

URC South Western Synod Environmental Policy, agreed on 9 March 2024

1. As the South Western 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 July 2022).
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.
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 of 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.
5. Synod commits to shrink the Synod 'carbon footprint' (the total greenhouse gas emissions both from (a) 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 used as a last resort). **2040 target:** to reduce the total carbon footprint of the Synod (as defined above) to net zero. 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 commits 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 commits to work towards achieving Eco Synod Gold Award 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 Eco Church 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 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.
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 develop more proposals for the Synod in terms of strategy, actions, resources, grants, etc.

Policy adopted at the Synod Meeting held on 9th March 2024