

Environmental Policy for the United Reformed Church South Western Synod

1 Executive Summary

1.1 This policy is an agreed, documented statement of the United Reformed Church South Western 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, to reduce our carbon footprint, improve recycling, minimise waste and improve efficiencies on finite natural resources in all of our operations.

1.3 The South Western Synod is committed to reducing its carbon footprint and Section 5 of this Policy lays out the steps that we shall take.

1.4 The South Western Synod is committed to working towards an Eco Synod Award and encourages every local church to work towards an Eco Church Award.

2 Introduction

2.1 As a 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.

2.2 We believe that God created and continues to create the whole universe, God continues to sustain and nurture Creation.

2.3 We believe that we are an integral part of God's Creation, that God 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 all humanity but to all Creation; and requires us to care for Creation so that future generations, whom God also loves, may enjoy it and benefit from it.

2.4 We affirm that Christian mission includes caring for God's earth and all Creation. It includes 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 grow towards justice and good stewardship as envisaged in the biblical vision of the world as it is meant to be.

2.5 We acknowledge that human activity has contributed to the degradation of the earth 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. As the Lambeth Declaration 2015 on Climate Change, to which the United

Reformed Church is a signatory, affirms, 'The demands of justice as well as of creation require the nations of the world urgently to limit the global rise in average temperatures. We have a responsibility to act now, for ourselves, our neighbours and for future generations.'

2.6 We recognise the significance of the December 2015 Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). One of its outcomes is to aim to hold 'the increase in the global average temperature 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.

3 Vision2020

3.1 The Environmental Policy of the United Reformed Church, adopted by General Assembly in 2004, was founded upon The Five Marks of Mission, the fifth of which committed the Church 'to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation; to sustain and renew the life of the earth'. General Assembly in 2010 adopted the Vision 2020 statements, which declared 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' (statement 10: The Integrity of Creation). Vision2020 also 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.'

3.2 This policy echoes Vision 2020's affirmation that 'The changing climate and its consequences for all life on planet earth cannot be over emphasised as the most significant underlying issue of our time' - and that it is vital that the Church 'recognizes the reality and fear present in environmental debates and lives hopefully in the present climate.'

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 the report's call for repentance in the face of our complicity in the sinful structures that are causing wanton damage to the earth, to its creatures and to many poor communities. We also commit to intercede for those threatened by climate change, and to adopt practices and lifestyles consistent with levels of carbon emissions the earth can sustain. 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 carbon footprint

5.1 Reflecting the commitments contained in the vision2020 statement, in the *Hope in God's Future* report, and in a resolution on climate change passed by General Assembly in 2007, the United Reformed Church South Western Synod affirms its pledge to shrink its carbon footprint and to strive to protect and restore the environment.

5.2 The Synod recognises that this pledge calls for both conversion on the part of its individual members and transformation of its internal structures. The remainder of this policy, which incorporates the 'suggested indicators' contained in statement 10 of vision2020, follows through on this 'conversion' and 'transformation'. We will endeavour to work ecumenically whenever possible and appropriate as we act upon this policy.

5.3 Accordingly, our churches will be supported and encouraged to:

- a) achieve 'Eco-Church' Bronze, Silver or Gold award status
- b) carry out a systematic environmental audit of their buildings and follow the strategies outlined below for reducing their carbon footprint;
- c) raise awareness, through prayer, preaching, Bible study, teaching and discussion, of the need for confession and repentance in relation to the causes of climate change, and of our calling, as God's redeemed people, to live joyfully, simply and responsibly with respect to God's Creation - caring for and treasuring that Creation, and celebrating all that is achieved in fulfilling that calling;
- d) celebrate 'Time for Creation' as encouraged by the World Council of Churches. Creation Time runs from 1 September until 4 October each year;
- e) ensure that energy is used efficiently and that their buildings are environment friendly through the use of energy-saving technologies and by identifying and using renewable sources of energy as appropriate;
- f) help members of their congregation to make adjustments in the carbon emissions associated with their lifestyles by supporting them in a personal audit and in finding appropriate strategies;
- g) involve their children and young people in activities focusing on care for the environment;
- h) engage their local political representatives, urging them to support policies that take effective steps towards realising the commitment to net zero carbon emissions by 2050
- i) support campaigns and action around climate change issues
- j) ensure that church-owned land is used in ways that encourage an enjoyment of nature and both enhance biodiversity and protect the environment;

5.4 South Western Synod staff will

- a) support churches to gain 'Eco-Church' Award status

- b) support the process of working towards 'Eco-Synod' Award status
- c) offer grants to ensure that church premises, including manses, are environment friendly through the use of energy-saving technologies and by identifying and using renewable sources of energy, as appropriate;
- d) encourage churches to work in collaboration with, or initiate, local transition or sustainability groups;
- e) encourage churches to receive training and support on issues of climate justice and environmental care;
- f) support one or more 'Green Apostles' to monitor progress on carbon reduction in the synod;

5.5 South Western Synod will aim to:

- a) lower incrementally its carbon footprint by a significant amount each year
- b) campaign at local and national level for policies that strengthen, and take steps towards realising, net zero carbon emissions by 2050
- c) ensure that its buildings are environment friendly through the use of energy-saving technologies and by identifying and using renewable sources of energy as appropriate;
- d) reduce, where practicable, car and air travel for meetings through the use of videoconferencing. With due regard for distances and costs involved, individual members will be encouraged to use transport with minimum impact; to cycle, use buses and trains, and car-share and use energy-efficient vehicles where possible. Members will also be encouraged to adopt the practice of carbon off-setting with respect to essential travel by making payments that support sustainable projects (e.g. through Climate Stewards)
- e) promote opportunities to develop an environmental theology
- f) remove all investments in fossil fuel companies, in line with the Mission Council recommendation (May 2019)
- g) establish the habit of recording and celebrating environmental initiatives within local churches in the synod
- h) ensure that environmental issues are integrated within the discipleship development provision of the synod.

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