

South Western Synod Green Apostle Report

Report prepared by Robert Weston (Synod Green Apostle)

There's much progress being made across our Synod, as 45% of our churches are working towards the Eco Church awards. The Bronze award has been achieved by 19 churches, the Silver Award by 9 churches and the Gold Award by one church. These are important as they recognise that each church has been through a process of assessing what they are currently doing to reduce their carbon footprint and increase biodiversity. This helps a congregation to understand what further steps need to be taken.

The Synod has introduced a generous 50% grant scheme for eco projects and these are being used for a variety of projects. Here are just a few examples:

- * Trinity-Henleaze URC in Bristol are creating an eco garden around their church premises
- * Westfield URC in Bridgewater are adding more LED lighting, double glazed windows and cycle racks
- * Emmanuel URC, Haydon Wick are adding double glazed units to reduce energy loss.

Some eco projects may not require additional grant support, for example:

- * Lavington URC in Bideford is installing bird boxes, a bat box and a bug hotel
- * Portscatho United Church is carrying out a bat survey prior to roofing works

The high level of energy costs over the past two years have focussed all of our minds on the need to reduce energy loss. This reduces our heating costs and reduces our carbon emissions. Heating and lighting are the most significant sources of carbon emissions in our churches.

The Green Apostles, Robert Weston and Chris Baillie, are happy to advise and occasionally to visit church premises to help with environmental deliberations. We can also help with applications for synod eco grants.

Resolutions:

This meeting of the URC South Western Synod,

- A. adopts the updated Environmental Policy**
- B. encourages all churches to register with Eco Church Award scheme and to work through the awards from Bronze to Gold**
- C. commends the 50% eco grant scheme (25% for LEP) to all churches and encourages applications, which can be used to reduce carbon emissions or increase biodiversity**

URC South Western Synod Environmental Policy 2024

1. As the South Western Synod of the United Reformed Church, we affirm that caring for God's Creation and protecting the environment are fundamental Gospel commitments

and central to our Missional Discipleship, as outlined in the United Reformed Church Environmental Policy (updated in July 2022).

2. Synod acknowledges that humanity has and is causing grievous harm to the natural environment of which it is part and on which it depends. Humanity is now confronted by multiple environmental crises of its own making, chief of which are the climate emergency, the ecological emergency (loss of biodiversity), environmental sustainability and the pollution of sea, land and air. Synod recognises the urgent need to respond to these crises, working within the wider church and in partnership with other organisations, to interact with the planet in ways that are environmentally sustainable.
3. Synod recognises that the impact of these crises is being, and will be, felt hardest by the world's poorest nations, communities and people (including those within our own nation and area) and that it needs to give special attention to this injustice and this suffering, by generous giving, campaigning and supporting the vulnerable.
4. Synod recognises the significance of the 2021 UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, produced in preparation for COP26, which UN secretary general António Guterres described as a 'Code Red' for humanity and shows the vital need for the full implementation of the international agreement for the good of the planet.
5. Synod commits to shrink the Synod 'carbon footprint' (the total greenhouse gas emissions both from (a) all Synod and church activities and (b) those embodied in materials and equipment acquired, buildings and building work) to net zero. Synod recognises that this is a demanding and collaborative endeavour and commits to providing assistance to churches and groups of churches, including information about practical measures and potential grants. The following targets are broadly commensurate with the UK achieving net zero by 2045 and the world by 2055.
2030 target: to reduce the CO2 emissions from all Synod and church activities to net zero (with offsetting used as a last resort). **2040 target:** to reduce the total carbon footprint of the Synod (as defined above) to net zero. Achieving these targets will require audits by all local churches and Synod committees to assess the present carbon footprint and necessary actions. Synod will aim to have all audits completed and robust action plans in place by 2025.
6. Synod commits to seek to protect biodiversity by all means and to be vigorous in combating the causes of ecological harm, including pollution in its different forms (such as water, air, noise and light). Synod encourages (a) church members to find quality time to enjoy nature as part of their discipleship, to take practical actions as they are able, to protect and encourage biodiversity and to share in campaigning on these issues; and (b) local churches to consider how to best manage any land they have in ways beneficial to biodiversity.
7. Synod commits to work towards achieving Eco Synod Gold Award and urges all its local congregations to take an active part in the Eco Church programme, giving thanks to God for progress made by some churches and Eco Church awards gained.
8. Synod recognises that many young people are deeply concerned for the environment and seeks to listen to their voices and support and encourage them in activities and campaigns to address the climate emergency and the ecological emergency.

9. Synod seeks to support people of all ages in living joyfully, simply and responsibly as part of God's Creation and to the glory of God, Creator and Giver of life.
10. The Synod Green Apostles, working with others in the Synod, will promote this policy across the Synod, inviting all members and local churches to rise to the challenge.
11. All Synod Committees are asked to consider their role in promoting these commitments and to develop more proposals for the Synod in terms of strategy, actions, resources, grants, etc.