

CHAMPIONING ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

LIFESTYLE

ECO  **CHURCH**
AN A ROCHA UK PROJECT



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WHY?

Embedding environmental sustainability into our individual and church lives requires us to change our thinking and behaviour. Change is challenging! Appointing an individual to champion change or lead a group sends a significant message that this is a priority area for your church.

An Eco Church group will also be a forum to share ideas, enable action and promote sustainable practices. Collating different skills and passions from volunteers, will enable the church to consider and act on all aspects of the Eco Church survey, for example some will be passionate about biodiversity in the church grounds, others about the way finances are invested.

Having a proactive lead facilitating regular engagement is key for keeping momentum going within the team and church life. A formally recognised 'Creation Care' or 'Eco Church' champion or group gives credibility to the work, allowing the church leadership to delegate in these defined areas.

HOW?

FIND OUT WHO IS INTERESTED

If you are just starting out, it can sometimes feel as if you are the only person passionate about the cause. This is often not the case! Sometimes putting out a notice in the newsheet or on Sunday is all it takes to find people who might be interested in getting involved. Think outside the box and don't be afraid to ask others and be intentional.

You don't only need to ask people who you already know are interested in environmental issues. For instance, you could approach those who lead the prayers on a Sunday to include issues of environmental justice as part of their prayers; what we pray for reflects (or becomes) what we are passionate about.



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TALK TO THE LEADERSHIP

Finding someone in the church leadership who is keen for the church to make progress in this area. If you are not the church leader, be patient as it can take time for the Eco Church voice to be heard properly by a governance body. Church leaders can be inundated with a plethora of requests from congregation members – most of which are good. Prioritising and finding space in a church timetable isn't always straight forward. Persevere and pray.

THINK ABOUT THE STRUCTURE

What is the best structure for your church to be effective in championing environmental sustainability?

- What is the route to ensure the church leadership is kept up to date? Are they represented in the group or do you need a monthly check-in meeting? This will be particularly important where decisions might be costly or where changes need to be made to management practices or the visual appearance of the church.
- Is it best to have someone to head up each area of the Eco Church survey (one who has an interest in buildings, another in global engagement and so on), or will you work collaboratively on all areas?
- What range of skills do you need? There will be a role for everyone. Great communication skills are helpful, working alongside those who prefer the behind the scenes work of collating data for a carbon footprint audit, and others who know about garden or land management.
- Having a co-ordinator (or leader) of the Eco Church 'group' will help you be organised and make the most of the time and talents.
- Do you want a coordinated group of enthusiastic people or a formal committee?



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SET YOUR PRIORITIES

There will be lots of knowledge and passions within the team. Tap into those resources to start work in areas where you find easy first steps.

Review the questionnaire to see where you are already well on the way towards an award and areas you might need more support.

ENCOURAGE ACTION

Create a group from across all areas of church life; children and youth teams, the worship group, or the welcome team. Having representatives across the whole church helps to embed and champion creation care into all areas of church life. Decisions to not buy plastic will mean the children's teams will use crayons instead of plastic felt tips and may well affect those doing any hospitality.

USE THE ECO CHURCH RESOURCES

Eco Church offers more than 70 resources across the five areas of the survey. Each resource is designed to help churches implement practical solutions to be more environmentally friendly in relation to a particular survey question. Use them to help you bring change. We also welcome feedback on what proves to be helpful and what else you'd like to see included.

Look to other local churches to exchange ideas and collaborate in Eco Church activities.

REMEMBER TO CELEBRATE

Celebration can be under-rated. Stop every now and then to recognise all that has been achieved. Eco Church has three award levels – Bronze, Silver and Gold. You may well be able to achieve a Bronze award quite quickly. Publicly marking that achievement gives an opportunity to inform the congregation and celebrate with them. It's very likely you will also garner more support and others will join you in reaching Silver or Gold.



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LONGER READS & OTHER RESOURCES

Climate Justice for All, a Methodist family, climate focussed, youth-led global campaign, share their top tips here:

- How to become a Bronze Eco Church (focussing on cheaper/easier targets): <http://climatejustice4all.com/2021/06/21/bronze-eco-church/>
- How to become a Gold Eco Church: <http://climatejustice4all.com/2021/10/01/gold-eco-church/>

CASE STUDIES

Be inspired by Joe Griffiths, from St Asaph Youth Forum. He is keen to 'green the church' saying, "Our actions should be witness to our love for God and His greater love for us; that includes sustainably stewarding His creation.":

<https://www.churchinwales.org.uk/en/about-us/our-campaigns/darkness-light/torch-bearers/joseff-griffith-eco-church-champion/>

See the separate case study from Holy Trinity Richmond explaining how they started a 'Creation Care' group.