

What can my church do do?

First we should congratulate those Birmingham churches who have already signed up to EcoChurch, especially those who have already gained awards.

For those who haven't yet done so, please check out:

ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/
where you will find clear information on how you can register. If you'd like to talk about what is involved in more detail, then feel free to contact me, initially by email (address below).

Whether you are currently involved or not, there are **two special Sundays** which your church could celebrate this year.

Environment Sunday

The Sunday which falls closest to UN World Environment Day (June 5th) has long been a focus for caring for creation. Each year A Rocha produces a special resource pack for those leading worship.

Climate Sunday 2021

This year Churches Together in Britain has set up the Climate Sunday initiative. It is calling on all local churches across Great Britain & Ireland to hold a climate-focused service on any Sunday before COP26 (November 2021). Their vision is to leave a lasting legacy of thousands of churches better equipped to address this critical issue as part of their

discipleship and mission as well as making a significant contribution to civil society efforts to secure adequate national and international action at the COP26 conference.

For more information contact:
www.climatesunday.org/

The CEE Bill

Whilst much of the current focus is rightly on the Climate Crisis, at the same time we are facing increasingly serious threats to the natural world. Bristol was the first city to formally declare an Ecological Emergency and establish a strategic plan to address it. See more at : *One-City-Ecological-Emergency-Strategy-28.09.20.pdf*

A recent UN Report by 145 experts from 50 countries finds nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history with more than 1 million species of animals and plants now threatened with extinction, many within decades. A similar UK *State of Nature Report* finds that 41% of UK species are in decline and more than a quarter of UK mammals face extinction unless urgent action is taken.

The Private Members' Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill now has the support of more than 100 MPs across 8 political parties.

Surely concern for nature and the natural world is something all our churches should be supporting.

For more information contact:

Mark Boulton, EcoCoordinator on ecodistrict2021@gmail.com

EcoDistrictNews

May 2021

The **EcoDistrict** scheme was developed by the Methodist Church in close cooperation with A Rocha, the Christian organisation which operates the EcoChurch Programme throughout England and Wales. The programme encourages every church to incorporate 'Caring for Creation' into all their activities and is now enshrined in the Service Section of the Methodist Way of Life. Birmingham became the first Methodist District to sign up to the scheme in England and had already started to discuss the way forward just before the arrival of the pandemic.

Summary of progress to date

Following the appointment of an EcoDistrict Coordinator in January 2021, a simple questionnaire with an explanatory email was sent out to all **137 churches** to determine the current status of EcoChurch throughout the District. This was distributed via Superintendents and Circuit Stewards but to date (May 2021) only received **31 responses** have been received.

Since the survey took place in the midst of the pandemic, it is likely that some churches may not have received it, or put it on hold.

Almost all replies supported the idea of Birmingham working towards becoming an EcoDistrict. If you have replied, thank you! If not please let us know and we will send the questionnaire again.

To date we are aware that **10 churches** have already received EcoAwards including **1 Gold** with Stratford Methodist Church becoming the first in the country to achieve this. There are also **7 Silver** and **2 Bronze** awards.

Six other churches have already signed up and if these are able to achieve their first Award, and we make one or two other changes at District level, we will be able to apply for a Bronze EcoDistrict Award. More than **12 churches** indicated they would **like some more help**.

It would be very helpful if those who have already replied could check whether neighbouring churches in their Circuit are aware of the EcoDistrict initiative.

Why sign up to EcoChurch?

EcoChurch is an award scheme for churches in England and Wales who want to demonstrate that the gospel is good news for God's earth and that caring for creation as an integral part of loving their neighbours and following God faithfully. EcoChurch links closely to the Methodist Way of Life which encourages us to help people in our communities and beyond, to care for creation and all God's gifts and to challenge injustice.

These commitments are inextricably linked to the increasingly urgent global climate and ecological emergencies; they also offer a new way of being 'churches without walls' - providing an ideal opportunity of expressing our faith by action in our communities.

EcoChurch in action

Stratford Methodist Church

As the first Methodist Church to receive the new EcoChurch Gold Award, Stratford is setting the pace! It's refurbished buildings generate significant amounts of electricity from solar panels and the building is kept warm by a ground source heat pump. Together with improvements in lighting, they have more than halved their carbon footprint. They are also rightly proud of their wildlife garden and their close links with the community.

Mickleton Methodist Church

This small rural church with only a dozen elderly members has gained a Silver Award. They have changed all their light bulbs & electricity supplier, are big into recycling and have made the unused lawn into a spectacular 'Three Bees' community wildlife garden.

Streetly Methodist Church

This Silver Award Church has a wood pellet burner fuelling its heating system and encourages

recycling. It has cleared a small woodland area of non-native species and uses it to host outdoor services and regular activities by non-church organisations. It has an Eco Garden where children and adults grow flowers and vegetables and a natural play area that is open to the public. It holds an annual Eco Festival with live music, food, and plenty of activity to engage children and a variety of local environmental organisations put up stalls in the woodland. The Festival on Sept 25th is a 'Great Big Green Week event'.

Solihull Methodist Church

This urban church has 'wildlife constraints', but has a community centre with 1,000/mth footfall and creates awareness amongst visitors with a recycling service in the foyer. Pre-Covid they had recycled 77,216 batteries, raised almost £3,000 by recycling printer cartridges, and collected tools, suits, wool, computers and more. Solihull has had a Greener Church Group for 12 years and every edition of their church magazine has a 'green tip'.

Methodist Church drops fossil fuel

The Central Finance Board of the Methodist Church has finally fully divested from fossil fuel companies. This decision followed advice from the Methodist Church's Joint Advisory Committee on the Ethics of Investment (JACEI) earlier this month, who decided that no oil and gas companies are currently aligned with the climate change targets set out by the 2015 Paris Agreement. It has now sold almost £21 million in shares in Shell, and around £2 million of bonds in Norwegian oil company Equinor.

Methodists, COP26 and CJ4A

Climate change is almost certainly the biggest crisis we face. In the last couple of years we have watched devastating wildfires in Australia and California, billions of locusts decimating crops in Kenya, terrible cyclones in India and Bangladesh, widespread flooding in China, UK, Australia and many parts of Asia, and probably the highest temperature ever recorded, 54.4°C in USA's Death Valley.

In November this year the UK will host COP26, the global UN Climate Change Conference, in Glasgow. This will be the most important gathering of world leaders ever to address the climate emergency. In response young Methodists around the world have been reminding us that climate change is also a justice issue.

Climate Change for All (CJ4A) says that the richest countries must be the most ambitious in reducing their emissions, and that those countries

which are already seriously affected by climate change should receive the most support.

CJ4A is asking the Methodist family to:

- Listen** to those whose lives are already affected
- Call** for political changes and
- Commit** to personal change

Local action groups

Several Birmingham Methodist Churches are working closely with local environmental action groups, a good example of churches without walls.

Jan Burrell from Kenilworth is closely involved with *Kenilworth All Together Greener* which has a lively Facebook site and holds regular meetings with a wide range of knowledgeable speakers.

Lim Ho works with Stratford Climate Action (www.stratfordclimate.org/), a network of local people seeking to build a stronger community movement against climate breakdown and was responsible for Stratford District Council's decision to declare a climate emergency. It promotes local action, support youth strikes, and encourages everyone to reduce their carbon footprints.

Mark Boulton is a core member of *Greening Mickleton* a small but very active group addressing both the climate and ecological emergencies. It has close links with the local school and has provided wild flower seeds to all pupils as well as to the community. The group is also working on energy, and transport issues, including safer walking and cycling.