

12. EDUCATION, TRAINING AND SUPPORT

LOCAL CHURCHES

The Eco-Congregation Programme

A National and Local Scheme

Eco-congregation was set up in 2000 by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and the environmental awareness charity “Going for Green” (established as part of the UK government’s response to the 1992 Earth Summit). It is an ecumenical scheme and can easily be adopted by LEPs. With its emphasis on links to the local community, Eco-congregation creates excellent opportunities for mission.

For the whole church

The eco-congregation programme provides a framework in which all church people, lay and ordained, together with people from the local community, can work together to learn about and participate in environmental awareness projects

In the foreword to ‘Sharing God’s Planet’, the Archbishop of Canterbury called on the whole church to undertake an ecological audit. He wrote: “Such local, internal responses are vital if our voice as a Church is to have integrity.”

Joining in

To register on the scheme a Church has to do three things:

- nominate a link person
- have the PCC agree to take on the programme
- carry out an audit of what good practice already exists and what aims for improvement might be.

For more information see Paper 16. Resources: Study Programmes and Books

CHURCH AND COMMUNITY

Within most communities there are people who are aware of the need to care for the environment. Their concerns will vary. Some will be changing their way of living. Some will support environmental organisations from the RSPB to Greenpeace. Many want to do something but do not know what they can do. Many are concerned but feel helpless.

Around the diocese members of local congregations and sometimes PCCs are working with others within their communities. Paper 19 describes one such project: *Go Zero in Chew Magna*.

In some communities, particularly where the life of the church is quite integrated with local community life, this might be the best way for a local church work in caring for the environment.

SCHOOLS

Action to encourage green thinking

The DfES has designed this school year as the “Year for Action on Sustainability for Schools”. Some key documents include:

- The National Curriculum: Statutory requirements ensure that every child is taught environmental awareness, particularly via geography, science and citizenship, at all phases of education. For examples see Ref 1.

- One of the 5 pillars of the “Every Child Matters” framework is to “make a positive contribution”, in which children are encouraged to “engage in decision making and support the community and environment”.

- The “Year of Action” began in May 2006 with the launch of the DfES Sustainable Schools Strategy and consultation document. Schools are asked to consider how they can extend their commitment to sustainable development through 8 key areas, or “doorways”:

- Food and drink
- Energy and water
- Travel and traffic
- Purchasing and waste
- Buildings and grounds
- Inclusion and participation
- Local well-being
- The global dimension

- New resources proliferate e.g. a special sustainable schools website. The very recent Sustainable School Self-evaluation (s3) tool, offers a whole-school approach based on Ofsted’s self-evaluation form (SEF) to record their evidence around the eight ‘doorways’.

Schools Making Changes

Many schools recognise that this topical and urgent issue needs to be taken on by the whole school. The pace and extent of this recognition is patchy, with some schools, particularly primary schools, at the forefront of thinking and action. Others are slower to integrate these issues into what they see as an already crowded curriculum.

The key factor in all examples of good practice is that it is the children themselves who are leading the action – this does not feel like an imposed curriculum!

Examples of some of the many projects in schools:

- “Eco-schools” motivates children to reduce their own environmental impact and that of their communities. Schools work towards their “green flag awards” by addressing 10 areas of sustainable development (similar to the “doorways” above). Crispin School in Street was the first Somerset school to achieve a green flag award; Milverton Primary and

Milfield Preparatory joined them this year, and many other schools are on the route.

- “Growing schools” uses “the outdoor classroom” to inspire learning across all subjects by interaction with the environment. School grounds are being redesigned and school gardens planted, in schools across the county.

- Other projects involve sourcing school food from local traders / healthy ways to travel to school / reduce, reuse and recycle initiatives / global citizenship projects / energy monitoring ... the sight of groups of children with clipboards, daily taking the school’s electricity meter readings, and setting goals for energy consumption, is becoming common!

- “Sustainable Scrap Science” is a project with 3 Somerset schools working in tandem with 3 under-resourced Indian schools to find innovating ways of using recycled materials in science, and to exchange ideas.

- At a different level, schools recognise that sustainable development contributes to strategic school improvement e.g. via achievement-raising, behaviour improvement, and cost savings, as well as providing a means to engage the whole school community in an issue of great topical importance.

The role of schools in communities

Churches were the “hearts of their communities” – built physically in the centre of communities and acting as the centre-board, for centuries. What is clear now is that the government is seeing schools as taking this role in C21 communities.

The Government's Sustainable School Strategy sees young people in general as part of the solution, but schools in particular, “because they have the potential to be the hearts of their communities”. The aim is for “all schools to become models of sustainable development for their communities”.

Schools and churches working together

So how can churches work together with schools, to encourage, resource and inspire the action which is already taking place?

- To recognise what is already happening; to be aware of the work being done in schools across the curriculum; to visit schools and show interest and encouragement; to provide and suggest further resources

- To be aware of the energy and creative thinking of children, who take on these issues far more readily and more urgently, often, than adults

- To work in partnership with schools, sharing the work the churches are themselves doing, and finding common ground

- To provide a platform and a space for children to share their work with the wider communities

Schools can provide for churches a perfect setting for interacting with children and young people on the issue

which is of such vital importance for the future of our earth, and ourselves.

THE DIOCESE

The School of Formation is organising an Inter-departmental day in January 2007 to work out the best way forward for the diocese in education, training and support.

The School of Formation will support the development of teaching and training programmes on environmental matters across the diocese.

The Department of Ministry Development is preparing two CME days, each held in three locations during 2007-8: one on preaching on creation and hope, the other on developing worship in the context of an ecological crisis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that

- every PCC should consider taking part in the Eco-congregation programme or an alternative.

- church members should be encouraged to work with others in their communities to care for the environment.

- the concerns of environmental organisations should be supported by local churches through magazines and other means.

- local environmental organisations should be invited to take part in church worship, particularly when the service has a particular creation theme or on Environment Sunday.

- PCCs should become aware of what is already happening in their local schools to encourage green thinking; support this work as much as they can; collaborate with their schools in environmental projects; and provide opportunities for children to share with the wider community and the congregation what they are doing.

- the Diocesan Board of Education and its officers should continue to help schools make links between RE and other aspects of the curriculum in which ecological awareness and thinking are being developed; to follow such relevant themes as creation, stewardship, penitence and hope in school worship; and to adopt an environmental education programme such as *eco-school*.

- a Diocesan Environment Officer should be appointed with the time and resources to help local congregations and LMGs consider and carry out the diocesan commitment, and to represent the diocese to other bodies concerned with environmental matters.

- the Archdeacons' Articles of Inquiry in 2008 should ask Churchwardens what action is being taken in their parishes in response to these recommendations.