

**Eco- Congregation Scotland
Annual Gathering 20 April 2013
Grassmarket Centre, Edinburgh**



Food: Why Should Churches Be Interested?



Over a hundred representatives, members and others joined together for the Eco-Congregation Scotland annual gathering in the wonderful setting of the new Grassmarket Centre in the heart of Edinburgh. We were welcomed and led in worship by the Minister of Greyfriars Kirk, the Rev. Richard Frazer.

David Atkinson of the Scottish Churches Rural Group explored why food should be important to churches and members of congregations. 'Dobbingate' (the horsemeat scandal) has highlighted the complexity of our food supply. For example up to 450 firms are involved in the production of a frozen lasagne! We do not value food enough and take too much for granted. Food prices are rising and food poverty is increasing.



David Atkinson

We must remember that food is a gift from God, and the Eucharist reminds us of its sacred importance. A meal is a communal activity with embedded values of sharing and gift giving; yet the international food economy treats food as just another commodity. In Scotland the food industry involves about 20% of the workforce and is important for communities across the country. Similarly feeding a growing world population is a challenge. We can ask ethical questions based in scripture of how our food is produced, and in churches we can take a lead. David Atkinson's presentation can be found by [clicking on this link](#).



Liz Henderson

Liz Henderson, Minister of Richmond Craigmillar Church in a regeneration area of Edinburgh, talked about the café linked to the church. This has been running for 15 years, a challenging experience but one that has been at the heart of the church. The café links the community with the church and has over 20 volunteers and one paid member of staff. It brings together people living in a variety of difficult circumstances and challenges a number of preconceptions we may have about living in poverty.

We enrich our lives if we eat with the poor, by meeting and sharing food we learn about poverty. Church cafes can help us to listen to the poor. Rather than offering charity, we share with others and help members of congregations rediscover faith.

Plenary discussion

Are big businesses pushing farmers to the wall? Farm profits are low, especially following the recent bad weather. As consumers and citizens we can ask questions of supermarkets such as 'where does this food come from?' Is it local? Price is important and some producers are priced out of competition by cheap supermarket food. Local co-ops like Sunrise in Castle Douglas can help. Is there a campaign to help to this?



An excellent lunch was provided for us by the Grassmarket Community Project

Workshop reports

Funding for Environmental Projects

Tim Mullins from Keep Scotland Beautiful introduced the [Climate Challenge Fund](#) which provides grants for community groups wanting to tackle climate change by reducing carbon emissions in their community. Up to £150 000 per year is available to groups, including churches. Examples of projects accepted include food growing, heating for community buildings, and bike stations which provide alternatives to driving.

Andy Mayberry from Community Energy Scotland spoke about the Scottish Government Community and renewable Energy Scheme ([CARES](#)) which provides support and financial help for local group projects to generate energy for community benefit.

The new '[Go For It](#)' fund encourages creative initiatives that address the needs of local communities. Any Church of Scotland congregation or other local partners can apply.

Just Eating

Sheena Wurthmann of Netherlee Parish Church, Glasgow introduced the Annual Gathering to the need for giving our food, and its associated mystery, a greater significance and prominence in our daily lives. Originally produced by the Presbyterian Church USA, Just Eating is an action plan that Netherlee church followed over the course of a 12 week session.

You can download the course materials at the [Just Eating website](#). Setting an extra place at table was one example of making us think of food in Sacramental terms including hospitality i.e. neighbours, family and strangers. Thoughts of Hunger, Fasting, Community, Giving, Love and God's presence were all generated from Biblical excerpts in the programme, not least the Last Supper.

There is Enough Food for Everyone...

Christian Aid and SCIAF have joined with other leading aid charities to promote [the IF campaign](#), drawing attention to global food insecurity and the consequences of the multinational food economy.



The campaign is seeking to raise public awareness and stimulate government action against land grabs in the third world, supporting small scale farming in developing countries and addressing tax dodging by multi-national companies. A campaign high point will be the G8 summit in Northern Ireland in June 2013. Eco-Congregations are encouraged to get involved. You can find out more on their website by [clicking on this link](#).

The Global Food Crisis

Dr Neil Hollow suggested we are facing a global food crisis, caused by volatile and increasing prices, potential shortages of water and oil, and a growing population. He rejects a 'bigger is better' approach to growing food and argues instead we need to change not only how food is grown but our attitudes to eating. Things we can do ourselves include eating less meat, growing our own, buying local and organic food and promoting small scale farming. He pointed to the biblical instruction to take care about food, including hospitality (Luke: 14-16-24), sharing (Acts 2:46) and greed (1 Corinthians 6:12-13).

You can read more in the book [`No oil in the lamp – Fuel, Faith and the Energy Crisis`](#) by Andy Mellen and Neil Hollow.

The Nourish Project with Pete Richie

Pete and Heather told the workshop about the charity Nourish, established for three years ago to promote sustainable food in Scotland. How do we feed people in Scotland's seven cities? The Whitmuir project was inspired by a Japanese community owned farm model. The aim is to provide enough food for a local community, this has inspired a restaurant and shop and bakery.



In 2012, a community share ownership scheme was developed and a 'community benefit society' established to own the farm. It was launched on 21 March 2013 as the first community owned farm in Scotland. The farm welcomes visitors and tries to promote awareness of farming and global food issues.

You can find out more about Nourish Scotland by [clicking on this link](#) and about Whitmuir The Organic Place by [clicking on this link](#).

Café Conversations

Members from various churches gathered for a lively conversation, sharing their experiences and practices. These included:

- [Carlops Kitchen at Carlops Church](#) – community suppers which financially support building a kitchen for a school in Malawi which then uses food grown locally
- [Queens Cross Parish Church](#) – renewing a church coffee lounge in an Aberdeen business district, with an eye to providing work placements

- [Cadder Parish Church](#) – linking their café to a local college providing work placements and sending profits to charity. They previously produced a nature-themed calendar, and this year are working with children to grow potatoes to be used for a Burns Supper
- Ardrishaig Parish Church – a church seeking to do ‘food with everything’, including serving refreshments at all ‘green’ events’ and hosting ‘Green Teas’, using local, organic and fair trade products
- [Torpichen Kirk](#) – letting local groups host the church coffee mornings, but providing the tea, coffee and sugar (all fairly traded)
- [Skene Parish Church](#) – disassembling life raft first aid kits which have been discarded because one item is ‘out of date’ and sending the salvaged items to two medical projects in Malawi



What did we learn and what should we do next?

Trevor Jamison, Eco-Congregation Scotland Environmental Chaplain gives his impressions.



I was struck by the impact food can make in terms of integration - of people, in community around a table, including but by no means exclusively, in worship. Also food projects seem to have great capacity to integrate with other aspects of church life and witness, for example on its environmental impact, community outreach and fundraising. Churches might take a look at current food related projects to see how they might have impact in additional areas of church and community life, or even use a food related project as a new means to wider witness and mission. Conversely, churches could look at current environmental projects and ask how food might add an extra dimension to what is currently being done.

Over to You...

Do you already have a food project in your congregation? Then please tell us about it so that we can share it with networks around Scotland. Would you like to develop a food project? Then ask other Eco-Congregations to help you.

Resources

You can find out more at the Eco-Congregation website, with links to other resources including the Church of Scotland, A Rocha, Nourish and congregational projects by [clicking on this link](#).

Thank you!

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