

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY FOR THE WEST MIDLANDS SYNOD OF THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

1 Purpose

This policy is the cornerstone of our intent, as a body of people committed to caring for God's creation, to:

- integrate our concern for environmental issues into the whole of our church life
- act urgently to reduce carbon emissions across the whole of church life in order to reach net zero emissions of greenhouse gases by 2030
- use the earth's resources wisely
- enjoy, protect and where possible renew the natural environment
- protect and increase biodiversity.

The West Midlands Synod recognises that there is a need to act urgently to reduce our negative impact on the environment and instead start to have a positive impact. Implementation of this policy requires action by Synod Officers, committees, task groups and individuals working on behalf of the Synod, and a task group will be formed to form a detailed action plan.

2. Rationale

2.1 As a Church we affirm that care for Creation, a just sharing of the world's resources, and a love for the environment in which God has placed us are fundamental Gospel commitments.

2.2 We believe that God created and continues to create the whole universe, sustains and nurtures Creation, but has given us active responsibility for this planet, as stewards for the time being. We believe that the reconciliation of all things to God in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus cannot be separated from God's act of creation: that all things have been created through Christ and for Christ – the Word of God incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth – and that, through Christ, God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things by making peace through the blood of his cross (Col 1.16-20). We believe that creative and redemptive work also belongs to the work of the Spirit, the Breath of God, who swept over the face of the waters in the beginning and who inspires a groaning Creation as it awaits redemption. We acknowledge God the Trinity to be the transcendent and immanent source, sustenance and salvation of all Creation, and so as Christians, part of God's created order, we accept our role of active care for Creation as an urgent duty.

2.3 We acknowledge humanity's interdependence with the rest of Creation, and that the flourishing of humankind cannot be separated from the flourishing of all life. We believe that God calls human beings to live in relationship with the rest Creation, and 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; and requires us to care for Creation so that future generations, whom God also loves, can enjoy it and benefit from it.

- 2.4** We know that human activity is responsible for the degradation of the earth, increasing climate change, and a frightening acceleration in the loss of biodiversity. This cannot be the will of God. It is harming the web of life and the balance of nature, and imposing most heavily upon the poorest people in the world. We believe that knowingly to continue in such activities is a sin for which highly industrialised nations must repent, seek forgiveness and make restitution.
- 2.5** We acknowledge our complicity in the sinful structures that are causing wanton damage to Creation, perpetuating injustice, and delaying action to change direction.
- 2.6** We affirm that it is part of Christian mission to strive to safeguard the integrity of Creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth. This involves 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 pursue justice and sustainability, as envisaged in the biblical vision of the world as it is meant to be. As the Glasgow Multi-Faith Declaration of 2021, to which the United Reformed Church is a signatory, affirms, 'We know that we must change our ways to ensure a quality of life which all can share, and we need to provide hope for people of all ages, everywhere, including future generations.
- 2.7** We commit to:
- listen to and intercede for those threatened by climate change and environmental degradation;
 - adopt sustainable lifestyles and practices that are consistent with our concern for Creation;
 - campaign for change in areas where we need governments and corporations to act.

In doing so, we seek to work towards a restoration of relationship between humanity, the rest of Creation and the Creator.

3. Policy statement

- 3.1** The West Midlands Synod recognises the urgency for action as the effects of climate change are already visible in the world, and are increasing. Because of the urgency of reducing and combatting climate

change, the focus for this policy is on reducing carbon emissions across the life of the Church.

3.2 The West Midlands Synod acknowledges our complicity in the sinful structures that are causing wanton damage to the earth, its creatures and to many poor communities. We commit to seeking a true and deep repentance from these ways, such that we shall live more fairly with respect to creation and all inhabitants of this planet.

3.3 We commit to pray for those threatened by climate change, and to adopt practices and actions consistent with levels of carbon emissions the earth can sustain¹.

3.4 We will adopt the following environmental practices and report to the Synod meeting annually progress on implementation.

4. Environmental Practices

In respect of the following areas, the West Midlands commits to:

4.1 Targets and monitoring

- a) calculate and track the carbon footprint of key activities (such as energy use of buildings, travel and transport, and meetings);
- b) appoint a task group to develop and implement an action plan for making annual reductions in this carbon footprint in order to reach net zero emissions by 2030;
- c) instruct the task group established under the previous point to monitor and have oversight on the implementation of the other practices identified below, and to bring the future Synod meetings further points of policy and action to develop our environmental performance;
- d) pay to offset unavoidable carbon emissions through a reputable scheme.

4.2 Meetings

- a) consider meeting physically less frequently and making greater use of videoconferencing, noting that we do not believe that videoconferencing wholly replaces the benefits of all in-person meetings;

¹ The December 2015 Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change aims to hold, “the increase in global average temperatures to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels,” recognising that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change. In February 2024, the EU’s Copernicus Climate Change Service confirmed that the 1.5 °C threshold was breached for a full 12 month period for the first time. [World's first year-long breach of key 1.5C warming limit - BBC News](#) retrieved 22/2/2024

- b) assess the environmental policies and credentials of the venues used for meetings and events;
- c) prioritise the accessibility of meeting locations for public transport.

4.3 Travel and transport

- a) consider the necessity and benefits of all travel with regard to its environmental impact;
- b) encourage and give preference to using lower-carbon modes of transport;
- c) introduce a carbon budget for international travel, with planned annual reductions;
- d) establish the principle that we should avoid or minimise air travel, and the recommended approach for travel is to use public transport unless there is a considered and compelling reason not to do so;
- e) encourage organisations which are requiring or funding travel by representatives of the Synod to also cover the costs of offsetting the carbon emissions associated with that travel through an appropriate scheme.

4.4 Buildings

- a) build environmental assessments into quinquennial surveys of buildings;
- b) investigate and where possible improve the levels of energy efficiency and environmental performance of buildings, including insulation, glazing, ventilation and heating and cooling systems, through refurbishment or replacement;
- c) ensure any buildings purchased have an Energy Performance rating of C or above, or are upgraded immediately after purchase to achieve this rating;
- d) implement measures to reduce energy use;
- e) support the generation of renewable energy – either on our own buildings or by cooperating with local community projects, including where technically feasible the installation of solar PV panels and/or ground- or air-source heat pumps;
- f) choose green energy tariffs, from suppliers investing in new renewable energy generation.

4.5 Investments

- a) not invest in fossil fuel 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;
- b) where possible engage further with companies whose activities foster significant carbon emissions, for example the electricity and automotive industries, and producers of energy intensive products (eg cement);
- c) investigate investment in renewable energy and clean technologies.

4.6 Use and disposal of resources

- a) reduce the use and consumption of unsustainable resources;
- b) work towards eliminating the use of single-use plastics, given their significant environmental impact;
- c) support and promote the reuse and recycling of materials;
- d) dispose of waste in ways that minimise its impact on the environment;
- e) reduce consumption of intensively produced meat and dairy products and other food with a high carbon footprint, or derived from vulnerable or unsustainable sources.

4.7 Worship, teaching and education

- a) ensure that those serving and being prepared for service in the church are cognisant of the global and spiritual context of the climate crisis as well as the response required by our faith;
- b) compile, promote and use resources for worship and teaching related to environmental themes;
- c) provide, promote and use resources and campaigns that support churches and church members to reduce their environmental footprint.

4.8 Advocacy

- a) advocate for action by government, industry and others to foster a deep, rapid and just transition towards a net zero carbon economy;
- b) urge the UK government to set targets and establish policies that will ensure a rapid reduction in greenhouse gas emissions so that net zero is achieved by well before 2050;
- c) campaign with others at local and national level for policies, targets and actions that take steps towards realising these goals;

- d) advocate for global climate justice and international financing mechanisms to be put in place to enable mitigation, adaptation and compensation for loss and damage.

4.9 Local Churches

- a) encourage every local church to register their intent to apply for A Rocha Eco Church² accreditation at Bronze, Silver or Gold level, and complete the application in order to qualify for at least Bronze level by the end of 2025;
- b) encourage every local church to nominate their own “Eco friend” who will co-ordinate action in their congregation and be a key point of contact between the Synod officers and the Synod Eco Steering Group, and the local church;
- c) encourage every local church to strive to raise ecological awareness amongst their fellowship and in their community, and continue to work towards attaining the Gold Eco Church award;
- d) encourage churches to take measurable action towards reducing their carbon footprint, using tools such as that at <https://360carbon.org> or similar calculators and to document and celebrate their progress;
- e) encourage churches to use renewable energy sources and reduce their energy consumption and to follow the principles of REFUSE, REDUCE, REUSE, REPAIR and RECYCLE wherever possible;
- f) ask churches to include regular teaching and prayer on environmental issues and climate justice, and encourage their members to follow a more ecologically-sustainable lifestyle, as action within the Church is vital but cannot stand alone: each of us need to take urgent action to change our own lifestyle.

Group responsible for this policy: Synod Executive

Revised policy adopted: March 2024

Date next review due: March 2025

Resolution: *The West Midlands Synod*

- a) *adopts the revised Synod Environmental Policy dated March 2024;*
- b) *instructs officers and committees in the Synod to take action to implement it and report progress annually to Synod Executive and the Synod meeting;*
- c) *encourages local churches to adopt and implement similar policies, reflecting local priorities and resources whilst respecting the fact that our actions always impact others, positively or negatively.*

² <https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/>