

# Becoming an Eco-Congregation

a suggested environmental check-up  
for parishes

Prepared by the Newcastle



**Diocesan  
Environmental  
Commission**

based on (and with permission from) the *Eco-Congregation Programme\** and the Commission for the Environment of the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn

***This document is offered as a suggested starting point for assessing ways in which parishes can review their environmental and sustainability interests and actions. Additional points and issues will no doubt emerge as the process develops. Comments, suggestions and feedback will be most welcome.***

\*Eco-Congregations is a partnership programme of 'Churches Together in Britain and Ireland' and 'ENCAMS'

This environmental check-up is designed to help parishes:

1. Identify and affirm their existing environmental ministry
2. Prioritise what they would like to do next and identify supportive resources
3. Assist the Diocesan Environmental Commission in further developing appropriate and relevant programmes and projects to support parishes in their environmental ministry

## 1. Life and Mission of the Church

In 1988 the Lambeth Conference adopted a model of mission for the church which has since been adopted by many denominations and ecumenical bodies as a guide to the way the church should be and act in our contemporary world. The model outlines five 'marks' for a healthy church existence:

**Mark 1:** To proclaim the good news of the Kingdom;

**Mark 2:** To teach, baptise and nurture new believers;

**Mark 3:** To respond to human need by loving service;

**Mark 4:** To seek to transform unjust structures of society;

**Mark 5:** To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation; to sustain and renew the life of the earth.

A church with a holistic mission should have activities related to each of the Five Marks.

In the past our church has been concerned very much with Marks 1-3 with progress being made in Mark 4. Across our Diocese we can see a whole range of activities that reflect and promote these aims. They remain central to our life because they are central to the Gospel story of God's love for the world in Jesus Christ.

In more recent years, the whole world has become aware of the threat that human population size and our industrial, economic, and leisure activities now pose for the world of nature, which is our home. The air, the water, the soil, the plants, the animals of our planet are all in their various ways showing distressing signs of suffering, degradation, and even death. Debates rage about how serious these threats are and what we ought to do about them. But almost no one these days doubts that we humans have a problem and a responsibility of great importance that touches upon the well-being of every creature on God's earth.

Hence the fifth Mark of mission has become prominent in the theology, mission and actions for many churches throughout the world. This document, *Becoming an eco-congregation*, is a first step in taking this seriously at the local level. It is a guide to help local congregations begin to think about what has been called 'the greening of the church'. It is *not* a theoretical textbook. Its aim is intensely practical. How may we act as the people of God so as to respect God's creation (that is, to celebrate the glory of God's world), repent of our sin towards God's creation (that is, to change our destructive and exploitative use of God's world), and work for the renewal of God's creation (that is, participate creatively in the regenerating life of God's Spirit in the world)?

Let us begin to think big, as our God is big! It is the *world* (the cosmos) that God created from the beginning (Genesis 1; John 1:1-4). It is the *world* that God so loved that he sent his Son Jesus Christ to bring it to life eternal (John 3:16). It is the *world* that God seeks to bring into fulfilment in Christ's eternal kingdom (Ephesians 1:3-10).

We humans have a tendency to see things mainly from our own perspective and in our own interests. This is pretty clear as we look at our political and economic life.

But it is also (sadly) true sometimes of our faith and prayer. We tend to think of God as *our* (human) God, and of salvation as the healing of *our* (human) lives, and of the hope of eternity as the future of *our* (human) being and meaning. And this is true, of course. The Word became *human* flesh and dwelt amongst us *humans* so that we might see the glory and salvation of God (John 1:14).

But the 'humanity of God', God's love for and participation in our human life and hope, does not exhaust the love and presence of God in the world. God is God of all creation. Christ is saviour of all being. The Holy Spirit is the Lord and giver of all life. Thus if we are to worship this God, follow this Christ, and give hospitality to this Spirit, we will find ourselves driven to concern for all God's world, but especially for those parts of God's world that are suffering and in danger. For this is the way God has shown love to us in Jesus Christ.

So: Not just me. Not just the Christian community. Not just the human race as a whole. But God's *whole creation* is the context and concern of the mission of Christian people. Of course, we must proclaim the gospel, and nurture believers, and be a loving presence for the needy, and work to transform unjust structures of our society. But today we need to widen our missionary vision further. We need to make real and telling the fifth Mark of our mission: to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and to sustain and renew the life of the earth.

But we cannot speak out on environmental matters if we have not got our own house in order! And starting to get our house in order, by our actions within each parish and as a diocese, is what this document is about.

At the Diocesan level, the Diocesan Environmental Commission has developed an overall aim of;

***encouraging and inspiring one another to become aware of issues affecting our environment and to take responsibility, both spiritually and practically, for our actions so that we can make a difference toward a sustainable future.***

The joint project with Samaritans aimed at creating awareness about the excessive use of supermarket plastic bags and encouraging the use of alternative calico bags, together with the regular ***Envirotopics*** column in the ***Encounter*** are initiatives undertaken so far by the Commission to progress this aim.

At the local level this document will allow individual parishes to assess their progress against the fifth Mark of a healthy church, assess whether care for the environment has sufficient weight within their parish's mission and to develop a practical plan of action for the future.

## **2. Worship**

Worship is the prime focus of Christian life from which the church's life and mission flow. This section is designed to help you identify how thankfulness and concern for God's creation are expressed in your worship:

**How regularly during the year are environmental concerns included in worship?**

Never

Occasional services

Frequently

e.g. Harvest Festival, Rogation Sunday,  
Creation Sunday (at beginning of spring), St Francis' Day (4<sup>th</sup> October),  
One World Week



## 5. Youth work

Churches undertake a range of youth work including Sunday focussed groups, church and open youth groups and mid-week uniformed organisations. If your church undertakes/is planning to develop youth work, review your existing activities and consider future possibilities:

**Have done**   **Could consider**

### Activities

- Hold a debate on environmental issues and personal responsibility
- Develop creation-care material to offer in worship
- Undertake a practical environmental/conservation project
- Arrange bushwalks
- Organise an environmentally focussed community event (with young people from a range of churches/organisations?)
- Assess how environmentally-friendly the parish is and make recommendations for action

## 6. All-age and adult education

Church is a place where people can grow in faith from cradle to grave. Relating key topics, like environmental issues, with Christian thinking can be inspirational and faith-affirming. What opportunities are or could be available for your church?

**Have done**   **Could do**   **Not current priority**

- Undertake an environmentally themed Bible study
- Invite a speaker on environmental issues
- Organise/participate in a creation-care lenten group

## 7. Church property

Good stewardship of energy and maintenance issues can both reduce your church's impact on the environment and save your church money, particularly in the long-term. Use the check-up to assess your church's current environmental stewardship of property (churches, halls, clergy housing) and the potential for developing this. (Remember you may need an assessment for each building if they are of different ages and states.)

**Have done**   **Con-sider**   **Not priority**

### General

- Audit of whole property register for functional use (include usage, fitness for purpose, size etc.)
- Develop forward plan to transform properties and uses (allowing more effective and environmentally efficient usage)
- Develop convenient procedures/instruction manual for routine environmental management (to be used by all building users)

**Have  
done**   **Con-  
sider**   **Not  
priority**

## **Energy- heating and light**

Monitor energy consumption regularly to check trends

Switch to 'low carbon intensity' energy sources (eg switch to gas, use solar heating, green electricity, etc)

Regularly service cooling and heating appliances

Consider ways to improve cooling and ventilation effectiveness

Choose appropriate sized rooms for activities

Timetable meetings to minimise heating/cooling use

Fit heating/cooling systems with timer and thermostatic controls

Commission an energy/environmental consultation (particularly useful if considering new heating/cooling systems or refurbishment of older systems)

Fit draft excluders around windows and doors

Install appropriate levels of insulation

Consider installing double glazing

Install solar passive designs in any new buildings or rebuilding programmes

Clean windows to maximise natural light

Encourage building users to switch off unnecessary lights and not leave items on stand-by (e.g. photocopier)

Replace cracked or broken windowpanes

Install low-energy light bulbs where appropriate

**Have  
done**   **Con-  
sider**   **Not  
priority**

## **Water**

Draft a routine water 'check-list' for each property

Install a water meter and monitor water consumption regularly (monthly?)

Check water outlets and fix any drips and leaks

Install water-saving devices e.g. dual flush toilets and low spray flow or auto turn-off taps, drip irrigation systems

Collect rainfall from down pipes for use in buildings and gardens

Use recycled/reclaimed material where appropriate

Choose timber from sustainably managed forests

## 8. Church management

Churches are responsible for the good stewardship of money and a range of consumables. Use this section to assess your church's existing good practice and identify issues for consideration and action:

Have done	Con-sider	Not priority	Financial management & purchasing policy
			Consider and be satisfied by the environmental policy of your bank
			Have an ethical investment policy for any savings
			Use environmentally-friendly cleaning materials & paint
			Purchase recycled paper (to boost demand for recycled products)
			Purchase fairly-traded products (e.g. tea and coffee)
			Use local suppliers where possible (so promoting a sustainable local economy and reducing transportation)

Have done	Con-sider	Not priority	Catering
			Use crockery rather than disposable cups and plates
			Use environmentally friendly cleaning products
			Use farmers' markets and other local suppliers (to promote local economy and reduce food miles)

Have done	Con-sider	Not priority	Waste minimisation
			Collection facilities for recycling items that church members, building users or local community can use (e.g. paper, spectacles, stamps, printer cartridges, shoes, foil)
			Hold jumble sales to raise funds, recycle goods and promote the availability of goods at affordable prices

## 9. Church land

Many churches are responsible for land varying in size from a tiny patch to a large acreage. Use this section to assess the community/visual/ environmental/ecological/ value of your church's plot and the potential to develop it:

Present	Potential to develop
	Native plant species and plants that attract wildlife (e.g. nest or roosting sites, native trees, shrubs, lichens, fungi, wildflowers)
	Weeds and plants that endanger the natural environment (e.g. remove weeds like Patterson's Curse and garden plants like rubber plants, privet and lantana)
	Other features to benefit wildlife (e.g., piles of leaves or rotting logs for insects, small mammals and reptiles, close cover for small birds)
	Visually attractive planting/features
	Area for prayer/contemplation/outdoor worship

Take part in improving other church properties (e.g. at the Fransiscan Monastery at Stroud)

## 10. Personal lifestyle

Use this section to assess what your church is currently doing to encourage individuals to green their lifestyle and the potential to develop this mission

**Have done**   **Con- sider**   **Not priority**

### **Greening personal lifestyle**

- Publish green tips in any church/parish magazine
- Promoting awareness through posters or information from environmental organisations (e.g. home energy audit)
- Encourage recycling by providing collection points or informing people of civic facilities

## 11. Community outreach

Churches can work with and through their local community to improve the quality of their neighbourhood and build links. Use this section to assess the links that your church already has in the local community and the potential for further development.

**Have done**   **Con- sider**   **Not priority**

### **Community outreach/mission**

- Establish links with community organisations with a view to sharing your environmental ministry (e.g. schools, youth groups, Clean-up Australia, catchment management groups, Landcare, other local environmental bodies)
- Advise building users of your environmental concerns and request that they utilise any environmental facilities
- Participate in local environmental initiatives or policy formation – your local Council may advise
- Draw on links that members have with environmental bodies e.g. Australian Conservation Foundation, Environment Centres, Wilderness Society, Friends of the Earth, etc
- Support or initiate community schemes with a positive environmental element (e.g Clean-up, LETS, Credit Union)

## 12. Overseas concerns

Living simply that others may simply live is a facet of Christian life. What does or could your church do to benefit the environment and people across the world?

**Have done**   **Con- sider**   **Not priority**

### **Community outreach/mission**

- Support the work of Christian development agencies (e.g. Christian Children's Fund, World Vision, Tearfund)
- Initiate or participate in activities in One World Week
- Promote fair trade (eg develop a church stall selling goods from Tradewinds etc)
- Explore environmental issues through any linked or twinned overseas community or church
- Support the work of international conservation/ environment agencies (e.g. A Rocha, WWF, Friends of the Earth)

# Churches environmental check-up: Action Plan

Use this template (or your own expanded version) to assess your existing environmental practise and identify future initiatives.

## Environmental Practice and Priorities

	Activities already undertaken	Future priorities/initiatives
Worship		
Theology		
Children's work		
Youth work		
Adult education		
Premises		
Finance		
Church land		
Personal lifestyle		
Local community		
Global concerns		

The Diocesan Environmental Commission is happy to advise on material for developing projects in any of these areas.

**As we develop our programme at the Diocesan level it would assist us if you could suggest the kind of material/programmes that we could provide/develop that would be helpful for you.**

The following English Eco-Congregation modules are also available free for parish use:

### **Grounding in Faith**

- **Module 2 Celebrating creation!**  
Ideas and resources for worship
- **Module 3 Creation and Christianity**  
Some green theological perspectives

### **Growing in Faith**

- **Module 4 Acorn to oaks**  
Ideas and activities for children's work
- **Module 5 Tread gently – go green**  
Ideas and activities for youth groups
- **Module 6 Exploring God's green word**  
An address and two sets of Bible Studies for house groups

### **Managing in Faith**

- **Module 7 Greening the cornerstone**  
Guidelines on caring for church premises
- **Module 8 Greening the purse strings**  
Management of financial, catering and purchasing matters
- **Module 9 Planting and conserving Eden**  
Practical ideas and advice to care for church grounds and land

### **Living in Faith**

- **Module 10 Green choices**  
Information and suggestions to green personal lifestyles
- **Module 11 Community matters**  
Ideas to help churches work with, through and for their local community
- **Module 12 Global neighbours**  
Sources and resources to help churches think globally and act locally.

### **Please note:**

- approval has been obtained for the use of these modules by Australian parishes
- modules are downloadable from: [www.encams.org/ecocongregation](http://www.encams.org/ecocongregation)
- Parishes may freely photocopy modules for use but must not sell them.

## **Who we are**

For more information about the Diocesan Environmental Commission and links to the other Australian Christian Environmental Activities visit the Envirotopics home page at [www.angdon.com](http://www.angdon.com)

For **more information** about the Eco-Congregation Partnership Programme, and to discover what English churches are doing, visit: [www.encams.org/ecocongregation](http://www.encams.org/ecocongregation)