



The
**United
Reformed
Church**

Eastern Synod

Environmental Policy

Caring for God's creation



1. Purpose

1.1. This policy is an agreed, documented statement of the United Reformed Church Eastern Synod's stance towards the environment.

1.2. It is the cornerstone of our intent, as a body of people committed to caring for God's Creation, who recognise the urgency of the climate emergency, and seeking God's justice and to live lightly upon the Earth in all of our operations, to:

- integrate our concern for environmental issues into the whole of our church life.
- act urgently to reduce carbon emissions across the whole of church life in order to reach net zero emissions of greenhouse gases by 2030.
- use the earth's resources wisely.
- enjoy, protect and where possible renew the natural environment.
- protect and increase biodiversity.

2. Introduction

2.1. As the Eastern Synod of the United Reformed 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 and central to our missional Discipleship.

2.2. We believe that God the Trinity is the transcendent and immanent source, sustenance, and salvation of all Creation.

2.3. We believe that we are an integral part of God's Creation, and that God commands us to act justly and in righteousness not only towards all humanity but to all creation.

2.4. We acknowledge that human activity has significantly contributed to the degradation of the Earth through both the climate emergency and the loss of biodiversity and that this is not the will of God. We believe that this limits the attainment of the fullness of life that God wills for all creation and is a sin for which we should seek forgiveness. We also recognise that this damage to the environment impacts heavily upon the poor and future generations and is part of the intrinsic injustice to which we bear witness.

3. Implementation

Eastern Synod affirms its pledge to shrink its carbon footprint and to strive to protect and restore the environment. Synod recognises that this is a demanding and collaborative endeavour and commits to providing all practicable assistance to churches. Synod also recognises that this pledge calls for both conversion on the part of its individual members and the transformation of internal structures.

3.1. Accordingly, Eastern Synod will:

a) encourage and support local churches to achieve Eco Church status and progress through the award levels, celebrating successes and sharing stories.

b) develop and implement plans to progress through the Eco Synod award levels (Bronze awarded June 2023)

c) Calculate and track the carbon footprint of key activities (such as energy use of buildings, travel and transport, and meetings)

- Develop and implement an action plan for making annual reductions in this carbon footprint in order to reach net zero emissions by 2030.

d) Appoint and support at least one or more 'Green Apostles' to monitor progress on creation care within the synod

e) Ensure that its buildings and land are environmentally friendly and offer grants to ensure that church premises are environmentally friendly

- include environmental and energy saving suggestions into quinquennial surveys of buildings.
- Investigate and, where possible, improve the levels of energy efficiency and environmental performance of buildings, including insulation, glazing, ventilation and heating and cooling systems, through refurbishment or replacement.
- Ensure any buildings purchased have an Energy Performance rating of C or above, or are upgraded immediately after purchase to achieve this rating.
- Implement measures to reduce energy use.
- Support the generation of renewable energy – either on our own buildings or by investing in and cooperating with local community projects.
- Choose green energy tariffs, from suppliers investing in new renewable energy generation, and pay to offset the carbon emissions of any unavoidable use of fossil fuels.

f) Reduce, where practicable, car and air travel for meetings through the use of videoconferencing. With due regard for distances and costs involved, individuals will be encouraged to use transport with minimum impact – to walk, cycle, use buses and trains, car-share and use electric and other energy-efficient vehicles where possible. Where there is no alternative to flying and the benefits out-weigh the environmental harm members will be encouraged as a temporary expedient to adopt the practice of carbon off-setting with respect to essential travel by making payments supporting sustainable projects, e.g., through Climate Stewards.

g) Not invest in fossil fuel companies whose total turnover is more than 10% derived from the extraction and/or supply of fossil fuels, including thermal coal, natural gas and oil. (These provisions reflect the Church's current agreed Ethical Investment guidelines)

h) Encourage churches to work in collaboration with ecumenical partners and with/initiate local transition and sustainability groups.

i) Promote an environmental theology and encourage their churches to receive training and support on issues of environmental care and to include these in the initial and on-going training of ministers, preachers, worship leaders and elders.

- Compile, promote and use resources for worship and teaching related to environmental themes.
- Provide, promote and use resources and campaigns that support churches and church members to reduce their environmental footprint.

j) Encourage church congregations to be more aware of, and ready to respond to, environmental issues in their area.

k) Encourage individual members of church congregations to be environmentally aware as part of their own lifestyle.

l) Campaign at a local and/or national level for policies that care for the environment.

m) Establish the habit of recording and celebrating environmental initiatives of churches in the Synod.