

Paper I2

Mission committee

Environmental URC policy update

Church 2014
United
Church **Reformed**
Church Church 2014

Paper I2



Mission committee: Environmental URC policy update

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Francis Brienen francis.brienen@urc.org.uk
Action required	Note, and take back to synods for discussion
Draft resolution(s)	None at this meeting
Alternative options to consider, if any	

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	Updating the URC's environmental policy.
Main points	This new draft policy is made available for discussion now, and will be brought back to the next meeting of Mission Council (possibly with some revisions) with a resolution that it be adopted.
Previous relevant documents	Several previous Assembly and Mission Council papers, referred to throughout the draft policy document.
Consultation has taken place with...	Within mission committee.

Summary of Impact

Financial	No direct impact on central budget.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Other churches take this issue seriously, and will be helped by the fact that we do.

Environmental URC policy update

Drafted November 2014

1. Introduction

1.1 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.

1.2 We believe that God created and continues to create the whole universe; sustains and nurtures creation; through Christ, wills to redeem the whole of creation from its bondage to decay; entrusts creation to our care, calling us to be stewards of it; 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 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.

1.3 We affirm that Christian mission includes caring for God's earth and all creation. It includes 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.

1.4 We know 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.

2. Vision2020

2.1 The previous 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'. This policy is informed by the Vision2020 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' (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.'

2.2 This policy echoes Vision2020'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.'

3. Hope in God's Future

3.1 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.'

3.2 We also endorse this 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 engage in this repentance, and also commit to practices and lifestyles consistent with levels of carbon emissions the earth can sustain.

3.3 We commit ourselves, as a Church, to exceed the UK government target of reducing carbon omissions by a minimum of 80% by 2050, and to taking urgent action to meet appropriate interim goals.

4. Shrinking our carbon footprint

4.1 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 re-affirms its pledge to shrink its carbon footprint (the total greenhouse gas emissions caused by the Church's activities) and to strive to protect and restore the environment.

4.2 The Church 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 Vision 2020, is an attempt to follow through on this 'conversion' and 'transformation'.

4.2 Accordingly, our churches will be encouraged to:

- a) carry out a systematic environmental audit of their buildings and follow the strategies outlined below for reducing their carbon footprint; in this the resource *Greening Church Buildings* produced by Eco-Congregation Scotland may be helpful – www.ecocongregationscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Greening-Church-Buildings.pdf;
- b) 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 for redeemed sacramental living, while also celebrating all that is achieved in fulfilling our human responsibility to live joyfully and simply, caring for and 'treasuring' creation;
- c) celebrate Time for creation as encouraged by the World Council of Churches (www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/climate-change/time-for-creation). Creation Time runs from 1 September until 4 October each year;
- d) ensure that energy is used efficiently and that their buildings are carbon friendly through the use of energy-saving technologies and by identifying and using renewable sources of energy (such as solar panels) as appropriate;
- e) 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;
- f) involve their children and young people in activities focusing on care for the environment;
- g) engage their local political representatives, urging them to support policies that take effective steps towards realizing the commitment to a minimum 80% reduction in carbon emissions by 2050;
- h) ensure that church-owned land is used in ways that encourage an enjoyment of nature and both enhance and protect the environment;
- i) produce a piece of community artwork celebrating the Creator God.

- 4.3 Our synods will undertake to:
- a) encourage their churches to become and continue to be ‘eco-congregations’, or churches with clear environmental action plans; in so doing they will encourage churches to see the positive benefits in terms of the financial savings that environmentally-friendly practices can bring;
 - b) develop and implement plans to become ‘eco-synods’;
 - c) encourage their churches to work in collaboration with, or initiate, local transition or sustainability groups;
 - d) encourage their churches to receive training and support on issues of climate justice and environmental care;
 - e) appoint one or more ‘green apostles’ to monitor progress on carbon reduction in their synod.
- 4.4 Assembly commits to:
- a) commissioning a suitable individual or body to calculate the Church’s carbon footprint, enabling a benchmark to be set against which future reductions in this footprint may be made;
 - b) lowering incrementally the Church’s carbon footprint by 5% each year by *carbon off-setting* and, in particular, *carbon budgeting*;
 - c) in terms of *carbon budgeting*, setting specific year-on-year reduction targets in the percentage of emissions over a defined period;
 - d) in terms of *carbon off-setting*, strongly encouraging all members of the United Reformed Church to make payments supporting sustainable projects (e.g. through climate stewards – www.climatestewards.org) when travelling. In the case of travel undertaken on Church business, the offset sum will be a recognised expense which the Church will expect members and staff to pay for and claim back. Car allowances for ministers and staff will also include a carbon-related element;
 - e) campaigning at local and national level for policies that strengthen, and take steps towards realizing, the government’s commitment to a minimum 80% reduction in carbon emissions by 2050;
 - f) ensuring that the Church’s buildings are carbon friendly through the use of energy-saving technologies and by identifying and using renewable sources of energy (such as solar panels) as appropriate;
 - g) encouraging its members and staff, where practicable, to reduce car and air travel for meetings through the use of video-conferencing; and to cycle, use buses and trains, and car-share and use energy-efficient vehicles where possible;
 - h) encouraging FURY to develop a strategy responding to the challenge of climate change;
 - i) setting up a working group to explore the feasibility of the Church disinvesting in fossil fuels.

5. Resources

- 5.1 We recognise and commend:
- a) Eco-Congregation, which provides an environmental toolkit and support network for local churches: www.ecocongregation.org;
 - b) Operation Noah: <http://operationnoah.org>;
 - c) Christian Ecology Link: www.greenchristian.org.uk;
 - d) A Rocha: <http://arocha.org.uk>;
 - e) Pray and Fast for the Climate: www.prayandfastfortheclimate.org.uk;
 - f) The promotion of links with transition towns, etc: www.christian-ecology.org.uk/cit.htm.

