

Paper B5

Net Zero Task Group

Faith in Action Committee

Basic information

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|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Contact name and email address | Roo Stewart, Head of Public Issues roo.stewart@urc.org.uk |
| Action required | Update only |
| Draft resolution(s) | none |

Summary of content

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| Subject and aim(s) | Report to General Assembly on Net Zero Task Group activity, including annual synods' report on progress towards net zero |
| Main points | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Publishing synods' progress on net zero for second year• Learning and sharing good practice to continue• Better connection with URC Green Apostles network |
| Previous relevant documents | General Assembly 2022 Resolution 17 General Assembly 2024 Resolution 36 |
| Consultation has taken place with... | n/a |

Summary of impact

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|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Financial | none |
| External (eg ecumenical) | Our carbon footprint has an impact on our planet and everything in it, including on the wellbeing of the most vulnerable in society, especially in the Global South. |

Activity in 2025-2026

The Net Zero Task Group (NZTG), brought into being at the request of the URC General Assembly in 2022, continues to meet regularly to develop advice and resources for the whole Church. The chair of the group since 2022 has stepped down, so the group is now looking for a new convenor. An updated Terms of Reference has been submitted to this General Assembly.

Engagement with synods in 2025-2026 was mostly limited to a feedback and advice session for the purposes of annual synod reporting, alongside the reporting template itself. The task group aims to increase its communications with committees, synod offices and church members in 2026-2027 through webinars, published articles, the URC's greener church webpage and possibly through the URC Resources Hub when this is available.

As other denominations have made progress with national and regional action plans, the NZTG recognises its limited capacity but resolves to address this lack within the URC as the required resources become available and expertise can be utilised. A strengthened connection with the URC Green Apostles network has already helped build capacity, knowledge and expertise, and

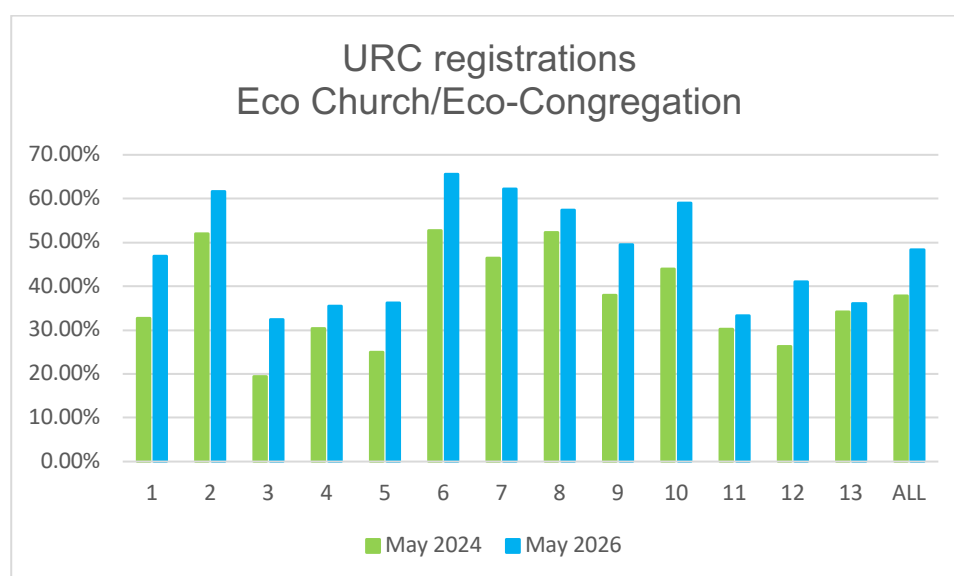
we are pursuing a similarly strengthened relationship with synod property officers and their equivalents.

Annual Synod Reporting

Eleven out of 13 synods have submitted reports this year, and we have seen an uptick in the quality and depth of these reports, thanks to the work and commitment from synod officers, Green Apostles and church treasurers who have responded to requests for information.

The reports will enable the NZTG to give personalised feedback, to explore key areas where each synod might be able to make progress.

Growth in Eco Church/Eco-Congregation participation by synod



Overall, the URC has increased its Eco Church registrations from **444 in May 2024** to **544 in April 2026** (48% of all congregations). This is a hugely encouraging step forward and we are grateful to all the eco groups in our churches who are working hard in this area.

Growing Eco Synod awards

Eight synods are now holders of bronze awards from Eco Church (England and Wales). (Eco-Congregation Scotland does not yet have an equivalent award.) We hope that the other synods will be able to reach bronze soon.

A Rocha UK's Eco Church programme will shortly be releasing a new Silver Eco Synod survey; we hope some of our synods will be able to reach 'Silver' soon as well.

URC Youth Assembly received a letter of commendation from Eco Church in 2022 in recognition of its leadership in environmental action.

Some new steps taken by synods in 2025-2026

Northern Synod

- Appointed Trustee Board Member and an Ecological/Environmental team
- Recognition of the need to work alongside Mission and Discipleship Committee
- Planning to involve young people in promoting caring for creation
- Synod team developing the skills to carry out energy audits

North Western Synod

- Carbon literacy training
- Synod land audit and carbon offsetting tree planting programme
- Manchester and Salford Urban Missional Partnership: Zero Carbon Church Demonstration Project
- Ministers and EM2 training on care for creation

Mersey Synod

- Mersey Synod Eco Group has representatives from 12 churches plus the Synod Property and Communications Officers
- Sharing good news and inspiration on our website and via the Synod newsletter
- Undertaking eco surveys of churches to raise awareness and assess priorities
- Planning continuing professional development sessions on 'Being More Eco' with the Synod Training & Development Officer

East Midlands

- A member of the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Group attending Historic England course become a Carbon Bookkeeper
- Preparing to trial an energy audit
- Progressing our Eco Synod application by offering to support the church from which Synod leases its offices in order that it may register for Eco Church



Eastern Synod

- Guidance and planning documents issued
- Sustainability plans must be included as part of grant applications

South Western Synod

- Developing our Synod Manse Policy has already had a significant impact on our carbon footprint
- Transfer of ownership of manses to Synod makes future eco changes easier to complete
- Eco articles appear regularly in Synod e-news

Wessex Synod

- Appointing a Net Zero lead
- The 50% grant scheme includes insulation to current standards, installation of double glazing and replacement of boilers with heat pumps. (Like-for-like replacement of gas boilers do not qualify for a Net Zero grant, even though any new boiler is almost certainly much more efficient than the old one it replaces.)

Thames North Synod

- Eco Day – now an annual event hosted by a local church – with at least one talk/workshop aimed at encouraging and equipping people to address Carbon Footprint
- Promoting the Carbon Literacy for Christian Congregations training pack, provided by the CofE through the Carbon Literacy Project with commitment to pay for certificates



- Training day – Designing for the future: Creating beautiful and sustainable buildings (joint with Eastern)
- Undertaking a project to understand how to support the eco journey of local churches – involved four local churches of different building types

Southern Synod

- Increased and positive engagement from local church treasurers who have submitted energy use of church buildings
- Outliers in energy use have been identified and prioritised for support

National Synod of Wales

- Travelling by train where possible and encouraging car sharing where not. We offer preferential mileage rates for those bring passengers to synod meeting
- Funding detailed energy audits for churches seeking to take significant action to lower their carbon footprints
- Opening a bespoke ethical investment account which contains sustainable investments in green technologies
- Explaining the 360Carbon online tool at every roadshow event
- The Synod Creation Care Steering Group has run a series of eco roadshows around Wales, which included presentations from A Rocha UK
- The Synod has funded heating feasibility studies for four churches
- We launched an expanded Green Team at our most recent synod meeting and we will be recruiting for more people to get involved

National Synod of Scotland

- The energy crisis fund from the Central URC Trust has been expended; £210,000 in local church grants has been distributed
- Seeking to create a new Net Zero Action Fund in the synod; applying to OSCR for the reorganisation of a restricted fund, which may take up to six months
- All manse purchases must have an energy performance certificate of C or higher. The manse purchase we made in 2025 has solar panels on the roof for the benefit of the household

Measuring carbon footprint

Five of the synods which responded have calculated the carbon footprint of their synod offices, and four or five are measuring carbon footprints for their business travel, synod activities or manses.

Five synods have begun building a picture of local church building energy footprints too. This is time-consuming data to gather, and in response we are seeking new ways to simplify this.

Most of the synods that have responded admit that a lack of capacity and expertise in this area has hampered progress. As we share advice and gather more data in further years, we will be able to build a clearer picture of successful progress and offer targeted support to synods.

The URC Retired Ministers' Housing Society has been making significant steps towards increasing the energy efficiency (and lowering heating costs) for its buildings. It will be sharing the expertise it has gained and reporting on its progress in future.

Green Apostles, Eco Church and Eco-Congregation

While the Net Zero Task Group is working toward a national strategy, our Green Apostles network is providing expertise, energy and enthusiasm at grassroots level.

Each URC Synod has at least one Green Apostle/Advocate or a Green Team or Eco Team. They are passionate and joyful about helping congregations and their synod to develop caring for God's creation as part of our mission. As well as sharing regular news updates, hints, tips and suggestions through synod newsletters or eco newsletters, Green Apostles have planned eco days in several synods in 2026 to encourage deeper engagement.



An excellent way to monitor and celebrate congregations' and synods' progress in caring for creation is through A Rocha UK's Eco Church programme (in England and Wales) and Eco-Congregation Scotland. All URC congregations are invited to register for free, to receive regular news, ideas and resources. Our network of Green Apostles welcomes the opportunity to share its knowledge and expertise with any congregation that asks for help with their eco journey. You can contact your Green Apostle/Synod Eco Team through your synod office or by contacting public.issues@urc.org.uk.