

# Eco-Congregation Scotland's Annual Gathering 2012: Conference Report



*Ewan Aitken welcomes participants to the gathering*

*The fourth Annual Gathering of Eco-Congregation Scotland was held on 21<sup>st</sup> April at Bridge of Allan Church. The Convener of Eco-Congregation Scotland welcomed over 100 participants to the event.*

The keynote speaker was Stewart Stevenson MSP, Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Scottish Government.

Stewart Stevenson told the meeting that the Scottish Government recognises the ethical and moral dimension of climate change and is pleased to support Eco-Congregation Scotland.

To achieve the targets for the reduction of carbon emissions there will have to be changes in the way we live. These will be challenging, and will include how we use energy and how we heat buildings. Transport is the most difficult challenge and on this we have made limited progress. Cars are more efficient but people are driving further.



*Stewart Stevenson, MSP*

The Climate Challenge Fund has supported a range of activities in communities across Scotland promoting innovation, and trying new approaches to carbon reduction. We recognise that some innovative projects will fail but on the whole the fund has been very successful and will continue for another three years.

## Highlights from discussion with Stewart Stevenson MSP

- The Scottish Government shares the concerns of congregations about changes to the Feed-in Tariff for solar panels, which was not well handled. However, there are other opportunities emerging such as ground source heat pumps.
- Carbon capture is an option to help continue using coal. There is potential to develop this technology in Scotland but it is not a long term answer. Peterhead power station is the most likely option for CCS in Scotland.
- Planning and listed building status: congregations continue to find barriers to improved energy management and Historic Scotland can be part of the problem.
- Fracking: Stewart Stevenson said he thought this was unlikely in Scotland in the near term.
- Climate justice – following the debate in parliament, an international climate justice fund will be announced in near future.



*Bridge of Allan Church Halls*

## Workshops

In the afternoon there were workshops on different aspects of behaviour change and how it can be brought about at home and abroad.

## Changing Behaviour

*Malcolm Rooney*, Minister at Kirriemuir Old Parish Church

Malcolm led a powerful interactive workshop that explored what we in society need to do to promote the acceptance of climate change, that it is a significant factor and what we need to do to promote a change in behaviour to combat climate change.

The workshop explored some basic facts of the outcome of climate change e.g. the significant issue of population migration due to rising sea levels - up to one billion people if the temperature increases by 2° C raising sea levels by 15meters. The issues explored the Ethical and Moral dimensions, the Political issues and Personal actions required.

*More information on Malcolm's thoughts can be found at: [climatechangescotland.blogspot.co.uk/](http://climatechangescotland.blogspot.co.uk/)*

## Climate Justice and International Development

*Diane Green of Christian Aid and Lexi Barnett of SCIAF*

Climate Justice is an important and emerging agenda for both SCIAF and Christian Aid. Consumption in the North can seriously undermine livelihoods in the South raising the challenge of justice and responsibility. This very well-summed up in the phrase “May we live simply in order that others may simply live.”

The key issues in addressing climate change are mitigation (reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the North) coupled with adaptation (especially in the South). Examples of adaptation were presented including Nicaraguan responses to increased hurricane activity; and solar power in Uttah Pradesh, India. Solar power is being developed to supply electricity to rural communities as an alternative to fossil fuels, as is the situation in South Africa where rural electricity is being provided by coal-fired power stations via loans under-written by the World Bank.

“Energy access for all” is emerging as a new development imperative - but the source of that energy needs to be based on renewables and not fossil fuels.

*You can find out more about climate justice at the websites of Christian Aid:*

[www.christianaid.org.uk/ActNow/climate-justice/Index.aspx](http://www.christianaid.org.uk/ActNow/climate-justice/Index.aspx)

and SCIAF: [www.sciaf.org.uk/robinhoodtax](http://www.sciaf.org.uk/robinhoodtax)

## Climate Challenge Fund (The Green Team)

*David Gunn, Manager of Climate Challenge Fund*

Launched in 2008 by the Scottish Government to support community action on climate change, it has awarded Grants of £32m to around 350 community projects across Scotland. For the next 3 years a budget of over £30m is available with a maximum of £150,000 per project.



To qualify there must be a measurable Carbon Emission reduction outcome and a long term sustainable legacy for the community. Changing behaviour is an important theme: e.g. car sharing, low carbon transport, buying local foods, energy efficiency, reducing waste, reusing & recycling, refurbishing old community buildings etc.

There is also a **Junior Climate Challenge Fund** (10% allocated) led exclusively by young people.

The next round of applications will be considered on 8<sup>th</sup> August 2012; submissions needed by 6 June 2012 deadline.

*For more information on the fund, how to apply and case studies see: [ccf.keepsotlandbeautiful.org/](http://ccf.keepsotlandbeautiful.org/)*

## The 'Green Deal'

*Andrew Faulk of Consumer Focus*

The Green Deal and the Energy Company Obligation offer new opportunities to address both fuel poverty and climate change emissions. This is a government sponsored initiative to promote energy efficiency in commercial and domestic buildings, but it will be financed by the energy companies. The energy efficiency measures will be paid for by the energy companies but the 'Golden Rule' of the Green Deal is that the consumer's bills remain the same and the costs to the company are reclaimed on the savings made on the energy used. This has yet to be tested.

The Green Deal proposals would benefit from pilot examples and testing. This is where Eco-Congregation could contribute in terms of upgrading church buildings – particularly listed buildings.

There are many concerns around the detail of the proposals and how they will work in practice and developing trust will be essential if the programme is to work.

*For further information on the green deal see: [www.greendealuk.co.uk/](http://www.greendealuk.co.uk/)*

*And Consumer Focus response to the proposals:*

*<http://www.consumerfocus.org.uk/scotland/news/consumers-in-scotland-yet-to-be-convinced-on-green-deal-2>*

## Action in Africa

*Charles Agboklu of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana*



The EP Church has a track record of involvement in agriculture and environment issues, for example through an Agenda 21 project on tree planting and woodland management. It has worked with communities to help them plant and manage community forests in areas prone to deforestation.

The climate change project is responding to the desertification of northern Ghana and has included introducing new drought resistant crop varieties, changing crop planting and agro forestry. It has set up

RELBONET (Religious bodies Network on Climate Change) with other churches and Muslim organisations, including the Chief Imam and has been a leading player in the All Africa Conference of Churches work on climate change.

The aim of the EP Church is now to become the foremost green religious institution in Ghana, supporting and training teachers to promote eco-clubs in schools and establishing eco-congregations.

*You can access RELBONET by clicking on the link: <http://relbonet.wordpress.com/>*

*The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana homepage: <http://www.epchurchghana.org/>*

## Green pilgrimage

Three ministers from Scotland attended the International Pilgrimage Conference in Assisi in 2011. Here they recounted what it meant to them and the opportunities for eco-congregations to become involved.

*Dane Sherrard, Minister at Luss Parish Church* introduced the history of pilgrimage at Luss and the work of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, which sets standards and objectives to promote environmentally responsible pilgrimage to help 'visitors become pilgrims and pilgrims to walk gently on the earth'.

*Richard Frazer, Minister at Greyfriars Church, Edinburgh* described how pilgrimage offers an opportunity to develop religious awareness and re-connect with the Scottish landscape. Greyfriars, was originally a Franciscan monastery, where, in the reformation, the Covenant was signed. It is associated with pilgrimage and is developing a website on its history that will help promote interest and stimulate people to make pilgrimage.



*Andrew Patterson, Minister at Portobello Old Parish Church*, witnessed the changes of rural life since the 1980s Scotland. He wrote 'A Way to Whithorn' and, with Martin Palmer, he has promoted the idea of pilgrimage and attended Assisi conference. He is researching the pilgrim ways of Scotland on study leave.

A **Scottish Pilgrim Routes Forum** has recently been set up for the sharing of information about existing and planned routes, and it is hoped that local groups will be set up to develop new routes, to regenerate communities and to promote sustainable off-road travel. For more details, contact Nick Cooke at [Nick@clearserv.co.uk](mailto:Nick@clearserv.co.uk) or call 07901 916884

*You can find out more about the alliance of religion and conservation 'Green Pilgrim Cities' at: [www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=521](http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=521)*

## Plenary

The meeting concluded with a reminder that climate change is a challenge but that there is more to caring for creation. Eco-Congregations should celebrate the beauty of creation and remind people of the beauty of the earth.

We welcome suggestions and ideas from all Eco-Congregations how to do this in worship, practical action and community involvement. Please let us know your ideas and suggestions!

Please send ideas to Gordon Hudson on **email** [manager@ecocongregationscotland.org](mailto:manager@ecocongregationscotland.org), by **post** to Eco-Congregation Scotland, 121 George Street, Edinburgh, EH2 4YN or **telephone** 01312402274.

*A few of the presentations made at the annual gathering are available on the ECS website: [www.ecocongregationscotland.org/events/annual-gathering-2012/](http://www.ecocongregationscotland.org/events/annual-gathering-2012/)*

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