

PLANS FROM CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

Around 20 Christian faith traditions have created their own plans special to their own strengths and outreach. Some are breathtakingly ambitious – the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania’s Northern Diocese, for example, intends to plant 8.5 million trees in the Kilimanjaro region to tackle serious deforestation – while others focus on encouraging their members to adopt lifestyle changes for long-term change and impact.

What most have in common is a recognition that climate change is a moral issue – that caring for God’s creation is as much an imperative for the faithful as prayer. These plans signify the growth of a movement that, in the words of the US interfaith ministry The Regeneration Project, “addresses ecological issues from theological roots”.

Many have widened this moral issue to include issues of justice and fairness. The Church of England, for example, recently launched the Climate Justice Fund, set up to compensate communities overseas suffering most from the impacts of climate change. The Lutheran Church of Norway says that as a major oil producer, Norway has a special responsibility to mitigate the effects of petroleum extraction and to protect vulnerable environments such as the Arctic. It intends to lobby the Norwegian Government to that effect.

A great many churches are incorporating a Creation Day or Creation Time festivals into their calendar of worship and contemplation, both to celebrate the beauty of God’s creation but also to focus attention on conservation and environmental issues. These festivals are part of wider moves to encourage people to make protecting and cherishing God’s creation part of living their faith.

Some of the plans from the poorest countries are deeply humbling – and challenging – to those of us in the richer, developed world. The Church of South India, for example, is urging its members to adopt environmental tithing: participants would “reduce their burden on the earth’s bounty” by producing 10 per cent less in waste and consuming 10 per cent less in non-renewable resources. The resulting financial savings would then be contributed to Earthcare efforts.

For their part, churches from the developed world are bringing their greater wealth and resources to collaborate with the churches in the developing world.

Forestry plays a big role in many plans, particularly from countries that are already experiencing the devastating effects of climate change. As well as the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania’s plan to plant 8.5 million trees, the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon and the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church have extensive tree-planting programmes, as does the Church of South India, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana, and the Orthodox Church of Poland.

As well as restoring degraded forests and developing tree nurseries, they also plan to protect existing trees by training volunteer fire wardens, encouraging the use of more efficient charcoal cookers and developing alternative income sources, such as bee keeping, to replace the harvesting of firewood.

The churches are also getting their own houses in order by ‘greening’ church buildings, both in terms of making them more energy efficient but also in switching to renewable energy systems. The Armenian Apostolic Church, for example, intends to promote solar power in Armenia by installing solar power systems in its church structures and some public buildings such as kindergartens and bath houses, while the Quakers in Britain are considering whether to make

some of their land available for commercial wind turbines.

Pilgrimages are still the world's biggest travel events. The faiths are looking at how to make pilgrimage more eco-friendly, both in terms of improving the carbon footprint of the sites themselves and also how to reduce the burden on environmentally fragile sacred ground.

And all are embarking on widespread education and awareness-raising programmes, both internally to train their own leaders and also externally, among their congregations and in millions of schools and youth programmes (the faiths are involved in half of all schools worldwide).

Here are just a few highlights from the plans, to give you an idea of their scope and ambition.

LONG TERM PLANS – MEDIA SUMMARY

ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC ORTHODOX CHURCH

Armenia was the first nation to adopt Christianity as a state religion in AD 301. The Armenian Apostolic Church is a worldwide church with its headquarters in Armenia in the Mother See of the Holy Echmiadzin.

Seven Year Plan

- Take a lead in promoting solar power, installing solar water heating systems in key church buildings as well as kindergarten schools and public baths to alleviate poverty and reduce tree cutting in forests;
- Plant trees to restore Sacred Green Spaces and green Church surroundings to tackle Armenia's acute deforestation; the Church also to participate in a plan to plant 1.5 million trees in memory of Armenian genocide victims;
- Establish an environmental education publishing unit to produce booklets for parishes and schools and establish a Green Theology research group;
- Broadcast twice-monthly 30-minute programmes on Green Theology on the Church's Shoghakat TV channel from 2010;
- Implement a Creation Day to help promote awareness of responsibility to the environment;
- Promote environmentally friendly tourism to churches, monasteries and holy sites.

CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES

Just under one sixth – one billion people – of the world's population are Catholic. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales is an assembly of English and Welsh bishops. According to the last UK census in 2001, there were 4.2 million Catholics in England and Wales – eight per cent of the population.

Seven Year Plan

Celebrate the beauty and power of creation through liturgy and music, with a specially designated Creation Time in the year;

- Develop a sense of awe and wonder for creation in young people and ground them in a spiritual awareness of the need to care for creation;
- Actively practice green living, gardening and food in all schools and places of education;
- Encourage everyone to understand that a simple lifestyle is not one of poverty but of restraint and finding joy outside consumerism;

- Promote environmentally sensitive pilgrimages and re-discover ancient routes that deepen our spiritual relationship with the natural world;
- Use Catholic media to inform and disseminate information about what is happening and how we can respond;
- Manage all Church land in an environmentally sensitive way and further promote an ethical purchasing policy.

CATHOLIC COALITION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

The Catholic Coalition on Climate Change is a partnership of 13 Catholic organisations in the US. A quarter of the United States' population is Catholic – approximately 70 million people – and the Church is a major provider of education, healthcare and charitable services.

Seven Year Plan

- Encourage the Church's parishes, schools, hospitals and facilities to become more energy efficient;
- Look at how to tailor Catholic investments to encourage renewable energy technology and support companies reducing their energy use and promoting sustainable energy;
- Promote the JustFaith Ministries, a US body which works with faith communities to empower members to care for the vulnerable and to become advocates for justice;
- Expand Catholic education to make teaching on climate change, the environment and the care for creation more central in schools and also in the training of priests, deacons and lay ministers;
- Sponsor two high-level scholars conferences within the next seven years to expand the evolving theology of stewardship and care for creation
- Encourage all to take the St Francis Pledge – a commitment to protect God's Creation and advocate on behalf of those who face the harshest impacts of global climate change.
- Work with other Catholic organisations and relief services to understand better the link between environment and poverty and to highlight environmental needs.
- Explore ways to integrate the themes of stewardship and creation into our liturgical life.

CHURCH OF ENGLAND

The Church of England is part of the worldwide Christian Church and comprises 43 dioceses with 13,000 parishes and 16,200 churches. There are 40 million official members in the UK and overseas and it is a major landowner and investor. It is also the Mother Church of the Anglican Communion, a worldwide family of churches located on every continent, with more than 70 million adherents in 38 provinces across 161 countries.

Seven Year Plan

- Reduce the Church's carbon footprint by 80 per cent by 2050 and 42 per cent by 2020, with systems for measuring and reporting on carbon footprints in every diocese by 2016;
- Encourage dioceses to link up in regional networks for action on the environment, such as investing in renewable energy, establishing environmental funds and implementing sustainable procurement of goods and services;
- Launch extensive 'education for sustainable development' programmes, with all 4,700 church schools to become sustainable schools by 2016;
- Hold annual Creation Time festivals and services of worship and prayer;
- In partnership with Tearfund, promote the Climate Justice Fund to compensate those communities overseas suffering most from the impacts of climate change; all dioceses to become Fair Trade partners before 2016;

- Celebrate the goodness of God's creation in all we do; respecting and cherishing God's world; seeking to banish the relentless pursuit of consumption for its own ends.

CHURCH OF SOUTH INDIA

The Church of South India has four million members in 21 dioceses stretching throughout India and northern Sri Lanka. It is a union of churches of varying traditions – Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Reformed – and was inaugurated in September 1947.

Seven Year Plan

- Large-scale planting of trees, vetiver, jatropha and mangroves on church land;
- Promotion of eco-friendly initiatives, such as fencing made from bamboo and vetiver instead of concrete compound walls in churches and schools; and community biogas plants using cow dung and human waste as cooking gas and for lighting in villages.
- Dioceses urged to love and protect nature, animals and plants, including domestic and farm animals;
- Church's environmental wing to be expanded with more eco-leadership and training;
- Dioceses instructed to recognise climate change as a moral issue;
- Church members urged to adopt environmental tithing: Tithers would reduce their burden on the earth's bounty by producing 10 per cent less in waste, consuming 10 per cent less in non-renewable resources, and contributing their financial savings to Earthcare efforts.
- All dioceses to celebrate an annual Environmental Festival, Ecology Sunday and Eco-Vision Month.

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF TANZANIA – NORTHERN DIOCESE

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania's Northern Diocese is in the Kilimanjaro Region on the slopes of Africa's highest mountain and has 400,000 believers. In recent decades, the area has seen great destruction of its environment, with de-forestation and drought leading to poor harvests, famine and rising poverty. The snow that has covered the top of Mount Kilimanjaro for the past 11,700 years is disappearing rapidly due to global warming, with significant implications for local people who depend on its water during dry seasons and monsoon failures

Seven Year Plan

- Implement an intensive tree planting campaign, with 8.5 million trees to create community forests across the region;
- Establish 152 tree nurseries– one in each parish – with two thirds of the estimated USD2.5 million raised locally and the rest in partnership with the US group Interfaith Power and Light.
- Implement community education on environmental conservation in Church schools, colleges and parishes.
- Encourage the use of economic charcoal cookers and non-wood alternatives, such as coffee and rice husks, to replace charcoal;
- To encourage green burials which neither use wooden coffins nor graves constructed by cement bricks and mortars;
- To introduce forest honey harvesting techniques to replace using fire to harvest honey.
- Encourage the use of compost and livestock manure instead of chemical fertilizer which in the long-term damages the soil.

EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana has more than 150,000 members in 133 districts in Ghana. It runs two teacher training colleges, nearly 500 schools, 197 kindergartens, eight

hospitals and clinics. It also runs the Evangelical Presbyterian University which specialises in agriculture and helps farmers in rural areas increase their productivity. Ghana is already suffering the impact of climate change, including poor and erratic rainfall leading to crop failures and malnutrition.

Seven Year Plan

- Raise awareness of climate change among its congregations, schools and public meetings, with particular emphasis on the need to conserve forest resources;
- Integrate the theme of climate change into worship, liturgy, preaching and the Church's theological institutions;
- Engage the government of Ghana through the Christian Council of Ghana to advocate policy that mitigates the effects of climate change;
- Restore degraded land by planting 200,000 trees in four areas and to create community woodlands with 100,000 seedlings;
- With the Ghana National Fire Service, to train 200 fire volunteers in reduce the incidence of bush fire; (in partnership with Interfaith Power and Light);
- Provide training workshops to provide skills in alternative livelihood programmes such as snail farming and bee keeping.

GREENFAITH

GreenFaith is a US-based, interfaith environmental coalition whose mission is to educate, inspire, equip and mobilise people of diverse religious traditions as environmental leaders. By 2025, it aims to have inspired more than one million individuals and thousands of religious institutions to alter fundamentally their relationship to the earth, their consumption habits and their participation in civil society.

Seven Year Plan

- Develop educational curricula on the environment for teens, adults and ordained leaders;
- Develop a series of sustainable consumption resources to enable faith communities to learn a religious basis for sustainable consumption, as well as practical strategies for reducing their own impact on the earth; .
- Develop a programme to train faith-based groups to participate in environmental justice advocacy and litigation, to address the substantial environmental health threats posed by pollution in poor US communities;
- Develop an outstanding online presence to enable people from diverse locations to learn, share resources, learn best practices and offer mutual support;
- Play a leading role in developing a US professional association of religious-environmentalism.
- Explore international collaboration and partnerships.

LUTHERAN CHURCH OF NORWAY

Around 85 per cent of Norwegians belong to the Church of Norway. Its 10 year plan calls for action from 2010 to 2017 – 2017 being an important year for the Church because it marks 500 years since Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door in Wittenberg.

10 Year Plan

- Launch a widespread sustainability reform programme to 'green' all parishes by 2017, and establish 'environmental lighthouse' churches.
- Promote "earthbound Christian practice" in the service of Creation and human beings;

- Celebrate Creation Day to promote greater environmental awareness, with Advent and Lent also used to focus on environmental involvement;
- Encourage church members as individuals to make active environmental choices in their daily lives;
- As a Church, to challenge the Norwegian Government to adopt a much more ambitious climate agreement, including radical cuts in the country's carbon emissions, much greater investment in renewable resources and action to protect the rainforest;
- Argue that as a major petroleum producer, Norway must accept its responsibility not to allow the industry to increase strain on vulnerable environments such as the Arctic and to make oil production carbon neutral as soon as possible.
- Lobby for a large proportion of the Government Pension Fund to be moved to environmentally-friendly investments and research.

JESUITS

The Society of Jesus is an order of priests and the largest male religious order in the Catholic Church. Jesuit priests and brothers work in 112 nations on six continents and are well known for their work in education, social justice and human rights, as well as their missionary work. They have been based in the Amazon region for hundreds of years and have many projects, outreach and influence throughout the region.

- Run retreat centres in an ecologically sensitive way, sourcing local, organic and fairtrade food, and auditing buildings to ensure a faith consistent use of assets;
- Set up a commission of Jesuits, religious and lay collaborators to write on the topic of Ignatian spirituality and the environment;
- Promote days of prayer and/or liturgy around the themes of sustainability and ecology for Jesuit communities, and encourage eco-retreats as part of all retreat centres;
- Assess the ecological footprint of Jesuit communities and adopt ways of conserving resources and implementing renewable energy sources;
- Commit our social centres and NGOs to be the first to recycle all paper, reduce carbon footprint, derive 35 per energy from renewables, offset air travel by planting trees and replace their fleet of cars with energy efficient ones;
- Establish a task force to promote action on the environment and launch a website later in 2009 to connect and inform Jesuits around the world about the environment;
- Designate a percentage of grants made by the Curia for projects relating to 'healing the land' or to a specifically designated environmental fund.

NEW PSALMIST BAPTIST CHURCH

The New Psalmist Baptist Church (NPBC) is a 110-year old, predominately African-American congregation in Baltimore, Maryland, USA, which attracts congregations of 7,500 to its services. In recent years, NPBC has expanded its understanding of its mission to empower disciples to encompass greater care for the physical environment. This plan builds on such activities, including its participation in clean water and medicine delivery projects in Kenya.

Seven Year Plan

- Ensure the church congregation is fully informed about the impact of the mismanagement of environmental resources and knows how to conserve energy and reduce their carbon footprint;
- Set up a business entrepreneurs institute to aid in making faith consistent investments;
- Improve the energy efficiency of the Church's new USD41 million edifice by reviewing lighting, heating, materials and energy efficiency strategies;.

- Ensure young people are educated to understand the science behind the impact of man's interaction with the natural world;
- Hold an annual Science Fair for primary and secondary school students to explore new, creative ideas to preserve our living planet and celebrate God's creation;
- Explore creating a garden at the new Church to promote the growing of food as a means of returning to a simpler lifestyle and becoming more self sufficient
- Expand partnerships with other organisations, including outreach work in Kenya on projects such as alternative sanitation systems in Nairobi;
- Hold annual Creation Celebration concerts and other festivals to honour the magnificence of creation.

OPERATION NOAH

Operation Noah is the only ecumenical faith-based body that focuses exclusively on climate change in the UK. Building on its media and advocacy work, it proposes the rolling out of an urgent new initiative to make Christian churches 'eco-cells' of transformation. It is asking members of congregations taking part to adopt the following action:

Seven Year Plan

- Undertake regular group theological study and contemplation on the relevance of faith, Creation and the crisis of climate change;
- Renounce flying, except in the case of personal or family emergency;
- Adopt sustainable transport, with walking or cycling to church the preferred option, and cars used only on a pooling basis;
- Undertake environmental audits of households and make eco-friendly improvements, plus adopt simple measures such as wearing extra woollies;
- Undertake similar environmental audits of church buildings;
- Change to energy suppliers that are 100 per cent committed to renewables;
- Exchange food-growing skills and source food locally;
- Prepare ways of communicating the relevance of the Christian faith to global warming;
- Challenge structural injustice – ecological, economic, social and political –in Britain and abroad.

ORTHODOX CHURCH OF POLAND

The Holy Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Poland has nearly half a million Orthodox Christians in 240 parishes throughout the country, mostly in eastern Poland. It gained its autocephalous status from the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1924 but has been established in Poland since the ninth century of the Christian Era.

Seven Year Plan

- Plant trees around Orthodox churches, churchyards and courtyards;
- Produce education material on the environment and conservation for public schools, Orthodox seminaries and sermons;
- Distribute practical guidelines on environmental protection to all Orthodox households during the traditional pastoral home visits after the Feast of the Epiphany;
- Use the World Day of Prayer for Creation to focus on the natural environment;
- Introduce eco-tourism rules and encourage greater participation in traditional walking pilgrimages to holy places;
- Print all Orthodox books and publications on environmentally friendly paper;

- Develop and promote ecotheology through Orthodox monasticism and through Orthodox theological education;
- Introduce new standards for waste, water and energy in key monasteries and the Warsaw Orthodox Theological Seminary, with geothermal heating installed in 2010/11.
- Revive and further develop seasonal ceremonies of blessings of farmland, as well as blessings of water, bread, wine, wheat and oil.

PATRIARCHATE OF ALEXANDRIA AND ALL AFRICA

The Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa – second in rank among all Orthodox Patriarchates with a jurisdiction extending to the whole of Africa – operates in 53 countries and has 10 million Orthodox believers.

Seven Year Plan

- Establish a new Environmental Centre of the Patriarchate – built using eco-friendly materials and using sustainable energy – in South Africa to promote the protection of the environment in Africa to facilitate education and action throughout Africa;
- Set up Environmental Awakening Centres in all localities, to co-ordinate green debates, awareness-raising and initiatives;
- September 1st to be designated a day dedicated to the environment and its protection, with special prayers for the whole of Creation;
- New Christian environmental education programmes to be developed for Sunday schools as well as public and church primary and secondary schools, and all dioceses and archdioceses to organize meetings on the environment;
- Young people to be encouraged to undertake environmental projects;
- Sermons and catechism to talk about the environment and the theology of Creation;
- Work with secular and government groups to co-ordinate action on environmental refugees; lobby to end the dumping of industrial waste in Africa from countries, and campaign for a taxation regime that favours eco-friendly initiatives over non renewable sources such as coal and petrol.

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CAMEROON

The Presbyterian Church (PCC) in Cameroon grew out of the Basel Mission Church in Kamerun, established in 1886 by Swiss evangelical missionaries. It gained its independence in 1957 and has since developed into one of the biggest indigenous Protestant mission organisations in Cameroon, with 1,364 congregations throughout the country. It is a major provider of healthcare, school and further education (including a rural agricultural programme) and runs a radio station.

Seven Year Plan

- Launch awareness-raising activities in the Church's schools, colleges and theological seminary, including regular sermons on the environment and climate change and Green Week celebrations in all PCC congregations and schools;
- Develop curricula on the environment and climate change for primary, secondary and university levels by 2012.
- Plant one million trees across the country, having identified species for different ecological zones, establish seedling nurseries and support community forests initiatives;
- Produce a documentary on the impact of climate change;
- Mobilise faith-based and civil society organisations to lobby the government on climate change action;
- Develop a PCC theology and liturgy on the environment;

- Encourage efficient use of water and exploitation of rain water harvesting, and promote sustainable harvesting of trees for fuel;
- Promote and enhance biological soil fertility methods and train farmers on sustainable agricultural systems.

THE REGENERATION PROJECT

The Regeneration Project (TRP) is a charitable corporation that seeks to deepen the relationship between ecology and faith and make environmental sustainability understood as a core American moral value. It has reached 500,000 people through the active participation of 4,000 congregations in all 50 states in its programs. Its current project is the Interfaith Power and Light campaign, which is focused on building a religious response to global warming through the promotion of energy efficiency, conservation, and renewable energy.

Five Year Plan

- Encourage congregations to be seen as an integral part of the solution to global warming;
- Encourage faith communities to lead by example and measurably reduce their own carbon footprints;
- Influence energy practices and policies on a local, state, and national level to reduce US greenhouse gas emissions to a safe level;
- Protect vulnerable communities from the impacts of climate change as well as the costs of mitigation and adaptation through further developing the Carbon Covenant project (eco-twinning communities of faith in the developing world with IPL congregations in the US);
- Strengthen the message of why a religious response to global warming is important and broaden the understanding of the role that the IPL campaign plays.

QUAKERS

The Religious Society of Friends was founded as a radical Christian movement in 17th century England. Today, around 25,000 people, known as Quakers, attend nearly 475 Quaker meetings in Britain. Quakers share a way of life, not a set of beliefs and sustainability is a core spiritual and strategic priority for Quakers in Britain.

Seven Year Plan

- Take the historic Quaker conference centre, Swarthmoor Hall, in Cumbria come 'off grid' in the next two to three years through on-site small-scale energy production;
- Seriously investigate the possibility of using farmland owned by Swarthmoor Hall for one or two commercial wind turbines, to be owned co-operatively by British Quakers;
- Implement a strict food policy at the main Quaker headquarters, Friends Hall in London, including total food recycling, a 35 per cent increase in organic produce and 40 per cent of food sourced from greater London by the end of 2012;
- Achieve at least 20 per cent reduction in carbon emissions from Friends Hall by 2013;
- Investigate how to improve the environmental impact of companies in which the Quakers have invested;
- Three-year programme of courses entitled 'Good Lives don't have to cost the Earth';
- Expand the 'Living Witness Project' with more expert 'resource people' to provide workshops and advice to Local Meetings about climate change;
- Quaker Peace and Social Witness to establish a 'Sustainability and Peace' programme exploring the links between conflict and climate change;

VINEYARD

The Seven Year Plan for American Evangelicalism was developed by members of Vineyard: A Community of Churches, with input from evangelical leaders in the faith-based environment movement, Creation Care. It is aimed at the broad-based American evangelical community. Evangelical Christians represent 28.6 per cent of the population, according to a 2004 Survey¹. Vineyard has 600 churches in the United States and more than 800 worldwide,.

Seven Year Plan

- Facilitate an annual Creation Care summit for evangelical leaders and a further high level event for pastors to inspire, equip and empower them to support creation care;
- Establish a Church Network Task Force to promote Creation Care within three influential American Evangelical Church Networks: Willow Creek Association, Saddleback Resources, and Vineyard: A Community of Churches;
- Promote Creation Care among younger American evangelicals;
- Develop a strategy to bridge the cultural divide between evangelicals who support action to mitigate human-caused climate change and those who are skeptical about the science;
- Mobilise the vast network of evangelical missionaries working among vulnerable people to help improve environmental conditions affecting those populations;
- Integrate evangelical concern for creation care with the much broader movement of growing evangelical concern for other justice issues.

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