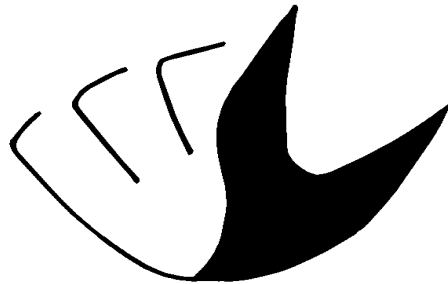


CANBERRA CENTRAL PARISH

Wesley Uniting Church, Forrest
and
St Aidan's Uniting Church, Narrabundah

www.wesleycanberra.org.au



ECO-JUSTICE CHARTER

Introduction

During July and August 2006 a series of workshops addressing our Christian concern for the state of the environment were held at Wesley Uniting Church in Forrest. Guest speakers included theologians, a Bishop and several scientists. Those in attendance were similarly diverse in their interests and experience.

The following Charter was affirmed during the closing session as a shared statement of theological and practical outcomes from this rich and informative time together. They are the key 'take-away' issues for us.

The Eco-Justice Charter is now offered to the Church and community in the hope that it will assist others to understand and act on their own concern for the well being of God's good creation.

Theological Basis

- The basis of our relationship with Creation is that God created all of it (Psalm 19.1-6*); this implies total interconnectedness, interdependence, reverence and caring for not just everyone but everything.
- Creation is ongoing, not complete, and we are called to be co-workers with the Creator God in the fulfilment of creation.
- Human greed and self-centredness (what might be called our sinfulness), together with a large and rapidly growing global population and the highly developed but poorly applied technologies of 'the West' have resulted in our species, humanity, becoming highly destructive of the biosphere, to the detriment of all future generations of life.
- Genesis 1.28 and 2.15 suggest God's desire for a human spiritual harmony with and custodianship of Creation, but not an ownership or authoritarian, self-interested stewardship.
- The Bible has many other passages emphasizing the importance of a spiritual understanding of, and relationship with, all Creation – for example, Psalm 104, Jesus' parables and Romans 8.18-25. It also has many passages that appear to emphasize a contrary view. We acknowledge that the Bible cannot be seen as a definitive basis either for or against eco-justice.
- We need to move beyond a singularly human-centred or biocentric approach, and embrace instead a God-centred ecological perspective and action toward the environment and humanity's place within it.
- Jesus' command to *love your neighbour as yourself* can and indeed must be seen to imply compassion and care for all Creation – which has been and continues to be grievously harmed, wilfully or by neglect.
- Restoring a harmonious relationship with Creation is a central concern of our faith. In modern parlance, 'environmentalism' is *core business* for the Christian. With 'ecological eyes' we can see that many other faiths and spiritual traditions share this view. Restoring a healthy relationship with Creation includes cultivating a passion for and consistent practice of *eco-justice* as an essential and urgent component of the Gospel.

Practical Action

The following practical suggestions are offered as ways for individuals and groups to enact their desire to help preserve creation.

Use of energy resources

- Purchase renewable electricity from the grid – for example, certified green power schemes such as ACTEWAGL's Green Choice. Where green electricity does not meet all of our energy needs (gas heating, for example), purchase CO₂ offsets through schemes such as Green Fleet and Carbon Neutral (trees are planted on our behalf to sequester our carbon emissions)
- Generate our own power where feasible – for example, through solar panels and small wind turbines
- Install solar hot water system
- Turn off all power that doesn't need to be on including devices left on Stand-By
- Switch from incandescent light bulbs to fluorescent and compact fluorescent systems
- Minimise fossil fuelled transport. Use electronic communication rather than personal travel where reasonable to do so. Consider cycling. Use public transport in preference to private vehicles. Use a small and relatively efficient car, and a hybrid or renewable fuel vehicle in preference to large and thirsty cars and 4WDs. Offset fossil fuelled travel impacts by purchasing carbon credits through Green Fleet or Carbon Neutral
- Manage and renovate homes and workplaces to be more energy efficient where appropriate, especially to conserve heat in winter – for example, improved insulation (especially in ceilings), seal air gaps, using heavy drapes with box pelmets, plants allowing winter sun in whilst keeping summer sun out, and use 'zones' in home heating systems so that only relevant rooms are heated. Where cooling is required, prefer evaporative cooling to the far more energy intensive compressor-driven air-conditioning
- Select, use and care for refrigerators/freezers appropriately to maximise their efficiency
- Audit household and business energy expenditures to obtain baseline data from which we can work to improve energy efficiency.

Water use, management and conservation

In gardens

- Adhere to Canberra's water-use regulations
- Grow drought-resistant plants, minimise or ideally remove lawns, and correctly mulch garden beds
- Where supplemental watering is required, use water-efficient irrigation systems and trigger-nozzle hoses
- Collect roof water from the home and associated structures. This can be dispersed onto gardens or stored in tanks for later use.

In the home

- Avoid long showers and use a water-saving shower head
- Stop drips and other leakages
- Use dual flush toilet cisterns, or add manual flush control mechanisms to older cisterns
- Save relatively clean waste water for use on garden (use phosphate-free and preferably liquid rather than powdered detergents to minimise pollution and potential harm to soil).

See www.actewagl.com.au for more tips.

Self-education

- Join Catchment Groups or other organizations with ecological vision and concern

Community education

- Share your knowledge and encourage others to make positive changes.

Land use, management and conservation

Food production, processing and marketing

- Use food production methods that are not water-wasteful - in large-scale and backyard production
- Encourage measurement of the penetration of water below soil, to ensure sufficient but not excessive watering
- Encourage local market-gardening and backyard gardening as a spiritual as well as social-economic venture
- Encourage and implement measures to prevent soil erosion and soil degradation in farms and gardens
- Foster community action along these lines through community groups.

Nature conservation

- Join and work with a nature conservation group – for example, Australian Conservation Foundation, Wilderness Society, Birds Australia
- Become active in a local landcare or nature group – for example, Parkcare (Canberra Nature Park, 6207 2193), Friends of Grasslands, Canberra Ornithological Group, Field Naturalists
- Reduce our own ecological footprint
- Avoid using material that is significant to wildlife habitat – for example, dead trees, rocks
- Plant native species in our own garden, and avoid exotics. Check that we are not growing declared noxious or ecological weeds
- Help identify and implement measures to minimize soil erosion and degradation in nature reserves and public places
- Weed swap (for native plants) twice annually
- Get to know native grasses one-by-one, and encourage them in own garden
- Make nest boxes for native birds and animals – selecting the appropriate design
- Join an Indian Myna control group, and a make trap
- Cats are not eco-friendly. Support laws and policies that encourage more responsible pet ownership, including the use of cat curfews and cat bans
- Watch for and appreciate local fauna including birds, reptiles and insects.

Population issues

- Study global, regional and local population trends and policies. Become aware of who is arguing for what and whose interests are being served by these positions
- Research the literature dealing with global, regional and local population-carrying capacities. Examine the position of political parties, environmental groups and other lobbies in relation to population issues. Not all environmental groups share the same stance in this regard
- Consider our attitude towards immigration of Pacific islanders, asylum-seekers from war-devastated areas, and ‘economic refugees’ in the context of eco-justice. Can our social justice concerns be commensurate with our ecological concerns?
- Review our Church’s stand on the full range of population issues including ACT and Federal Government policies on national immigration, interstate/territory migration, projected population sizes and the economic, social and ecological arguments involved
- Speak out against those who deliberately conflate discussions about population size with issues of race. Consider joining ‘Sustainable Population Australia’. This organisation has eminent patrons and specifically opposes any form of racism

- If all the people on Earth at present were to live the lifestyle of the affluent West, we would need several Earths to support them. Identify ways in which we, individually and collectively, are willing to moderate our lifestyle and standard of living to help others – individually and through the church
- Become involved with an informed, reputable advocacy group that encourages adequate policies and action programs against excessive population growth and its drastic ecological consequences.

Church Action

Congregation level

- Produce an Eco-Justice Charter as an issue of Windows or as a leaflet
- Recommend that the Joint Church Council establish and provide objectives for a new Eco-Justice Mission Team, including in their objectives the task of providing regular opportunities for eco-justice educational programs and the promotion of effective action
- Suggest that the Eco-Justice Mission team review all decisions relating to property and environment before their adoption in order that ecological benefits and damage may be considered
- Suggest that the Eco-Justice Mission Team provide a forum for mutual support to people who may need to study and discuss difficult or controversial issues, share experiences, and support one another in possible changes to home and lifestyle
- Consider a car-pool to bring people to church, or buy a bus
- “Live simply so that others may simply live”!

Presbytery level

- Propose to the Presbytery of Canberra Region that every Uniting Church congregation be asked to undertake a regular energy and water use audit
- Need for an education/information officer (at presbytery or synod level) and ‘extension’ action.

Synod or National Assembly level

- Consider negotiating with a National Power Authority (perhaps as part of an ecumenical approach) for a concessional supply of ‘green’ energy to churches who are willing to convert to more energy efficient use of supplies.

** Biblical references in this document are for reflection and are not intended as ‘proof texts’*