

SYNOD ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY v5 March 2020

1. **Affirmation** As the East Midlands Synod of the United Reformed Church, we affirm with General Assembly that living lightly on the Earth, caring for God's Creation and protecting the environment are fundamental Gospel commitments, central to our Missional Discipleship.
2. **Synod acknowledges** humankind's culpability for causing grievous harm to poorer peoples and to Creation in general. Humanity is confronted by two crises of its own making: **the climate emergency** and **the ecological emergency (loss of biodiversity)**. We commit to work with in the wider Church and with partners outside the Church to transform this double injustice.
3. **Synod recognises** the significance and hope of the 2015 Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the imperatives of the 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5%, the 2019 Food and Agriculture Organisation report on the State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture and looks forward to other scholarly reports and international agreements.
4. **Synod pledges to shrink the Synod 'carbon footprint'** (the total greenhouse gas emissions both (a) from 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 all practicable assistance to churches and groups of churches, including information about practical measures and potential grants. Individual members will be supported in making corresponding life-style adjustments. The following targets are broadly commensurate with the UK achieving net zero by 2045 and the world by 2055. As a last resort, offsetting through 'Climate Stewards' is permitted for the 2030 target.
2030 target: to reduce the CO₂ emissions from all Synod and church activities to net zero.
2040 target: to reduce the total carbon footprint of the Synod (as defined above) to net zero.

The attached commentary on the environmental policy indicates how these targets may be achieved by audits and actions such as switching to 100% renewable electricity and gas.

5. **Synod pledges to seek to protect biodiversity** by all means and to be vigorous in combating the causes of ecological harm. Synod encourages church members to find quality time to enjoy nature as part of their discipleship, to engage with political representatives, and to campaign together with others.
6. **Synod commits to a systematic audit of Synod buildings and activities and encourages local churches to do likewise.** In addition to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, possible measures include: elimination of single use plastics and other hard-to-recycle materials, use of eco-friendly cleaning materials, enhancing any church land (applying organic principles), significantly reducing meat, fish, dairy products and unsustainable palm oil in catering and promoting the 5 R's: REFUSE, REDUCE, REUSE, REPAIR, RECYCLE.
7. **Synod pledges to work towards achieving Eco Synod status and to commend Eco church to local congregations.** Synod will implement measures to support people in living joyfully, simply and responsibly with respect to God's Creation including: promoting an environmental theology, training preachers and leaders, appointing 'Green Apostles', celebrating 'Time for Creation', undertaking practical projects, producing community artwork celebrating the Creator God and working in collaboration with other denominations, other Faiths and local environmental groups.
- 8a. **Synod recognises young people's desperate concern for the environment,** as evidenced by the global 'Fridays for the Future' campaign on climate change, and
- 8b. **Synod pledges to support and encourage the Youth Exec, along with all committees,** in activities and campaigns to address the climate emergency and the ecological emergency.

Introduction to the revised Environmental Policy:

The JPIC Group is grateful for all the time and effort that congregations have put into prayerfully and thoughtfully studying and considering the draft policy presented to Synod on 12th October 2019. We recognise that the climate and ecological emergencies raise complex issues that go to the heart of our faith and cannot easily be summarised. The theological and secular debates are fast-moving and many of our long-held positions are being challenged afresh, which is uncomfortable. Everyone who commented agreed that these are urgent matters but not everyone is agreed about the extent to which they take precedence over other missional priorities. Some congregations have endorsed the draft policy without revision, some have suggested improvements and some have raised concerns. All of the points made were relevant and helpful and, although alterations apart from clarifications have been minimised, all have been taken into account in this improved draft policy.

The main change that we propose is that the shorter, one page document, should be adopted by Synod as the environmental policy and that the longer, five page document, should simply be commended by Synod to churches as constituting non-binding commentary, suggestions, best current practice and a basis for study of the issues involved. The JPIC Group will be charged with keeping the latter document up to date, informed by Christian agencies such as Christian Aid, TEARfund, Green Christian and Operation Noah, by international agencies such as the IPCC and FAO, by observations from and best practice in the churches of the Synod and by initiatives of national and local government. Proposed changes to the policy itself would, of course, need to be brought to a meeting of Synod.

We noted the question from Revd Helen Wakefield-Carr about how the new resource ministries which are being established will affect the Synod's carbon footprint. They will tend to increase the carbon footprint despite any introduction of video-conferencing, bikes or electric cars. The revival for which we hope and pray will inevitably tend to increase our carbon and even our ecological footprints. It would be tragic were our mission to be constrained in order to meet environmental targets. Our challenge, therefore, is to serve this generation without harming the prospects of future generations and the prospects of God's other-than-human creation. We believe that this is possible but it is neither simple nor easy, especially as we seek to undo the harm already done.

Several respondents raised concerns about what is now described as 'Holy Resistance' to policies and actions that harm the environment. We certainly approve of people and churches changing their lifestyles in order better to care for Creation. We certainly approve of all legal actions such as planting trees, clearing up waste and joining marches and demonstrations. There was, however, a worry expressed about Synod possibly being seen to endorse 'Fridays for the Future' (school strikes) or non-violent direct action (NVDA, including law-breaking) e.g. by Extinction Rebellion. This is currently a matter of vigorous debate within the churches and it would be wrong for the Synod to appear to dictate to individual consciences. It is no light matter for children to miss lessons or for adults to break the law, especially in a democracy, but as Christians we do owe allegiance to a higher law. The difficulty is to discern where we need to draw our red lines. In revising this policy, therefore, we attempt not to sit on the fence but neither to offend those who in good conscience either support or avoid NVDA.

Draft Resolutions to be proposed at the meeting of Synod to be held on 21st March 2020 with a view to approval and adoption :

Synod

- i. Acknowledges with thanks the work of the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Group, and of all those who commented on the draft, in developing the Synod Environmental Policy**
- ii. Approves and adopts the Synod Environmental Policy and encourages local churches to study and implement the Policy.**
- iii. Approves and commends the commentary on the Environmental Policy to churches for advice and as a basis for study and asks the JPIC Group to keep this under review and to work to keep this up to date in line with best practice.**