



Church of Christ Wembley Downs

Environment Policy

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Preamble

‘In the beginning God created...’.

So begins the first book of the bible.

Whilst there are those who would take the stories of Genesis literally, it would probably be fair to say that the majority of people in our church would take a longer view of the story of creation. Similarly there would be a majority that would accept that global warming is a reality, but some present a considered and reasonable case for the opposite. However, in both the issue of creation and the issue of global warming one is left to ask the same question – does it really matter which is correct?

In terms of our theological perspective – in other words, what we understand about God and the God-Human-Environment relationship – whether creation took several days or several billion years and whether our environment is changing due to human intervention or not, both are irrelevancies which, if we let them, colour two of our fundamental beliefs – God created, and cares about, the environment and, secondly, that we are in the image of God. What these fundamental truths tell us is that we have responsibility to future generations and also to God to look after and protect our environment.

The Genesis stories of creation and environmental texts such as Psalm 8 challenge us to find ways of becoming *pro-active* in dealing with an environmentally-challenged world instead of only being *reactive* or even worse – doing nothing.

Whilst recognising that Jesus proclaimed justice for the poor and marginalised and made little direct comment about the environment, we also recognise that environmental issues weren't as high on the agenda when the entire world population was limited to less than one hundred million, whereas now we are approaching 7 billion inhabitants of the planet Earth. Demand for resources has never been higher. Pressure on fragile eco-systems has never been greater.

As faithful followers of God, we accept that it is fundamental to our beliefs that we continually look for ways to care for the poor and the needy, that we show compassion and mercy and that we accept all peoples as equals, regardless of gender, race or creed. However, as followers of God, we don't seem to put as much emphasis on reaching out to, and caring for, a hurting environment. We proclaim and practice social-justice ad-infinitum, but what are we doing about eco-justice? Yet the two are inextricably bound together.

Here is a straight-forward question that you might hear asked at various environmental meetings and even in the media: *How many millions of people will be made destitute and become refugees because of rising sea-levels caused by climate change directly caused by the life-style choices people like you and I make every day?* ‘Social Justice’ might say ‘*How can we help the refugees and those made homeless by the rising sea-levels?*’ But Eco-justice might ask a more challenging question: ‘*How can we stop or limit the effects of the rising sea-levels?*’

In truth, there is probably little we can do to prevent the ice-caps from melting to some degree. Geological research shows that the ice caps have melted and reformed many times in the past.

There is of course debate as to whether the current rate of melting is exacerbated by human activity. However there are several *facts* that are indisputable regarding the impact of human activity on the environment.

It is a *fact* that many species of plant and animal are threatened by human activity. The rate of extinction of species is higher now than at any time in Earth History. This is due almost exclusively to the changing environment brought about by human activity. As God-worshippers, it is surely our responsibility to do whatever we can to protect plants, birds, fish and other animals as far as it is practically possible to do so.

Another *fact* is that water is becoming a scarce resource. Many countries are experiencing water shortage and there are social commentators who argue that the race for control of water resources could very-well become the catalyst for future global conflict. In achieving our social objectives of peace, love and tolerance, among many other objectives, it seems important that we do whatever we can to not only ensure food for all, but also to ensure drinkable water supplies for all.

A third *fact* is that fossil fuels are not an infinite resource. We are, according to most research, going to run out of oil, coal and gas in the near future – near being relative in the context of Earth-history. It took millions and millions of years to make, but fossil fuels almost definitely won't last a thousand more. Other minerals are also on a time-clock. So in economic terms alone, it would seem prudent to save them for as long as we can. But it would also seem prudent to bring pressure to bear on the relevant authorities to develop alternatives, so that our descendents have adequate energy resources.

Developing efficient and economical alternative energy sources would also seem to go to the heart of our social responsibilities. Oil, coal and gas are becoming more and more expensive as demand grows and supply dwindles. Food is also becoming more and more expensive as fuel costs rise. We really need to find alternative fuel sources, not as an after-thought but as a significant part of our efforts to help the poor and marginalised.

However you look at it, social justice and eco-justice are inextricably bound together.

Therefore, we as the Environmental Committee for the Church of Christ at Wembley Downs present the following, as the environmental policy of our church. Just as the sacraments of communion and baptism and an understanding of the cross are important elements of our faith, respect and consideration for the environment should also be an integral part of who we are as the Church of Christ Wembley Downs. Having said that, this should be a *living* policy. We are an 'open' church, so there is always room for questions, discussion and vigorous debate, and we would expect that such will be a healthy part of our theological, social, economic *and* environmental journey as followers of Jesus of Nazareth.

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1. Introduction

This Environmental Policy of Church of Christ Wembley Downs is divided into two sections. The first section contains general policy statements that we believe we should adhere to and that will govern the environmental direction of our church community.

The second contains more practical steps that we should take in adhering to our policy direction and achieving our environmental goals. We, as the Environmental Committee encourage all our members to follow these practical suggestions.

Whilst this policy is to be applied to our church community, we would encourage all members of our church community to follow this policy in their normal daily lives and to promote this policy wherever practical in the general community.

2. Policy

a. General

Where possible and practical, we will endeavour to protect and improve the environment by adopting activities and processes accordingly.

We will consider the environmental impact in any and all endeavours of this church over and above economic considerations, so far as this will not prevent the successful operation of our church community.

We will, as far as we are able, lobby relevant government authorities on environmental issues.

We will, as far as is practical, adopt a 'reuse, recycle, renew' approach to everything we do.

We will encourage healthy debate based on sound environmental, scientific, social, economic and theological principles and will promote tolerance of views different to our own.

We will ensure, through reading, discussion and prayer, that ecology becomes an essential element of our theology. We will endeavour to incorporate ecology into our services and activities.

b. Energy

We will aim to limit our use of energy, especially where fossil fuels are involved. We will promote alternative energy sources and where possible, will become energy self-sufficient.

c. Water

We will use water responsibly and where possible will re-use water. We will endeavour to limit our use of water and, where possible, will promote and achieve water self-sufficiency.

d. Chemicals

We recognise that many chemicals are harmful for the environment, and will, where practical, find natural alternatives for chemicals used for cleaning and single-use storage containers.

e. Green-house gasses

Whilst there is debate about the green-house effect, we recognise that the rate of green-house gasses being released into our atmosphere is higher, due to human activity, than it would otherwise be. We will, therefore, attempt wherever practical, and in accordance with our other policy objectives, to minimise the release of green-house gasses directly due to our activity.

f. Ecological Foot-print.

We undertake to responsibly reduce our ecological footprint.

g. Australian Products

Where it is practical and where it doesn't impinge on the objectives elsewhere in this policy, we will buy Australian products, and in particular local Western Australian products, with a view to ensuring the well-being of Australian producers and farmers, recognising the impact of transport costs on goods and the impact this has on the poor and marginalised and their ability to purchase quality products at reasonable prices.

Notwithstanding the above, we will promote the use of goods produced using economically-, socially- and environmentally-just practices.

3. Practical Strategies

We recommend that the **Board** adopt these policies on behalf of the congregation.:

a. General

- Purchase or obtain books that contain environmental tips for the Church Library.

b. Energy

- Lights: - Use energy efficient light fittings.
- Switch off appliances at wall when not in use.
- Place signs near taps, light switches and power outlets to encourage power saving.
- When the manse hot-water system needs replacing, replace with a solar system.
- Encourage use of natural lighting (e.g. pull curtains aside), and avoid unnecessary artificial light use. (note: neon lights which will be re-used within an hour should not be turned off).
- Kitchen - Encourage those washing-up to use leftover urn water where possible.
- Have the refrigerator defrosted regularly, or replace with a self-defrosting model.

c. Water Use

- Garden – continue mulching regularly.
- Monitor reticulation for efficient watering.
- Concentrate on water-wise plants.
- General – Maintain dual-flush toilets.
- In the future, consider installing waterless urinals. (Note: at the present time this has been determined to be infeasible.)
- Monitor and fix leaking taps.
- Consider a rain-water tank for the manse.

d. Chemicals

- Cleaning – buy and promote use of micro-fibre cloths for chemical free cleaning.
- Where chemicals are needed, use biodegradable, organic non-phosphorus alternatives.
- Use only non-toxic paints and other products on the church premises.

e. Green House gasses

- General – consider switching to green energy.
- Suggest car-pooling for congregation, to come to church and attend functions away from premises.

f. Ecological footprint.

- Buy recyclables where possible, e.g. toilet paper, photocopy paper made from recycled paper.
- Avoid consumerism, encourage “enough-ism”.
- Continue to promote recycling through garage sale, and clothes to welfare groups.
- Consider ways to help the community recycle more; provide advice and a clearing system if appropriate..
- Encourage members to borrow/share rather than buy. Foster an on-going “share:” system.
- Buy local where possible.
- Help the congregation understand Stirling Council’s One-Bin recycling program.

We recommend that the **Congregation** adopt these policies:

a. Energy efficiency.

- Have a home energy audit.
- Install energy-efficient lighting.
- Switch off appliances at wall when not in use.
- Insulate.
- Reduce shower-length.
- When your hot-water system needs replacing, replace with a solar system.
- Use natural lighting (e.g. pull curtains aside); avoid unnecessary artificial light use.
(note: neon lights which will be re-used within an hour should not be turned off).
- Use natural warming and cooling where possible rather than air-conditioning.
- Lower HWS temperature if possible.
- Wash clothes in cold water, using grey-water-friendly detergent where possible.
- Use sensor lights for outside lighting where possible.

b. Water use

- Garden – Use water-wise plants and mulching, minimize lawn use.
- Water with efficient reticulation.
- Install dual-flush toilets.
- Reduce shower length.
- Fix leaking taps.
- Consider rain-water and grey-water use as appropriate.

c. Chemicals

- Cleaning –use micro-fibre cloths for chemical free cleaning.
- Where chemicals are needed, use organic non-phosphorus alternatives.
- Use only non-toxic paints and other products around the home.
- Purchase and use “Spotless” booklet for chemical-free cleaning.
- Grow non-toxic plants, and use organic fertilizers and sprays in the garden.

d. Greenhouse gasses.

- Walk or catch public transport when practicable instead of driving.
- Consider switching to “green” energy.
- Car-pool when attending functions.
- When travelling, pay to offset carbon emissions.
- Try composting or worm-farming, or special self-composting bins..
- Next time you buy a car, consider low-energy alternatives.

e. Ecological footprint.

- Buy recyclables where possible, eg toilet paper, cards and writing paper, photocopy paper made from recycled paper.
- Try “enough-ism” rather than consumerism.
- Support recycling through garage sale, and clothes to welfare groups.
- Recycle batteries, clothes, computers, mobile phones, etc, through suggested facilities.
- Consider borrow/share rather than buy. What does my neighbour need that I could lend?
- Avoid unnecessary packaging and shop without plastic bags.
- Make optimum use of your council’s recycling program.
- Buy local whenever you can.

Notes:

1. In presenting this policy to the Board, we recognize the need for a strategy to promote it to the congregation and others. Some ideas included:
 - an EXPO, inviting the community
 - A “green Earth” service.
2. We commend the uniting Church’s “Green Church Handbook”. Maybe CoCWA could be persuaded to consider doing something similar.