

Ideas for Action – **Young people and the environment**

Ideas and activities for youth groups

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Introducing **environmental footprints**

Creatures from ants to antelopes, ear wigs to elephants all leave footprints behind marking where they have been. For the ants and earwigs the impressions may be fairly light, but antelopes and elephants leave tracks which can be more easily seen. A footprint is not the only mark left on the environment by an animal's activity. Ants build anthills, earwigs appear unsolicited in apples, antelopes can be prolific grazers and elephants can make leave their mark whether crashing through the undergrowth or appearing on Blue Peter!

Humans, like animals, also leave a mark on the environment. Like animals, they can leave footprints showing where they have been, with those wearing 'Doc Martens' leaving a deeper impression than those going barefoot. Humans, like animals, also leave an impression as a consequence of their activities. Actions from switching on a light to littering the street, running a tap to travelling by car, all leave some form of impression on the environment. This is known as our environmental footprint.

The **Young people and the environment Ideas for Action** is an aid to assessing the environmental footprint of our activities and considering ways in which we can tread more lightly on the earth.

Your Church's **footprint**

Introduction

Churches, like any other organisation, leave an environmental footprint. Some parts of their footprint may have a very positive impact on the environment. For example, many people value the beautiful architecture of churches, having a place to gather and worship God and the positive role that churches play in the local community. Other parts of their footprint may be less beneficial.

Assessing the environmental footprint of your church

The following section contains a tongue-in-cheek check-up to assess the environmental footprint of your church.

1. Photocopy the ready-reckoner page and distribute it amongst your group
2. Invite your group to tick the boxes that best match your church's situation
3. Assess how well your church is doing:
 - 3 or more 'a's - so the 20th century has passed you by!
 - 3 or more 'b's - have potential but could try a lot harder!
 - 3 or more 'c's - you should apply for an Eco-Congregation Award.
4. Explore ways to reduce your church's environmental footprint using the information in the rest of this Idea for Action.

Church environmental footprint – a quick inspection

How much energy does your church use on heating?

- π a) Jesus was born in a barn and it feels as if we worship in one too
- π b) Our energy bill is through the roof, which is also where much of our heat goes too!
- π c) Our church is comfortably warm and we have relatively low heating bills thanks to thermostatic and timer controls, insulation and careful use

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How brightly do your lights burn?

- π a) The church is lit at a level so that we can just about read the hymnbook but can't see the dust
- π b) The wattage of our lights means that they double up as our heaters, summer and winter!
- π c) Our church has low-energy light-bulbs providing good light without costing the earth

Is your church involved in recycling?

- π a) The last time recycling was mentioned was when one of the Guild member's reminisced about her penny farthing!
- π b) We had a policy on it once, but we think that it got filed
- π c) Our church chooses recycled paper products and has a collection point for material to be recycled

How often do environmental issues get mentioned in your church?

- π a) We last sang 'All things bright and beautiful' about three years ago!
- π b) It usually gets a mention at harvest time, and the backyard where the rubbish is dumped was once called our wild patch!
- π c) Environmental perspectives are regularly considered in worship and by the Property Committee in their care of our premises

What community environmental initiatives has your church been involved in?

- π a) Do 'community' and 'environment' have anything to do with the church?
- π b) It planted a 1st World War memorial rose garden – but it needs attention!
- π c) One of our members represents Churches Together on the Local Agenda 21 Committee and our youth group built a path at the local nature reserve

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Reducing your church's environmental footprint

If your church scored 3 or more 'c's, give yourselves a pat on the back and get busy sharing your initiatives with neighbouring churches. If your church scored some 'a's or 'b's, then it's time to literally put God's house in order. One way forward is to follow the 3 steps to an environmental heaven.

Step 1 Gabriel's Report

Having inspections is a way of life. Cars are inspected for their MoT, schools are inspected by Ofsted or Her Majesty's Inspectors and, when we feel very brave, our teeth are inspected by dentists. Imagine that your church is going to be inspected by a crack team put together by the Angel Gabriel, with St Francis as their special advisor. Identify the key areas/activities in your church's life and brainstorm the sort of comments that Gabriel's hit-squad would make about its environmental credentials. Consider using Eco-Congregation Ideas for Action 1 to conduct a more detailed check-up.

Step 2 Gabriel's Recommendations

Based on the areas of concern identified in Gabriel's Report, form a set of key action points. It will be useful to specify what should be done, by whom and when, together with any resources (money/gifts/abilities/time) that are needed. Present both Gabriel's Report and the consequent recommendations for action to an appropriate church meeting. It may be useful to highlight some responses that are 'QEC' (quick, easy and cheap) to prioritise for action.

Step 3 Get cracking

Don't let Gabriel's Report join that pile of plans gathering dust at the back of the cupboard of good intentions. Get cracking! Why not start with one or two of the 'QEC' recommendations and put them into action? There is nothing like progress and success to give your campaign a boost.

Key tips

- Check that your proposals/planned activities meet your church's good practice/safety guidelines
- Consider inviting individuals, groups and organisations both outside and within the church circle to help enact your proposals
- Consider seeking positive publicity – local press like good news stories

Getting personal – a moral maze

The following are some of the daily dilemmas that we face. Tick your responses:

1. You've bought a drink in an aluminium can from a newsagent. Once you've finished the can do you:

- A. Put it in the nearest bin?
- B. Take it home for recycling?
- C. Drop it in an existing pile of debris in the gutter?

2. You've arranged to meet up with some friends at a location about a mile away. To get there do you:

- A. Arrange to be picked up by a friend?
- B. Pump up your tyres and get on your bike?
- C. Drive yourself or get someone to make a special journey to take you?

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3. You've had enough of your chewing gum. Do you:

- A. Stick it to the inside of the nearest bin?
- B. Put it in the wrapper and place it in a bin?
- C. Stick it underneath your chair or pew!?

4. You're stocking up on some stationery. Do you:

- A. Look for a recycled pad, but choose a regular pad on the basis of price?
- B. Choose recycled paper and pay a small supplement because the cost to the environment is more important?
- C. Choose a smart and glossy looking pad with a chic picture on the cover?

5. You are sent shopping for the youth club coffee supply. Do you:

- A. Choose a fairly traded brand and not say anything?
- B. Choose a fairly traded brand and resolve to encourage a debate along the lines: 'This club believes that people matter more than profit and resolves to buy fairly traded tea and coffee in future'?
- C. Choose the smartly marketed top brand, because people like the look and taste?

Assess your answers:

Mostly 'A's: You are on the right lines but lack the commitment to put environmental ideals into action

Mostly 'B's: You're a right on 'green' – you need to share your commitment and good practice with others

Mostly 'C's: So saving the planet isn't on your agenda yet – why not think about some of the answer 'B's

Discussion and decisions

Caring for God's creation may involve changing the way in which we live our lives. Reflecting on other parts of your life, are there other ways in which you could adapt your lifestyle to leave a more gentle impression on the Earth? This might involve how you undertake the activity or even changing activities! For example, for any regular journeys that you take to school, college or work is it feasible to walk, cycle or use public transport instead? Share these possibilities with your friends. Have you identified any issues and ways forward?

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What we did – stories from Eco-Congregations

St Fergus Roman Catholic Church, Paisley

For over two years the youth group at St Fergus Church has worked with the Renfrewshire Sustainable Communities Project carrying out many practical projects in the church grounds which are wildlife friendly, relatively low maintenance and enhance the appearance of the church. They have had special services relating to caring for creation and have taken their message out into the whole congregation.

The work in the grounds has been extended into the community by clearing away rubbish and dumped material and alerting the neighbours to watch out for people littering and dumping. Also, hanging baskets and bird boxes made during the project have been taken home and so out into the wider community. The young people have also visited local countryside sites to further and explore and enjoy God's creation. They are now planning an organic vegetable patch and willow planting.

Nails and Nest Boxes @ Trinity URC, Wigan

With our church surrounded by a wooded churchyard, Trinity URC Youth Group decided to undertake some home building for birds. To help us we invited two rangers from the local park service to one of our evenings to tell us about birds and nesting. They then helped us construct some boxes. We had an evening of sawing and sanding, hammering and nailing resulting in the construction of six boxes with different holes to suit different residents. Each group signed their own box on the bottom so we could track progress. The boxes were nailed (aluminium nails) to the trees on Good Friday – there was something symbolic about hammering nails into wood that day. However three weeks later (as opposed to three days) there was new life with one nest box being inhabited by a pair of blue tits who raised a brood.

Rachel Pickering – Trinity United Reformed Church, Wigan

First Ballymoney Presbyterian Church

First Ballymoney Presbyterian Church joined forces with Ballymoney District Council to get their Eco-Congregation Programme off the ground. They appointed their youth worker, Alex Patterson, as their 'Green Apostle' to lead the church's environmental initiatives and be a link person with the Council.

Alex commented:

"Our young people quickly got into the environmental work. They:

- *looked at creation issues in their Bible exploration sessions*
- *adopted a piece of local authority land in town to do a mini 'Ground Force' and keep it tidy*
- *'litter picked' at our annual District day whilst wearing a tee shirt supplied by our Local Authority bearing the slogan: keep it clean, keep it green!"*

Alex reflected:

"Following the Eco-Congregation Programme gave our youth programme a renewed sense of purpose. We felt that the church was taking an issue that was important to us seriously and being involved in Eco-Congregation boosted our faith and fellowship."

Better be @ Bethesda

The young people of Bethesda Methodist Church, Cheltenham, led their church's environmental work through their enthusiastic approach to a range of issues. They gained signatures for a 'Cancel the

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Debt' petition and presented it at 10 Downing Street, raised money for AIDS orphans in Malawi and bought a piece of rain forest for conservation. They also helped design and then undertake a 'makeover' of a courtyard within their church premises that was transformed from an uninviting space to a green oasis with seating and plant holders made from recycled materials.

Mark Boulton – Bethesda Methodist Church

All aboard the Ark!

The Junior Church and Youth Fellowship at St. Andrew's with Castlegate URC, Nottingham re-enacted the story of Noah bringing events up to date with concerns about climate change, rising sea levels and risks to endangered species. Animal masks were made by the Juniors and toys and pets were also welcomed aboard by Mr and Mrs Noah.

The Ark was launched in the Church Hall, sailed down the River Trent into the North Sea and then around the world picking up survivors from floods and droughts en route, who all had sad tales to tell. Radio and TV kept the mariners informed of perils across the globe. When the rainbow appeared on screen, everyone was able to go ashore and a rainbow covenant was signed in which promises were made about caring for the earth. These were displayed in the Church Hall to start everyone thinking.

It is now planned to repeat the voyage, this time sharing the adventure with young people from the Jewish Lads and Girls Brigade and the Muslim-led Bobber's Mill Community Centre. It should bring new perspectives on a story that is known to them all.

Following St Andrew's....

The following are some activities suggested by St Andrew's with Castlegate:

Action activities:

- ◆ Treading lightly – draw around your own foot, cut it out and write on it one thing you promise to do to care for the environment
- ◆ Floor game with dice. Mark out a footpath with distinct steps across the floor. Some steps have a good or bad issue associated with them and a corresponding instruction to move forward or backwards.
- ◆ The island game with a group of children inside a piece of rope. The circle of rope gets bigger or smaller depending on answers to questions given to the group.

Craft activities:

- ◆ Make animal masks – talk about the needs of the animal and any challenges the species faces
- ◆ Make animal mobiles – they could have a theme e.g. woodland, endangered, native or mentioned in the Bible
- ◆ Planting own names or an environmental message in cress

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Activities

Recycling quiz

Obtain from your Local Authority's Recycling Officer a map detailing the location of all recycling sites in your area and a list of what can be recycled through any domestic kerbside collections. Use the map to draft a quiz to test your group's knowledge of what can be recycled where. A sample template is shown below:

Location/item	glass	paper	oil	batteries	textiles	cans	plastic
Supermarket car park	x					x	
Council depot Oxfam shop	x	x	x	x	x		x
Kerbside collection	x	x				x	

Award an appropriate prize to the person with the most correct answers: for example, an aluminium can of coke on the condition that the can is recycled after consumption. Give copies of the recycling facilities location maps to all present.

Brainstorm and word search

1. Brainstorm/prepare a list of environmental terms. Examples include: biodegradable, dog fouling, environment, recycling, eco-labelling, conservation, biodiversity, insulation, pollution, waste, litter, noise, creation
2. Construct a word search using the terms
3. Distribute the word search and ask your group to:
 - a) Complete the word search
 - b) Discuss what each of the words means
 - c) Identify one positive response that they can make to each word listed.

Beliefs and creeds

From time to time within the Church people have gathered under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to consider the beliefs of the Church and sometimes to formulate these beliefs into a creed.

During the fourth century AD a number of different understandings of the Christian faith were held. In order to define what were core understandings and beliefs a Council was held at Nicaea out of which came the Nicene Creed.

The creed begins:

*We believe in one God,
The Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen...*

One of the great challenges for the 21st century is to live in such a way that the quality of life of our descendants will not be impaired. Can you formulate a creed that outlines our belief in God the creator and states our responsibility to exercise prophetic stewardship in the world?

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Eco-bingo icebreaker – Find someone who...

Recycles glass bottles ----- 	Walks or cycles to school/work or shops regularly ----- 	Chooses to buy recycled paper ----- 	Belongs to an environmental organisation -----
Composts waste vegetable matter from the kitchen ----- 	Has bought fairly traded goods within the last month ----- 	Recycles aluminium cans ----- 	Uses a bus or train rather than a car for at least one journey per week -----
Recycles paper ----- 	Is always equipped with a poop-a-scoop when exercising their dog ----- 	Knows what the initials F.o.E. stand for ----- 	Can name a politician who is responsible for the environment -----
Knows what a Womble's key activity is ----- 	Who has never dropped litter on the pavement ----- 	Who has taken things to or bought things from a jumble sale ----- 	Who has bought or eaten something organically grown this week -----

Find a different person who can truthfully sign each box

Shout "Eco-bingo!" for the 1st complete line and column and **"Eco-house!"** for the first full-house.

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Our commitment – **A Rainbow Promise**

After the flood the Bible records that God made a promise to the people on earth:

God said to Noah and his sons: 'I am now establishing my covenant with you and with your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, all birds and cattle, all the animals with you on earth, all that have come out of the ark. I shall sustain my covenant with you: never again will all living creatures be destroyed by the waters of a flood, never again will there be a flood to lay waste the earth.'

Genesis 9:8-10 Revised English Bible.

As a sign of this covenant Genesis records that God made the sign of the rainbow.

In the light of your environmental concerns, draft a 'Rainbow Promise' to care for creation using appropriate words and images. Could your church adopt it as part of its environmental policy?

Dramatic **Sketch**

Introduction and preparation

This sketch was performed at the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church to illustrate, in a light hearted way, the lack of care shown by humanity for the planet and a danger of putting profit and economic growth before the welfare of the earth.

The Cast

Narrator- dressed neutrally

Boss- with bowler hat and suit

Technician- scrappy clothes e.g. boiler suit/wellington boots

Five assistants- old clothes

The Props

- 1 large blue balloon with green outline of land sketched onto it
- Spray paint¹: Red, black, blue, green and brown
- Strips of paper
- Assorted pieces of rubbish
- Spray glue
- Large plastic or cloth sheet
- Bamboo cane and fishing line
- Cigarette, matches and pin

¹ Choose water soluble rather than oil based paint to minimise fumes

Preparation:

- Tie balloon to string and suspend from bamboo cane
- Insert the pin, blunt end first, into the end of the cigarette to be lit, leaving the sharp end protruding

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The Sketch

Narrator: *Once upon a time there was a big blue planet. It was suspended in space like a glistening sapphire and was beautiful to behold.*

Action: The planet is brought on, suspended by fishing line, from a pole. The other four assistants bring on a large sheet which lies under the planet.

Narrator: *The big blue planet teemed with life, green plants with flowers of every colour in the rainbow, waters filled with flashing silver, the air singing with a myriad of song and across the land slithered, walked, ran and crept many living creatures. Among these was the human species, made in the image of God and who, from time to time, acted as if they were a God.*

Action: Entrance of Boss and Technician.

Boss: *This planet looks a dull green, lets develop it. Cut some forest down to make space for development.*

Action: Technician sprays green areas brown.

Action: Boss surveys the planet.

Boss: *That's better, a bit of variety in the world, and we didn't need all those bugs and beetles. We need some real development. Let's go for the oil, gas and coal.*

Action: Technician paints black dots across the seas and sprays the surface of the globe red.

Action: Boss surveys the planet.

Boss: *What's a bit of global warming when we can get all this energy, what's a bit of oil pollution when we can go where we want. We need growth, lets build factories to make goods. The more people consume, the richer we will become.*

Action: Technician sprays glue onto the planet, then throws coloured paper over it. This should stick to the glue and paint. Then the technician pours a bucket of assorted rubbish e.g. orange peel, bottle-tops over the planet. These will fall to the ground with a clatter.

Action: Boss surveys the scene.

Boss: *That's better, development, some real wealth, and don't worry about the mess. Where there's muck there's brass. You've worked hard, take a break, have a fag.*

Action: Boss offers Technician a cigarette. Technician takes one and pretends to light it. Slowly and purposefully takes a drag, blows the smoke and simultaneously moves hand with cigarette away from mouth until it (the pin end, touches the balloon with a bang!)

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Further **Resources**

Eco-Congregation Ideas for Actions

- **Ideas for Action Children and Creation Care** - whilst designed for younger children, contains some ideas which can be adapted and used for youth groups.
- **Ideas for Action Churchyard Conservation** - includes some ideas for implementing in a churchyard or grounds.

Book

- *Rescue Mission Planet Earth* is a Children's edition of Agenda 21, written and illustrated by children, for children. ISBN 1-85697-175-9

Web

- HDRA the organic organisation have word searches and lots of practical advice www.gardenorganic.org.uk/organicgardening/schools.php

For Schools

EcoSchools is a sister programme of Eco-Congregation, designed to help school communities move from environmental awareness in the curriculum to environmental action in the school and wider community. It is available for church schools, local authority schools and schools of other faiths.

Contact: W www.ecoschoolsscotland.org | **T** 01786 468234 | **E** ecoschools@ksbscotland.org.uk

REEP - The Religious Education and Environment Programme was established to encourage the study of environmental issues in the context of religious insights. It is based on the understanding that at the centre of the world's great religious traditions is a system of ideas and a corresponding set of values and practices which can provide people with effective tools for reflecting on, and responding to, the crisis that faces our planet. REEP has a website to enhance teaching at both primary and secondary schools with classroom activities and ideas, links to the curriculum and aids to deliver ICT in religious education.

REEP has published 'Faiths for a Future' which contains material relating to the Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Islamic and Jewish traditions and it has a network of trainers drawn from specialists in six world faiths.

Contact REEP: W www.reep.org | **T** 01926 851966 / 851977 | **E** enquiries@reep.org

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A directory of **useful organisations**

A number of uniformed organisations have work sheets or badges relating to environmental issues

The Boys' Brigade:

Scottish Headquarters

The Boys' Brigade, Carronvale House, Carronvale Road, Larbert, Stirlingshire FK5 3LH

W scotland.boys-brigade.org.uk | **T** 01324 562008 | **E** scottishhq@boys-brigade.org.uk

The Girls' Brigade

The Girls' Brigade Scotland

11a Woodside Crescent, Charing Cross, Glasgow G3 7UL

W www.girls-brigade-scotland.org.uk | **T** 0141 3321765 | **E** hq@girls-brigade-scotland.org.uk

The Guide Association

Girlguiding Scotland

Girlguiding Scotland Headquarters, 16 Coates Crescent, Edinburgh EH3 7HA

W www.girlguidingscotland.org.uk | **T** 0131 226 4511 | **E** administrator@girlguiding-scot.org.uk

The Scout Association

Scouts Scotland

The Scout Association, Fordell Firs, Hillend, Dunfermline, Fife KY11 7HQ

W www.scouts-scotland.org.uk | **T** 01383 419073 | **E** shq@scouts-scotland.org.uk

Local authority ranger services

Based in your local country park or with your local authority many ranger services will provide free environmental education activities for children.

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)

RSPB Scotland

2 Lochside View, Edinburgh Park, Edinburgh EH12 9DH

W www.rspb.org.uk/scotland/ | **T** 0131 317 4100

Wildlife Trust

Scottish Wildlife Trust

Cramond House, Kirk Cramond, Cramond Glebe Road, Edinburgh EH4 6NS

W scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk | **T** 0131 312 7765

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World Wildlife Fund

WWF Scotland

Little Dunkeld, Dunkeld, Perthshire PH8 0AD

W scotland.wwf.org.uk | **T** 01350 728200 | **E** scotland@wwf.org.uk

About Eco-Congregation

Eco-Congregation is an ecumenical environmental project for churches. It provides free resources, support and an Award scheme to help churches to consider environmental issues in the context of their Christian life and mission and to take positive action. Eco-Congregation was originally developed by the environmental charity ENCAMS on behalf of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI). It is now overseen by CTBI and delivered by a partnership of organisations.

Eco-Congregation Scotland is an independent charity is supported by a range of denominations and relief agencies.

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Email: scotland@ecocongregation.org

Web: www.ecocongregationscotland.org

<http://ecocongregationscotland.blogspot.co.uk>

In England and Wales, Eco-Congregation is managed by AROCHA UK.

Tel: 0114 263 6421

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