

An Environmental Policy for the Wessex Synod of the URC

Caring for the Environment - Why the Churches should Do It!

The fifth mark of mission speaks of *safeguarding the integrity of creation and sustaining and renewing the life of the earth*. It is clear that care for creation, a just sharing of the world's resources, and a concern for the environment are fundamental gospel commitments. Some Churches are already making efforts along these lines. Such an approach usually has a significant impact on a Church's mission, and so we believe that many more should be encouraged to give expression to their Christian faith in this way.

The Synod is therefore invited to reflect upon and to affirm the following policy statement in order that it may guide thinking and practice within our local churches and districts.

Our Stewardship of Creation

We believe that God

- Created and continues to create the whole universe;
- Sustains and nurtures creation;
- Through Christ, wills to redeem the whole of creation from its bondage to decay;
- Entrusts creation to our care, calling us to be stewards of it;
- 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 our fellow human beings, but to all creation;
- Requires us to care for creation so that future generations, whom God also loves, can enjoy it and benefit from it.

We affirm that Christian mission includes caring for God's earth and for all creation. It includes 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.

We know that human activity has contributed to the degradation of the earth in its land, seas and atmosphere, 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.

In fulfilling our commitment to our calling, **we challenge and encourage** our churches and members to care for the earth by following sustainable practice and by taking into account global and local environmental considerations for present and future generations

- in the conservation and use of resources in church life and at home;
- in following a more sustainable lifestyle;
- in active involvement in community initiatives aimed at sustaining and renewing the environment;
- in concerns for action on global environmental issues.

To this end **we should have regard to**

- the challenge of meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs;
- the potential for harnessing the skills, expertise and enthusiasm of the members of our congregations;
- the opportunities for co-operation in joint initiatives with other congregations, including ecumenical joint action, and secular organisations;
- the actions in one place that may have an effect in other places;
- the valuable contribution of small steps by individuals as well as major initiatives.

Our Environmental Objectives

In order to work out our faith and fulfil our responsibility for the stewardship of God's creation, we commit ourselves to the following actions:

Awareness and Commitment

- promoting awareness among our congregations of these principles and objectives and of the values underpinning them;
- encouraging United Reformed Churches in their activities to comply with all relevant environmental recommendations for good practice.

Energy and Water

- ensuring energy is used efficiently and whenever possible conserving and reducing its use;
- encouraging the increased use of renewable energy, especially green electricity;
- using water efficiently and with care;
- preventing pollutants from entering the drainage system.

Waste

- reducing the production of material waste including unnecessary packaging;
- encouraging the re-use, repair and re-cycling of materials including organic waste;
- disposing of waste in a safe and responsible way;
- adopting environmentally sensitive purchasing policies, for example recycled paper.

Materials and Resources

- buying products which are made in accordance with the principle of using material in a sustainable way and using locally-made or produced goods and food as far as this is possible and practicable;
- buying products from sources that adhere to principles of fair trade, especially mindful of those within poorer countries;
- taking into account the lifetime costs and embodied energy of materials when repairing, altering or rebuilding premises;

- offering electronic communication as an alternative to paper for those who are suitably equipped.

Natural and Built Environment

- taking appropriate opportunities to conserve and enhance the natural and built environment;
- engaging with local planning developments where these affect the environment;
- encouraging the renewal and enhancement of the urban environment;
- being sensitive to the impact of church activities on the local environment;
- ensuring church-owned land is used in ways that will protect the environment.

Travel

- making every effort to reduce air pollution and energy consumption resulting from the use of cars and planes by avoidance of unnecessary travel and the use of energy-efficient vehicles;
- exploring undertaking the work of the Synod and local church in ways which reduce the need for travel, particularly by car and plane, and encouraging the use of public transport;
- sharing car transport whenever possible.

We affirm that the earth belongs to God and hold to a vision of a world that reflects the glory of God. So together we will celebrate all that is done and achieved in fulfilling our human responsibility for the care and stewardship of creation.

To Get Further Information, we recognise and commend:

- **Eco-Congregation**, an environmental toolkit for local churches which was established by the partnership of the Environmental Issues Network of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. Eco-Congregation operates in England and Wales from the Arthur Rank Centre (www.ecocongregation.org);
- **Operation Noah**, an initiative of the Christian Ecology Link seeking to raise awareness of, and promote action around, the issue of Climate Change (www.christian-ecology.org.uk/noah);
- **The Roots and Branches pack** produced by the Church and Society Committee of the United Reformed Church in 1999.

These projects supply materials and assistance in raising the awareness of congregations to our stewardship of creation, for enhancing worship and Bible study, for working with children, young people and adults, and for taking action of a practical nature in our church life and within our communities. We encourage their use amongst our churches as a way of living out our environmental policy.

Together we can save the world!

And if you already are saving the world!

If you are already working to some extent on becoming more environmentally friendly, please let us know:

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