

BECOMING AN ECO-CONGREGATION

The results of the Parish Environmental Checkups

Two years ago a questionnaire derived from the English Eco-congregation material was distributed to all Parishes with the support of Bishop and Synod. The primary aim was to assist parishes to assess their practices and goals against the sixth mark of mission: 'To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation: to sustain and renew the life of the earth.' Copies of the completed questionnaires were returned to the Commission for the Environment to assist it in developing a program to meet the needs of congregations.

The information provided by the twenty-one parishes that responded are summarised here. Clearly the main aim of the exercise was to help parishes reflect on their practice and planning in this area of their lives as a community. Your rector or parish council would have your parish's response if you would like to look at it.

Worship

Three parishes included environmental concerns frequently in their worship, most did so occasionally, two never. Involvement usually took the form of praise, thanksgiving and acknowledgement of our shortcomings. Interestingly ten parishes used outdoor or special venues services in their worship life, while five parishes never used hymns or songs about creation. Nine parishes included consideration of the theology of creation in their preaching programme. Only four parishes had access to Christian environmental books or resources.

Education programs

While sixteen parishes had children's programs, only seven included issues of creation or the environment in these programs. Ten parishes had youth programs but only four included an environmental component in their activities. Fifteen parishes support adult education programs, though none of these had used environmentally themed bible or lenten studies. Two had had an invited environmental speaker.

Property Management

Eight parishes had audited their properties and eleven intended to use recycled/reclaimed materials wherever appropriate; most would consider doing so.

Energy

While eleven parishes monitored their energy use, only five used 'low carbon intensity' energy sources (eg green power, solar heating). Eleven parishes used low energy light bulbs. Fourteen parishes either do or would consider using solar passive designs in any new building projects. All parishes avoid leaving machines on standby (eg photocopiers). Surprisingly only eleven parishes regularly service their heating/cooling systems.

Water

Only one parish had a routine water check-list. While effectively all parishes checked for dripping taps, only three had installed water-saving devices (eg dual flush toilets, auto turn off taps, drip irrigation).

Church Management

Financial

No parishes inquired into the green credentials of their bank and only seven had an ethical investment policy for savings.

Resources

Twelve used recycled paper but only three used fair-traded products. Crockery rather than disposable cups and plates were used by almost all parishes. Surprisingly, only nine parishes used environmentally friendly cleaning products, though most would consider doing so. Fifteen parishes attempted to recycle goods in some fashion.

Land

Twelve parishes use native plant species and most of the remainder would consider doing so. Eleven have an area for prayer/contemplation or outdoor worship and most of the remainder would consider developing such an area. Surprisingly thirteen parishes either do or would consider taking part in activities to improve other church properties.

Lifestyle

Three quarters of the parishes would consider publishing green tips or putting up posters etc on environmental issues. Nine parishes would consider establishing links with environmental groups in their region as part of their Christian outreach.

Overseas Concerns

All but one parish supports one or more Christian development agencies (eg World Vision) but no parish has links with any international Christian environmental group. Quite surprisingly only four parishes promote fair trade projects (eg Tradewinds).

In summary the result is a very spotty report card. We treat some matters responsibly but others seem to have been missed almost entirely. For example we support Christian development agencies but, unlike the Church in England, have little knowledge or interest in supporting fair trade. We use crockery rather than disposable cups but do not use green cleaning agents. We run adult education programs but do not consider Creation as a suitable topic for a course.

The Commission would very much like to hear from parishes and individuals as to what they see their needs are. Where would they like help or support? Sermon notes? Lists of suitable music? Sunday School material? Youth material? Adult education material? Assistance in developing effective water management?

The Commission is planning to offer parishes, or groups of parishes workshop days on topics related to Creation, we would be delighted to hear from groups that would like to be involved in such days. We can also provide speakers for presentations to groups or during services. We have also just completed preparing a course that looks at various issues in developing a Christian response to our place in Creation. This uses a mixture of biblical passages and other material.

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