

dlbh003d Diocesan synod 3 Sep 05: booklet:

**The diocesan commitment to the environment:
Suggestions about ways to make it your own**

“Oh, no, another diocesan initiative for us hard-pressed parishes to attend to!”

If you feel like this, you will not be alone, though there will be others thinking,
“At last the church is taking the environment seriously.”

So can you summon up the energy too use the opportunity of the new diocesan commitment to the environment to move things along a bit at parish level? We hope you can, as it is our duty and our joy. The joyful part is rejoicing in the wonder of God’s creation, from plants and animals to things like the weather, playing our proper part in the scheme of things. So please don’t let this become a burden as you focus on all the things you cannot do, but enjoy the excitement of doing new things that are within the reach of your parish.

Suggested procedure

If you are the vicar or the PCC secretary, who has just received this mailing, the first thing to do is to consider who is the best person in the parish to take a lead on the environment. It could be you. It might be another PCC member, or someone else with enthusiasm who could attend meetings where the environment is on the agenda.

This person then needs to familiarise himself or herself with the diocesan material and, perhaps, environmental issues more widely. They can then look carefully at the diocesan booklet ‘Sustain and Renew the Life of the Earth’ and consider how they might best be adapted to the parish. They provide only a model and we hope parishes will make the commitment their own by changing it to fit their own by changing it to fit their own circumstances and the concerns God has laid on them. As you work through the model clauses you may find that some can stand as they are or just be omitted (not all may be relevant), other could be altered straightforwardly, yet others may need to be presented to the PCC as a series of alternatives to choose between.

It will be particularly important to sound out who might be the environment officer for the parish (warning! – it might be you). But even if there is no volunteer, do not let that stop the parish from adopting an environmental policy, as the bulk of the responsibility rests on the whole PCC and congregation. The job of the environment officer is to keep the subject on the agenda of the parish, but this could be done in other ways, such as having a regular agenda item on the subject at PCC meetings.

The next step is to present the diocesan Commitment to the Environment, together with your suggestions on how it could be taken, by explaining the reasons for taking the environment seriously and for having a policy, then set out some of the things churches and Christians can do to help, and then get to the details of the text of any policy with its various clauses.

After the policy is agreed

When the PCC has agreed a policy (and this may take more than one meeting), we love to receive a copy. This is so that we can share your pleasure at getting this far and to learn from what you have done. We may be able to share your good ideas with other parishes (appropriately crediting the originators). We invite you to send a copy of your policy to the Diocesan Officer for the Environment (c/o 38 Sydenham Villas Road, Cheltenham, GL52 6DZ). The officer is a good person to ask for more ideas and resources. The diocesan papers refer to three particular national organisations that can help and give their contact details. But also ask around in your parish and check with your neighbours to get other good ideas.

Celebrate your commitment, too, perhaps with a special service. And let other people know what you have done. This especially includes the wider congregation, so give a report in the parish magazine or whatever. It also includes your general neighbours, so try to get your local newspaper to run an article on it. You can be pleased at what you have done and be confident that most of its readers will be encouraged to hear of their local church taking such a step.

Of course it is very easy for policies to be adopted and then to gather dust for a year or two before finding their way to the wastepaper basket. After your hard work, and for the sake of creation, you will not want that to happen. A group of people will need to work through the specific clauses, for instance, working out concrete changes in how the church does things, (eg what food it buys, how it heats the church, whether car sharing could be organised for Sunday mornings.) Alternatively, already established groups such as a worship committee or a fabric committee could be asked to consider the issues that apply to them and to respond accordingly.

And how will you be doing a year hence? The clauses that specify when the PCC and others will review what is going on are very important. So don't let people forget that there should be a triennial debate and, we would suggest, an item in the annual report. If the parish has a keen environment officer, this will be easier to do, but even if you do not have such a person, the PCC secretary can establish the routine of putting the environment on the agenda at the agreed frequency.

Be encouraged. Every little helps. As Christians we believe that nothing that is good is lost forever. Keep going, and if the church takes a step back, work and pray for it until it takes two steps forward again.

A prayer

Almighty God, give us reverence for all creation, and respect for every person, that we may mirror your likeness, in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

(The collect of the second Sunday before Lent (additional))