



Eco-Congregation Highland Network

REPORT OF THE REGIONAL GATHERING Ness Bank Church, Inverness 26th April 2014

Introduction

This was the latest in a series of Regional Gatherings being held in Network areas from where it is hard for people to travel to national meetings, which are usually held in the Central Belt. The aim of the day was to help support and develop caring for creation work in the area's congregations. It was also an opportunity for ECS to consult and listen to the views of the network in regard to how to best support development locally. This was Eco-Congregation coming to the Highlands!

Attendance

28 people attended the Mini Gathering, representing 15 congregations from Dornoch to Daviot. We were also delighted to welcome representatives from congregations in the Moray area, who had made the effort to travel up and join the Gathering for the day. The wide mix of congregations represented brought a whole range of experience: from those who are currently working towards a second award to those that are just considering registering as an eco-congregation.

Making the Link*

Rev Trevor Jamison

Following a warm welcome from the Rev Fiona Smith of Ness Bank Parish Church, Trevor gave a talk on resources for Christian Worship that is grounded in creation, entitled, "The Theatre of God's Glory". He explained the "Why, When, Where and How" of Green Worship.

Included in the "Whys" were:

- The earth is the Lord's (Psalm 24)
- He loves it ... so much "For God so loved the WORLD that he gave his only Son (John 3: 16)
- We are grateful
- We love God
- And our neighbour
- We are part of creation

We can express worship grounded in creation in many ways and theologians representing very different backgrounds, from Calvin to the present Pope Francis, encourage us to do so.

Trevor reminded us that we are worshipping God and not creation itself and among the "Whens" were special occasions, at different seasons of the year and through special actions in our churches, like floral arrangements, it can be at any time!

We can obviously have worship focussed on creation both inside and especially outside our church buildings and our worship can be through:

- Praying
- Singing
- Preaching
- At the table

Trevor then led us in prayer and song, including a new song by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette sung to the tune of Beethoven's Ode to Joy, see www.carolynshymns.com/.

For preaching, favoured texts include Romans 8, Colossians 1, Genesis 1 and 2, Psalms and a suggestion to follow the lectionary. For some, it might also be appropriate to consider the way in which the liturgy is used at the table and with the elements: are they organic, fairly traded, locally produced?

Trevor's final thought was "Let everything that breathes praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!" Psalm 150: 6



Growing Eco-Congregation in Scotland*

Margaret Warnock

This was an overview of the movement showing how it had grown from just 4 pilot congregations in 2000 to more than 300 now registered. There are 20 registered eco-congregations in the Highland area with another 8 in Moray and, amongst those, there are 3 award winners. However, many more congregations and parishes than those registered are probably active in caring for creation work.

Eco-Congregation Scotland offers:

- Resources: web based, written resources, people
- Support: web site: www.ecocongregationscotland.org, newsletters, links to other organisations, support and advice
- An Award scheme to affirm, encourage and witness
- Local Networks to help churches: work together on bigger, joint projects, exchange ideas, access information, advice and grants
- An Environmental Chaplain to help understanding of the spiritual and theological reasons why we should care for creation

Margaret then showed examples of congregations from across Scotland that are taking action in the three core areas of the Eco-Congregation programme: Spiritual, Practical and Community. There are also church based environmental programmes in many different countries throughout Europe and beyond and some, such as Hungary, have adopted the Eco-Congregation model.



Lastly, Margaret shared ECS's mission (see also <http://www.ecocongregationscotland.org/about-us/about/>):

- In prayer, worship and conversation we discover what it means to care for God's creation
- We put that care into action individually, locally, nationally and globally, desiring to live justly in a transformed world
- We commit ourselves to campaigning on urgent threats to the web of life in our vulnerable world

Questions & Answers

A number of questions from the group, relating to Trevor's presentation, were then discussed:

Q What about "dominion"?

A "Dominion" has become a "bad" word in relation to caring for creation. It seems to imply that we can use creation in any way we want but what does it really mean? Elsewhere in the bible, the Kings of Israel are given dominion but their authority is never total, it was given in order that they serve the people. Whenever they used their authority for their own ends, it was seen as misuse. When we are given dominion, what we do with it is important. Using it for our own ends is totally against the way in which Jesus used his dominion / authority.

Q The need for radical change is urgent – what can churches do about it?

A Worship has a very important role to play in bringing about incremental change. Preaching that God is God of all creation is a conservative theme but should be used to enable people to explore environmental issues. Preaching on caring for creation doesn't have to be about the details but just saying, week by week, this is important / significant. It can be brought into themes on Love, Peace, Justice, Sharing and many more. It is very important to include in worship, as this is when people are together.



Q How do we overcome the attitude that "it's not our responsibility, it is divine providence"?

A It could be likened to a tenant trashing their rented home, just because they are not the owners and not there forever. We don't have the right and are not given licence to wreck things. Also, we must consider that Jesus told us to love our neighbours and we have to understand our "neighbour" in the widest possible way. Some in the world are now suffering because of our actions and "neighbours" should also be considered as the generations to come (children and grandchildren).

Q Are we doing well enough? (eg the Rich, Young Ruler was challenged to give up all his material goods)

A We have to acknowledge that we are as much sinners as everyone else but we have to avoid turning this into one more burden, where we set ourselves up to fail (again!). We are here to enjoy and use creation properly, not to be judgemental or legalistic.

Growing ECS in your congregation

Contributions from Highland churches

1. Hilton Parish Church, Inverness *

Anne Thomas

Anne spoke about the redevelopment work at their church. They have:

- created the Light House café and community centre from the former Manse building and installed solar panels for hot water, generating about 2500kW of heat a year, and put in low energy lights.
- had a grant to install solar panels for electricity on the café. They only had to pay 10%, should generate enough electricity to pay this off in a couple of years and will continue to generate

electricity, which saves money and lowers carbon pollution. Both these measures have significantly reduced their energy usage. The panels should generate 3,700kWh a year, about half what the café uses. Most of this energy is used on site as the café is busy during the day but is fed into the grid when not needed. These panels were not eligible for feed in tariffs because of the grant. They are slightly larger than a house sized solar system which costs around £5000 now. This grant also covered loft and cavity wall insulation for the café and church area.



- secured an 8 year interest free loan from the Energy Saving Trust to pay for hall insulation and low energy lights. They also installed new doors, as part of a disabled access project, with money a local council fund, which have also helped save energy.
- so far, they estimate this has about halved their gas usage for the church and hall. They continue to monitor their energy bills. This picked up a problem with a faulty timer.
- installed 48 solar PV panels on the church hall roof by gaining a grant from the Church of Scotland (25% of cost) plus an 8 year loan from the Energy Saving Trust. This has interest because the panels are eligible for 'Feed in Tariffs' (money paid for generating renewable energy whether used or exported to the grid). Income from the electricity used on the site, that was exported at 4.5p per kWh and the feed in tariffs, which pay 13.5p for generation, mean that the panels should pay for themselves in about 8 years. This ties in nicely with the loan period. Over a year, the panels should generate about as much as the church uses, making it carbon neutral for electricity. The total cost of the panels was £20,000.
- It took some work to convince the Church Board that it made financial, as well as environmental, sense. However, several of the board have since installed their own solar panels as a result of being involved in this project.
- For further information see <http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/scotland/Communities> and <http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/scotland/Publications2/Organisations/Small-business-loan-application-form-PDF>). A more detailed case study can be found at: <http://www.foe-invernessandross.org.uk/keep-the-heat-in-campaign/hilton-church-case-study>

Anne also showed slides outlining why Christians should be environmentalists, focussing on climate change and peak oil

2. Daviot, Dunlichty linked with Moy, Dalrossie and Tomatin

Rev Reg Campbell

These rural congregations have taken a completely different approach and many members work with and care for the environment in their daily lives. They:

- make the link in special services eg at Harvest and through a "Good Shepherd" service
- have regular recycling collections of computer cartridges and waste paper
- use and promote fair trade
- have installed low energy lighting in church and manse
- have installed a more energy efficient boiler in manse

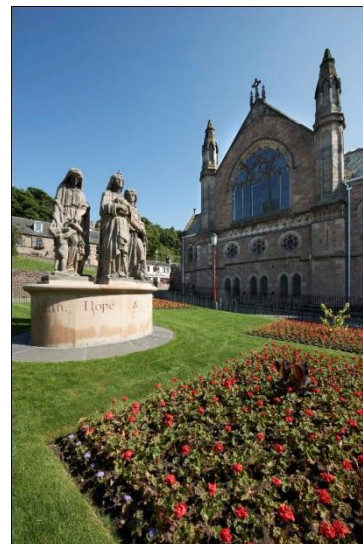
In addition, the minister has created an eco page on the local Presbytery website (<http://www.invernesspresbytery.co.uk/events.htm>)

3. Ness Bank, Inverness

Rev Fiona Smith and Clare McLean

Ness Bank started with an initial push on environmental issues across the whole of church life. They have not set up a separate Green or Eco Team but, instead, have tried to integrate caring for creation into each church organisation's work, so that they have it in mind in all that they do. Actions listed in their award application include:

- preaching on caring for creation and, during Lent, challenge the congregation to reflect on lifestyles and the environment
- involving young people and youth organisations in practical and fun events, such as a "Go Green Day"
- having a 5 week Bible study on the theme
- having "Blythswood Bins" for items such as clothes, cds, toys, shoes, etc that can be reused and encouraging recycling of all items collected by the council
- fitting a new, more energy efficient boiler in the church, as well as motion activated lighting in the toilets and continuing to look for other ways to reduce energy usage
- providing Green tips and eco updates on the website, intimation sheet and the monthly newsletter
- participating in Tearfund's "Toilet Twinning" initiative, which seeks to enable people living in poor communities to have clean water, a decent toilet and to learn about hygiene (see <http://www.toilettwinning.org/>)
- being a Fair Trade Church (http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/get_involved/campaigns/fairtrade_places_of_worship/fairtrade_churches/)
- including Green tips and eco updates are given on the website, intimation sheet and the monthly newsletter <http://www.nessbank.net/page8.htm>



Growing ECS in Inverness and the Highlands

All

The final session was a discussion about what would those present like to get from the Highland Network of Eco-Congregation Scotland – and how do we make that happen?

There was general agreement that:

- It was valuable to get together and exchange ideas, information, news and views
- An e-newsletter would enable those in more remote areas to keep in touch but it would need a local editor
- It was important to maintain links into the community to both learn from other local initiatives and share our experience and enthusiasm about caring for creation, eg examples of innovative energy saving measures in local homes are available at: <http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/scotland/exemplarhomes/search?membertype=homes>
- The network could sustain two meetings a year but the format should not always be a whole day event and two hour evening meetings would generally be sufficient
- Suggested timings for these meetings were September 2014 and April 2015

It was therefore requested that participating congregations explore if it would be possible for their own church to host a future network meeting.

* Powerpoint presentations from these talks are available on the Eco-Congregation Scotland website at <http://www.ecocongregationscotland.org/networks/highlands-2/>.

Feedback on Regional Gathering

Everyone who attended received an evaluation questionnaire consisting of six questions. Thank you to the seven people out of 28 who responded (25% response rate). The feedback was overwhelmingly positive and the respondents appear to have benefited greatly from sharing experiences and being inspired by the caring for creation activities of fellow Eco-Congregations. All respondents expressed the intention to follow up on the Regional Gathering with their own congregations.

Q1. How successful was the Mini Gathering in meeting expectations?

Two respondents thought it was good, while five thought it was excellent.

Q2. Which aspect did you find most useful?

All respondents mentioned that meeting others, sharing experiences and being inspired by hearing about other churches' ideas and achievements was most useful. One respondent specifically mentioned hearing from other Highland congregations helped awareness of where their church is [with making the link to environmental issues] and what will be required to become an eco-congregation.

Q3. What aspect did you find least useful?

Four respondents said that nothing was irrelevant and one did not reply. One respondent highlighted the Green Worship session and another thought the guidance on how to share Eco-Congregation with their own congregation was least useful.

Q4. How do you intend to follow up on the Mini Gathering with your congregation?

One respondent was going to away to look into their congregation becoming an eco-congregation and another was going to meet with their eco group to consider an award application. One was going to study the website and, perhaps, make up their own materials, whilst two others were considering using the materials from the Green Worship session, with one of them planning to involve other elders from their congregation. Two respondents highlighted that they would share information with their congregations or eco groups, one by already having circulated a summary of the day and then making it an agenda item for a Session meeting.

Q5. Do you have any suggestions on how to improve the format or topics for discussion?

One respondent suggested that a summary hand out of each presentation would be useful and another said that it would have been better to have introduced ourselves at the beginning of the Gathering, rather than half way through. One respondent, who described themselves as a "visual person" thought it would have been good to have displays and folders of information to share and get ideas from. One respondent suggested that, although the Gathering had been suitable for anyone who had not been to one before, a session specifically on how to become an eco-congregation would have been helpful. Another wanted to maintain a good mix of congregations, giving a range of examples of eco-congregation work. They further commented that focussing on big projects, such as solar panel installation, could be "scary" for some, although it was still valuable to open up these possibilities. One other respondent suggested getting someone to speak on church heating and lowering the church's carbon footprint.

Q6 Asked for further comments or suggestions. There were none.

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