

Environmental Policy for the United Reformed Church Eastern Synod

1. Purpose

- 1.1. This policy is an agreed, documented statement of the United Reformed Church Eastern Synod's stance towards the environment in which it operates
- 1.2. It is the cornerstone of our intent, as a body of people committed to caring for God's creation, seeking God's justice and to live lightly upon the Earth in all of our operations.

2. Introduction

- 2.1. As the Eastern Synod of the United Reformed Church, we affirm that care for creation, a just sharing of the world's resources and a concern for the environment are fundamental Gospel commitments and central to our missional Discipleship
- 2.2. We believe that God the Trinity is the transcendent and immanent source, sustenance and salvation of all Creation
- 2.3. We believe that we are an integral part of God's creation and that God commands us to act justly and in righteousness not only towards all humanity but to all creation
- 2.4. We acknowledge that human activity has significantly contributed to the degradation of the Earth through both the climate emergency and the loss of biodiversity and that this is not the will of God. We believe that this limits the attainment of the fullness of life that God wills for all creation and is a sin for which we should seek forgiveness. We also recognise that this damage to the environment impacts heavily upon the poor and future generations and is part of the intrinsic injustice to which we bear witness
- 2.5. We recognise the importance of the 2015 Paris agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate

Change and its aim of keeping temperature increases below 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

3. Vision 2020

- 3.1. As with the Environmental Policy of the United Reformed Church, this policy is informed by the vision 2020 strategic framework for mission adopted by General Assembly in 2010, which declares that the United Reformed Church will be a Church that has taken significant steps to safeguard the integrity of Creation, to sustain and renew the life of the Earth, and states that 'Our churches, reflecting faith in God, the creator and sustainer of life in all its fullness, must discover the radical voice of care for the Earth that is supported by the way we live.'

4. Hope in God's Future

- 4.1. We affirm the view expressed in the 2009 report *Hope in God's Future* that: 'it is now intellectually and morally irresponsible to fail to acknowledge and address the urgent need for radical cuts in greenhouse gas emissions in order to prevent intolerable damage to human populations and mass extinctions of many plant and animal species.'
- 4.2. We pledge to respond to respond to the report's call for repentance in the face of our complicity in the sinful structures that are causing damage to the Earth, to its creatures and to many poor communities. We commit to intercede for those threatened by climate change and environmental degradation and to adopt practices and lifestyles which are sustainable for the planet. Specifically, and in line with the report's recommendations, we shall strive to act urgently to reduce carbon emissions across the whole of church life.

5. Shrinking our impact on the environment

- 5.1. Reflecting the commitments contained in the vision2020 statement, in the *Hope in God's Future* report, in a resolution on climate change passed by General Assembly in 2007 and being mindful of the national and international climate change targets, the Eastern Synod affirms its pledge to shrink its carbon footprint and to strive to protect and restore the environment. Synod recognises that this is a demanding and collaborative endeavour and commits to providing all practicable assistance to churches. Synod also recognises that this pledge calls for both conversion on the part of its individual members and the transformation of internal structures
- 5.2. Accordingly, Eastern Synod will:
- a) Support and encourage our churches to achieve 'Eco-Church' bronze, silver or gold award status
 - b) Actively work towards achieving 'Eco-Synod' award status
 - c) Lower incrementally its carbon footprint by a significant amount each year
 - d) Appoint and support at least one or more 'Green Apostles' to monitor progress on creation care within the synod
 - e) Ensure that its buildings and land are environmentally friendly and offer grants to ensure that church premises are environmentally friendly
 - f) Reduce, where practicable, car and air travel for meetings through the use of videoconferencing. With due regard for distances and costs involved, individuals will be encouraged to use transport with minimum impact – to walk, cycle, use buses and trains, car-share and use electric and other energy-efficient vehicles where possible. Where there is no alternative to flying and the benefits outweigh the environmental harm members will be encouraged as a temporary expedient to adopt the practice of carbon off-setting with respect to essential travel by making

payments supporting sustainable projects, e.g. through Climate Stewards

- g) Remove all investments in fossil fuel companies
- h) Encourage churches to work in collaboration with/initiate local transition and sustainability groups
- i) Promote an environmental theology and encourage their churches to receive training and support on issues of environmental care and to include these in the initial and on-going training of ministers, preachers, worship leaders and elders
- j) Encourage church congregations to be more aware of, and ready to respond to, environmental issues in their area
- k) Encourage individual members of church congregations to be environmentally aware as part of their own lifestyle
- l) Campaign at a local and/or national level for policies that care for the environment
- m) Establish the habit of recording and celebrating environmental initiatives of churches in the Synod.

[Adopted by Synod October 2020]