

METHODIST CHURCH REPORTS

Special Report

Environmental Policy for the Methodist Church

Introduction

This policy seeks to identify principles to assist the Methodist Church in translating into action its affirmation that mission includes 'caring for the earth' in the life of the Church at national and local level. It has been prepared in the context of a Notice of Motion proposed at the 1998 Scarborough Conference and referred to the Connexional Team without debate: The Conference directs the Methodist Council to prepare a Draft Environmental Policy for the Methodist Church. Such a policy statement should relate to all relevant areas of the Church's life.

This statement should:

- i. spell out a commitment to act responsibly on matters of environmental concern
- ii. identify ways in which this commitment can be translated into action
- iii. identify the means by which progress can be measured

The Methodist Council to report to the Conference in 2000. The proposer and a small group of people drawn initially from the Darlington and Newcastle Districts have co-operated with the Secretary for International Affairs.

CARING FOR THE EARTH

1. The Methodist Church affirms that Christian mission includes caring for God's earth and will endeavour to develop both the theology and practical implications of this on a continuing basis.
2. The Biblical creation stories give human beings privilege and responsibility in relation to the earth and every living creature. We are called to be partners with the rest of creation and co-partners in the ongoing creative and renewing activity of God. Such partnership goes wrong when human beings act as if the whole earth were simply for their present benefit. God's way, revealed in the Bible and particularly in the life, death and resurrection of Christ, is a generous sharing of the divine love to serve the needs of God's creation until it reaches its fulfilment.
3. Christian mission includes sharing in putting right the relationships within God's creation that have gone wrong, and growing towards the balance and good stewardship envisaged in the Biblical vision of the world as it is meant to be.
4. The Methodist people are challenged and encouraged to care for the earth by following sustainable practice and taking into account global and local environmental considerations for present and future generations

- in the conservation and use of resources in the Church and at home
- in helping to develop more sustainable lifestyles
- in active involvement in Local Agenda 21* and other community initiatives
- in concerns for action on global environmental issues

5. To help the Methodist people to fulfil this commitment, this 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.

Action in working towards achievement of the objectives should have regard to:

- the challenge of meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs
- the potential for harnessing the skills, expertise and enthusiasm of the Methodist people
- the opportunities for co-operation and joint initiatives with other Churches or environmental initiatives and of the potential to contribute Methodist insights, including those arising from the connexional structure and shared ministry
- the effectiveness of the overall mission of the Church and the overall demands upon Methodist budgets
- the valuable contribution of small steps by individuals as well as major initiatives

6. The Connexional Team will keep this policy under review. Progress towards achievement of the principles and objectives will also be kept under review by the Methodist Council in relation to the work of the Connexional Team. Districts and Circuits will be encouraged to support and encourage the pursuit of the objectives at the local church level. For significant change to take place, monitoring of plans and targets will be essential at every level of the Church's life.

7. This policy contains a commitment to co-operation and joint initiatives with other Churches. To this end close contact is being maintained, in particular, with the Eco-Congregation Project. This project, based in Wigan, is jointly sponsored by Going for Green and the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland's Environmental Issues Network and is led by Rev Dr David Pickering. A pilot project, in which three Methodist churches in the Darlington District are involved, will be completed in early 2000 prior to the official launch of the Eco-Congregation project in September 2000. Part of the pilot phase will be the testing of the usefulness of material already available

i. The United Reformed Church's *Roots and Branches* pack.

ii. Christian Ecology Link's *Sustainability* pack, as well as the Christian Ecology Link Millennium Certificate Award Scheme.

iii. London and Southwark Diocese of the Church of England: *Caring for God's World (Practical Steps to becoming an Environmentally Friendly Church for the new Millennium)*

* *Agenda 21 /Local Agenda 21 - an agenda which developed out of the 1992 United Nations Earth Summit (held in Rio, Brazil). Agenda 21 means 'an agenda for the 21st century'. Its aim is to promote development, which respects the environment and the needs of future generations. Much of the responsibility for the development and implementation of Agenda 21 is at national level but each Local Authority is also required to develop a set of Local Agenda 21 policies promoting sustainable development. Local Authorities are required to consult people and groups and this is where the churches can play a role.*

Environmental Policy Objectives

Awareness and Commitment

- to promote awareness within Methodist people of these principles and objectives and of the values underlying them
- to ensure that Methodist Church employees and office holders are familiar with and implement this environmental commitment and its objectives
- to ensure that Methodist Church activities comply with all relevant environmental regulations

Energy and Water

- to ensure energy is used efficiently and wherever possible reduce its use
- to encourage the increased use of renewable energy
- to use water efficiently and with care
- to avoid pollutants entering the drainage system

Waste

- to reduce the production of material waste including unnecessary packaging
- to encourage re-use, repair and recycling of materials including organic waste
- to dispose of waste in a safe and responsible way

Materials and Resources

- to buy products which are made in accordance with the principle of using material in a sustainable way and to use locally-made goods where practicable
- to take into account the lifetime costs of materials when repairing, altering or rebuilding premises

- to maximise the proportion of paper used from sustainable sources and recycled materials
- to offer electronic communication as an alternative to paper for those who are suitably equipped
- to show concern for the environmental quality of food production systems and the equitable global distribution of food

Natural and Built Environment

- to take appropriate opportunities to conserve and enhance the natural and built environment including Methodist Heritage Sites
- to be aware of local planning developments
- to be sensitive to the impact of church activities on the local environment

Travel

- to make every effort to reduce air pollution and energy consumption resulting from the use of the car by avoidance of unnecessary travel and the use of energy efficient vehicles
- to explore undertaking the work of the Church in ways which reduce the need for travel particularly by car and allow for the possibility of and encourage access by public transport, cycle and on foot
- to share car transport where possible
- to support the expansion of good quality public transport, the provision of improved facilities for cyclists and pedestrians and local Green Travel Programmes.

RESOLUTIONS

2/1. The Conference adopts the policy 'caring for the Earth', endorses its policy objectives and urges individual Methodists and Methodist churches to become aware of these objectives and to integrate them both into individual lifestyles and into the ongoing life of the church especially in relation to the construction, maintenance and use of church buildings.

2/2. The Conference gives authority for the Environmental Policy, as it may from time to time be reviewed and amended, to be used by churches for submission in applications for grants from the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme.