

What churches/worship communities can do to become more environmentally friendly

What follows is a list of the sort of things some churches /worship communities have been doing or are planning to do to become greener. The list is extensive, but not exhaustive – once you start to think about the issues you will come up with many more examples – and when you do, please email me so that I can pass your ideas on to others!

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I have divided these suggestions into three basic areas:

- Worship / teaching / learning – covering all age groups
- Practical work around the church/worship space, in its grounds and associated with its management including finance
- Work in and for the local / global community including community co-operation and outreach

These are the three areas required for an Eco-Congregation award – but they work really well simply to cover most of the activities churches / worship communities will be able to engage with. For further ideas you could look on the Eco-Congregation website where you will find the 13 modules and plenty of ideas and examples to set the creative juices flowing!

As a starting point why not do the Church Check Up – Module 1 of the Eco-Congregation programme. Even if you don't want to go for an award, this is a good place to start, to see what you already do and to think what might be possible.

All the suggestions included here have come from the work of genuine churches / worship communities, so are tried and tested. Nothing is prescribed for an Eco-Congregation other than that the worshipping community embarks on a journey towards a lower carbon, more sustainable way of doing things which will hopefully also encourage individual members to make greener life-style choices

If you would like more details about how to approach any of the activities mentioned here, do email me and I can put you in touch with the churches who have shared these ideas with me, if I don't have the information myself.

Pam Martin February 2015

Worship / Teaching / Learning

- Include environmental issues in or, even better, make them the focus of intercessions / prayer groups / prayers for healing etc on a regular basis
- Use environmental issues / creation care as the focus of study groups and house groups / mission weekends
- Make the link between environmental problems / climate change and social justice around the world (Christian Aid has a lot of information on this – could be the focus of a service during Christian Aid Week)
- Organise a creation walk to help open people's eyes to the glories of the natural world. This can be a good focus for Good Friday walk – with natural world treasure hunt to find symbols through which to tell the Easter story (twigs=cross : red flowers/leaves=blood : opening buds=new life : stones=grave and door stone : white flowers=grave cloths : thorny twigs=crown of thorns : something dead=Christ crucified : something alive=Christ risen)
- Outdoor services / farm services etc at Rogation tide, Harvest, International Environment Day
- Harvest services with a specific theme of Creation Care
- Offering leaves during an environmental service which bear an environmental pledge for congregation members to staple on to a pledge tree. This can also be done with flowers on lolly sticks which are then 'planted' in a sand tray
- Create a display of books on environment topics for specific events
- Create a display of environmentally friendly products /cleaning materials for specific events.
- Some companies (eg Ecover) will send sample-sized bottles of washing up liquid which can be handed out at an environmental service or event
- Sunday School / Messy Church craft activity about the destruction of the rainforests to help the children learn how valuable they are.
- SU "Wastewatchers" holiday club materials
- One church wrote its own "Use Your Loaf" holiday club materials all about food / food miles / environmentally friendly production techniques / equitable sharing of resources etc. Full details on request!
- Share prayers and information from the Christian Ecology Link (CEL) / A Rocha / Green Christian / Christian Aid / Operation Noah with the congregation
- Church becomes a member of one or more of the above charities to support their work and receive regular information.
- Have a Creation Care board with up to date displays
- Make a point of choosing hymns and worship songs with an environmental theme
- Run an "Any Questions" event with a panel of 'experts' like the local waste officer, a church environment adviser, local MP, other committed people
- Offer to help Uniformed Organisations with badge work (gardening / wildlife / environment) / or the local school with their Eco-Schools work to make the link between the Bible and the science they learn in school. Members of the community are often warmly welcomed in school if they can help with gardening, growing veg, planting bulbs etc. Excellent church and school links can come out of this practical action.
- Regular preaching on environmental and social justice issues
- Pet Service
- Run Forest Church style services as a Fresh Expression

- Involve young people in planning AAW with an environmental theme
- 40 green lifestyle tips for Lent / 25 for Advent – seasonally themed in some instances!
- 40 social justice thoughts for the day for Lent / 25 for Advent
- Having available / handing out at appropriate services/activities leaflets on environmental issues / products / free samples etc
- Highlighting Fairtrade through a stall, teaching the children, putting up displays, offering an activity in the local school, cooking with children for a specific event eg Fairtrade baking for Mothering Sunday.
- Prepare a list of Fairtrade products available all year round in local shops and hand out to congregation and members of the wider community at an awareness-raising event
- Use Advent Carol Service with its theme of darkness to light, to retell the creation story and encourage creation care
- Run a Songs of Praise with an environmental theme and invite local organisations / businesses to say what they do to care for the environment – preferably held outside so encouraging people who would not normally go into church to attend – or even just to listen from the fringe.
- Use Christmas to put the child in the manger at the heart of the created universe
- Use Lent /Advent as an opportunity to preach on current ‘big issues’ and include Climate Change
- Holiday Club on the Celtic saints and their relationship with the created world
- Create “Experience Harvest” and “Experience Easter Outside” (Gloucester Diocese Jumping Fish Publications) tableaux for use with school children and the wider public
- Create prayer stations about the created world and using natural materials (Rock / Living Water / Thin Spaces / Autumn / New Life in Spring / trees and wood / the vine etc. etc) using them to make theological links
- Promote “Pray and Fast for Climate Change”
- Teach the children how to make lovely Mothering Sunday gifts by recycling / reusing waste (boxes, jars, magazines, tins, fabric etc)
- Design a special service for International Environment Day (First Sunday in June)
- Show films like “Do the Math” / “Home – the earth from above” / “The Age of Stupid” / “An inconvenient truth” / “Hope for Planet Earth” to as wide an audience as possible
- Run a mission weekend on “Poverty, Wealth and the Environment” or “Prosperity without Growth” or some other appropriate theme
- Involve young people in an environmental drama which they have written themselves instead of a sermon
- Use “Love life – live Lent” which frequently has environmental and social justice “thoughts” or actions
- Run prayer walks to raise people’s awareness of the beauty of the created world (part of Forest Church?)
- Have a section on the theology of creation care on the church website
- House group bible studies on environmental themes- eg “Trees” “Birds of the air” “Lilies of the field”
- Regular prayer support for the work of A Rocha / CEL / Christian Aid / Tearfund / the wildlife trusts
- Create a prayer diary for social justice and world church links – so that all are prayed for on a regular basis in intercessions

- Prayer for/ involvement in /fundraising for the work of The Woodland Trust / Water Aid / RSPB / Wildlife trusts
- Children's art work about creation / the seasons / the natural world /
- Produce a book about the flowers, insects, birds and animals which visit the church garden. Make it available to visitors.
- Use Christian Aid Lent and Advent materials
- Fellowship group series of four meetings on gardens – bible study / visit to members garden / discernment of suitable hymns and prayers for a celebratory service / creation walk
- Fellowship group series of four meetings on the theme of harvest – the problem of inequality and how it can be addressed
- Invite speaker from Local Authority recycling office to talk to church family about recycling and waste reduction.
- Put on public social event as above to include a wider range of the local community
- Have a library of ecological books available for borrowing
- Make sure that all members of the congregation understand about the leachate and methanogenesis involved in inappropriate products sent to landfill
- Invite different groups within the church to lead worship on environmental issues to ensure that all parts of the congregation have to address these issues
- Plan an eco-retreat / quiet day so that the congregation members have the space to really engage with the created world and to enter into a deeper relationship with it

Practical action in church and grounds

- In every possible context concentrate on REDUCE before reusing and recycling!
- Monitor your progress in all contexts.
- With all the suggestions below, publicise and explain the reasons for them to building users and visitors
- Change to a green provider of electricity (generated renewably)
- Monitor power use and check trends –trouble shoot / problem solve as a result
- Fit low energy lighting
- Do an energy audit – or have one professionally done
- Fit draft excluders to doors
- Use thermal lining on curtains
- Fit temporary internal secondary glazing – if allowed
- Keep windows clean to maximise natural light and reduce need for lights to be on
- Fit water hippos to all loos
- Check for dripping taps
- Turn off all appliances when not in use
- Never leave anything on stand-by
- Check investments and make sure they are ethically sound. Check especially that your church is not investing in fossil fuel companies. There is a drive towards disinvestment in such companies in most churches these days.

- Use environmentally friendly cleaning materials – such as Ecover / Bio. Be careful of supermarket products which are sometimes packaged to look as if they are ‘green’ but are not! Read the contents carefully and compare with Ecover and Bio products! You can get liquid soap, washing up liquid, cream cleaners, lino cleaners, wood polish, glass and mirror cleaners, floor cleaners, multi-purpose cleaners, washing powders etc.
- Use Fairtrade products whenever possible
- Use Fairtrade communion wine
- In all church catering try to stick to LOAF principles – **L**ocal / **O**rganic / **A**nimal friendly / **F**airtrade – publicise the fact and explain why
- Never use disposable cutlery or plates, bowls, cups – especially not polystyrene or plastic ones. If at all in exceptional circumstances then paper ones
- Offer recycling points in church / church hall facilities – especially for things not usually collected by local authority services eg: stamps (RSPB or Hospice movement), batteries, spectacles (World Vision International), foreign and old British coin (Children’s Society), Christmas cards / greetings cards (Woodlands Trust)
- Persuade congregation only to send one card each to all the church community – and display as part of your Christmas Decorations. Eg Get the children to make them into a Christmas tree shape on a board.
- Use lino rolls made of recycled paper (ASDA do the strongest and best! Also nouvelle and other supermarket own brands)
- At church events offer bric a brac / nearly new stalls so unwanted items can circulate and find a new home
- Run jumbles sales
- Install ramp access for wheelchairs and pushchairs
- Install baby changing facilities
- Install a loop system
- Consider not mowing the churchyard as frequently as up to now, to allow wild flowers to develop and set seed. Rake off all clipping after mowing to reduce the nitrogen content of the soil in order to increase the quantity of wild flowers – which like poor soils and don’t flourish in very fertile soils,
- Install bird boxes / bird feeders / a source of water at ground level for birds and other small animals
- Make a bug hotel from pallets piled up and the gaps filled with different media – straw, canes, pots, wood etc. Cover with a green roof of succulents for extra beauty!
- Leave log piles in unobtrusive places.
- Don’t keep the churchyard too tidy round the edges to leave hibernation places for small mammals and frogs, newts etc
- Plant native plants wherever possible – preferably single flowered (for pollinators) which will then set seed or produce berries for birds.
- Keep biodiversity levels as high as possible
- Never use pesticides and herbicides
- If appropriate allow part of the churchyard to revert to hay meadow – now in serious decline nationally and thought to be part of the problem with the declining number of pollinators
- Use local flowers and greenery in church rather than imported ones which often carry a considerable carbon footprint eg roses imported from Egypt! Pot plants are a good alternative if local flowers are not available. If you have to buy in flowers- try to buy Fairtrade ones.

Supermarkets stock these more frequently than they used to (Morrisons and ASDA – and maybe others).

- Set an example and always recycle waste paper. Try to use recycled paper for church-run events
- Install a digital projector and screen for orders of service to reduce the amount of paper use.
- Install water butts for watering plants and flowers in the church and church garden
- Use email wherever possible for communication within the parish / worshipping family
- Do local litter picks
- Help to keep 'unadopted' areas of the local community bright with bulbs and pollinator friendly flowers – preferably wild flowers. Try to create pollinator highways within a given area.
- Be seen to be walking or cycling within the local area – rather than using vehicles
- Actively promote Eco-Schools, Eco-Congregation and Transition Communities
- Use local produce and service providers as far as possible to keep the carbon footprint down
- Encourage church management team to attend courses on maintaining places of worship with care of the environment in mind
- Collect used greetings cards and make them into new cards to sell cheaply for church funds
- Create a compost corner both as a habitat and also to provide a natural soil improver for the church garden
- Keep Church maintenance up to scratch – clean out gutters / have boiler serviced regularly / research best heating solutions /
- Choose meeting rooms appropriate to the number attending to minimise heating
- Make sure that all church buildings including the vicarage / church hall / office etc are appropriately insulated and maintained and that the boiler if there is one is regularly serviced
- Install PVs
- Install ground source heat pump
- Install air source heat pump
- Install grey water harvesting technology for loo flushing
- Use spare graveyard capacity for a community garden / veg growing until it is needed
- Only ever use organic, peat free composts
- Consider environmental issues in all capital projects associated with any church building
- Have a green procurement policy
- Have an agreed and publicised church environmental policy
- Create a conservation area within the church grounds
- Display statistics for energy / water use in the hope that people will try to reduce their use
- By publicising environmental work – try to encourage more people to get involved
- Plant a "Bible Garden" using plants mentioned in the Bible that will also grow in this country and document it appropriately for the general public
- Involve young people and the wider community in making wildlife boxes and creating habitats in the church grounds
- Offer yew clippings from the churchyard to cancer drug manufacturers
- Remove all non-native wildflowers like Himalayan Balsam and Spanish bluebells to protect the native gene pool
- Worship in wellies – service + bring and share lunch + work in the church garden
- Create a spiritual garden – focused around some visual stimulus like a celtic cross perhaps – for public use

- Create a meditation garden for public use
- Create a Labyrinth – inside or outside
- Draw in non-regular church attenders by involving them in special services eg history of local farming (or whatever is appropriate to the local community)
- Start a film club showing ethical films
- Plan a “Green Christmas Fair” using home-made, locally sourced materials to take the consumerism out of Christmas
- Introduce slates with ethical / social justice / environmental sayings on them into the churchyard to give visitors something to think about
- Plan a self-guide walk round the churchyard –pointing out special features of interest to visitors
- Run a book exchange where people bring books which can be borrowed or swapped for other books
- Run a wildflower flower festival to help people to see the true beauty of wildflowers
- Include a small pond / bog garden in the church grounds to promote biodiversity
- Create Christmas decorations made from natural materials

Community and global outreach

- Green corner in parish magazine or local press
- Outdoor services lend themselves comfortably to creation care themes. If held on neutral territory they frequently attract in people who would not come into church
- Community collection of items for recycling not collected by the local authority – eg aluminium, tetrapaks, batteries. This will vary from area to area.
- Run a recycling event after Christmas to harvest stamps, Christmas cards, unwanted gifts and other things collected by charities. Makes the church look more relevant and brings in lots of people who wouldn't naturally come to church
- Run a free exchange event – inviting people to bring unwanted items (photos of larger things like furniture) which can be picked up free by someone who needs them. A sort of local freecycle.
- Respond to local and international appeals by fundraising or collecting goods – eg: Cumbria floods, Floods in developing countries (filling Aquaboxes) Japanese earthquake (filling Shelter boxes), Ethiopian / Sudanese drought and famine (fundraising) – and at all of these events make clear the connection between polluting western lifestyles and climate change.
- Display materials produced by A Rocha, CEL, Green Christian etc prominently in church and on its website
- Flag up local recycling possibilities in the locality (Parish magazine / community newsletter / local press etc)
- Use the village/community website to advertise environmental events and Eco-Congregation status
- Share good practice in all contacts with the local community eg church hall users or in work done in school / with uniformed organisations / mother and toddler group / Age UK events etc
- Promote Christian Aid's environmental and social justice work via fundraising events, services etc.
- Highlight One World Week
- Invite local press to cover environmental work done by the church / in the local area

- Collect unwanted garden tools and household items and donate them to local social enterprises or national / international charities
- Promote “The Real Easter Egg” and “The Real Advent Calendar”
- Encourage the use of virtual gifts eg toilets / solar cookers / cows / compost / worms or adopt the fundraising for this sort of thing as a church project
- Keep a regularly updated board in the church where environmental issues are explored and shared
- Use signage to explain environmental philosophy and information – choice of native plants / single flowered plants / berry bearing plants / use of organic peat free composts / list of wild flowers in churchyard / list of wildlife observed in church grounds
- Produce leaflet about “living Lightly” / “green living” / “reducing carbon footprint” for church visitors to pick up and take away
- Community apple pressing
- Encourage community groups to use church grounds once they are attuned to creation care principles and to contribute by planting bulbs/ trees for significant anniversaries etc
- Invite Ruth Valerio to preach / talk at / contribute to mission events
- Write regular articles for church magazine / local newsletter on lifestyle choices – reducing carbon footprint – general reducing – reusing - recycling – walking lightly
- Take every opportunity to publicise the environmental work done by churches – eg County Shows / agricultural shows / garden shows etc
- Persuade church members not to send Christmas cards to everyone – but one to all – use money saved to buy virtual gifts for developing countries
- Invite uniformed organisations, young people and members of the wider community to take part in the care of the church grounds / gardens and so to learn about environmentally friendly principles
- Encourage members of the church to take part in marches, demonstrations and campaigns run by Christian Aid and other organisations
- Run a public event like a coffee morning involving outside environmental agencies and speakers to spread the word
- Establish a Social Responsibility Group to make the links with social justice and environmental concerns as well as other ethical perspectives
- Establish information boards within the church ground about all aspects of creation care and about wildlife both flora and fauna
- Run Eco-Weekends eg Bird weekends where people are invited to bird spot and learn to identify different species – same for wild flowers, trees, mammals and other aspects of the natural world.
- Write to local MPs and MEPs to challenge them on environmental issues in the hope of influencing government policy