

## **URC Thames North Synod Environmental Policy agreed on 26 March 2022**

### **Affirmation**

1. As the Thames North Synod of the United Reformed Church, we affirm that caring for God's Creation and protecting the environment are fundamental Gospel commitments and central to our Missional Discipleship, as outlined in the United Reformed Church Environmental Policy (updated in May 2019).
2. Synod acknowledges that humanity has and is causing grievous harm to the natural environment of which it is part and on which it depends. Humanity is now confronted by multiple environmental crises of its own making, chief of which are the climate emergency, the ecological emergency (loss of biodiversity), environmental sustainability and the pollution of sea, land and air. Synod recognises the urgent need to respond to these crises, working within the wider church and in partnership with other organisations, to interact with the planet in ways that are environmentally sustainable and do not jeopardize the lives and well-being of today's poorest communities and of future generations.
3. Synod recognises that the impact of these crises is being, and will be felt, hardest by the world's poorest nations, communities and people (including those within our own nation and area) and that it needs to give special attention to this injustice and this suffering, by generous giving, campaigning and supporting the vulnerable.
4. Synod recognises the significance and hope of the 2015 Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the imperatives of the 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5C, and the 2019 Food and Agriculture Organisation report on the State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture. It notes the 2021 UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, produced in preparation for COP26, which UN secretary general António Guterres described as a 'Code Red' for humanity and shows the vital need for the full implementation of the international agreement for the good of the planet.

### **Commitment**

5. **Synod pledges to shrink the Synod 'carbon footprint'** (the total greenhouse gas emissions both (a) from all Synod and church activities and (b) those embodied in materials and equipment acquired, buildings and building work) to net zero. Synod recognises that this is a demanding and collaborative endeavour and commits to providing assistance to churches and groups of churches, including information about practical measures and potential grants. The following targets are broadly commensurate with the UK achieving net zero by 2045 and the world by 2055.

2030 target: to reduce the CO2 emissions from all Synod and church activities to net zero (with offsetting a part of the way this is achieved as a last resort).

2040 target: to reduce the total carbon footprint of the Synod (as defined above) to net zero (without resorting to offsetting).

Achieving these targets will require audits by all local churches and Synod committees to assess the present carbon footprint and necessary actions. Synod will aim to have all audits completed and robust action plans in place by 2025.

6. **Synod pledges to seek to protect biodiversity** by all means and to be vigorous in combating the causes of ecological harm, including pollution in its different forms (such as water, air, noise and light). Synod encourages (a) church members to find quality time to enjoy nature as part of their discipleship, to take practical actions as they are able, to protect and encourage biodiversity and to share in campaigning on these issues; and (b) local churches to consider how to best manage any land they have in ways beneficial to biodiversity.

7. **Synod pledges to work towards achieving Eco Synod status** and urges all its local congregations to take an active part in the Eco Church programme, giving thanks to God for progress made by some churches and Awards gained.

8. **Synod recognises that many young people are deeply concerned** for the environment and seeks to listen to their voices and support and encourage them (through the Youth Executive) in activities and campaigns to address the climate emergency and the ecological emergency.

9. **Synod seeks to support people of all ages** in living joyfully, simply and responsibly as part of God's Creation and to the glory of God, Creator and Giver of life.

### **Synod Implementation**

10. The Synod Green Apostles, working with others in the Synod, will promote this policy across the Synod, inviting all members and local churches to rise to the challenge.

11. All Synod Committees are asked to consider their role in promoting these commitments and to bring further, more detailed proposals to Synod in terms of strategy, actions, resources, grants, etc. (see Appendix).

**APPENDIX**  
**Thames North Synod Environmental Policy Implementation**  
**ACTIONS NECESSARY FOR PROGRESS**

*All local churches and their members, together with Synod bodies throughout Thames North, are asked to identify actions that they can take, and to liaise with the Green Apostles to ensure that these actions are reported back to Synod.*

**All Synod committees** are asked to calculate their own carbon footprint, to consider the implications of the policy on how they work, and to identify practical means to reduce their carbon footprint.

**Synod Executive** – is asked to ensure the policy is given attention within Synod life and meetings, ensuring that there is an annual review at Synod meeting. With reference to item 8 in the policy it is asked to ensure the voice of young people is heard on these issues at Synod meetings.

**Synod Trust** – is asked to consider the implications of the policy on its own work and priorities.

**Synod Office and staff** - is asked to consider the practical implications of the policy on its own work and priorities.

**Synod Moderator** - is asked to consider the implications of the policy on their own work and priorities.

**Appointments Advisory Committee** – is asked to ensure sufficient Green Apostles are appointed to enable and encourage the policy to be implemented. Agreement to appoint one (or more) apostles was made at the March 2021 Synod. In the light of the need for urgent action it would be desirable to have 4 or 5 Apostles to be able to support all local groups and churches.

**Resources Committee** – is asked to consider the financial implications and what level of grants can be provided to enable to local churches to meet the targets and put the policy into action. Recognising that care of the environment is one of the marks of mission the Committee is asked to ensure this is taken into account in any application for funding (and that at a minimum any church applying for a grant is registered as an Eco Church). In terms of future strategy the Committee is asked to consider the sustainability of each local church in terms of its environmental impact and to give special attention to improvements necessary to fulfil the carbon footprint targets. Investment should be made in those buildings that the Synod considers to have a long-term future (both churches and manses). This must include moving away from gas heating by 2030.

**Pastoral Committee** – is asked to consider the implications of the policy on its own work and priorities and how it can best support churches and groups in implementing the policy.

**Discipleship Steering Committee** – is asked to consider how to support local churches and members in the outworking of the policy, recognising that care for God’s creation is an essential part of missional discipleship. The committee is asked to give special attention to those parts of the Eco Church programme that relate to Christian discipleship (i.e. Worship and Teaching, Community and Global Engagement, Lifestyle).

**Synod Youth Executive** – is asked to consider ways to encourage the young people of the Synod to share their hopes and concerns on these issues with the Synod as a whole (and within their local churches and groups).

**Local churches** – are asked to register as Eco Churches (informing Synod that they have done so) and work through the online survey (excellent and simple to use). They are asked to bring the Policy to Church Meeting for discussion and reflect on the necessary actions that are required

**Local Area Groups** – are asked to consider the implications of the Policy on their work and how, with the help of one of the Green Apostles, they could support and encourage local churches in its implementation.

**Church and Society Network** – is asked to consider how to help inform the policy and take practical steps to encourage its implementation.