



Your eco-church check-up

TN122 Training Notes series: Administration

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Churches have been slow to address environmental issues but there is a growing recognition that Christians have a God-given responsibility to care for creation and to ensure that our children have a world that can sustain them.

Much of the credit for this goes to A Rocha and Christian development agencies. Also to campaigning individuals such as Dave Bookless and Ruth Valerio.

Many churches and church-based groupings now have an environmental policy, but it is possible to show high aspirations, perhaps copied from elsewhere, yet do little. These notes seek to provide a selection of practical actions any church can take to make a difference and to show they mean what they say.

A note on Christian responsibility

Christians seek to care for this world because they are called to do so by the Creator. We show our love for and obedience to our Father by taking seriously his command to rule over this world, not as tyrants but as recipients of this amazing planet and cosmos (Genesis 1:28). This world was created through Christ (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16) for God's praise. We are privileged to be part of God's created order.

The Israelites were commanded not to defile the land (Leviticus 18:26-28) with consequences if they did. It is not that the world is due for total destruction as some Christians argue, for there will be a renewed heaven and earth (Revelation 21:1; Romans 8:21,22).

God is Creator and Sustainer. Our role as his children is to work with him to ensure that this awesome creation is kept for the future. Yet we pollute it and our sinfulness brings about injustice in how its gems of life are not shared out for everyone fairly.

Themes of discipleship, obedience and justice demand that we take our world seriously seeking to pass it on to future generations for their benefit. This world does not belong to us, but we have been given authority to care for it by the One who made it.

Christian mission includes seeking to correct relationships within God's world that have deviated from his purpose. Our job is to work with him to restore humanity within the created order to what it was always intended to be.

It is therefore important that our churches seek to minimise the resources we use up and the pollution and waste that we create. Although the ideas that follow are deliberately straightforward and practical, there is a much deeper theology underpinning all this.

1 Church buildings

- Take professional advice from an independent source for both heating and lighting: the cost can be recovered many times over in finding a system that is right for your building.
- Ensure that insulation is as good as it can be. This is not easy of course for many historic buildings, but consider possible actions on double-glazing, entrance features, roof insulation, and all other means of minimising heat loss.
- Eliminate draughts, especially in older buildings. Check all sources of incoming air, especially doors and windows and repair or block gaps.
- Renew your boilers and choose your means of heating so that you are using energy-efficient equipment and systems, especially in tall buildings where you can end up heating the roof but not the ground level.
- Choose an energy-efficient lighting system that gives you the intensity you need at minimum power consumption. Fit energy-saving (such as LED) lightbulbs.
- Install solar panels and other means of generating renewable energy. The generous feed-in tariff has ended but the government is considering a new export tariff which will help with costs.
- Switch to a renewable energy supplier, possibly one of the smaller companies but check first for their financial viability as several have folded.
- Fit dual-flush mechanisms or water-saving devices for toilets and taps. Use water butts from your roofing areas for use in the church grounds.

2 Use of buildings

- Heat only those sections of your buildings that you need by means of split systems and time clocks. Do not over-heat rooms and use good thermostats.
- Encourage users to switch off lights and power when rooms are not in use by means of clear signs. Use movement detectors in toilets and corridors.
- Minimise the use of flood-lighting and lit displays, although security issues may mean this advice has to be modified in some cases.
- Map your church energy use through the installation of smart meters, with reduction targets to cut unnecessary energy and expense.
- Avoid waste by fully maintaining all equipment and fittings to manufacturers' specifications. Provide recycling bins wherever people generate waste.
- Ensure that hazardous waste (including asbestos) is disposed of to local authority standards by professional companies with proper certificates.
- Insist that outside bodies that hire your buildings comply with your environmental policy in every way.

3 The office

- Purchase recycled paper-based products where high standard is not vital.
- Recycle all paper-products no longer required, and shred and recycle all confidential, sensitive or personal documents. Recycle all toner and ink cartridges.
- Aim to use digital means of communication and storage more than paper-based systems. Possibly aim for a paper-free office.
- Purchase eco-friendly toiletries and cleaning requisites for your buildings and use purchasing schemes where available. Avoid micro-plastics and try to avoid palm oil.
- Switch off computers, screens and other electrical items when not in use, or check that there is a deep-sleep mode which is switched to without delay.
- Put pressure on office suppliers to take environmental issues seriously.
- Aim to repair equipment rather than exchange it for new whenever it fails to deliver at the standard required.

4 The kitchen

- Seek to recycle all possible waste products with clearly marked bins provided and well-signed instructions to all kitchen users: glass, plastics, tins, cartons, foil, etc. all washed and sorted, plus food waste bins.
- Avoid single-use plastic. Encourage your members to do likewise.
- Avoid single-use cutlery and crockery, especially plastic coffee cups, but then use an energy-efficient dishwasher.
- Use Fair Trade products and, possibly, organic foods for church meals as an example to all the congregation.
- Use local suppliers of seasonal foods where possible, avoiding over-packaged and imported foods.
- Seek to minimise food waste at church meals through skilled ordering and careful plating up but without compromising on hygiene standards.

5 The grounds

- Minimise the use of non-organic pesticides and weed-killers.
- Seek to make your churchyard or grounds wildlife friendly (nest boxes, wild-flower meadows, bee-friendly plants, rotting wood, etc.). Do not cut trees or hedges during the nesting season.
- Encourage a programme of tree, shrub and bulb planting.
- Set up colour-coded recycling bins for church members and the local community for items where there is no kerbside collection (eg. toner cartridges, fabrics).
- Set up compost bins for vegetable/garden matter and use the resulting material or offer it to church members for their gardens.
- Avoid large areas of hard surface that drain into the public sewer. Use soakaways.

6 Church members

- Appoint an environmental champion and/or group for your church. It needs someone to take a lead and feel the responsibility, or nothing sustainable will happen.
- Write a clear policy on such issues and seek to become a registered Eco Church.
- Book Christian speakers on environmental themes for groups and services. Encourage people to talk about sustainability in groups.
- Ensure that your programmes for children and teens include this subject, teaching Christian responsibility for God's creation. Enjoy creation in families through local walks and nature trails.
- Preach on God's creation and your responsibilities to it. Show people that this is not just jumping on a secular bandwagon but a responsibility for all God's people.
- Celebrate Harvest Thanksgiving and special environmental days in the calendar. Include these issues in your prayer diaries and service intercessions.
- Set up an annual Creation Sunday (or merge with Harvest) to consider widely how each person treats the planet and lives in God's world. This goes much deeper than issues such as recycling.
- Highlight organisations such as A Rocha, Green Christian, Operation Noah, Christian development agencies, denominational environmental officers.

7 Local and global mission

- Include at least one environmental mission agency or project in your global support schemes.
- Include too at least one development agency carrying out environmental projects or involved in climate change initiatives.
- Join in with local environmental groups so that churches are seen to be involved in the community on this vital issue. The churches should in fact be leading local campaigns for better use of our physical resources.
- Encourage members to take part in local pressure groups on eco issues and, in particular, on fossil-free investments.
- Encourage church members to lobby councillors and MPs on such issues. Let them write as church members so that those in local and national politics can see the Church at work.
- Organise local litter-picking activities so that Christians improve the quality of the local area. This could form part of your local outreach programme.

8 Individual responsibilities

- Encourage everyone to adopt similar initiatives to these at home and at work. Church sets the example for responsible discipleship in God's creation.
- Encourage parents to teach children about such issues and provide them with suitable materials from the various Christian eco agencies.

- Encourage all church members to walk or cycle to church rather than take a car wherever possible. Install secure bicycle racks to welcome cyclists.
- Organise lifts and car-sharing for church services and events to minimise use of car travel.
- Ask the church staff to follow these same guidelines in travelling to and on behalf of work.
- Encourage church members to use Freecycle or Freegle. Encourage all Christians to obtain second-hand items where this makes sense and, when no longer needed, to pass them on to others.

9 Simple living

- Determine as a church to live simply in this world, purchasing wisely and using your funds and other assets to God's glory, minimising waste and avoiding unnecessary luxury.
- Share your wealth with other Christians who do not have what you may too often take for granted, by means of global mission support.
- Teach your congregation to live more simply in this world, even though this runs counter to the prevailing consumerist culture, and to be generous in sharing what goods and wealth they have with others.
- Seek to help all to appreciate the wonderful world we have, putting our trust in our Lord and not in our material possessions, praising him for this world and seeking to bring it back towards the beauty of its created state.

Notes

- 1 The Anglican Church has as its fifth 'mark of mission': 'To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth'.
- 2 To write a church environmental policy, Google 'church environmental policies'. Do not copy any one you see but use them, with these notes, to write your own policy. This is a better way of going about this than simply copying a pro forma.
- 3 You will sometimes hear reference to LOAF. This stands for food that is Locally produced, Organically grown, Animal friendly, Fairly traded.
- 4 Resources available from, among many others, **A Rocha** including **Eco Church** (<https://arocha.org.uk>), **Green Christian** (<https://greenchristian.org.uk>), **Operation Noah** (on climate change) (<https://operationnoah.org>), **ChurchCare** (<http://www.churchcare.co.uk>) and development agencies such as **CAFOD**, **Christian Aid** and **Tearfund**.

These notes are available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index> then TN122. This item was originally written for the magazine, *Maintenance and Equipment News*.

See also Article A16, *Funding a capital project*, and Training Notes TN44, *The message of your buildings*, and TN117, *Building project preparations*.

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication and Administration. File TN122 under Administration.

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