

The Methodist Church in Ireland

A Policy Statement on the Environment, introductory paper

June 2020

1 Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to set out a revised policy statement on ecology and the environment for the approval of the Methodist Church in Ireland (MCI) conference June 2020.

The revised policy statement is set out as an appendix to this introductory paper and replaces the 2011 Environmental policy; 'Climate justice in the name of Christ Jesus'

2 The Global Problem

Global climate change was, during the latter half of the twentieth century, considered to be an environmental challenge. Over recent decades it has become recognised as a global environmental crisis. This change in perspective has come about on foot of a series of scientific reports the most prominent being those of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2015¹ and the United Nations Global Assessment on Biodiversity (UNGAB) 2019.² The impact of climate change on the environment, as set out in these and other major scientific reports has been found to be negative. The earth's climate is overheating and biodiversity is being radically depleted. In the most vulnerable areas of the world ecosystems are under serious threat. There is no doubt that we are facing an environmental crisis at the heart of which lie questions of human ecology and in particular political ecology.

However, the detailed science behind climate change is complex. A review of the scientific reports is beyond the scope of this paper and would in any case require expert explanation and comment.³ Suffice to say that six major aspects of global climate change have been identified as critical namely, sea levels are rising, ice caps are melting, ocean temperatures are rising, low lying islands are under threat, soil cycles are being disturbed and extreme weather conditions are intensifying e.g. hurricanes and forest fires.

The key message from the scientific reports warns that if we do not radically reduce global emissions of carbon dioxide and other atmospheric pollutants by 2030 to 2050, then the resulting increases in global temperature will further accelerate climate change to the point of the change processes becoming overwhelming and irreversible. As part of our response scientists strongly recommend that we attempt, for example, to eliminate the use of fossil

¹ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Report (2015)

² United Nations Global Assessment on Biodiversity Report (2019)

³ For a well informed and readable overview of the scientific background see Joseph Fromm, *Climate Change, What Everyone Needs to Know*, Oxford University Press, 2018.

fuels and non-biodegradable plastics. At best the scientific community is saying that there is time, though limited, to draw back from the worst case scenario.

3 Ireland

It has to be acknowledged that the global problem is simply out of reach for local Churches. What is needed is a sense of urgency closer to home. Something that is, in the first instance relevant to Ireland and can be further scaled down to what can be done locally.⁴

Concerning the island of Ireland the recommendations of two reports give a flavour of what is required by Government, Industry and local communities. The Irish Environmental Protection Agency report 2016⁵ highlights the following key areas for action.

Republic of Ireland

- Restore & Protect Water Quality - Implement measures that achieve ongoing improvements in the environmental status of water bodies from source to the sea.
- Sustainable Economic Activities - Integrate resource efficiency and environmental sustainability ideas and performance accounting across all economic sectors. Inform, engage and support communities in the protection and improvement of the environment.
- Nature & Wild Places - Protect pristine and wild places that act as biodiversity hubs, contribute to health and wellbeing and provide sustainable tourism opportunities.
- Community Engagement - Improve the tracking of plans and policies and the implementation and enforcement of environmental legislation to protect the environment. -

Northern Ireland

In July 2018, the Permanent Secretary of the Department for Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs (DAERA) in Northern Ireland requested the National Committee on Climate Change's advice on how Northern Ireland could reduce greenhouse gas emissions between now and 2030.

The Committee recommended⁶ that policymakers in Northern Ireland should focus on the following areas:

- There was a need for a route to market in the electricity sector for new low-cost intermittent renewables especially onshore wind.
- Emissions from agriculture have risen year on year since 2009 in Northern Ireland despite efficiency improvements in dairy farms. The post-CAP framework is an opportunity to more closely link financial support to agricultural emissions reduction and increased carbon sequestration, including afforestation.

⁴ See Eco-congregation Ireland website at www.ecocongregationireland.com

⁵ Republic of Ireland Environmental Protection Agency Report (2016)

⁶ Committee on Climate Change, *Reducing Emissions in Northern Ireland*, February (2019)

- The current rate of tree planting falls well short of meeting the Committee's recommendations for the fifth carbon budget or the average rate targeted in Northern Ireland's most recent Forestry Strategy.
- There is no policy support to incentivise consumers to install low-carbon heating, especially heat pumps, in homes off the gas grid. There is considerable potential to switch households off the gas grid from use of oil boilers to heat pumps.
- Policies to incentivise energy efficiency improvements in homes are largely targeted at low-income households. Northern Ireland should consider policy options to deliver an attractive package for able-to-pay householders aligned to trigger points (such as when a home is sold or renovated).
- There is a need for more rapid deployment of electric vehicles, tighter conventional vehicle standards, and inter-modal transport behaviour change.

We do not need to discuss the detail of the above points. We can note that there is a public policy context that can be supported by local Churches and with which local churches can engage. It also makes way for Churches to constructively challenge what is or is not happening in their local area. There is a prophetic role for Churches in the public square at national, regional and local levels, a role that can facilitate the raising of questions concerning environmental justice.

Language

The language used in discussing ecology and the environment can be confusing. We tend to use terms such as the environment, nature, landscape and ecology almost interchangeably. There has been a longstanding use of 'stewardship' as a term to indicate our essential role in relation to the earth and the world around us. However, it is notable that over recent years the term 'stewardship' has increasingly been replaced with the term 'Creation care'. An economic term is being replaced with a relational term. There is a need to understand, as part of our theological conversations, why this is or should be the case.

5 The Policy Statement

The revised policy statement on the environment is attached as an appendix to this paper. It is short but comprehensive and is submitted by the CSR for Conference approval. In practice its interpretation, expansion and detailed application lies with the CSR and local churches. The onus lies with the CSR and local churches to develop local environmental strategies using the policy statement and related resources as a framework for thinking and acting.

Review

It is recommended that the attached policy statement is reviewed every three years with a formal review by CSR no later than 2027.

The Methodist Church in Ireland

Environmental Policy

Environmental Policy Statement

This policy replaces the Environmental Policy 2011 'Climate Justice in the name of Christ Jesus'.

The Irish Methodist Conference 2019 directed each Circuit Executive within the connexion to have environmental issues as a standing item on their agenda.

The policy seeks to support and encourage Circuits and Societies to care for the earth by following sustainable practices, taking account of global and local environmental considerations, which include;

- the conservation and use of resources in the Church and at home;
- helping to develop more sustainable lifestyles;
- involvement in community initiatives and
- concern for action on global environmental issues .

The revised Policy sets out the Methodist Church in Ireland's statement of faith in respect of God's world and it makes clear commitments in how we care for all creation and pursue eco justice.

To help the Connexion to fulfil these commitments, the policy identifies objectives relating to six aspects of the environment. The objectives are considered relevant to individual lifestyles, the ongoing life of the Church and to the construction, maintenance and use of church buildings.

Progress against the objectives will be monitored through an electronic MCI property report which will be routinely completed by circuits.

Resources available through Eco Congregation Irelandⁱ will assist congregations to identify the changes they need to make. Accreditation as an eco -congregation is highly recommended and a worthy ambition.

The Council for Social Responsibility will review the policy on behalf of the General Committee every three years.

God's World – Statement of Faith

We love the world of God's creation. This love is not mere sentimental affection for nature (which the Bible nowhere demands) still less is it pantheistic worship of nature (which the bible expressly forbids) Rather it is the logical outworking of our love for God by caring for what belongs to him. 'The earth is the Lord's and everything in it' The earth is the property of the God we claim to love and obey. We care for the earth, most simply, because it belongs to the one we call Lordⁱⁱ

The earth is created, sustained and redeemed by Christ.ⁱⁱⁱ We cannot claim to love God while abusing what belongs to Christ by right of creation, redemption and inheritance. We care for the earth and responsibly use its abundant resources, not according to the rationale of the secular world, but for the Lord's sake. If Jesus is Lord of all the earth, we cannot separate our relationship to Christ from how we act in relation to the earth.^{iv}

'the Rescue preached in Bible takes place within a single, all-embracing community of: God, people, and earth.' Walter Burghardt

Such love for God's creation demands that we repent of our part in the destruction, waste and pollution of the earth's resources and our collusion in the toxic idolatry of consumerism. Instead, we commit ourselves to urgent and prophetic ecological responsibility.

Creation Care- Statements of Commitment

- 1.The Methodist Church in Ireland (MCI) affirms that Christian mission includes caring for God's earth and safeguarding the integrity of creation; we will endeavour to develop both the theology and practical implications of this on a continuing basis.
- 2.The MCI acknowledges the over-whelming scientific evidence for human-caused climate change and the consequent need for action both to mitigate its effects and adapt to them. We affirm the need to change our behaviour collectively and as individuals in order to achieve this.
- 3.The MCI affirms that Christian discipleship involves addressing injustice and working for the good of all, especially the poor. The injustice that those most affected by climate change have contributed least to it calls us to respond and to work for the protection of our common home.
4. The MCI is committed to the pursuit of eco-justice by continuing to support the work of Christian development agencies, supporting the work of international conservation and environmental agencies as appropriate and ensuring that all Church investments are socially, ethically and environmentally responsible, particularly in relation to the use of fossil fuels.
- 5.The Church is committed to engaging and collaborating with local communities, other churches and organizations and contributing to local environmental awareness activities.

Environmental Policy Objectives

Waste and Recycling

- Promote the "reduce, reuse and recycle" message to all users of church premises
- Direct to collection facilities for recycling items which can be used by church members or local community

- Encourage appropriate use of council / local authority recycle bins for church waste

Lighting and Energy

- Use energy saving bulbs
- All lights and stand -by devices to be turned off when rooms are not occupied
- Plan for high efficiency boilers and regular servicing
- Use renewable energy if possible e.g. solar panels
- Employ low cost electricity tariffs
- Install zoned, thermostatically controlled heating systems where possible
- Review standard of insulation, walls, roof space, double glazing

Water (excluding wastewater systems)

- Install water saving devices e.g. dual flush toilets
- Check water outlets for drips and leaks
- Fix de-scaling devices
- Read water meter and monitor consumption
- Prevent pollutants entering the drainage system

Purchasing Policy

- Purchase recycled paper, envelopes , ink cartridges etc
- Reduce paper use by using electronic communication where possible
- Eliminate the use of disposable cups and cutlery
- Use only ethically and environmentally aware suppliers e.g. cleaning materials, building stock, Fairtrade goods.
- Buy locally when possible

Use of Land external to Church or Manse

- Encourage wildlife friendly management of church land and property
- Publish green tips in church magazines
- Facilitate biodiversity and natural species are facilitated and not eradicated by cutting down trees etc
- Minimise use of pesticides and weedkillers

Travel

- Make every effort to reduce air pollution and energy consumption from car usage by avoidance of unnecessary travel and the use of energy efficient vehicles
- Promote car sharing where possible
- Support local initiatives for the expansion of good quality public transport, the provision of improved facilities for cyclists and pedestrians and local Green Travel Programmes.

Further reading and resources

www.arocha.org

www.christianaid.ie –

Song of the prophets:

a global theology

of climate change

www.christian-ecology.org

www.stemthetide.org.uk

creationcare.org

www.fairtrade.ie

<https://www.tearfund.ie/current-campaigns/renew-our-world/>

www.foe.ie

www.changesomething.ie

ⁱ www.ecocongregationireland.com

ⁱⁱ Deuteronomy 10:14; Psalm 24; Psalm 89:11; Psalm 95:4-5; 1 Corinthians 10:26

ⁱⁱⁱ Genesis 1; Isaiah 42:5; John 1:3; Romans 1:20; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1: 2-3; Hebrews 11:3

^{iv} Genesis 1:26; Leviticus 25:23-24; Ezekiel 34:2-4; Jeremiah 2:7; Mark 12:30-31; Revelation 11:18