

Commission for the Environment

CHARTER

The Commission for the Environment was set up under a Synod Motion 974/01 and members appointed by the Bishop-in-Council in February 2002 with the following terms of reference:

The Diocesan Commission for the Environment will work to promote a Christian theology of the environment and a sense of responsibility for environmental issues, both at local and global levels. It will seek to provide objective guidance and direction on how the Church might creatively address the problems and challenges that face our communities.

The Commission will promote the Christian obligation to nurture and care for the environment at three levels in the Church:

- • Church as an institution or organisation.
- • Church as a Faith Community
- • Church as an influential party in the development of community and governmental attitudes and policies.

ACCESS

The Commission can be contacted through its web page

(<http://www.pastornet.net.au/envcomm/>)

or through its Chair Barry Richardson, 0262581195, barrysalt@bigpond.com.au

MEMBERSHIP

The members of the Commission are:

Barry Richardson (Chair)

Alexa Barr

Charles Body

Linda Chapman

Rod Corrigan

Graeme Garrett (on leave)

Bill Leane

Christine Ledger

Frances Marsdon (on leave)

Stephen Palethorpe

John Walker

During the year Roger Beale resigned from the Commission. We would like to thank Roger for his great contribution to the work of the Commission and for the wise advice he provided on so many issues.

ACTIVITIES

In a recent speech, the Archbishop of Canterbury said: “Worship is not only a matter of words, but is a foretaste of the God-related destiny of the world, that longed-for state of creation in which everything can be clearly seen as bearing God’s glory and love. And one signal and important aspect of sin is the refusal of human beings to undertake this calling, to refuse to act in a ‘priestly’ way towards the environment – to refuse to bless and give thanks, to refuse the right use of material things.”

“And the Church’s contribution has to consist not primarily or exclusively in public lobbying, though that is important, but in its showing forth the truth of creation’s relation with the creator and especially the role of human work and thought within that. This is what is exhibited every time the Eucharist is celebrated. But this puts a considerable challenge before congregations as well: how easy is it to see in our worshipping practice and our habitual life together both a celebration of God’s communication in what God has made and a process of conversion from the *Homo economicus* towards the new humanity which restores blessing and justice to their proper place? A recent and welcome development has been the growth of ‘eco-congregations’, local churches or church groups signing up to a set of environmentally responsible policies for their day to day work as individuals and as communities. But there is still a gap in speech and practice at the level of our institutions as a whole. If we commend contraction and convergence, should the churches undertake an ecological audit of some sort, to contribute to that change in the [perspective] that we are advocating?”

The Commission on the Environment over the past year has sought to transform such insights into action through its several programmes

Liturgy

The Bishop has agreed to designate the second Sunday in September as Creation Sunday. A service has been developed and distributed to Parishes for use on this day. It is hoped to make this an annual part of the teaching cycle of the liturgical year with different aspects of the relationship between Creator and creation emphasised in each of the three-year cycle. The date may need to be reviewed as other Australian dioceses celebrate on the Sunday nearest World Environment Day. St Francis feast day is also used.

Energy

In the ACT, the Commissions’ energy project, which aims to improve the energy efficiency of Diocesan agencies, has secured the cooperation of the key facilities as well as support from the Anglican Development Fund. The project will now proceed to a formal agreement and detailed design of capital works. These will be prepared over the months to October 2004 and physical works will commence soon thereafter.

The Commission is anxious that the commitment to energy improvement works by the facilities be promoted to the faith community and that the moral issues related to proper energy use be communicated to a wider audience. To do this we are proposing an “Outreach Project”. This will include a series of promotional initiatives including :

- ○ publication of an information brochure,
- ○ staging an open day at one of the participating facilities, and

- ○ a classroom based initiative for schools that relates the project to youth and develops the connections to life skills.

A funding application has been presented to the ACT Government and a decision is expected soon.

In NSW, our efforts to extend the ACT program have not been taken up. It is proposed that the Commission proceed with implementing the ACT projects and revisit the situation outside the ACT once statistics of actual cost savings and environmental benefits are at hand.

Education and information

An evening seminar series supported by the Commission and run by a joint group representing the Anglican, Roman Catholic, Uniting and Church of Christ churches in the ACT was held on the topic “*Global Warming: Christian Perspectives, Christian Responses*”. Speakers included representatives of the church in Kiribati, WCC, ACCC, ANU, St Marks and the Commission.

Talks on Christian approaches to Creation have been given to church groups including C3 Convo at Fitzroy Falls in June 2004

A monthly column has been published on environmental matters in *Anglican News*.

The Commission’s website has been refined and updated as needed.

Parish Audits

At its last session, Synod unanimously supported the proposal that an environmental audit, based on the English Eco-congregations model should be undertaken. The purposes of this audit were to assist parishes in reviewing their environmental behaviour as well as assist the Commission in identifying the needs of the Parishes in the work of the Commission. The questionnaire has been developed and distributed to Parishes. Unfortunately less than half of the Parishes have returned their questionnaires. This is a rather sad commentary on the attitude of parishes towards their responsibilities towards creation and to the decisions of Synod.

The Future

In the coming year we plan to continue developing liturgical material for use on Creation Sunday, to further develop our energy program, to finalise the Parish audits and begin the development of educational resources, possibly based on other modules of the Eco-congregation material. The possibility of visiting parishes or groups of parishes to give seminars or lead discussions is also being considered. An issue of particular concern to this Diocese is that of Christian responses to water management and use. The Commission will begin exploring this issue in the coming year.

FINANCES

The costs of the Commission are small and are met by the Diocese

Professor Barry Richardson (Chair)