

Eco Synod/ Eco Church

This presentation was prepared by Eileen Newington for the Synod Meeting held in October 2020. Eileen is the Green Advocate for the URC Synod of Wales and a member of Beulah URC in Cardiff. Each of the 13 URC Synods has a Green Advocate to focus on environmental work.

Eileen would be delighted to hear from individuals and churches who are thinking of taking part in the Eco Church Award scheme or who have already registered. Please do get in touch through the Synod Office at meetingsupport.urcwales@urc.org.uk.

Links to all the organisations highlighted in this presentation can found through the Eco Church page on the Synod website at www.urcwales.org.uk/eco-church.

Slide 1: Eco Synod/Eco Church

In 2020 the URC Synod of Wales registered as an Eco Synod and began its journey towards gaining an Eco Synod award. A Synod Environmental Policy has been drafted and will be presented at the Synod Meeting in March 2021. Despite lockdown, three other important pieces of work have been undertaken.

Slide 2: Synod Office footprint

The carbon footprint of the Synod Office has been documented for 2019 using 360Carbon which is an online carbon calculator commissioned by A Rocha and the Church of England. It allows churches to calculate their carbon footprints from different activities such as energy, travel, food, waste and water and then to offset through Climate Stewards' overseas projects.

In the top diagram *Main Church Building* refers to the Synod Office and the second diagram shows that the total emissions for 2019 were 34.39 tonnes of carbon dioxide which can be offset at a cost of £687.88. The aim is to reduce the carbon footprint year on year and calculations for 2021 will be made at the end of each quarter.

Slide 3: Eco Church online posters

In order to gain Eco Synod status, a percentage of the Synod's local churches must have an Eco Church award themselves. As part of a Mission and Discipleship Board initiative, Judy Harris, Jason Askew and myself are putting together a series of online sessions designed to support and encourage churches with the Eco Church scheme and hopefully to provide them with new ideas, fresh perspectives and potential practical steps they can take. Each session has a guest speaker and is based loosely on one of the five Eco Church areas.

We were especially pleased that members of churches from across the Synod who already had Eco Church awards joined us in September and helped facilitate in the breakout rooms. Our next session is on Wednesday 2nd December and will focus on Community and Global Engagement with guest speaker Cynan Llwyd who is the Acting Head of Christian Aid in Wales. Please do look out for the publicity and spread the word ... these sessions are open to everyone and all are very welcome, whether you are old hands at Eco Church or just thinking about starting out.

As you can see from the smaller poster, for our first session we focused on Lifestyle choices and our invited speaker was Caroline Pomeroy the director of Climate Stewards. As a result of

this contact with Caroline, Judy Harris took the opportunity to develop an exciting and important piece of work around making the Eco Church scheme more accessible to children and young people.

A group was drawn together from the CYDO+ team and some others who have worked with children and young people around environmental issues and they worked together on developing something which will engage children and young people. Judy was in conversation with Caroline Pomeroy and Helen Stephens at A Rocha to gauge their views and they've developed two questionnaires based on Eco Church themes but using similar formats to the Eco Schools' surveys.

The first questionnaire is for Primary school children and the second for older children and young people. The group are also developing a library of resources and activities which will sit alongside the questionnaires to help develop some of the ideas within them. The surveys should be done in conjunction with the church's Eco church survey and will form a bigger picture of the environmental activity within the church. This initiative will not only allow children and young people to contribute to Eco Church Awards within their churches but will also hopefully open essential intergenerational conversations and action around environmental concerns.

I know that many churches within the Synod are already registered with the Eco Church programme, that you understand the processes and that protection of the environment and climate justice play an important part in church life already.

So I thought we might look now at the five areas in the award scheme to consider some new resources and possibilities for action in each. Every church, though, will have its own priorities and ideas and the Eco Church survey lends itself to building gradually towards an Award. When I was putting together this presentation it struck me how colourful many of the images are and I hope that reflects your Eco Church journey. Taking action and working towards an Award should be a joyous and galvanising experience for congregations and should be undertaken at a pace which feels feasible and appropriate.

Slide 4: Worship and Teaching

Here are two examples of the many excellent resources available to help with the inclusion of concern and care for creation in worship.

Churches are invited to hold a climate focused service anytime between now and September 2021 and to be part of a mobilisation of churches across the UK calling for climate action ahead of COP 26 in November next year.

The Christian Aid Song of the Prophets service outline is part of their 2020 campaign for climate justice.

Slide 5 : Buildings

To reach the carbon emissions reduction targets in the Synod Environmental Policy, the work done on Libanus Chapel near Brecon provides a brilliant example of actions that many churches will have to consider over the coming few years. The worship space had pews fixed in place with very inefficient heating via pipes beneath them. These were replaced in 2012 to create a user friendly, adaptable space with free standing chairs. An Air Source Heat Pump

was installed which has proved economic as well as environmentally friendly, and the building was insulated from the outside.

Green Journey began in 2015 when the Diocese of Leeds asked one of the UK's leading renewable energy experts to assist with the reduction of their carbon footprint. The scheme, which is endorsed by the URC, provides churches with a free energy audit and an opportunity to reduce their overall costs while improving their green credentials by switching to renewable energy.

Slide 6: Land

If you put all churchyards and land together in one place, apparently they could create an area the size of a national park. So what we do with the green spaces around our churches could have a significant impact on the future for UK wildlife. *Caring for God's Acre* is a charity established in 2000 to support volunteers who look after and maintain burial sites. It helps to preserve rare species of plants and wildflowers and encourages wildlife, while still leaving access to visitors and relatives.

With limited space on their own land, Uniting Church in Sketty decided to pay for a tree to be planted in a local park this winter. Organised through the City and County of Swansea, they chose a Liquid Amber tree which will have a plaque on it to say who paid for it. This seems like a lovely idea which I hope is available in other local authorities.

Beulah URC's garden has just won a Green Flag Award and the judges were particularly pleased that the local Men's Sheds group meet there each week.

Slide 7: Lifestyle

Each of us has a 'carbon footprint' which represents how we live and the lifestyle choices we make, but we know that some of those choices are robbing younger generations of their futures on a healthy planet. When churches go into the Lifestyle section of the Eco Church survey, they are now directed automatically to the 360Carbon calculator which we spoke about before. It may be best to begin with basic steps when first using this tool and then take time to explore the details of further calculations and reductions later.

One of the most significant and simple steps churches can take to reduce their carbon emissions is to switch to a green energy supplier. As I said before, Green Journey can help with this. It may be a good idea though to do a bit of your own research on any recommendations as a certain amount of 'green washing' goes on in the energy sector, but Green Journey are very open to communication and questions.

Making a commitment to end investment in fossil fuels is also a powerful statement and action. You can contact the Bright Now team at Operation Noah to find out more and to join in the next Global Divestment Announcement on 16th November.

Slide 8: Community and Global (a)

There are so many ways for churches to engage within the community and to reach out globally that I've split this area into two sections and, even then, they seem to have got rather full! I've included the Welsh government logo at the top as a reminder that it's easy to focus on

speaking to our constituency MPs and to forget that we should also be lobbying our Councillors and Welsh Assembly members.

Sometimes starting small on the Eco Church journey can encourage others to join in and can generate interest ... you may begin simply by doing some recycling or perhaps a litter pick. Then there's community gardening, ecumenical projects or perhaps engagement with the Transition Towns movement.

Local environmental charities are usually very happy to come along to church events and open up dialogues.

I've included an example here of a community art project undertaken by Beulah a few years ago which we called Graffiti Jesus. It ran for several months and the community really engaged with the images and message.

Slide 9: Community and Global (b)

These next examples look more to the global side of engagement.

The Climate Coalition is a group of organisations, including Christian Aid, who are calling on politicians to put aside their differences and to work for a healthy, green and fair recovery from the pandemic that goes hand in hand with tackling climate change and puts us on track for net-zero carbon emissions targets. As individuals and churches we can sign their Declaration, The Time Is Now.

Thank You For The Rain is a film available to download from Christian Aid throughout 2020. It documents powerfully the journey of a smallholder farmer in Kenya as he builds a community movement of farmers fighting the impacts of extreme weather and ultimately takes his message all the way to the UN Climate Talks in Paris in 2015. The film is a call to action and you can use it to start a discussion around our response to the climate crisis.

Next year sees the COP26 United Nations summit coming to Glasgow. It's likely that the majority of our MPs will be unaware of how significant these talks are and of what they could do to increase the likelihood of their success. Hope for the Future is an ecumenical organisation that equips individuals and churches to lobby their MPs on climate change. Faith communities are well respected by MPs and we all have a powerful voice to advocate for climate action.

Slide 10: Rowan Williams

There has recently been thought given to what we say about the climate crisis and an acknowledgement that how we say it matters. The way information and discussions are framed affects how people think, feel and act, and the challenge is to transform growing awareness into widespread desire for change.

I'd like to finish with this quote from Dr. Rowan Williams. I think he sets this challenge in a refreshing and positive light ... I hope you find it helpful. Writing earlier this year in *Green Christian*, he described social distancing during the pandemic to secure the safety of our neighbours as a 'physical act of generosity'. He went on to suggest that we could perhaps find a parallel to this action within the global ecological sphere and that 'thoughtful restraint can be a vehicle of protective love'.