

Aiming for Net Zero Carbon

Newcastle Diocesan Synod, November 2020

What is 'carbon net zero'?

'Net zero' carbon: carbon emissions that are eliminated/balanced with the use of renewables and carbon removal.

Climate change is a large-scale, long-term shift in the world's weather patterns and average temperature. The effects of the climate crisis are seen around the world, prolonged droughts, erratic rainfall and flooding are putting millions of people at risk of poverty as crops fail and food prices surge. One of the major causes of climate change is carbon dioxide emissions, which act as a greenhouse gas, trapping the heat of the sun. The Church of England is aiming to reduce its carbon emissions to net zero by 2030.

Why Net Zero Carbon?

In February 2020 the General Synod of the Church of England passed a motion to become carbon neutral by 2030. This included a call for all Dioceses to urgently examine their carbon emissions, plan how to reduce their carbon footprint and report their emissions figures to Diocesan Synod on a regular basis.



Worship & Discipleship

Celebrating God's gift of creation can be found throughout Scripture, we are called to show compassion and love for God's people and his creation.



Response to Climate crisis

The target of net zero by 2030 is due to international calls by scientists and governments for a dramatic reduction in carbon emissions to stop warming by 1.5 degrees. The impact of warming has been recorded across the world with increased droughts, flooding and poor harvests.



Social Justice

Climate change is one of the greatest injustices of our time because the people least responsible for it are often the most vulnerable to its impacts. According to Tearfund, climate change could push more than 100 million people back into poverty by 2030.



Mission & Outreach

Environmental projects are a great opportunity to engage people in the good news of Jesus, inspire love of God's creation and connect people with their local church.

What have we achieved so far?

Reporting

An annual carbon emissions report is being compiled for 2019. The data for this has been collected from energy performance certificates and the Energy Footprint Tool which calculates the carbon footprint of churches, and now forms part of the Parish Returns process.

Findings so far:

The Diocese of Newcastle emitted nearly 5800 tonnes of carbon in 2019.

This is equivalent to greenhouse gas emissions of 14,392,060 miles driven by an average car.

According to the Forestry Commission, Kielder Forest's 150 million trees lock up 82,000 tonnes of carbon every year, so we would need 2,900,000 trees to absorb our 2019 carbon emissions!

The majority of our emissions come from heating our churches, schools and housing.

Team & Training

- The Environment Working Group, made up of people from across the Diocese, meets monthly and has begun to devise a long-term environmental action plan
- Staff have received training through the National Church of England Environment Programme Carbon Net Zero webinars. A new series of webinars has been produced for clergy/churches that are considering changes to their heating, lighting etc.

Commitment

November Diocesan Synod

The Environmental Working Group will propose that we change our environmental policy aims to reduce carbon emissions to net zero by 2030, instead of the current date of 2050, to reflect the General Synod motion.

We also intend to register as an Eco Diocese and encourage churches to participate in the Eco Church scheme which equips churches with tools and resources to make changes to their impact on the environment.

Next steps

- Establishing better reporting and monitoring e.g. Annual Carbon Emissions report 2019.
- Setting our targets for net zero in our Long-Term Environmental Action Plan.
- Environment themed Diocesan Synod (rescheduled from March 2020).
- Identifying quick wins and projects that can make significant reductions.

The quick win in terms of carbon reduction would be switching churches, schools and clergy housing to a renewable electricity supply and carbon neutral gas. In clergy housing and schools, we need to tackle poor thermal retention, and create long-term plans for generating renewable electricity and using renewable heat instead of oil and gas.