

Mersey Synod Environment Policy

1. What is our Purpose?

1.1 This policy is an agreed, documented statement of the Mersey Synod's stance towards the environment in which it operates. It draws on the Environmental Policy of the United Reformed Church, adopted by resolution of the General Assembly in 2016, which was updated by Mission Council in May 2019¹.

1.2 It is the cornerstone of our intent, as a body of people committed to caring for God's creation, to reduce our carbon footprint, minimise waste, improve recycling, improve resource efficiency and protect biodiversity².

1.3 It is intended that this policy will be put forward by the Mission and Discipleship Committee for adoption by the Mersey Synod at the earliest opportunity. Once adopted, it will form a key driver for action by the Synod and churches.

2. Why are we concerned?

Caring for God's creation is a Biblical requirement and central to Christian mission. Our relationship with the natural environment is integral to our relationship with God. Good ecology is not an optional extra, but a matter of social justice. Humanity's actions have caused dangerous global heating and catastrophic loss of biodiversity. A climate emergency has been declared by many bodies and organisations in our world, including the United Reformed Church's Youth Assembly. It is urgent that we act to reduce our toxic emissions and promote biodiversity in every way that we can.

3. How will we achieve our Purpose?

To achieve our Purpose, we encourage individual churches or group of churches³ to:

3.1 Appoint an individual or a group to champion the Purpose and to lead the implementation of this Policy.

3.2 Include regular topics in our worship and teaching relating to caring for God's creation and the environment. These should draw on materials and resources which are available from a variety of organisations and other churches.

¹ https://urc.org.uk/images/mission/church_and_society/Resources/201905_URC_Environmental_Policy.pdf

² Biodiversity refers to the variety of life. It is seen in the number of species in an ecosystem or on the entire Earth. It is used as a measure of the health of biological systems, and to see whether there is a danger that too many species become extinct.

³ Including churches that are Local Ecumenical Partnerships.

- 3.3 Calculate the carbon footprints⁴ of all buildings⁵ and related activities and set time-related targets for carbon reduction⁶. This should take account of the URC's updated Environmental Policy which states that "we will strive to act urgently to reduce carbon emissions across the whole church life in line with the target we are calling on the UK government to achieve, of net zero emissions of greenhouse gases⁷ well before 2050."
- 3.4 Develop action plans aimed at achieving the targets. These should cover a range of measures including improving energy and water efficiency, investing in renewable energy technologies, reducing transport emissions, purchasing green energy supplies and offsetting any remaining carbon emissions⁸.
- 3.5 Manage resources more efficiently by adopting the waste hierarchy of reduce, reuse, recycle, recover and safe disposal.
- 3.6 Ensure that food and drink supplied on church premises are produced in ethical and sustainable ways and use Fairtrade products where possible⁹.
- 3.7 Encourage external users of church premises to reduce their carbon footprints and manage their resources more efficiently.
- 3.8 Look after church land so as to encourage biodiversity of birds, animals and plants and to foster its use by church members and the local community.
- 3.9 Manage investments ethically with due consideration of the environmental implications, taking account of the updated guidelines produced by the Mission Council in May 2019¹⁰.

⁴ Guides on measuring carbon footprints are available from A Rocha and Eco Congregation Scotland. Online tools are also available, details of which are provided in the Resources Appendix.

⁵ Covering buildings owned by the Synod Trust and for which the Synod has responsibility.

⁶ This is short hand for reducing all greenhouse gas emissions which are measured in terms of carbon dioxide equivalents (CO₂e).

⁷ Net zero means any emissions would be balanced by schemes to offset an equivalent amount of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, such as planting trees or using technology like carbon capture and storage. Note that the Church of England Synod voted in February 2020 to set its net zero emissions target at 2030, 15 years earlier than previously.

⁸ <https://www.climatestewards.org/>

⁹ See Resources Appendix for links on the sustainability of Fairtrade products

¹⁰ https://urc.org.uk/images/mission/church_and_society/Resources/201905_URC_Environmental_Policy.pdf

- 3.10 Communicate with other churches in the local community (e.g. through Churches Together groups) to share information and activities relating to climate change and the environment.
- 3.11 Identify and work with others in the local community who are involved in climate action and environmental initiatives e.g. councils, schools, low carbon and transition town groups, plastic-free and tree planting initiatives.
- 3.12 Support international environmental and climate justice programmes e.g. Christian Aid and Tear Fund.
- 3.13 Encourage church members and adherents to reduce their personal carbon footprints and to manage their resources more efficiently at home and in their travels.

4. What actions should Synod take?

4.1 Appoint a Green Apostle to lead and coordinate the development and implementation of this Policy. This individual will report to the Mission & Discipleship Committee but also liaise with other Synod Committees (e.g. Resources and Pastoral) and the URC's Environmental Task Group¹¹ as required to achieve our Objectives.

4.2 Inform the churches on where they can obtain resources to help them to integrate topics on caring for God's creation and the environment into their worship and teaching. This could cover activities at specific times of the year for example Environment Sunday¹² and Harvest Festival as well as participation in initiatives such as 'Time for Creation' and Climate Sunday¹³. Resources should also be provided to integrate environmental topics into Fresh Expressions activities such as Messy Church and Church cafés.

4.3 Register the Mersey Synod with Eco Synod and achieve the Bronze award by the end of 2021 (see Appendix 1). This will require 10% of churches to be Eco Church registered and 5% of them to have achieved Bronze awards. Target dates

¹¹ <https://urc.org.uk/caring-for-creation>

¹² Closest Sunday to World Environment Day held each year on June 5th

¹³ An initiative from Churches Together Britain and Ireland

to achieve Silver and Gold awards will be reviewed at the first annual review- see section 5).

4.4 Encourage and help individual churches to participate in the national Eco Church initiative¹⁴ (A Rocha) and to implement action plans based on the results of the initial survey. This includes encouraging local churches to measure, record and reduce energy/water use and carbon emissions. A Rocha provides a wide range of resources to help with the development and implementation of action plans. Eco Congregation in Scotland¹⁵ operates a similar initiative and also provides a wealth of resources to help with implementation.

4.5 Resource and encourage a network of 'Green Champions/Eco Church promoters' who are recognised by their local churches and prepared to help them engage with caring for God's creation. Support these green champions by way of training, regular news, materials and story sharing.

4.6 Identify opportunities for investment in renewable and low carbon technologies on church premises which could generate income as well as reduce carbon emissions e.g. heat pumps and electric vehicle charging.

4.7 Investigate opportunities for Synod to provide grants or loans for churches to invest in renewable energy technologies and energy efficiency measures e.g. low energy lighting and insulation¹⁶.

4.8 Work with the Synod Communications Officer to develop and implement a communications plan including use of the Synod web site, newsletters, social media, press releases and promotional materials.

4.9 Promote the recording and celebrating of environmental initiatives of local churches and individuals within the Synod.

4.10 Produce and disseminate guidance to churches on personal carbon and waste reduction plans.

4.11 Participate in joint climate action and environmental activities with other URC Synods and with the URC nationally (e.g. Eco events, Green Apostle Network).

¹⁴ <https://ecochurch.arochoa.org.uk/>

¹⁵ <https://www.ecocongregationscotland.org/>

¹⁶ Ref Resources Report to the Autumn 2019 Synod: Resources Committee, on behalf of Synod, will look favourably on projects which include elements which support the "Green Agenda", even if this involves extra cost, but will need to see that the grant monies are appropriately accounted for.

4.12 Help local churches to engage with their wider communities on these issues, e.g. where they exist through transition towns, low carbon communities, plastic free and tree planting initiatives.

4.13 Provide information to churches on national Christian organisations and initiatives which are involved in the climate change and action agenda e.g. Green Christian¹⁷ , Operation Noah¹⁸ and Christian Climate Action¹⁹.

4.14 Provide information to churches on international and national developments on climate change and carbon reduction measures and technologies which are relevant to the churches.

5. Monitoring

Monitoring of this Policy will be undertaken by:

- Reporting on progress towards achieving Eco Synod status (annual report to Synod in March after annual returns are received)
- Reporting on progress with Eco Church registrations and awards (annual)
- Collating and sharing data on carbon footprint measurements and reduction targets set by individual churches
- Providing examples of best practice/case studies
- Producing an annual report to the Mission and Discipleship Committee on the progress achieved and future plans and initiatives

This Policy will be subject to an annual review by the Mission and Discipleship Committee and any recommendations for revision will be submitted to the Synod.

Richard Pearce

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¹⁷ <https://greenchristian.org.uk/>

¹⁸ <https://operationnoah.org/>

¹⁹ <https://christianclimateaction.org/>

Appendix 1: Eco Synod Award Process

At the 2016 General Assembly, the United Reformed Church (URC) commended the Eco Church award scheme within the context of its new Environmental Policy.

The URC has since worked with A Rocha UK to develop Eco Synod as a tool by which Synods can encourage local churches to engage in wider creation care.

The Eco Synod Award is a development of Eco Church whereby a URC Synod can register its interest in and work towards an award. The two awards are designed to complement each other, encouraging both Synod-level and local church-level engagement with Eco Church.

Eco Synod status will be given to your Synod when it has:

1. Registered its intent to become an Eco Synod
2. Commissioned an individual or group to coordinate progress within the Synod.
3. Write an environmental policy that has been agreed by the Synod meeting. This should include points on travel, the environmental maintenance of its manses (where appropriate) and a commitment to reducing Synod carbon emissions (taking into account the recommendations contained within the URC Environmental Policy.)
4. Gained the appropriate levels of local church registrations and Awards for Eco Church*
 - Bronze Eco Synod: 10% of local churches registered; 5% of local churches awarded
 - Silver Eco Synod: 20% of local churches registered; 10% of local churches awarded
 - Gold Eco Synod: 30% of local churches registered; 20% of local churches awarded
5. Achieved the relevant Eco Church Award level for its Synod offices (where appropriate) and land (where appropriate)
6. Embedded environmental issues having sought to ensure that environmental issues are integrated within the discipleship development provision of the Synod, including continuing ministerial education.
7. Managed Synod investments ethically with due consideration of the environmental implications of those investments, taking into account the URC's Ethical Investment Guidelines on Climate Change Issues and the resources available within the Ethical Money Churches Project.

8. Worked with other denominations and/or faith groups to encourage greater environmental action, including promoting Eco Church as a helpful tool

9. Established the habit of recording and celebrating individual environmental initiatives

*Note: Based on recent data, 6 churches in the Mersey Synod (i.e. 7.4%) have registered for Eco Church but none have achieved any awards (*checking latest figures on this*). This compares with about 15% of all URC churches in England & Wales being registered for Eco Church and 4% achieving awards (mainly Bronze).

Appendix 2: Resources

Events

Big Energy Saving Week (usually third week in January): Aimed mainly at domestic consumers: <https://energysavingtrust.org.uk/blog/big-energy-saving-week-2020>

Earth Hour (March 27th 2021 8.30 to 9.30pm) A time to switch off your lights at home for an hour and a list of 20+ things you can do for a memorable (and impactful) on-the-night experience all from comfort of your home: <https://www.earthhour.org/>

Earth Day (April 22nd every year): The theme for Earth Day 2020 was climate action. The enormous challenge — but also the vast opportunities — of action on climate change have distinguished the issue as the most pressing topic for the 50th anniversary: <https://www.earthday.org/>

World Environment Day (June 5th): <https://www.worldenvironmentday.global/>

Plastic Free July: <https://www.plasticfreejuly.org/get-involved/what-you-can-do/>

Climate Sunday (Churches Together Britain and Ireland): <http://climatesunday.org/>

Season of Creation: The Season of Creation is a time to slow down and focus on what matters. During this special time each year, we repair and restore our relationships with each other and with all creation. From September 1st to October 4th, Christians around the world celebrate the Season of Creation. Join us in this season of care: <https://seasonofcreation.org/>

Publications

The Sustainability Book online. Texts and resources about the Sustainable Development Goals that you can use with your congregations, gatherings or for your own reference. <http://sdgbook.com/>

Saying Yes to Life: Ruth Valerio: <https://spckpublishing.co.uk/saying-yes-resources>

Norman Habel: An Inconvenient Text: <http://normanhabel.com/>

Nick Spencer and Robert White: Christianity, Climate Change and Sustainable Living

Organisations

A Rocha/Eco Church: <https://arocha.org.uk/> and <https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/>

Climate Stewards helps churches to offset unavoidable carbon emissions by supporting community forestry, water filter and cookstove projects in the developing world. <https://www.climatestewards.org/>

Christian Climate Action is a community of Christians supporting each other to take meaningful action in the face of imminent and catastrophic anthropogenic climate breakdown <https://christianclimateaction.org/>

Eco Congregation Scotland: <https://www.ecocongregationscotland.org/>

Green Christian is a community of Christians from all backgrounds and traditions. Inspired by our faith, we work to care for Creation through prayer, living simply, public witness, campaigning and mutual encouragement.
<https://greenchristian.org.uk/about/what-is-green-christian/>

Green Journey is a consultancy which helps churches to reduce overall energy costs while improving green credentials and reducing environmental impact:
<https://greenjourney.org/>

Operation Noah is a Christian charity working with churches to inspire action on the climate crisis: <https://operationnoah.org/>

URC Environmental Task Group: <https://urc.org.uk/caring-for-creation>

Carbon Footprint Measurement for Churches

Climate Stewards 360 Carbon Footprint: <https://360carbon.org>

A Rocha Guide to Carbon Footprint Reduction: <https://3ak4be4522es3y5i4l2cwfx-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Buildings-Guide-to-Carbon-Footprint-Reduction-Schemes.pdf>

Eco Congregation Scotland Guide:
<http://www.ecocongregationscotland.org/materials/ideas-for-action/global-living/manage-carbon-footprint/>

Personal Carbon Footprint Calculators

World Wildlife Foundation environmental footprint calculator (simple and fun to use): <https://footprint.wwf.org.uk/#/>

CoGo carbon footprint tracker/App: <https://cogo.co/>

InnerPlanet App to help people to measure their carbon footprints:
<https://www.innerplanet.world/>

Fairtrade and Sustainability

<https://www.fairtrade.org.uk/What-is-Fairtrade/Fairtrade-and-sustainability>

<https://www.fairtrade.org.uk/Media-Centre/Blog/2017/June/Fairtrade-projects-cope-with-climate-change>