



Sustainability and Church?

United Church

House Groups

Autumn 2018

Leader's Version

Introduction

The June 2018 United Church Meeting took a decision to prioritise Education for Sustainability at church over the next year.

‘Education for sustainability develops the knowledge, skills, values and world-views necessary for people to act in ways that contribute to more sustainable patterns of living. It enables individuals and communities to reflect on ways of interpreting and engaging with the world.’

Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), viewed on the Australian Curriculum website on 21/10/2015.

This house group series is designed for sharing and developing your views about sustainability and what it has to do with your faith.

As you work through the material, bear in mind the following 2 points of context:

❖ Sustainable Development Goals

On September 25th 2015, countries adopted a set of goals to **end poverty, protect the planet** and **ensure prosperity for all** as part of a new sustainable development agenda. Each goal has specific targets to be achieved over the next 15 years. For the goals to be reached, everyone needs to do their part: governments, the private sector, civil society and people like you. For more information see www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



❖ Climate Change

Climate Change, arguably the single most important issue facing our age, demands a response from individuals and communities, if it is to be addressed. In December 2015 195 countries adopted the first ever legally binding global climate deal which sets out a plan to try to avoid dangerous climate change by limiting global warming to below 2 degrees C. (UN, 2015). But how does this translate down into each organisation, each individual doing their part to make it possible?

Other opportunities for learning about and exploring these issues will come over the next few months, in services, events, discussions, prayers.

Feedback Please!

Please capture and feedback ideas and questions from your group to Tim Searle or Jo Crocker (part of the Education For Sustainability Working Group). The ways we take this forward will be shaped by the learning that happens as we go along.

Jo Crocker: Convenor for Education for Sustainability Group

Acknowledgement

Sessions 2-6 of this material are based on Mission and Creation Care for Christian Disciples, produced by the John Ray Initiative. (www.jri.org.uk).

This material compiled and produced by Jo Crocker and Juli Wills

1. SUSTAINABILITY

(Leaders, you will need a large sheet of white paper and, if possible, some coloured felt tip pens. You could take a sheet of white A3 paper from the office, or use the back of wall paper if you have it)

Opening Prayer:

Take a few moments to be present in this place, be conscious of the air you are breathing and the space you are occupying.

Creator God,
you made the goodness of the land,
the riches of the sea
and the rhythm of the seasons;
as we bless you for all you have created,
may we cherish and respect
this planet and its peoples,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

We are going to be spending the next few sessions focusing on sustainability, so first we need to define our terms. A definition offered by the UN in 1987 is *‘to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’*.

What do we mean by sustainability in a Christian context? What do we need to sustain? In other words, what in our lives do we **value** enough to want to keep it going for the future?

Spend a few minutes thinking about the things that are important to you in life in its widest sense, not just the natural world but in terms of relationships, faith, care for the world etc. What do we need to sustain?

First, individually ask yourself ‘what do I value?’. Family is an obvious first choice, but what else? Try to think as broadly as possible and jot down your thoughts below.

What do I value?:

Now share your lists with the group. Make a master list on a large sheet of paper so everyone can see the subjects you have agreed. For ease of reference, you might like to make your own master list at the same time on the blank space at the end of this session. (Leaders, it might be good to encourage members to take their own notes just in case they can’t see the sheet properly)

Over the next five sessions we shall be looking at the following topics:

1. Renewing our understanding of Mission (sustaining our relationship with God and the world through mission)
2. The call to care for creation (sustaining creation)
3. The challenge to live sustainable lifestyles
4. Our approach to economics (what do we need to sustain economically?)
5. The Church's role as an agent of change towards a more sustainable way of living

Looking at these five subjects and looking at the group list that you have put together, see how any of your subjects relate to the sessions. Perhaps colour-code them to clarify the groupings.

Are there subjects which you have missed out in your original lists?

Now, looking at each of the session headings in turn, ask the question 'What is the biblical evidence to back up our need to sustain (or value) this now and for the future? You don't need to remember the actual bible references, just the gist of what you remember!

- What biblical passages can you think of which express our need to sustain (or value) our understanding of Mission? Try to think of one or two bible passages. (Eg Matthew 22:34-40)
- What biblical passages can you think of which express our need to sustain (or value) our creation? (Eg Genesis 2:15)
- What biblical passages can you think of which express the importance of living sustainable lives? You may find it easier to answer this question if you think about why we need to live sustainable lives (is it out of fear, duty or guilt or out of love?) (Leviticus has something to say here, try Leviticus 19:9-16, also concepts of Sabbath and Jubilee)
- What biblical passages can you think of which express the importance of sustaining (or valuing) our economy? (Eg Luke 12:15-21)
- What biblical passages can you think of which support the view that the Church has a role as an agent of change towards a more sustainable way of living? (Eg Ephesians 2:10)

(Leaders, don't worry if you cannot get much detail on these, the following five sessions will be covering them all in detail!)

As a group, bearing in mind the dictionary definition of sustainability, try to redefine the concept of sustainability in a Christian context and write it below:

(Leaders, there might be something focusing on God's love)

Does that change your thinking at all?

Between meetings, you might like to consider the following quote:

‘The Shift from destructive to sustainable patterns of living is the great work of our time. In the ancient words of the Christian tradition, it is metanoia (repentance) and conversion, both of which mean literally to turn around and change direction. They are about more than just thinking differently, but living differently, even being different.’

(Smillie 2011 in Kim 2016, p80)

Closing Prayer:

**Heavenly Lord,
you long for the world’s salvation:
stir us from apathy,
restrain us from excess
and revive in us new hope
that all creation will one day be healed
in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen**

2. RENEWING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF MISSION

Opening Prayer:

Have a time of silent recollection and share the prayer from session 1

Getting Started:

Try a word association game. I say 'Mission' and you say ...

If it was suggested that the mission of the Church included sustainability of creation, what would you think?

Our Mission is focused on Christ:

Read Colossians 1:15-20. This is an early Christian hymn. Compare this with John 3:16

- Who and What is redeemed through the Cross?
- What do we mean by 'redeemed'?
- How does the concept of redemption link into the theme of sustainability? (you might like to revisit the Smillie quote from the end of the last session)

Our whole life is our worship of God:

Read Romans 12:1-2

- How do these words challenge the way we live?
- Are our lifestyle choices and our care of creation part of our worship of God?

Living in right relationships:

The Bible story begins with the centrality of relationships in creation.

Genesis 2 (read later at home) shows us the relationships that God desires; with God; with each other; and with creation.

Genesis 3 (read later at home) describes the 'Fall' through which human rebellion and the human desire to play God leads to as breaking of these relationships.

Read Matthew 22:37-40

- What does Jesus call us to do in repairing these relationships?
- What does 'loving your neighbour' mean if looked at through the lenses of sustainable thinking?

(Leaders be aware of the global implications of 'who is our neighbour' try to draw out thoughts on the wider world community needs)

Paul affirms that creation 'groans' as it waits for us to get our relationship with God fixed – to behave in a Christ-like way (Romans 8:18-23)

Following Jesus:

Read Mark 8:34

- How does this invitation that Jesus offers challenge our relationship with other people throughout the world, and our care of creation?

In his book *'The Challenge of Jesus'*, Tom Wright challenges us to live as if Jesus has already returned. If we embraced this challenge how would it affect our personal lives and the collective life of the church?

Mission and Sustainability:

Bearing in mind all that you have discussed, what links can you see between mission and sustainability? (Leaders, if you are stuck, you could look below at the **Five Marks of Mission**)

Challenge:

Try the world association game again. If I say 'Mission', what do you say now?

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If you have more time:

Look at the **Five Marks of Mission** formulated by the Anglican Consultative Council, can you think of practical ways in which you can personally be involved in making these a reality?

- proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the earth

3. THE CALL TO CARE FOR CREATION

Opening Prayer:

Have a time of silent recollection and share the prayer from session 1

Getting started:

Go around the group and ask everyone to answer the following question:

‘What thing that you’ve created (made, written, sewn, built, painted, drawn) are you most proud of? Describe it and say why you’re proud of it.’

What does care of creation mean to you? Is this something that you consider to be important and/or put into practice?

God’s first Covenant:

Read Genesis 8:22-9:17

God’s first covenant is with the whole of creation, which reaffirms God’s initial creative act, which saw the whole of creation as good (Genesis 1). We live within this covenant

- what are God’s promises and our responsibilities?

Read Psalm 65

- List the ways this psalm describes God’s relationship with human and non-human creation. Do any of the descriptions in this passage surprise you?
- Compare God’s attitude to non-human creation in this psalm with his attitude to human beings elsewhere in the Bible (eg Psalm 8, Matthew 10: 29-31, Luke 12:24)
- If we are called to be like God, what do these passages tell us about how we should relate to creation?

A thought:

One has to ask (Christians) if they can imagine the pain of the parents who lovingly create a home for their children and one night return to find it wrecked by a teenage party, or simply treated as a hotel with a fridge to be raided and a place to dump dirty clothes; or of Michelangelo completing the Sistine Chapel ceiling and sharing all his learning, experience and skill with his children, then offering them the use of his paints for their own artistic expression – and finding that they have used them to scrawl ugly graffiti across his masterpiece.

(Stephen Rand in *The Care of Creation: focusing concern and action*)

- How does this relate to what you have been discussing?

Challenge:

Think of one thing you can do this week to reflect God’s care for creation better (live sustainably) in your own life. You could consider how you might help cultivate, sustain or preserve the world around you. Agree to share feedback on this next week.

Closing Prayer

Read Psalm 24:1, then listen to and watch this video of John Rutter's **Look at the Earth**: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kxr8QBPq1zo>

If you have more time:

God's principles for the care of creation:

- Sabbath (read Leviticus 23:3 and 25:1-7)
- Jubilee (read Leviticus 25:8-34)
- Gleaning (read Leviticus 19:9-16)

These give three principles for farming and food production: sharing – with the poor; caring – for the earth; and restraint – of power and wealth. Jubilee was intended to protect the small householder and also served to establish an economic practice for redeeming the land and the people.

But creation is still in a mess: there are imbalances in the world food system, there is unfair trading, and a growing industrialization of agriculture, which is destroying the environment.

- Can you give some examples?
- Is it possible to take a Sabbath rest, for example, in the extraction of fossil fuels, and not begin to engage in fracking?

4. SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLE

Opening Prayer:

Have a time of silent recollection and share the prayer from session 1

Getting started:

- How did you get on with last session's challenge?

Everybody in the group to answer the following question:

- *What were the last three things that you bought, and where did you buy them from? What factors affected your decision to buy those particular items? Jot them down below:*

Discuss the following questions:

- Which people have been affected (positively and negatively) by our decision to spend money on these things?
- What effect do you think the production, transport, and sale of the items we have bought had on the environment?
- How might these environmental impacts affect different people around the world?
- How do we respond to A Rocha UK's 'three Rs' of waste: reduce, re-use, recycle and then add a fourth – refuse to buy in the first place?

In the image of God:

Read Genesis 1:26

- In what ways can we understand ourselves to be in the image of God?
- What is God like?
- What are we like – be honest?

Our individual discipleship:

Read Matthew 5:3-16 (cf Luke 6:17-26)

- In what ways is the Mennonite author, Donald Kraybill, right to describe this as the mandate of an upside-down Kingdom?
- Dave Bookless challenges us to live a sustainable lifestyle not out of fear, duty or guilt, but out of love: for our neighbours; our fellow creatures; future generations; and at the deepest level for God. Discuss the ways in which you do, or could, act to make your life more sustainable.

Companies, corporations and communities:

- Development that is sustainable is not based purely on profit. What other factors do you think should be involved in business and community activities and decision-making in order for them to be described as sustainable?

- If human flourishing (characterized by creativity, productive lives, responsibility, fruitful relationships and a generosity of spirit) is factored into corporate management, community government or church, how would decision-making be affected?

(Leaders, you might want to refer to the Sustainable Development Goals in the Introduction)

Challenge:

A Carbon Footprint is what we call the amount of carbon (CO₂) that a person or household emits. Much of climate change is caused by greenhouse gases like CO₂ in the atmosphere which come from burning fossil fuels – petrol, diesel, coal, oil and natural gas – when we power our house and cars and produce the goods we consume. Greenhouse gases create a blanket around the earth warming up the atmosphere and disrupting the climate. The typical UK household of 2.3 people generates a massive 28 tonnes of CO₂ annually (13.4 tonnes directly and indirectly another 14.6 tonnes on average) The UK is one of the top CO₂ emitters per capita. (Cool Communities Handbook, 2014, Winacc and David Gershon)

Think of one thing you could do differently this week to reduce your carbon emissions. We will check up on each other next time to make sure we did what we said we would.

Ideas for actions can be found on the Winchester Action on Climate Change website at <http://www.winacc.org.uk/what-can-i-do/top-tips-reducing-your-carbon-footprint>

Closing Prayer:

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5. BIBLICAL ECONOMICS

Opening Prayer:

Have a time of silent recollection and share the prayer from session 1

Getting Started:

- How did you get on with your carbon emissions counting of last week?
- What do we think about when we hear the word economics?
- What shapes our own family budget; our pay, salary or pension; credit and debt?
- How do churches, companies and governments address profit and loss?

(Leaders, try to bring out the sense that the accepted global economic model is for growth. But how can you have endless growth?)

Rich Christians:

Read Luke 4:18-19

- If Jesus came to bring good news for the poor, how do rich Christians get into the Kingdom of God?
- What difference would it make to our individual, our church's, our community's and our country's economic plans if we saw these economic transactions as channels of Christ's redemptive love and God's desire for justice and the well-being of creation as a whole?

Luke recounts five stories about rich people in Luke 10:30-37; 12:13-21; 16:1-12; 16:19-31 and 19:1-10. (You may want to look at just a couple of these references)

- How do these help us to answer the question of rich Christians and the Kingdom of God?

CASE STUDIES

Ethical Business

Harvard Business School 'Class of 2009' drafted a voluntary pledge 'to create value responsibly and ethically'. It begins:

As a business leader I recognize my role in society.

My purpose is to lead people and manage resources to create value that no single individual can create alone. My decisions affect the well-being of individuals inside and outside my enterprise, today and tomorrow.

- Is this a useful suggestion for an ethical and sustainable approach to business decision making?

Sustainable Church:

Our church decision in 2017 to refurbish the kitchen was a decision made on sustainability grounds. The principles we followed were to refurbish the kitchen facilities at United Church for reliable future use, within a realistic cost, whilst being as environmentally friendly as possible. This was achieved by:

- Reuse, repair and refurbishment of as much as we could, and to recycle as much as possible of what had to be discarded.
- High re-use of materials (fewer new materials used means lower environmental footprint)

- Consideration of and consultation with users so needs of use were integrated into the design
- Anything purchased new was as environmentally friendly as possible eg FSC certified wood
- Decisions made were based on values broader than just finance

The Church of England is to sell its shares in oil and gas firms that fail to do enough to tackle climate change. (9th July 2018) It will pull its investment out of firms not on track to meet the Paris Agreement on climate change by 2023. The General Synod, the church's parliament, voted 347 to four in favour of the symbolic move. The Church of England said the vote made it clear that "the church must play a leading role on the urgent issue of climate change"... The new rule will apply to the Church Commissioners' £8.3bn investment fund, as well as a £2.3bn retirement fund overseen by the pensions board and a further £2bn of other Church of England funds. The Church Commissioners had around £123m invested in oil and gas firms at the end of last year.

The Church's ethical investment policy dictates that all investments should be compatible with Christian values.

So it will not invest in companies with the following mix of sales:

- 10% of turnover from weapons
- 3% of income from pornography
- 10% of income from tobacco, gambling, non-military firearms, high interest-rate lending and human embryonic cloning

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-44759914>

- What values do you identify underpinning these 3 case studies above?

Challenge:

Consider what sustainable values underpin the economic decisions that you make.

Closing Prayer:

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6. CHURCH AS A CHANGE-MAKER

Opening Prayer:

Have a time of silent recollection and share the prayer from session 1

Getting started:

- Where do you feel the church (locally and globally) has been an agent of change (for example in the areas of mission, creation care, sustainability and economics)?
- Jesus taught us to pray ... *your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven* ... Discuss how this prayer does or does not show itself in our daily lives and the programmes of our church.

Evangelism:

- People in churches often say in response to an address about the environment or climate change '*but surely we are here primarily to spread the Gospel and not get distracted by these other issues.*' How would you answer this response in the light of the last five studies in this pack?

Read Matthew 25:31-46

- According to Jesus' parable, on what is God's judgement of our lives based?
- It is true, as Paul says (Ephesians 2:8) that we are saved by grace through faith, but what then does Paul continue to state that we are saved *for* (Ephesians 2:10)?
- Do the words of St Francis of Assisi help? '*Always remember to preach the Gospel and if necessary, use words.*' What does that mean in practice?

Gospel presence:

- The purpose of the Church, the Body of Christ, is to present Gospel values to a world which is out of step with its Creator. Is our church doing this, and in what ways?

Read 1 Peter 2:1-11

We are called to be counter-cultural, presenting light and truth, and modelling new possibilities in relationship with God.

- How might we become a foretaste of the coming Kingdom, presenting God's *shalom* (well-being)?

Changing the World:

At the heart of a learning organisation is a shift of mind – from seeing ourselves as separate from the world to connected to the world, from seeing problems caused by someone or something 'out there', to seeing how our own actions create the problems we experience. A learning organisation is a place where people are continually discovering how they create their reality and how they can change it. (Senge 1990, p13)

- Do you think the United Church is a learning organization?

The Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu said: *‘the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.’*

- What are the steps that our church can take in:
 - Caring for creation
 - Demonstrating sustainable living
 - Helping the community to flourish
 - Taking a stand for justice in the world?

Afterthought – setting our agenda

Social change begins with personal change, but wider structural change only comes about when people come together and work for justice. The church’s contribution is to build communities, committed to Christ through worship, prayer and service of the poor, who will bring about transformation.

- Think back to the challenge in the Smillie quote in session 1 (p3). What one thing can you suggest our church could do to shift towards sustainable patterns of living?

(Leaders, this is something Jo would really like you to feed back to her!)

Closing Prayer:

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