

Address to the Climate Change and the Developing Countries
Kerala 2015
Norman Hutcheson

Good Afternoon.

I bring you the good wishes of our climate director Adrian Shaw who can't be here personally, and has invited me to attend representing the partner church to the CSI

I am a pastor of the Church of Scotland, and have been involved with the eco congregational movement since the start.

I will tell you a little about the history, and the work of the congregation that was awarded eco congregational awards. Then I will outline the areas for the 3 awards, and then reflect on my own journey and where I see it today in missiological terms

The story of eco congregations is only 15 years old, having been launched at was dedicated on 19 September 2000, at a special service in St Paul's Cathedral, London, in the presence of representatives of most denominations. Eco -Congregation was officially launched in Scotland at a special dedication service at Dunblane Cathedral on 28 March 2001, and as you will be hear the congregation that I served as Minister was in there at the beginning.

Since the launch, hundreds of congregations in Scotland have begun to explore ways of using the Eco-Congregation resources in their own contexts. These churches are members of the Baptist Union, Church of Scotland, Jesuit Community, Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church of Ireland, Religious Society of Friends, Roman Catholic Church, Russian Orthodox Church, Scottish Congregational Church, Scottish Episcopal Church, United Free Church and United Reformed Church.- a truly ecumenical cross section of Church life in contemporary Scotland.

The Scottish Eco Congregational award is available to all congregations who register their interest, and then commence a fairly lengthy evaluation of their work and ambitions.

My own story started over 15 years ago when several elders approached me as their minister to ask if we could embark on the then new eco congregation award. I said yes without any idea of where this would take me.

The Award was open to all congregations within Scotland, and there is a similar programme operating in England and Wales.

It is a strenuous programme that lays down working agenda that now covers a Church Environmental check up, then longer term issues on Spiritual Practical and Global living.

The first step we made was to calculate our carbon footprint, and this came out a huge 40 tons of CO₂. The plan was to reduce this by 5% on a year on year basis, which was going to be very difficult. Our churches are large buildings, built in a different age when people walked to church on the cold days of winter with heavy coats. Now they drive, and the come in lighter suits, and feel the cold differently. The obvious cost efficient

saving was to be had by using roof insulation, at a cost of several thousand pounds. It made some difference, but as I will state later when we were assisted by the Glasgow University Carbon Management staff, we discovered that the bulk of heat loss and carbon emission was caused not just by roof leakage and window seepage – but the walls were taking so long to warm up that we were losing significant amounts of energy. I appreciate that heat loss is not an Asian issue, but the search for efficient use of energy is common to us all

In the grounds, we planted a wild garden where insects and birds could feed. We created a Biblical garden to mark the year 2000, which was designed as an arbor surrounded with biblical flowers where the public could come and sit, and relax. The plants were labeled to enable visitors to gain an insight and connection to the days of the Bible

The young people of the church were encouraged to participate by maintaining bird feeders in the wintertime. While not always cold, temperatures can drop close to freezing, and particularly the small blue tits benefit from a supply of food and drinking water. The children also put up bird boxes for spring nesting, and many were filled with small birds.

We knew from carbon calculator that we emitted over 40 tonnes of CO₂ annually, most of it from church heating. We installed massive 300 mm thick insulating material in the roof space.

In spiritual terms, the years with the eco movement has changed my preaching and liturgical style. I would not want it thought that eco living was my only message, but I found that the prayers reflected a new dimension in creation care. God was often referred to as Creator in place of Father, and prayers for intercession often focused on those who work for the sustainability of the planet. Even prayers of confession included reflections on our relationship to the earth

Biblical Studies were part of our years of endeavour. Creation care does not have a great presence in Reformed Theology, and the gift of God in Genesis for man to use the earth and its resources usually ignores the call to tend the earth, to care for it.

In Scotland, the award is available at three levels. The title of eco congregation is offered for three years after which the award has to be applied for.

There are excellent resources available on the web, and I suggest you look for eco congregations Scotland to find out more

At the first level there has to be a link between faith and the environment. This is the theological input of the Bible Studies and the preaching and prayers of the church.

Then we must look at our buildings and the environment they are set in. How do we use fuels, office supplies, transport, and the whole area around the church? What does it say to the passing world, and what should it say about our God and the world He has made?

Thirdly, our carbon footfall has to be reduced on a 5% basis year on year, as well as showing involvement in the local community

The Second Award looks to us to build on the work that was started and extend it, and in particular reach out in some global connection. I will say more about this later.

The Third Award requires that the work is continuing, while at the same time participating in eco movements on a wider scale by networking with others. By the third award, there should be the feeling that the congregation is there for a long haul, constantly aiming to keep the targets before the community and the church as well as be involved in a wider community

Now my own personal journey has taken me a long way. We were reminded that at the Lambeth Conference of 1988 and before that at the WCC in Canberra in 1983, Creation was put at the front edge of missiological thinking. I am going to suggest to you that I found that it has taken me in a small community into the world of schools and academia, local enterprise company and civil society.

When we became an eco congregation, we were one of the first to receive the award. Around the same time the University of Glasgow invested in an extension campus at nearby Dumfries where they offered a post graduate Degree in Carbon Management. They looked for groups that might be able to set them off, and they approached me as an eco congregation minister if I was willing to help. This was to be a journey over several years, as we struggled with the impact of heat loss in large cold churches. They discovered eventually that heat was seeping into the walls, and massive heat loss was occurring on the one area we had never thought of. They as professional advisers had thought of the windows, doors being left open, inefficient boilers, and even accumulation of heat at the top of the church. By now carbon management was on the wider agenda of the town where we lived. Soon an approach was made to create a publicly funded Carbon Advice Centre, so that people could come and have free advice on roof insulation, solar panel installation and a host of practical solutions.

Meanwhile, in working with local schools, they went on to win their green flag awards as eco schools. We joined them on Earth Hour, when we paraded round the town with only rechargeable torches to guide us, while our homes were left in darkness.

We part of the 350 chime bell ringing festival across the world, when on a given hour in December Churches rang their bells for 350 rings, calling on the world to return to the 1950s level of CO₂ in the upper atmosphere where there were 350 parts per million of CO₂

We organized a food is local as part of the 10 10 10 campaign. Here we hit a debate, for we were concerned about food miles. But green beans that I enjoy come from Zambia, where local small producers grow. Pack and air lift their green beans to the UK. If we stop buying green beans or a host of small producers output, they will be unemployed

and become charity cases for the aid network. Which is worst – air miles or poverty? This question is still not resolved in my mind.

Eco Congregations are wider than the small town where we live. We became involved with a sister church in Hungary in Hajdunanas. There a group of us went to visit at Creation Time. We saw the attempt to create food production for local unemployed people when the Mayor Tibor made over agricultural land for the unemployed to grow and sell local produce at market

The list goes on. But when I look back, and know that the small town that I lived and worked in slowly took the earth seriously. It started with the eco congregation award, it moved out to Academia, then the schools, then the wider community. It started with the church, and then went out into all the world. Neighbouring small towns have no eco congregations and no carbon management structure

The eco congregation movement was the yeast in the bread – the loaf rose, and the yeast is in the middle of it, but never taken back out
The impact of eco congregations, thank God, is greater than just the award itself
And the reward is knowing that in the great scheme of things, lives have been changed as they participate in caring for the world that God so loved that he sent his only Son to die for it.