

"Shrinking the Footprint"

The Church of England Environment Strategy

"For the Church of the 21st Century, good ecology is not an optional extra but a matter of justice. It is therefore central to what it means to be a Christian" ... Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury.

The Archbishop expands on this in his foreword to "Sharing God's Planet - a Christian Vision for a Sustainable Future." He says, *"The Christian reason for regarding ecology as a matter of justice is that God's self-sharing love is what animates every object and structure and situation in the world. Responses to the world that are unaware of this are neither truthful nor sustainable. To be aware of this is to enter into relationship, for the self-sharing love of God is not simply something we admire, but something in which we fully participate. We are not consumers of what God has made; we are in communion with it."*

This sentiment and commitment to conserve and nurture the global environment is being taken up in a number of ways across the Anglican Communion. An example of local action was featured in the July 2006 Anglican news, which detailed energy efficiency achievements at Diocesan facilities.

In England, the Church of England General Synod has debated the issue of "Sharing God's Planet" and has called upon the whole national Church to engage with the issues of climate change and energy use.

A positive development from this is a national strategy, titled "Shrinking the Footprint," aimed at reducing the environmental impact of Church activities.

To give impetus to the "Shrinking the Footprint" strategy, the Church of England marked World Environment Day (5 June 2006) by taking a further step in its campaign to 'green' the Church. The challenge is to reduce the environmental impact of the Church at national level by 60 per cent by the year 2050. The term "40 per cent Church" is being used to headline this target.

The "Shrinking the Footprint" project adopted by the Church of England involves a number of achievable steps:

Step 1. Assess the current carbon footprint and audit activity

Step 2. Use energy more efficiently

Step 3. Switch to green energy

Step 4. Generate renewable energy

Step 5. Offset carbon emissions

Step 6. Review - take another look at the footprint and start again

In the first step, all parishes are being invited to carry out an audit of current energy uses so that a starting benchmark can be established. Once the size of the current 'carbon footprint' of the Church has been assessed, the campaign will introduce initiatives to shrink that footprint.

In practical terms, all dioceses in England have received an audit pack to help parishes assess current levels and types of energy consumption. Church people are being invited to promote discussion of the issues locally.

Step 2 proposes a range of relatively simple measures that can be adopted immediately. Cutting the amount of energy used and using the remainder better is the easiest and cheapest way to save energy and reduce carbon emissions. A check list of practical measures is provided in the Church of England's support material.

The third step advocates a switch to "green energy." As in Australia, the process of switching to a green energy electricity supply is relatively simple and is an immediate way to cut carbon emissions - an average household could save 1.5 tonnes of carbon dioxide every year.

Green energy is produced from renewable or sustainable sources, for example, wind turbines and hydro-electricity. Most electricity suppliers offer a "Green Tariff."

Step 4 of the Church of England's strategy calls for generation and use of renewable energy. The point is made that renewable energy is no less reliable than energy generated from more traditional sources and a commitment to renewable energy does not imply a dramatic change in lifestyle.

Australians are very familiar with one form of self-generated renewable energy, the use of solar hot water systems. Other possibilities involve more sophisticated renewable technologies, such as photovoltaic (PV) cell systems to generate electricity, wind turbines and ground source heat pumps.

Offsetting carbon emissions – Step 5 – suggests support for climate-friendly projects, products and activities that offset our impact on the environment. Projects of this nature include providing support for new sources of renewable energy, improving energy efficiency and restoring forests. In Britain and other countries there are a growing number of companies structured specifically to facilitate investment in climate-friendly projects.

The "Shrinking the Footprint" project of the Church of England is a remarkable country-wide initiative, not least because it gives a practical dimension to the Christian obligation to nurture and care for the environment. The Church of England's General Synod proposes to review progress with the "Footprint" project in 2008.

There is a good internet support site for the "Shrinking the Footprint" initiative. It is www.shrinkingthefootprint.cofe.anglican.org.