

Synod Environmental Policy

SUMMARY

1. **Purpose**

As the National Synod of Wales 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 discipleship.

2. **Introduction**

God calls us to be partners in God's ongoing creative, renewing and redeeming activity; commands us to act justly and in righteousness not only towards all humanity but to all Creation; and requires us to care for Creation so that future generations may enjoy it and benefit from it.

In March 2019 the National Synod of Wales adopted the document The National Synod of Wales and our part in God's Mission in which the Synod committed, "to promote, support and take intergenerational mission initiatives which sustain the environment".

We affirm the view expressed in the 2009 URC/Methodist 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.'

3. **Shrinking our Carbon Footprint**

Churches are encouraged to work towards achieving Eco Church Bronze, Silver or Gold award status through A Rocha UK: The Eco Church free online survey and supporting resources are designed to equip churches to express their care for God's world.

<https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/>

Churches are encouraged to follow the Synod in divesting from companies whose total turnover is more than 10% derived from the extraction and/or supply of fossil fuels: *Divest your church*, is a step-by-step guide to divesting from fossil fuels, switching to renewable energy and reinvesting in clean alternatives. <https://brightnow.org.uk/>

Churches are encouraged to take steps to review and reduce their carbon footprint: Churches can get help in calculating, analysing and considering off-setting their carbon footprints through Climate Stewards. <https://www.climatestewards.org/>

The Synod aims to shrink its carbon footprint year on year, recording and reporting progress annually, and to reduce the total carbon footprint to net zero by 2040: Synod recognises that this is a demanding and collaborative endeavour and commits to providing assistance to churches, including information about practical measures and potential grants.

The Synod will aim to reduce car and air travel for meetings through the use of video conferencing, and where that is not possible to adopt the practice of carbon off-setting.

The Synod commits to a systematic audit of the Synod Office and of its activities, and encourages local churches to do likewise to ensure that their buildings and actions are environment friendly.

The Synod and its officers will support local churches in their response to the climate emergency, particularly working towards Eco Church awards, and will work towards achieving Eco Synod status.

4. **Some online resources which local churches may find helpful**

[Operation Noah](#)
[Green Christian](#)

[A Rocha](#)
[Season of Creation](#)

[Greening Church Buildings](#)

SYNOD ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This policy is based upon the United Reformed Church's (URC's) [Environmental Policy](#), outlining its 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.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 As the Synod of Wales 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 discipleship.
- 2.2 We believe that we are an integral part of God's Creation, that God calls us to be partners in God's ongoing creative, renewing and redeeming activity; commands us to act justly and in righteousness not only towards all humanity but to all Creation; and requires us to care for Creation so that future generations, whom God also loves, may enjoy it and benefit from it.
- 2.3 We affirm that Christian mission includes caring for God's Earth and all Creation. It includes acknowledging humankind's responsibility, sharing in putting right the relationships within God's Creation that have gone wrong, and working within the church and with partners outside the church to grow towards justice and good stewardship as envisaged in the biblical vision of the world as it is meant to be. (This section draws upon the Baptist Union of Great Britain statement '*A Vision for the Environment*', and the Methodist, Baptist and URC report *Hope in God's Future: Christian Discipleship in the Context of Climate Change* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing, 2009) p.7.)
- 2.4 We acknowledge that human activity has contributed to the degradation of the Earth and that this is not the will of God. We believe that this degradation limits the attainment of the fullness of life that God wills for all Creation, and is a sin for which we should seek forgiveness. It also imposes most heavily upon the peoples of the developing countries of the world and is part of the intrinsic injustice to which we bear witness. As the Lambeth Declaration 2015 on Climate Change, to which the URC 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.'

- 2.5 We recognise the significance and hope of the December 2015 Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the imperatives of the 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) special report on global warming of 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels.

3. Our Part in God's Mission

- 3.1 The Environmental Policy of the URC, adopted by General Assembly in 2016, was founded upon the Vision 2020 statements, which declared that the URC 'will be a church that has taken significant steps to safeguard the integrity of creation, to sustain and renew the life of the earth' (statement 10: The Integrity of Creation). Vision 2020 also 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.'
- 3.2 This policy echoes Vision 2020's affirmation that 'The changing climate and its consequences for all life on planet Earth cannot be over emphasised as the most significant underlying issue of our time' - and that it is vital that the Church 'recognises the reality and fear present in environmental debates and lives hopefully in the present climate.'
- 3.3 In March 2019 the Synod of Wales adopted the document *The National Synod of Wales and our part in God's Mission* in which the Synod committed, "to promote, support and take intergenerational mission initiatives which sustain the environment".

4. 'Hope in God's Future'

- 4.1 We affirm the view expressed in the 2009 URC/Methodist 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, to its creatures and to many poor communities.
- 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.
- 4.5 We also commit to intercede for those most threatened by climate change.

5. Shrinking our carbon footprint

- 5.1 Reflecting the commitments contained in the vision 2020 statement, in *The National Synod of Wales and our part in God's Mission*, in the *Hope in God's Future* report, and in a resolution on climate change passed by General Assembly in 2007, the URC Synod of Wales affirms its pledges to shrink its carbon footprint and to strive to protect and restore the environment. The Synod will record and report progress annually, and will endeavour to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2040.
- 5.2 The 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 in the working out of this policy.
- 5.3 Synod will carry out a systematic audit of the Synod Office and the activities of Synod staff in order to establish strategies to reduce their carbon footprint.
- 5.4 Local churches in Wales will be encouraged to:
 - a) work towards achieving Eco Church Bronze, Silver or Gold award status through A Rocha UK (see <https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/>);
 - b) respond positively to the encouragement of the 19th October 2019 Synod Meeting and divest from companies whose total turnover is more than 10% derived from the extraction and/or supply of fossil fuels, including thermal coal, natural gas and oil (see <http://brightnow.org.uk/>);
 - c) carry out a systematic environmental audit of their buildings;
 - d) 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;
 - e) celebrate 'Time for Creation' as encouraged by the World Council of Churches. Creation Time runs from 1 September until 4 October each year;
 - f) ensure that energy is used efficiently and that their buildings, including Manses, are environment friendly through the use of energy-saving

technologies and by identifying and using renewable sources of energy as appropriate;

- g) 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;
- h) involve their children and young people in activities focusing on care for the environment;
- i) engage their local political representatives, urging them to support policies that take effective steps towards realising the commitment to net zero carbon emissions by 2040;
- j) support campaigns and action around climate change issues promoted by Christian Aid and other organisations;
- k) ensure that church-owned land is used in ways that encourage an enjoyment of nature and both enhance biodiversity and protect the environment.

5.5 Synod of Wales Synod Officers will:

- a) support churches to gain Eco Church Award status;
- b) support the process of working towards Eco Synod Award status;
- c) assist in seeking appropriate support to ensure that church premises, including manses, are environment friendly through the use of energy-saving technologies and by identifying and using renewable sources of energy where appropriate;
- d) encourage churches to work in collaboration with, or initiate, local transition or sustainability groups;
- e) encourage churches to receive training and support on issues of climate justice and environmental care;
- f) support the synod's Green Advocate in monitoring progress on carbon reduction in the synod.

5.6 The Synod of Wales will aim to:

- a) lower incrementally its carbon footprint by a significant amount each year;
- b) campaign at local and national level for policies that strengthen, and take steps towards realising, net zero carbon emissions by 2040;
- c) ensure that its buildings are environment friendly through the use of energy-saving technologies and by identifying and using renewable sources of energy as appropriate;
- d) reduce, where practicable, car and air travel for meetings through the use of video conferencing. With due regard for distances and costs

involved, individual members will be encouraged to use transport with minimum impact; to cycle, use buses and trains, and car-share and use energy-efficient vehicles where possible. Members will also be encouraged to adopt the practice of carbon off-setting with respect to essential travel by making payments that support sustainable projects (e.g. through [Climate Stewards](#));

- e) promote opportunities to develop an environmental theology;
- f) establish the habit of recording and celebrating environmental initiatives within local churches in the synod;
- g) ensure that environmental issues are integrated within the whole life of the synod;
- h) support URC Youth in developing a strategy responding to the challenge of climate change.

6. Resources

Season of Creation

oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/climate-change/time-for-creation

Bright Now

<http://brightnow.org.uk/>

Greening Church Buildings

ecocongregationscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Greening-Church-Buildings.pdf

Green Christian

<https://greenchristian.org.uk/>

Operation Noah

<https://operationnoah.org/>

A Rocha

<https://www.arocha.org/en/a-rocha-uk/>

Eco-Church

<https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/>