avoid cruelty)

Fair trade (this section includes avoiding palm oil and also paying a fair price to farmers and horticulturists in the UK),

e) engage their local political representatives, urging them to support policies that take effective steps towards protecting biodiversity locally and globally,

f) support, and where practicable instigate, campaigns and peaceful popular action around loss of biodiversity issues promoted by responsible organisations,

h) support URC Youth in developing a strategy responding to the challenge of biodiversity loss.

## 7. Eco church and Eco synod

7.1 In order to support churches in caring for Creation, including reducing their carbon and environmental footprints and restoring and promoting biodiversity, Synod has become an Eco synod and will work towards achieving the Eco synod awards and will encourage churches to work for the Eco church awards. [see [www.ecochurch.arocha.org.uk](http://www.ecochurch.arocha.org.uk) ]

7.2 Synod will promote an environmental theology and encourage their churches to receive training and support on issues of climate justice and environmental care and to include these in the initial and on-going training of preachers, worship leaders, elders and in Stepwise.

Note: The relevant content of training should be indicated here by JPIC group, as it is developed

7.3 Synod will appoint one or more 'Green Apostles' to promote and monitor rapid carbon reduction and care for Creation in the Synod.

Note: Churches are requested to contact the Green Apostle(s) for support and to inform the Green Apostle(s) when they achieve Eco church awards, when they arrange an energy survey with 'Green Journey' or join the the 'Green Journey' bulk buying scheme, when they take major steps to 'green' their churches and when they achieve the emissions targets.

7.4 Synod will celebrate and encourage churches to celebrate 'Time for Creation' as promoted by the World Council of Churches.

Note: The Time for Creation runs each year from the World Day of Prayer for Creation on 1<sup>st</sup> September to the Feast Day of Francis of Assisi on 4<sup>th</sup> October [www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/climate-change/time-for-creation](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/climate-change/time-for-creation)

7.5 Synod will encourage all members and adherents to live joyfully, simply and responsibly with respect to God's Creation – caring for and treasuring that Creation, and celebrating all that is achieved in fulfilling that calling and will encourage children, young people and adults to undertake practical projects and also to produce a piece of community artwork celebrating the Creator God.

7.6 Synod will encourage churches to work in collaboration with local environmental groups and to join, or initiate, local transition or sustainability projects.

See [www.greenchristian.org.uk/churches-intransition](http://www.greenchristian.org.uk/churches-intransition)

## 8. Resources

The United Reformed Church Environmental Policy commends:

- Eco church, which provides an environmental toolkit and support network for local churches in England and Wales [www.ecochurch.arocha.org.uk](http://www.ecochurch.arocha.org.uk)
- Climate stewards: [www.climatestewards.org](http://www.climatestewards.org)
- Operation Noah: <http://operationnoah.org>
- Green Christian (formerly Christian Ecology Link): [www.greenchristian.org.uk](http://www.greenchristian.org.uk)
- A Rocha: <http://arocha.org.uk>
- 'Time for Creation' (World Council of Churches): [www.oikoumene.org/en/what-wedo/climate-change/time-for-creation](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-wedo/climate-change/time-for-creation)
- Greening Church Buildings (Eco-Congregation Scotland): [www.ecocongregationscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Greening-ChurchBuildings.pdf](http://www.ecocongregationscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Greening-ChurchBuildings.pdf)
- Hope in God's Future: Christian Discipleship in the Context of Climate Change – report of a joint working group on climate change and theology convened by the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing, 2009)
- 'Laudato si', the encyclical of Pope Francis (2015)
- Nick Spencer & Robert White, Christianity, Climate Change and Sustainable Living (London: SPCK, 2007)
- the promotion of links with transition towns, etc: [www.greenchristian.org.uk/churches-intransition](http://www.greenchristian.org.uk/churches-intransition).