

Eco-church Proposal to PCC, Feb 2021

Context: The Climate Emergency

The effects of climate change are well known – leading to the increased frequency and magnitude of extreme weather events from heatwaves, droughts, flooding, winter storms, hurricanes and wildfires, all of which have a disproportionate impact on the world's poorest. The scientific evidence that human activity is the main cause of climate change is overwhelming. To prevent global warming beyond 1.5°C, we need to reduce emissions by 7.6% every year to 2030.

In 2019, the UK government declared a climate emergency. The UK will be hosting the intergovernmental climate change conference (COP) in November 2021, seen by many as a key opportunity to take crucial decisions. Waves of school strikes, inspired by Greta Thunberg, have kept the issue of climate change regularly in the public eye.

But there are many other environmental issues of concern too. In September 2020, a BBC documentary by David Attenborough revealed that a million species are at risk of extinction, and that numbers of vertebrate animals have decreased by 60% since 1970. Everyday, around 8 million pieces of plastic make their way into the sea, threatening irreparable damage to our marine ecosystems.

A Cultural Moment: Build Back Better

The Covid-19 lockdown that began in Britain in March 2020 briefly led to empty roads, and the sound of birdsong heard on city streets. Although the lockdown has had no appreciable impact on the rate of global warming, it has given rise to a movement to 'Build Back Better' – dealing not only with the injustices in our economy, but the impact of our economy on climate change.

Church Response:

Stewardship of God's creation has been an imperative of God's people since the earliest pages of Genesis. The New Testament teaches that God's redemptive purposes encompass creation, which has been subjected to frustration and is longing for liberation from its bondage to decay (Romans 8). As Christians, we follow Jesus, who came to reconcile to himself all things, on earth and in heaven (Colossians 1).

This Christian imperative to care for creation places environmental activism firmly within the 5 Marks of Mission, first adopted by the Anglican Consultative Council back in 1984:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

In February 2020, the General Synod of the Church of England passed a resolution to achieve year-on-year reductions in carbon emissions, in order to become carbon neutral in our operations by 2030. This applies to all parishes, and so in June 2020, the St Thomas' Eco-Church Team was formed.

Members of the Eco-Church Team include:

Jon Scamman
Katharine Shentall
Richard Dawson
Tim Parsons

Kathy Barton
Kezia Howlett
Andrew Talks
Sofi Waterer

Sam Arputhuraj

Aims and Objectives of the St Thomas' Church Eco-Church Team

- **Theological Reflection:** The team will facilitate opportunities for church members to encounter distinctively Christian theological and missional perspectives on creation care.
- **Raise Awareness:** The team will work to raise awareness of environmental issues within the life of the church, encourage church members to become active in making lifestyle changes, and make church members aware of opportunities to campaign on environmental issues.
- **Eco-Church Awards:** The team will work to help St Thomas' Church to achieve the Bronze Eco-church Award Bronze in 2021, and the Silver level by 2023.
- **Carbon Neutral by 2030:** In line with the Church of England General Synod resolution from Feb 2020, the team will outline an action plan for St Thomas' Church to achieve year-on-year reductions in carbon emissions, in order to become carbon neutral in our operations (i.e. the church's activities over which the PCC has responsibility) by 2030.

First Steps: 2020

- The team completed the Eco-Church Survey as an audit to indicate where St Thomas Church is currently with regards to environmental issues. Results indicate that we are close to achieving the Bronze Level award, but with some additional work required with regards to our land usage. An award level is reached only when it is reached in all 5 categories.
 - Worship and Teaching: Silver (Score, 73 out of 110)
 - Buildings: Bronze (Score: 189 out of 490)
 - Land: No award (Score: 30 out of 135)
 - Community and Global Engagement: Silver (Score: 115 out of 230)
 - Lifestyle: Bronze (Score: 61 out of 160)
- The team has started a monthly Eco-church newsletter to church members, to raise awareness of ways to engage with environmental issues.
- The team has re-engaged with the Treading Lightly network of Lancaster eco-churches.
- The team has developed a set of recommendations for the PCC in the form of this proposal to be submitted in February 2021. This includes an action plan for the next three years.

Proposal to the PCC, February 2021

The Eco-church Team proposes the following to the PCC:

1. To declare a climate emergency, see p.3-4 (www.climateemergencytoolkit.com)
2. To commit the church to work to achieve the Eco- Church Bronze Award in 2021, and the Eco-Church Silver Award by 2023 (<https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk>) and donate £125 to support the work of Arocha Eco-Church in 2021
3. To work to achieve year-on-year reductions in carbon emission, in order to become carbon-neutral in the church's operations by 2030. (www.churchofengland.org/about/policy-and-thinking/our-views/environment-and-climate-change/about-our-environment-1)
4. To adopt the proposed Eco-Church Annual Action Plan and work to implement it, reviewing the plan and adapting it as necessary (pp.5-7)

Declaring a Climate Emergency

A number of Christian organisations including Tearfund, A Rocha, Christian Aid, and the Church of England have recently set up a Climate Emergency Toolkit website, www.climateemergencytoolkit.com

This recommends three steps to help churches engage with climate change issues:

- **Prepare** by starting the conversation about the climate emergency and beginning to plan your response;
- **Declare** or recognise an emergency in a way that engages your community and amplifies the need for leaders everywhere to act;
- **Impact** widely by partnering with your local community and speak up for change together.

In the Climate Emergency Toolkit, the reasons to declare a Climate Emergency are helpfully outlined in this way (also available on p.10 of the attached PDF).

Declare.

Recognise or declare an emergency in a way that engages your community and amplifies the need for leaders everywhere to act.



What is a declaration?

A declaration is a clear, public and formal announcement. By declaring or recognising the climate emergency, you're communicating to your members and wider community that your church or organisation understands the urgency of climate change and commits to taking action. It also invites your community to join you on that journey.

- It's a clear announcement to make sure everyone in your congregation or organisation is aware and invited to play their part.
- It's a public announcement, perhaps on your social media, through a press release or an email to other churches and local institutions.
- It's a formal statement from your governing body – whether that's your eldership, PCC, members, trustees or other form of leadership team.

Why Declare?

The language of 'emergency' has gained a lot of traction over the past couple of years because it communicates both the scale and urgency of the climate crisis.

Making a declaration, or formally recognising the emergency, unites us with a growing movement of citizens, councils, businesses and organisations who are doing the same. It publicly communicates your commitment to pursuing justice and loving your global neighbours who are already facing the worst of the climate emergency.

Your public statement also has a positive impact way beyond your own congregation. By speaking up together, you will be contributing to the growing movement of people calling for much faster action from local institutions and national governments. This is vital in the coming year as the UK will be hosting leaders from around the world for the UN's climate talks (COP26) in November 2021.

By speaking up prophetically together, we are increasing public understanding of how urgent this is, inspiring people to play their part, and encouraging national leaders to act with the necessary ambition.

Recognise, Declare or Acknowledge?

Some churches will choose to declare an emergency as this is commonly used language by councils, businesses and governments. Others will prefer to 'recognise' or 'acknowledge' the emergency, emphasising that your role is to recognise the validity of the science and the crisis at hand. What's crucial is making a statement that leaves people in no doubt about the situation we're facing, and engaging them in meaningful, empowering action as a result.

Councils, businesses, universities, churches and governments have declared or recognised a climate emergency. Check out the map to see how many places around the world have done so already.



Climate Emergency Declaration for St Thomas' Church

On the basis that:

1. The world is facing a severe crisis of environmental degradation and climate change that affects our ability to sustain human civilisation in its present form;
2. The main cause of the crisis is human activity;
3. The crisis is inextricably linked to global injustices and inequality;
4. The crisis indicates a failure of human beings to follow God's mandate to care for the world and to seek justice among its peoples;

We, the leaders of St Thomas' Church, publicly declare a Climate Emergency, and commit ourselves to:

1. Examine our lives individually and corporately in relation to this crisis, and seek to live faithfully to God;
2. Adopt an action plan, beginning in February 2021, to minimise our negative corporate impact on the environment and climate and to help restoration where possible;
3. Encourage our members to make relevant lifestyle changes appropriate to their circumstances;
4. Encourage action on this emergency in our neighbourhoods, workplaces and other spheres of activity;
5. Using whatever influence we may have to bring about positive actions by local and national government and by corporations.

St Thomas' Church Eco-Church Annual Action Plan

Year 1: 2021

- Ask PCC to adopt the Eco-church Proposal, and declare a climate emergency, explaining its importance to our mission as a church
- Complete Eco-Church Bronze Award

Worship and Teaching:

- Start an annual Climate Sunday, including youth and children's groups
- Include environmental concerns within intercessions
- Reduce or eliminate printed bulletins
- Reduce paper use in office, encourage scrap paper
- Communications to church membership
 - Monthly email newsletter
 - Noticeboard in new church centre
 - Section on church website

Buildings:

- Carry out Energy Audit, and develop action plan for St Thomas' Church to achieve year-on-year reductions in carbon emissions, in order to become carbon neutral in our operations by 2030.
- Use only renewable energy electricity tariffs, and green-source gas if possible. Consider off-setting energy use.
- Reduce carbon footprint: build new centre, install double glazing and solar panels, with modern levels of insulation
- Purchase and use only eco-friendly cleaning products
- Switch to recycled loo roll and recycled paper
- Develop and implement policy on management of security lighting

Land:

- Develop and implement a site plan designed around the new church centre e.g.
 - Planters around edges of the car park; rain barrel water butts and wildflower area – church garden team
 - Bug hotels, mini-ponds, bird feeders and bird boxes, hedgehog boxes– pre-school
 - Plant native trees as part of the HOTC project
 - Recycling bins – consider outside as well as inside
- Eliminate use of chemicals on garden areas
- Consider installing electric vehicle charge points in church car park.

Community and Global Engagement:

- Connect with Tread Lightly group of Lancaster Eco-churches
- Promote Tearfund Climate Activist network to church members, encourage sign-up
- Write to the church's banks and ask for their ethical investment portfolio

Lifestyles:

- Encourage reduction of car use, especially when coming to church – promote cycling and walking
- Encourage church members to 'reduce, re-use, recycle' as a way of life.

Year 2: 2022

Worship and Teaching:

- Offer Tearfund Climate Course as a Lent Course
- Hold an annual Climate Sunday, including youth and children's groups
- Include environmental concerns within intercessions
- Develop resource bank including worship songs, liturgy, Bible readings with creation theme
- Communications to church membership
 - Monthly email newsletter
 - Noticeboard in new church centre
 - Section on church website

Buildings:

- Install water-less urinals in main church
- Twin the church's bins and all toilets

Land:

- Install compost bin for garden waste, coffee grounds (if the compost can be used)
- Grow fruit and veg in window boxes (lettuce, herbs, fruit bushes like currants) – preschool
- Start an annual survey of the flora and fauna
- Develop a management plan for the church land and gardens

Community and Global Engagement:

- Register as a Fairtrade Church – committing to use Fairtrade wherever possible (at least tea, coffee, sugar) and share this with the congregation. Celebrate Fairtrade Fortnight
- Hold or publicise an event with the local council, MP, and local people (e.g. Transition City) to engage with local environmental issues.
- Promote national and global campaigns on environmental issues such as Tearfund's Rubbish Campaign

Lifestyles:

- Encourage a personal carbon footprint and environmental lifestyle audit – perhaps as part of a Lent course.
- Have a communal Christmas card
- Have a 'green event' like a swap or give/take which encourages people to reduce, re-use, recycle
- Support eco-diversity campaigns in the UK – e.g. bird, butterfly and bee counts, tree planting.

Year 3: 2023

- Complete Silver Eco-Church Award

Worship and Teaching:

- Hold an annual Climate Sunday, including youth and children's groups
- Include environmental concerns within intercessions
- Communications to church membership
 - Monthly email newsletter
 - Noticeboard in new church centre
 - Section on church website

Buildings:

- Review lighting in main church and switch lights to LED's or energy-saving equivalent wherever possible
- Eliminate disposables on-site if possible, or ensure they are compostable if they are necessary (e.g. for takeaway drinks or food).

Land:

- Open up community garden space with benches at the front of church, facing Penny St
- Consider joining Living Churchyards with another church, e.g. St John's Ellel

Community and Global Engagement

- Promote Eco-church to other local churches – through Treading Lightly we could see who is already involved, and try to engage those that aren't.
- Do a review of our investments, move to ethical investments if possible

Lifestyles:

- Promote fairtrade / ethical consumption and LOAF (Local, Organic, Animal Friendly and Fairtrade)
 - Encourage church members to take part in Earth Hour
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Years 4-10: Long term goals

- Review action plan towards becoming carbon neutral by 2030
- Install solar panels on church roof
- Improve glazing and insulation in main church in HOTC Phase 3, if possible