

Overview

Biblical references

1 Chronicles 29:1-2 (NIV)

The task is great, because this palatial structure is not for man but for the Lord God. With all my resources I have provided for the temple of my God.

Introduction

We know that carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions are leading to climate change and more extreme weather conditions. While carbon dioxide emissions can come from natural causes, many are from human activities such as burning fossil fuels. The people who are most affected by climate change and more volatile weather are the world's poorest countries. Climate change, pollution and emissions also affect nature and wildlife.

The UK government set a target of a 77% reduction from 1990 emissions by 2035 and aims to reach net zero carbon by 2050. Most church denominations have set more ambitious dates for achieving net zero carbon emissions and this survey category focuses on this area – reducing carbon emissions and establishing policies to achieve this. Recording data is an important part of setting targets and monitoring progress and consequently this section encourages you to have plans in place to do this.

Although many aspects of this category might be 'behind the scenes', remember to encourage the congregation to get involved – whether for simple things like remembering to turn lights off or informing them about the waste and recycling processes of the church. Larger projects, such as installing solar panels (PVs) will need to have the whole church understanding the rationale in order to be engaged.

The Church of England document [A practical path to net zero carbon for our churches](#) sets out a helpful framework which is applicable to churches of *all* denominations. This category draws on that framework, though other denominational guidance is available – see the resources below.

Many of the steps outlined in this category point toward good building maintenance for the long term, as our buildings endure a changing climate, with more extremes, and as we seek to maintain them as welcoming spaces, glorifying God.

There are three pathways through this survey:

Pathway 1 – Cathedrals and churches that are used regularly (at least weekly) and have energy and water supplies.

Pathway 2 – Small, intermittently used churches, including those without energy or water supplies.

Pathway 3 – Churches without their own building (e.g. those that meet in rented space or outdoors).

What pathway should we choose?

There are 3 pathways through the 'Buildings and Energy' category of the survey. Choose the pathway that, on balance, best suits your setting.

When considering the pathway to choose, remember to include *all* the buildings you own, manage or use. If you have more than one building, then you will need to reflect your overall situation as 'a blend'. For example, if you have a church with no double glazing and a hall that is all double glazed, respond 'partly' when asked about double glazing.

For large churches and cathedrals you may also find our [Further information for very large churches](#) helpful.

Terminology

For consistency, the survey uses two main ways to refer to concern and care for the Earth. Reference to 'creation' and 'creation care' points to our interdependence on, and responsibility for, our God-given common home. Reference to the climate and nature crises signifies our recognition that urgent action is required. In addition, the term 'environmental issues' is used to refer to the wide spectrum of problems we face locally and globally.

Commitment and link to Environmental Policy

At the outset of every category the Eco Church survey asks your church to acknowledge the climate and nature crises and demonstrate a commitment. A vision or mission statement can be a great place to acknowledge our role as Christians to care for and protect the Earth. An Environmental Policy is an excellent way for your church to present your recognition and outline the commitments you are making.

Once you have chosen your pathway, the next question of the Buildings and Energy category requires you to confirm '*Our church has recognised the climate and nature crises and the fundamental injustice these represent. We have committed to reducing our carbon footprint year-on-year, in line with our denomination's commitment to net zero (if appropriate).*'

See [our corresponding information sheet on Creating an Environmental Policy and Net Zero Action plan](#), and [example policies](#) that you can adapt for your church. You will need to copy and paste the text into a new blank document to be able to edit and add your content.

There is a [simple environmental policy](#) and [more detailed Environmental Policy and Net Zero Carbon Action plan](#) as examples that you can adapt. You can also find these documents in the [Buildings and Energy category](#).

Although an Environmental Policy is not referenced explicitly in the Eco Church survey, it is somewhere that you can bring together church policies and procedures in one document.

An Environmental Policy outlines your church's **commitment** to care for the environment, and provides a **framework for setting objectives and targets** to improve your environmental performance. Such a policy should relate to *all* relevant areas of the church's life and therefore will be tailored to the individual church building, activity and setting.

Themes in Building and Energy

The questions start by asking churches to consider measuring their carbon emissions and setting targets to improve their carbon efficiency. There are further questions asking about the detail of action you have taken to reduce energy consumption (e.g. changing to LED lighting, insulating and draught-proofing), switch to green energy suppliers or generate energy via solar panels, for example. Finally, there are questions about the policies and procedures which guide your action.

This category encompasses the following themes:

Theme 1: Carbon measuring

- Carbon footprint
- Net Zero Carbon Action Plan
- Eco champion or team and their skills

Themes 2a and b: The building

- Building maintenance
- Double/secondary glazing
- Insulation
- Climate resilience plan
- Lighting
- Energy supply
- Energy generation
- Water

Theme 2c: People and policies

- Building operations
- Climate resilience and building use
- Procurement
- Waste
- Lettings
- Offsetting

Additional comments

At the end of each survey category is an opportunity for you to add additional comments. Please make use of this space to expand on any of your answers and anything else related to this survey category.

What is a carbon footprint?

The calculation of the carbon emissions you produce, as a church or individual, is known as your carbon 'footprint'. It is necessary to understand your carbon footprint in order to set targets toward net zero.

Some denominations are required to submit annual carbon emission measurements (e.g. via the CofE Energy Footprint Tool). Where this is not a requirement we recommend using the [Climate Stewards 360° carbon tool](#) each year. This will form an important baseline measure, the first time you complete it, with annual results which will enable you to make comparisons and see progress on your carbon reduction.

Please note that we ask to see your 360° carbon footprint report when you apply for a gold Eco Church award. We'd encourage you to include all aspects of the tool and set related targets.

As a church, you will need to choose the 'scope' of your carbon measurement. Remember, even if you don't own a building you will still have a carbon footprint from your activities as a church community.

What does 'scope' mean?

Scope 1: Refers to all **direct emissions** from owned or directly controlled sources (i.e. fuel being burned on the premises, such as gas, as well as vehicles *owned* by the church).

Scope 2: Refers to all **indirect emissions** from the generation of **purchased** energy. (i.e. purchased electricity).

Scope 3: Refers to **all other indirect emissions** that occur in producing and transporting goods and services, including the full supply chain.

Climate Stewards 360° carbon footprint is a holistic tool that encompasses scopes 1, 2 and 3 emissions – in other words measuring carbon in food, other purchases and waste as well as building and travel. Note, you can still use the 360° carbon footprint tool even if you are following Pathway 3 (a church without a building) as you can select from the 6 activity areas: energy, travel, food, waste, water and other expenditure.

The Energy Footprint Tool (EFT), required by CofE churches, measures carbon emission in scopes 1 and 2 and transport emissions in business travel in non-owned transport from scope 3.

When you fill in the EFT, you get a gross and a net figure. **Please use the net figure**, as this takes into account whether you are using a green tariff.

What is a green tariff?

Assessing what is 'green energy' can be complex, not only taking into consideration what is genuinely low carbon, but also bringing in wider social and ethical considerations. Further guidance about what 'green' tariff means is being developed. In the meantime, please refer to our [Buying greener energy](#) guidelines, and this [Which article about Differences between green energy suppliers](#).

What does 'offsetting' mean?

Carbon offsetting is a way to **compensate for carbon emissions** by funding projects that reduce or remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Carbon offsetting **does *not* reduce emissions** and should be a last resort, after other measures to reduce or avoid emissions have been explored.

Until you have reached net zero carbon you will be producing net carbon emissions. Once you have calculated your footprint, and reduced what you can, you may wish to mitigate the environmental impact of these emissions by purchasing offsets.

Read more in [A Rocha UK carbon footprint measurement and off-setting](#).

Resources and information

You can access all [Eco Church resources](#) via our website, as well as resources relating specifically to the [Buildings and Energy category](#).

UK government net zero targets

The UK government sets out two strategy publications to reach net zero: the [Net Zero Strategy](#) (2021) and [Powering Up Britain: The Net Zero Growth Plan](#) (2023). A subsequent review of progress, [The UK's plans and progress to reach net zero by 2050](#), was published in 2024.

Denominational net zero ambitions

[The environment | The Salvation Army](#)

The URC has made a commitment to reduce carbon emissions across the whole of church life, see their [Greener Church](#) resources.

The Church of England has produced a comprehensive [Routemap to Net Zero Carbon 2030](#) and an [introduction to Next Zero](#) for churches in the Church of England.

[Church in Wales Toward Net Zero](#)

The Methodist Church provides guidance and resources to help churches produce a [Net Zero Carbon Pathway](#).

Net zero and carbon reduction tools and resources

The Church of England document '[A practical path to net zero carbon for our churches](#)' sets out a helpful framework which is applicable to churches of all denominations. This section broadly mirrors that framework.

[Guidance and resources to reduce the impact of our buildings, money and travel](#) from the Methodist Church.

[Church in Wales](#) resources.

Sheffield Diocese have some excellent guidance and templates to [guide maintenance](#) of your building.

[Climate Stewards](#) provide free tools to measure, reduce and offset carbon for individuals, churches and other organisations.

Examples of Environmental Policies

[Parish Environmental Policy model template for Churches in the Diocese of Newcastle](#)

[St Mark's Methodist Church Environmental Policy](#)

[St Andrew's Ealing URC Environmental Policy](#)

Other subjects mentioned in the Buildings and Energy survey category

[Climate resilient Churches guidance](#) and [further resources](#) from the Church of England.

[Warm Welcome](#) is a campaign supporting spaces which offer a 'warm welcome and a cuppa'.

[Warm spaces in England: an evidence review and toolkit for local organisations](#) is a guide for local organisations offering warm/cool spaces for the local community.

Just Money's [Ethical Purchasing Guide for Churches](#).

Further reading

Saving Us: A Climate Scientist's Case for Hope and Healing in a Divided World (2022) by Katharine Hayhoe

How Bad are Bananas?: The Carbon Footprint of Everything (2010) by Mike Berners-Lee

There Is No Planet B: A Handbook for the Make or Break Years (2021) by Mike Berners-Lee

A Christian Guide to Environmental Issues (2021) by Martin Hodson and Margot Hodson

[Climate Stewards article about ice-cream and carbon offsets](#)