



ECEN Assembly 2021:

The Churches and the European Green Deal: some principles from UK experience.

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In five minutes I want to share some thoughts on mobilising churches to action on the environment over time. As you will know, regrettably from my perspective, the UK is no longer in the EU. So, A Rocha UK's focus on UK policy on climate and nature post-EU. But whatever the political framework we in this conference are operating in, we all here are dealing with the same environmental and theological reality in at least two respects

- There is a multifaceted, global environmental crisis that is now an existential threat to humanity as well as the rest of God's creation.
- And, the church has a biblical mandate to care for creation and challenge structures of injustice.

So, building on these two truths, which defy geography and politics, how can we mobilise Christians and Church to act on the environment?

I will posit three key Operational Principles to stimulate discussion and suggest they can be applied to the Green Deal.



Principle 1: Identify your starting point. Understand where the church is on what I could call the '**Arc of Awareness**' about the environment and the role they can play in acting on it. I suggest four key *areas* of awareness - which can also be *stages*, although progression through them is not necessarily linear.

1. Are they aware that there *is* an environmental crisis?
2. Are they aware that there *is* a Christian mandate to act on it?
3. Are they aware of the *resources* which they as individuals or a church can bring to bear on the environmental crisis - from buildings and land, to links into local or national society, prayer, faith.
4. Are they aware of *the ways* in which they can use these resources to have impact - how to cut carbon emissions from their buildings, how to manage their land for restoring nature, how to use their combined voice for influencing government on its policies - whether it's the European Green Deal, the national government's renewable energy plans, or the local government's transport plan.

Basically, how aware are they of *why* they should act, *what* they can use, and *how* best to use it.

Churches will be in different places in their level of awareness and conviction about these things. But understanding where they are is essential to take them forward most effectively - or *bypassing* them (and I'll explain that later).

Principle 2: Make it easy for individuals and churches to move along the arc.

Obvious ways of doing this are by ongoing schemes and one off campaigns, such as Eco Church in the UK, or the Climate Sunday campaign which are coalition of us are putting on around COP26.



- Not only do such schemes or campaigns make it easy to act practically, but they make it easy psychologically and politically, by providing a community to act with, making it feel safer.

[You can explore Eco Church [here](#) and Climate Sunday [here](#)]

Principle 3: Ongoing coordination with intent.

It is much easier to take advantage of opportunities to influence when they come along, if key players among the churches are sharing intelligence and analysis of the wider church and national political context on *an ongoing basis*, and regularly asking how they can best *respond together*.

- Only getting together in an ad hoc fashion, when there is a perceived need, is likely to mean missing opportunities completely or being slow off the starting line when they emerge.
- On the other hand, meeting regularly only to exchange information *without a clear intent to act together for maximum collective impact*, is not enough any more given the scale and urgency of the environmental crisis.

Not coincidentally, both A Rocha' Eco Church programme and the Climate Sunday campaign have emerged from this forum in the UK - the Churches Environmental Issues network.



If I had time for a fourth principle it would be this.

Principle 4: Avoid time wasting diversions: We need to avoid the diversion of two very common traps:

1. Spending all our time *preaching to the converted*. This can be comfortable, but it's not necessary.
2. Spending all our time *arguing with the unconvertible*. This can be fun for those of us who like a good scrap or argument, but it's a waste of time.

I suggest we need to spend our time in the middle-ground, with christians and churches open to greater awareness, to help them to get it and use it.

I look forward to discussing this further.



Appendix: additional material for interest

Where is the UK church at?

I would say that in the UK, after perhaps three decades of work by a growing group of individuals and organisations, the national churches have moved dramatically from lack of awareness of the environmental crisis or the Christian mandate to act on it, to general awareness of both, so that we can now put much more of our effort into helping Christians and individuals understand what their resources are to act, and how they can act effectively with them.

How does Climate Sunday work?

CS is calling on churches across the land to hold a climate-focused service before COP, and at it to do two things: a) Commit to taking further practical action itself - such as joining or advancing in the Eco Church scheme and b) secondly, to sign a national civil society declaration calling on the UK government to get its own climate change policies in order before chairing COP.