

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 reduce our carbon footprint, improve recycling, minimise waste and improve efficiencies on finite natural resources in all our operations. The West Midlands Synod has previously adopted the Assembly Environmental Policy (at the Synod Meeting in October 2017). This revised policy can be read alongside the Assembly Policy, but commits the West Midlands Synod to specific actions. Its implementation requires action by Synod Officers, committees, task groups and individuals working on behalf of the Synod

2. Rationale

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. We believe that God created and continues to create the whole universe, sustains and nurtures Creation, and wills to redeem the whole of Creation from its bondage to decay (Romans 8.21). 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, 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 accept the stewardship of God's creation entrusted to us, with its attendant rights for us to care for God's earth and all creation, 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.

3. Environmental and Mission Pledges

1. 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. We also commit to pray for those threatened by climate change, and to adopt practices and actions consistent with levels of carbon emissions the earth can sustain^[1]

2. The West Midlands Synod will seek to complete Eco Synod accreditation from A Rocha^[2] by the end of 2020 and continue to improve its practices.
3. The West Midlands Synod shall strive to reduce incrementally carbon emissions caused on Synod business, including its Synod meetings, committees and task groups.^[3] Consequently we will do further work on carbon budgeting, to set specific targets to carbon reductions and report to Synod before the end of 2021, setting out plans to work towards net zero emissions for Synod activities by 2040 or earlier. We will seek to reduce the carbon emissions caused by journeys on Synod business through video-conferencing, car-sharing, the use of public transport and other means. We will do further work on investigating appropriate carbon-offsetting programmes^[4] to compensate for our actual carbon emissions, and bring proposals to Synod meeting before the end of 2022.
4. The West Midlands Synod will work to make the Synod Office and any other buildings provided by the Synod and under its control^[5] more environmentally friendly through the use of appropriate energy-saving technologies, and using renewable energy sources wherever possible^[6]. We will consider environmental implications in making decisions on grant funding for projects and look for suitable evidence of environmental sustainability in applications. We will encourage, wherever reasonably possible, building and refurbishment work to be carried out using locally sourced and/or sustainably produced materials, for waste materials and demolition waste to be re-used or recycled, and for local professionals, contractors and suppliers to be engaged on the project.
5. The West Midlands Synod will build upon its habit of recycling waste materials wherever possible, and move to embed good practice with regard to reducing its waste stream through applying the principles of
 - * **REFUSE** (refusing to buy items that are not needed and, if possible, rejecting goods supplied with excess packaging),
 - * **REDUCE** (minimising purchases and only purchasing new when this is necessary, avoiding wherever possible single-use plastics),
 - * **REUSE** (avoiding single-use cups and plates, refilling containers, finding new uses for items no longer needed),
 - * **REPAIR** (where practical. repair items rather than discarding them) and
 - * **RECYCLE** (when all other options have been explored, sending redundant or used items for recycling in preference to sending them to landfill).
6. The West Midlands Synod encourages every local church to register their intent to apply for A Rocha Eco Church^[7] accreditation at Bronze, Silver or Gold level by the end of 2022, and complete the application in order to qualify for at least Bronze level by the end of 2023. The Synod further encourages 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. We 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. We 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. We 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.

Group responsible for this policy: Synod Mission Council

Revised policy adopted: October 2020

Date of review due: October 2021

20/10 Resolution 1: *The West Midlands Synod*

1. *adopts the revised Synod Environmental Policy dated October 2020;*
2. *instructs officers and committees in the Synod to take action to implement it and report progress annually to Synod Mission Council and the Synod meeting;*
3. *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.*

This resolution was passed unanimously at Synod on October 17, 2020.

[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 2oC above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5oC above pre-industrial levels,” recognising that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change.

[2] <https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/denominational-awards/eco-synod/>

[3] A baseline calculation of our 2019 carbon footprint for Synod-related work, based on 15469 units of electricity consumed at the Synod Office, supplied on a “green” tariff, and a total of 62,762 miles travelled on business purposes and for staff commuting into the Synod Office, along with other consumables and energy usage at the office equates to a carbon footprint of **32.28 tonnes of CO2 equivalent emitted** (tCO2e).

Source: <https://360carbon.org>

[4] For example, Church House are encouraging the use of offsetting through the charity Climate Stewards, who cite the cost per tonne of CO2 emissions at £20.00. Taking the 2019 baseline calculation as an example, had we used Carbon Stewards to offset carbon emissions it would have come at a cost of £645.54. See <https://www.climatestewards.org/offset/> - retrieved 27/8/2020

[5] For example, Manses provided for Synod Officers, but not those Manses, church buildings and other properties that come into the control of the Synod which are subject to resolution for disposal.

[6] We already use a “Green” electricity tariff (the office does not use gas). We are investigating the possibility of solar PV cells. We have budgeted £15,000 for improving the heating in the office and installing solar cells.

[7] <https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/>