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Walk the Talk

A Toolkit to Accompany the
"Roadmap for Congregations, Communities and Churches
for an Economy of Life and Ecological Justice"



World Council
of Churches

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Introduction

“The way we interact with the economy and creation - not only as individuals, but also as congregations, communities, and churches - is strongly connected with our faith convictions.”

“Walk the Talk” builds on the 2019 publication of the World Council of Churches (WCC) titled, “Roadmap for Congregations, Communities and Churches for an Economy of Life and Ecological Justice,” an invitation to discuss a 5-step programme to change the way we deal with the economy and our ecological surroundings.

The roadmap is a key legacy of the late Rev. Norman Tendis who served as WCC consultant for Economy of Life from 2017 to 2019 and pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Austria. Norman was committed to building a more just, sustainable, and caring world as a matter of faith. And he believed it was important to start in our very own backyards. Norman helped to establish “Rainbow Land” – a refugee garden surrounding a parish in Landskron where migrants and asylum seekers can reconnect with the land, foster friendships with each other and fellow neighbors, and derive dignity in labor.

Churches and other faith-based institutions hold significant resources such as land, buildings, and financial assets.

Churches are also employers and consumers and users of all sorts of products and services.

- What if churches’ resources were used to promote sustainable alternatives responding to the climate emergency and to break the cycle of poverty by making reparations and providing opportunities for decent work, just wages, and fair prices?
- What if churches collectively applied their purchasing power to support products and companies that consider the wellbeing of communities and our planet?

Wouldn’t we be living out God’s call to transforming discipleship? And wouldn’t the world be a kinder, fairer, and more beautiful place?

This toolkit aims to enthuse congregations and churches through concrete examples of communities in action as well as offer good practices and practical materials to “walk the talk” on economic and ecological justice.

“We invite congregations, communities, and churches to join a pilgrimage for an Economy of Life and climate justice, to commit to make changes in the way we live, to share successful ideas, and to encourage one another.”



Photo: Marcelo Schneider/WCC

1. Living in Accordance with the Covenant with God and Creation: Key Practices, Examples and Resources

“God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.” (Genesis 1:31) Just as creation cares for us, providing all that we need to live fully, so should we take good care of God’s gift of land, forests, and bodies of water.

1.1 Support and practice small-scale, life-giving agriculture

The expansion of megafarms that promote monocultures and rely heavily on chemical fertilizers and pesticides has caused much ecological and social harm, including large-scale desertification and the displacement of Indigenous communities, especially in the developing world. Churches can take action against this ruthless exploitation. Through the adoption of alternative farming models that show care for the land and community-rooted approaches, many church initiatives are already demonstrating positive impacts.

Key practice: Promote sustainable small-scale farming on church and other lands

Churches can run counter to destructive agricultural trends by making their lands available for small-scale sustainable agriculture and building awareness on good farming practices that protect the land as well as ensure food security and sovereignty for communities.

Examples

Farming God’s Way

Originating in Zimbabwe, “Farming God’s Way” is making its way all around the continent, including Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, and South Africa. Promoted by Methodist and Presbyterian churches, “Farming God’s Way” combines biblical, managerial, and technological aspects into new farming practices that nourish the land. The method includes crop rotation, use of mulch covers, and a “no plowing approach,” enabling the regeneration of the soil through microorganisms in the topsoil layer and improving the quality of crops and yields. “Farming God’s Way” has lifted subsistence farmers and their families out of poverty. (<https://www.mnnonline.org/news/farming-technique-changing-lives-africa/African>)

African Instituted Churches’ small-scale poultry farming in Kenya

Farmers have much to learn from each other. The Organization for African Instituted Churches (OAIC) supports farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchange in Kenya about new technologies and alternative models of poultry farming, particularly in regions facing extreme weather conditions due to climate change and where raising cattle or growing crops is challenging. The project is aimed at addressing food insecurity, building livelihoods, and empowering smallholder female farmers who are especially vulnerable to poverty. (<https://united-church.ca/stories/smallholder-farmers-can-play-big-role-ending-hunger>)

Fish farming project of the United Church of Zambia

The United Church of Zambia (UCZ) partnering with the Chipembi College of Agriculture launched a fish farming initiative in Petauke to fight hunger and provide the community, including many refugees from Mozambique, with a sustainable income source. Despite the arid climate, this region of Zambia is rich in water, therefore fish farming is a good way to make a living. The UCZ offers a training programme on fish farming principles, with participants consisting of clergy and laity. In 2020, 21 participants, including men and women, successfully completed a training of trainers program on aquaculture farming. Trainees will spread the word and share their knowledge with more farmers around the country.

(<https://www.globalministries.org/project/sustainable-agricultural-project-for-ecological-and-economic-development/#March2021>)

Resource

Introduction to “Farming God’s Way”

A short introduction to “Farming God’s Way” is provided by this video, briefing viewers with basic facts and tips about the method.

(<https://youtu.be/u6ygllNoCl8>)



1.2. Create community gardens

Through establishing community gardens, from tiny plots to large fields, churches are in a special position to bring together consumers and producers, women and men, local people and refugees, the elderly and young.

Key practice: Open church gardens and lands for the benefit of the community

Gardens surrounding many churches can become spaces for cultivating and transforming relationships within a community as well as for meeting the basic needs of vulnerable members. We find many examples of churches around the world that are already engaged in food shelf gardens, refugee gardens, and more.

Examples

Intercultural community garden “Rainbow Land” in Landskron, Austria

A Lutheran Church in Landskron, Austria opened its community garden to refugees seeking asylum and employment. In “Rainbow Land,” members of the local congregation till, sow, and harvest alongside refugees that come from over 15 nations. Cultivating and working the soil has deepened peoples’ relationship with the land and, for some, promoted healing of past traumas.

With the sharing of land, resources and produce, walls of suspicion and fear within the community have collapsed. “Rainbow Land” has become a space for learning and appreciating different cultures as well as sharing experiences and gifts. (<https://www.oikoumene.org/blog/intercultural-community-garden-rainbow-land>)

Pacific Conference of Churches’ Peace Garden

In 2020, the Peace Garden, an urban garden in central Suva in Fiji, was re-opened by the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) to encourage local communities to use their land resources, bring nutrient-rich food into diets, reduce the reliance on imports, and allow islanders to get in touch with the soil and creation. Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit tourism-reliant Fiji and many people lost their jobs, the PCC’s Peace Garden has been transformed into a food bank supplying fresh vegetables to families and villages in need. (<https://350.org/justrecoverycommunityfridge/>)

Massam Kpaka Community Garden in Sierra Leone

A community garden in the Anglican Diocese of Bo in Massam Kpaka, Sierra Leone is feeding families as well as building gender equity. Composed of women and men, the church’s gardening group obtained training, tools, and seeds through the diocese’s programme. All members receive a share of the produce they harvest as well as a share of the income earned by selling the surplus. This has helped to improve the diets as well as increase the income of many families. The community garden is the first stage of a larger project that aims to provide farmers with the practical know-how - such as how to make and use compost as fertilizer - to develop larger farms.

Currently, the demonstration farm is cultivating moringa that produces edible and nutritious seed pods, leaves, and roots.

In a series of group workshops, men and women come together to discuss and implement ways of leading and working, developing relationships that emphasize mutual respect and equity, and adding value well beyond income gains.

(<https://www.episcopalrelief.org/stories-info-2/community-garden-grows-seeds-of-development-equality/>)

Uniting Church community gardens in Australia

Community gardens of various shapes and sizes have sprouted in Uniting Church congregations in Australia. They produce organically grown vegetables, herbs, and flowers. Churches see this as a way to deepen connections with and within the community. At the same time, sowing, growing, and harvesting your own food re-connects communities with the beauty of God’s creation, said a congregation member.

(<https://journeyonline.com.au/features/bringing-in-the-sheaves-church-community-gardens-take-root/>)

Resources

Community Gardens—Faith and the Common Good

The webpage offers useful information on the establishment of community gardens, including advice on gardening, harvesting, and community involvement.

(https://www.faithcommongood.org/community_gardens)

Resources for Refugee Gardens—Presbyterian Mission

On the website of the Presbyterian Mission, useful materials and guidelines on how to establish refugee gardens can be found.

(<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/food-faith/2015/06/29/gardens/>)

The Edible Garden

This video provides detailed insights on the creation process of an edible community garden in a church in Toronto.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=shaG8N0lxF4&t=79s>)



Key practice: Plant a forest on church lands

Forests are a habitat of rich biodiversity, sequester carbon, enrich the soil, conserve water, and prevent floods. In the face of deforestation linked to logging, mining, mega-plantations, and other commercial interests, churches can plant forests on their lands and contribute to preserving oases of life.

Examples

Ethiopia's Orthodox Church Forests

If you see a forest in Ethiopia, you can be sure a church stands in the middle of it. Only 5% of the land in Ethiopia is covered by trees, and nearly all the forested land belongs to the country's Orthodox churches. For Ethiopia's Orthodox Christians, forests are a symbol of heaven on earth. With extensive training programmes and the efforts of scientists, churches have played a key role in conserving forest pockets.

Churches have invigorated forests through careful extension and reforestation programmes using indigenous plants. Ranging from 3 to 300 hectares, the church forests are home to evergreen trees and shrubs that provide sanctuary to animals, spaces for prayer and contemplation, as well as natural medicines for the community.

(<https://www.nature.com/immersive/d41586-019-00275-x/index.html>)

and

(<https://www.nytimes.com/video/opinion/100000006808736/the-church-forests-of-ethiopia.html>)

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land's Tree for Life Initiative

The "Tree for Life" initiative was launched to lament the death toll from the COVID-19 pandemic in Palestine and around the world. The initiative memorializes lost loved ones by planting native trees in their memory on church lands. As a sapling grows into a tall and sturdy tree that can endure difficult conditions, trees symbolize hope after tribulation. Moreover, remembering our loved ones through tree planting offers us the opportunity to reflect on the Christian calling to care for God's creation. Just as each of the loved ones we lost to the pandemic contributed something special to our communities, trees provide us with clean air to breathe and richer soil in which to plant the crops that feed us as well as help to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Key practice: Encourage biodiversity wildlife in churchyards

While growing a forest might be too big a project, churches can still play host to vast amounts of different flora and fauna, including endangered ones, within their own borders.

Especially in rural areas, churchyards can simply be left alone to provide shelter to various species of grasses, flowers, herbs, vertebrates, and invertebrates - all part of God's creation.

Example

Churches Count on Nature in the United Kingdom (UK)

Churches in the UK launched a one-week-long “Churches Count on Nature” in June 2021, attracting wildlife activists, nature enthusiasts, and other interested people to visit churchyards and record what they see or find regarding native flora and fauna native. The collected data will be summarized and sent to the National Biodiversity Network of the UK.

The idea is to find out to what extent churchyards - which are often unploughed and left alone - can be a habitat for precious and endangered species. In the UK, the combined land covered by churchyards is equivalent to a small national park. To encourage churches to leave their churchyards undeveloped to serve as a refuge for plants and animals, the Church of England is offering a series of webinars and expert talks with scientists, conservationists, and other experts from the fields of tree management, ecology, and biology.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/media-and-news/news-releases/churches-launch-nature-count-assess-biodiversity-within-national-park>

Resource

Encouraging wildlife in your church backyard —Church of England

The Church of England gathers useful information for congregations on how to improve churchyards’ wildlife diversity. Suggestions include advice about grasslands, animals, and community involvement.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/biodiversity#n>

1.3. Ensure and provide access to clean water

Clean water for over 800 million people who do not have access to it is not only one of the Sustainable Development Goals, it is also a basic human right.

Jesus said: “Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14). Churches can be involved in promoting the value of water and providing clean water to communities and congregations.

Key practice: Raise awareness in congregations on the value of water

A first step in promoting access to clean water is for churches to create awareness on the inherent value and importance of water among congregations through excursions and liturgical materials, among others.

Example

Water Hike to the Springs of Cape Town

The Green Anglicans, an initiative founded by the Anglican Church of South Africa, organized a water hike to the water reservoir of Cape Town. More than 20 “water disciples” participated in this educational hike, with the aim of learning about the origins of the city’s water. *Camissa* is the indigenous name for Cape Town, which means “the place of the sweet waters”. During the hike, the disciples discovered how the spring waters run through a specific kind of permeable rock into the groundwater. Even during the drought in 2017, the springs did not dry up. Ultimately, the disciples learned that water is a precious resource that should never be taken for granted.

<http://www.greenanglicans.org/cape-towns-springs-of-sweet-water/>



Resource

Toolkit: Our Watershed Moment—Lutheran Minneapolis Area Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of America (USA)

A collection of resources for church leaders and congregations to invite creative engagement and discernment in how the Christian faith calls us to care for water and advance ecological justice. (<https://mpls-synod.org/files/EcoFaithToolkit - Our-Watershed-Moment.pdf>)

Key practice: Provide communities with clean water access

Churches can take action on the water crisis that is aggravated by climate change by implementing and protecting the right to water in their congregations, communities, and institutions.

Examples

United Methodist Church in Liberia's Water for Life project in Guinea

Growing out of the many requests from church members across the border, the United Methodist Church in Liberia is building at least five water wells in Guinea. The first two wells have been dedicated in Yassata and Burumma as part of the church's Guinea Ministry, while three other wells are under construction. Access to safe drinking water will prevent waterborne diseases and contribute to building healthier congregations.

(<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/water-for-life-project-expands-to-guinea>)

The Water Project

The Water Project is about churches helping other churches to access clean water. Nearly half a million people in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, South Sudan, Uganda, and Kenya have benefited from wells, dams, and other water solutions.

(<https://thewaterproject.org/our-water-projects>)

Key practice: Join the Blue Community

Blue Communities are communities that respect the human right to water, promote water as a public good, say "no" to bottled water where tap water is safe to drink, and look for alternatives where it is not.

Churches big or small can become members of the Blue Community.

Example

Swiss Churches becoming Blue Communities

In Switzerland, a growing number of churches and church-related institutions, aside from the WCC, have committed to the Blue Community principles, turning away from bottled water and providing water fountains in their premises as part of living out their advocacy for water justice.

These include:

- Evangelisch-Reformierte Kirch-gemeinde (or the Johannes Church in the capital of Bern),
- HEKS - Swiss Church Aid (an aid organization of the Swiss Protestant Churches based in Geneva), and
- Haus der Kirche ("The House of the Church," a meeting place and conference center located in the northern Black Forest that was founded by Cistercian monks in 1149).

Resource

Blue Community Project Guide

This resource from the Council of Canadians introduces a water commons framework by taking three important actions.

The guide gathers information and materials to help implement these actions.

(<https://canadians.org/bluecommunities-guide>)



Photo: Marcelo Schneider/WCC

2 Renewable Energy and Climate Protection: Key Practices, Examples and Resources

Our reliance on fossil fuel-based energy is causing global temperatures to rise compared to pre-industrial levels with increasingly catastrophic consequences especially on the poor and vulnerable. Churches and congregations can and must do their part to promote climate protection. Through moving towards renewable energies, the promotion of climate-friendly mobility, and prudently dealing with energy and materials, we can make a difference.

2.1. Monitor energy consumption and move towards renewable energies

Without doubt, the use of fossil fuels to produce energy harms our climate. Therefore, churches and communities, starting with those in wealthier and privileged countries, need to start monitoring their energy consumption and adopt new and sustainable ways of producing power.

Key practice: Conduct energy audits

In the Northern hemisphere, heating accounts for 75% of energy consumption in religious buildings.

Conducting energy audits can be a good practice to monitor churches' energy consumption and to significantly improve energy efficiency. Energy audits can be undertaken by professionals and also by congregations themselves.

Example

Subsidized energy audits offered by the Diocese of Oxford to churches

In the face of climate change and within the framework of a net-zero carbon target, the Diocese of Oxford in the UK runs a programme where churches can sign up for professional energy audits at a low price by simply filling out an inquiry form on a website.

The form includes brief questions about the size of a church, the system of heating, etc.

After submitting the form, general guidance, phone consultations, or on-site audits are offered. Additionally, the diocese issued a guidance document with suggestions for simple energy efficiency improvements.

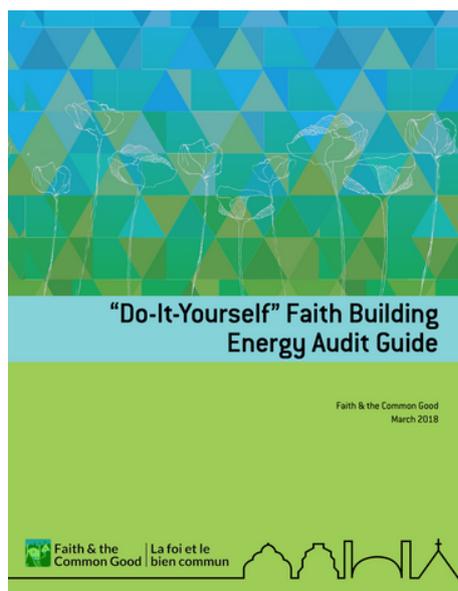
(<https://www.oxford.anglican.org/energy-audits/>)

Resource

'Do-It-Yourself' Energy Audit Guides for Congregations - Faith and the Common Good and Kansas Interfaith Power and Light

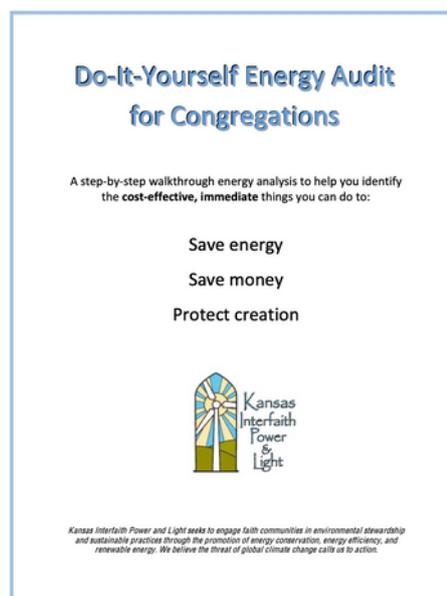
Not every church can afford professional energy audits. Therefore, alternative self-audits are a good way to monitor energy consumption and to improve energy efficiency. Here there are two guides with different approaches. The "Do-It-Yourself' Faith Building Energy Audit Guide" produced by Faith and the Common Good encourages churches to develop an energy plan and shares good practices linked to an energy benchmark on their website.

(https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/faithcommongood/pages/283/attachments/original/1522264704/DIY_Walkthrough-FCG_2018.pdf?1522264704)



Meanwhile, the "Do-It-Yourself Energy Audits for Congregations" from Interfaith Power and Light, equips the reader with a checklist for self-evaluation.

(<https://www.interfaithpower.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Energy-Audit-KSIPL.pdf>)



Key practice: Announce and develop plans to become "a carbon-neutral church"

Some churches are large institutions. For that reason, they can have a huge impact when it comes to the fight against climate change. By announcing and developing plans to reduce institutional emissions, churches can make a measurable change and inspire others to do the same.

Examples

Disciple of Christ resolution calling on its churches to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030

In 2017, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) passed a historic resolution that called on its churches to be carbon neutral by 2030 and carbon positive by 2035. "This resolution amplifies our efforts to empower our congregations and over 450,000 members to increase climate literacy, support climate solutions and policies, and take active measures to restore creation."

(<https://disciples.org/general-assembly/general-assembly-adopts-green-resolution/>)

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland and Germany Carbon Neutral Plans

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland plans to be carbon neutral in 2030, reducing carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions by 80% while offsetting the remaining 20%, for example, through its parish-owned forests. To begin to achieve these goals, church emissions as well as carbon sink capacities of forests will be mapped.

(https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/25840624/Ilmastoteksti_engl_2019.pdf/3ff35917-6bd7-6e86-2754-cb5885cf8ea8?t=1591868102539)

Building on their climate report, the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD) Synod called on EKD, all regional churches, and their institutions to cut emissions by 60% (from 2005) in 2030 and to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 at the latest. This gives further strength to the EKD Synod's call for the German government to adopt an ambitious climate protection programme that will reduce emissions by 65% in 2030 (from 1990) and to reach full climate neutrality in 2050.

(<https://www.ekd.de/beschlusse-synode-2020-60334.htm>)

Resource

Carbon Neutral Guide—Disciples for Christ

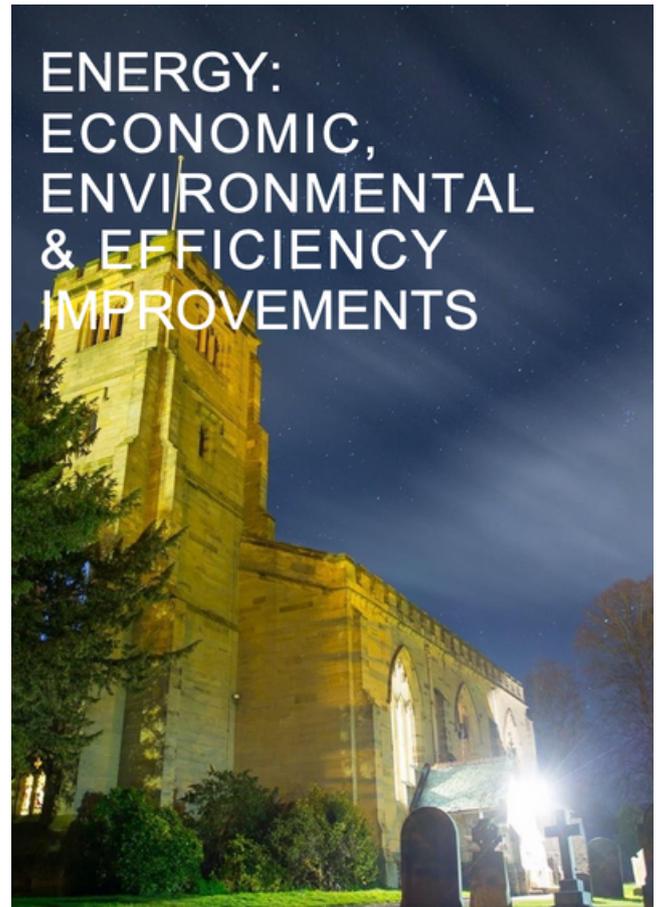
Find ideas and inspiration for becoming a carbon neutral church in this resource produced by the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and their ecumenical partner, Blessed Tomorrow.

(<https://www.discipleshomemissions.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Carbon-Neutral-Guide.pdf>)

Energy: Economic, Environmental and Efficiency Improvements—Church of England

This short guidance note aims to give church decision-makers useful ideas about relatively easy steps to cut electricity and gas use (and also utility bills!)

(<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-12/Energy%20-%20Economic%2C%20Environmental%20and%20Efficiency%20%20Guidelines.pdf>)



Key practice: Offset unavoidable carbon emissions from church activities

As much as churches and related institutions are striving to shrink their carbon footprints, some emissions are simply unavoidable in the course of doing God's work. Carbon offsetting is not by any means a solution to the climate emergency, but it is a practical effort at balancing the pollution scale and can contribute to mitigating climate impacts.



Photo: Marcelo Schneider/WCC

Example

Klima-Kollekte carbon offsetting initiative

Klima-Kollekte is a carbon offsetting initiative operated by churches in Germany and other European countries. The process of offsetting is accomplished through funding various projects in developing countries aimed at decreasing emissions while using renewable energies or energy-efficient methods and promoting climate protection. The projects are implemented or managed by church-related partners and organizations such as: MISEREOR, Bread for the World - Protestant Development Service, German Caritas Association e.V., the Protestant Church in Germany, the Swiss relief organization Fastenopfer, the Protestant Institute for Interdisciplinary Research, HORIZONT3000, the Missionary Childhood Association "Die Sternsinger," Mission EineWelt, the United Protestant Mission and Nordkirche Weltweit.

Resource

Offsetting—Klima-Kollekte

What is carbon offsetting? What are the principles behind compensation? And how does it work? These questions are addressed in this article on the Klima-Kollekte webpage.

(<https://klima-kollekte.de/en/offsetting>)



Photo: Claus Grue/WCC

Key practice: Switch to renewable energy providers

Changing to a clean energy provider, where available, is perhaps one of the quickest and easiest ways for a church or faith-based institution to make a difference. By using green energy suppliers, we put our faith into action and demonstrate our commitment to tackling climate change.

Example

The Big Church Switch

The Big Church Switch calls on churches and other faith communities to switch to using energy suppliers that only put electricity into the national grid from 100% green sources such as solar, wind, or hydro. It sets out clear criteria for alternative suppliers: 100% green sources, 100% locally generated, and no energy from nuclear. Hundreds of churches from several denominations in the UK have signed up for green power tariffs through the Big Church Switch website.

(<https://www.bigchurchswitch.org.uk/>)

Resource

Switching to Clean Energy—Tearfund

This information sheet addressed to churches and homeowners explains why we should shift to clean energy providers and shows how simple it is to do so.

(https://www.tearfund.org/~/_media/Files/Youth/SwitchingGuide.pdf?la=en&la=en)

Key practice: Install solar panels on roofs of churches and church buildings

Many churches, cathedrals and other related institutions are fitting solar panels on their roofs to help tackle the climate crisis and, at the same time, fund important work in their communities. Solar churches mean lower energy costs, freeing up funds for other purposes. Beyond the savings, solar churches are equally motivated by faith. Solar panels are creation care.

Examples

A solar Lutheran congregation in Pelotas, Brazil

A congregation of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in the city of Pelotas, Brazil invested in a solar project which will supply the power needed for all the congregation's buildings, from the church to pastors' homes. The system produces 25% more energy than is currently consumed.

Aside from being climate-friendly, the project is expected to result in savings that can be used to finance pastoral work. According to Rev. Beatriz Regina Haacke, the project serves to "arouse curiosity, inspire, and motivate more people, institutions, and communities to plan similar actions...It might even encourage people to join the congregation."

(<https://www.lutheranworld.org/news/brazil-solar-panels-produce-power-pastoral-work>)

Orthodox Academy of Crete's solar roofs

The Orthodox Academy of Crete in Chania, Greece installed solar PV panels in its premises to reduce dependency on fossil fuel energy and to produce renewable energy. Solar PV electricity could annually offset part or all the grid electricity used by the academy. Annual electricity generation from the solar PV system is approximately 75 MWh, resulting in annual emission savings of 56 tons of CO₂. (<https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices/item/165/installation-of-solar-pv-panels-in-the-premises-of-the-orthodox-academy-of-crete/>)

Resources

What are the benefits of solar power for churches?

This article gives an overview of the various ways in which a solar project benefits churches in the long-run.

(<https://www.solarreviews.com/blog/solar-power-for-churches-benefits>)

Solar Panels on Church Buildings—Methodist Church in the UK

From the Methodist Church in the UK, this resource talks about the technology behind solar panels, pre-installation on churches and church buildings, post-installation and financing possibilities.

(<https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/3247/solar-panels-guidance-0612.pdf>)

Presbyterian Churches and Solar Energy—Presbyterian Church in the USA

This webinar spotlights 5 dynamic Presbyterian congregations in the USA and how they funded, promoted, and installed solar panels on their church buildings.

(<https://youtu.be/OEbpfjBlh3Y>)



Solar Power 101: A Webinar for Faith Communities—United Church of Christ

This video produced by the United Church of Christ (UCC) in the USA discusses how congregations can get involved in the solutions to the climate crisis that are afforded by solar power.

(<https://youtu.be/zvE0ehr3bvY>)



2.2 Promote climate-friendly mobility

Mobility is an important part of our modern world. With flights getting cheaper and transport infrastructure expanding, we witness today a certain level of interconnection humanity has never seen before. Fueled by carbon, this interconnection has come at an ecological price. Bearing in mind that not all people enjoy the advantages of modern individual transportation, churches and congregations can set a good example by promoting accessible and climate-friendly forms of mobility.

Key practice: Encourage biking or carpooling to church

Introducing a bike-to-church day is a small but easy to implement step to a greener future and is also a sporty alternative for a family trip on Sunday mornings. Biking to church offers congregation members the opportunity to begin to break the habit of taking motorized transportation. A free, communal, and nutritious breakfast could help incentivize the activity. For more elderly parishioners, carpooling could be an option.

Example

Bike-to-Church Sundays

The Presbyterian Church in Fort Collins introduced the Bike-to-Church Sunday on the last Sundays of the summer months of 2020. In the face of the pandemic, biking instead of taking public transport is a healthier and safer way to get from A to B. Cycling is popular in Fort Collins, therefore the congregation created a makeshift bike repair shop near the fellowship hall for the church service cyclists to maintain their bikes. Through small incentives, we can develop a community spirit towards a CO2-neutral congregation.

[\(https://www.presbyterianmission.org/story/pt-0520-outreach/\)](https://www.presbyterianmission.org/story/pt-0520-outreach/)

Meanwhile, the Presbyterian Church in Colorado encouraged congregation members to take part in Colorado's Bike Month. With an overwhelming response and many volunteers offering refreshments to the cyclists, many seized the opportunity and commuted to work in a CO2 neutral way.

Resource

"Make your church bike-friendly"

The article shares five easy steps to make your church bike-friendlier:

1. provide a bike map to your church
2. provide ample and good quality bike parking
3. install a self-service bike repair station
4. get in touch with the local bike-sharing program
5. provide bike training

<https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2016/4/22/how-and-why-to-make-your-church-bike-friendly>)



2.3 Deal with energy and materials consciously

The equipment and materials we use in our churches and church activities require energy and natural resources. When it comes to dealing with energy and materials in a careful manner, we need to start at our very own doorstep by creating awareness, issuing guidelines, and becoming a "paperless church," among others.

Key practice: Raise awareness and issue guidelines on conscientious use of energy and resources in our churches and congregations

Churches have a responsibility towards their congregations and communities to build awareness and encourage mutual learning on the careful use of energy and materials. Issuing guidelines on energy and material use to dioceses with easy and simple improvements is a further step in the right direction.

Example

Church of South India's (CSI) Green Protocol

In order to contribute to a more sustainable handling of materials and energy, the CSI pledged themselves to stick to the Green Protocol and encouraged all dioceses to follow their guidelines. The protocol covers several important topics - energy conservation, water conservation, and treatment infrastructure, addressing the issue of plastics - and gives hands-on advice on how to deal with the resources we have in a considerate and appropriate manner. By issuing the protocol the CSI commits to protect the integrity of creation.

([https://www.csisynod.com/Admin/news/5828_Green%20Protocol%20for%20Green%20Discipleship%20\(revised\)%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.csisynod.com/Admin/news/5828_Green%20Protocol%20for%20Green%20Discipleship%20(revised)%20(1).pdf))

Church of South India Green Protocol –Guidelines

[CSI Synod requests all the Dioceses to give publicity for the Green Protocol and encourage all to follow the guidelines in all their activities. Approved by CSI Synod Executive held on 20th and 21st November 2018 at CSI Synod Centre, Chennai.]

The Church of South India (hereafter CSI), the only Church in India which has mentioned Ecology as a mission in its Constitution and in its Mission statement, emphasizes the message that Christians have a duty to protect God's creation. In the life and ministry of the Church, the CSI would like to promote sustainable development practices and to build power for change. Hence, the CSI Synod publishes the "8 GPGD 12 Points: Green Protocol for Green Discipleship - A Guideline of 12 Points for the CSI Dioceses to develop Green Congregations". We hope and pray that all the parishes in the CSI would abide by this Green Protocol and would thus effectively participate in the "Green Discipleship" of our Church.

As the CSI is committed to protect the integrity of the creation, we do believe that the Green protocol should reflect in the life and ministry of the Church. We do believe that the Church should respond prophetically or lament like Jeremiah when people exploit natural resources and consequently crushing God's creation, the flora and the fauna. The CSI expresses her solidarity with our growing creation, eagerly waiting for redemption. God the Creator designed the universe as interdependent and as a living organism and therefore her redemption is possible only by preserving (in some cases, retrieving) her dynamic and harmonious balance.

1. # GPGD1: Development according to the Church of South India
The CSI supports any development that fulfills the requirement of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs. The CSI does believe that the present development paradigm promoted by the 'developed' countries is responsible for the global ecological crisis, and thus 'Climate Injustice'. We demand the 'developed' countries to change their present development paradigm which exploit the fossil fuels resulting in the Climate change.
2. # GPGD2: Energy Conservation
 - a. Reduce using electric lamps in churches during day time when there is enough light from the Sun
 - b. Use LED light system in Church and in its buildings
 - c. Use Solar energy, in the churches and all the institutions owned by the Church
 - d. Use Biogas whenever possible
 - e. Encourage people to depend on energy conservation methods like solar system and Biogas plant
3. # GPGD 3: Water Conservation
 - a. Harvest the rain water from roof top of all the churches and the buildings of the CSI
 - b. Encourage people to harvest rain water from their roof tops and make rain pits on the land, for water recharge.
 - c. Avoid leakage of the water taps.
 - d. Propagate and plant Vetiver which will enhance ground water recharge and avoid soil erosion.
4. # GPGD 4: Do not throw away Plastic
 - a. Make our churches plastic- free. Avoid throwing away polythene bags and other plastic material completely during the activities in the day today life of church.
 - b. Use steel tambors and steel plates for Church functions. Serve food on banana leaves or Oil papers over the steel plates which will reduce the use of water and soap during cleaning it. Encourage the participants to clean their own plates after use.
 - c. Arrange discussions at local level on how to reduce the use of plastic in your locality.

Resources

Greening Your Parish and The Orthodox Creation Care Toolkit by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

Inspired by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, affectionately known as the Green Patriarch, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America initiated the "How to Green Your Parish" video series.

New episodes are released regularly featuring ideas and ways to introduce creation care and sustainable use of resources in homes and parishes.

Ranging from practical to theological, each three-minute video offers a unique perspective on environmental stewardship through the knowledge and expertise of Orthodox Christians. (<https://www.goarch.org/society/greening-the-parish>)

Another resource is the Orthodox Creation Care Toolkit which features manuals for starting immediately and proceeding effectively with this important work on the parish level in line with the Orthodox Christian tradition.

(<https://sanfran.goarch.org/news/greek-orthodox-archdiocese-of-america-launches-creation-care-toolkit>)

Key practice: Become a "paperless church" or "less paper church"

Paper is part of our everyday church and congregational work. It should be used wisely since paper production, distribution, use, and disposal entail energy and raw materials.

Opting for paper with high recycled content produced by companies that support responsible forest management is a good idea. But streamlining paper use in church meetings and events through digital tools like online platforms, where available, is an even better one.



Example

Paperless Sundays

The Brawn Myr Presbyterian Church in Pennsylvania, USA is organizing Paperless Sundays (or less paper Sundays), worshipping together without paper bulletins and orders of service to highlight the church's work for ecological justice. Celebrating Paperless Sundays is not so much about the resources saved and waste averted by not producing bulletins a few days a year. "It is about shaking our assumptions, calling us to attention, and reminding the congregation that we have been called by God to be good stewards of the Earth."

<https://bmpc.org/resources/pastors-column/451-paperless-sunday>

Resource

Three Ways Your Church Can Go Paperless

E-bulletins, online registration, and online contributions can help your church go paperless.

This article tells you more:

<https://www.theaccessiblechurch.com/index.php/articles/category-blog/69-three-ways-your-church-can-go-paperless>



Photo: Albin Hillert/WCC

3 Just and Sustainable Consumption: Key Practices, Examples, and Resources

Consumption is a key pillar of our economies and a big part of our lives. Churches are also significant consumers. But we need to ask ourselves a key question: is limitless consumption good for our neighbors and a planet with finite resources? No. We can and need to change our consumption habits especially in wealthier parts of the world. Churches and congregations can be a part of the change, by promoting fair trade, reusing or repairing instead of re-buying, and reducing waste.

3.1 Buy ecological, fair, and regional

Buying ecological, fair, and regional has a positive impact on the planet and climate. This is not only a great opportunity for churches to support local and small enterprises, the practice also reduces the use of fossil fuels and CO2 emissions. But be aware: corporate marketing departments sometimes use legal loopholes to promote supposedly regional, ecological, or fair-trade products. Always check twice for certified third-party labels before purchasing.

Key practice: Patronize fair trade products

Churches can be key supporters of fair trade that better the lives of small-scale farmers and producers by committing to use fairly traded products, including tea, coffee, sugar, and biscuits, at church events and activities.

Example

United Church of Christ Fair Trade Project

A collaboration between Equal Exchange and the United Church of Christ (UCC) Justice and Witness Ministries encourages churches and individuals to choose organic, fairly traded products from small-scale farmer cooperatives. (<https://equalexchange.coop/ucc>).

Initiated in 2004, the UCC Fair Trade Project allows congregations to support small farming communities by serving fairly traded coffee, tea, cocoa, chocolate, and olive oil for justice at fellowship hour on Sundays.

Through this project, congregations can join hands with communities in the developing world, helping small farmers and their families to gain more control over their lives, earn a fairer share of income, have access to credit and technical support, and gain a trading partner they can trust. Congregations also learn about consumption habits that support small-scale farmers and workers throughout the world and that encourage careful stewardship of God's creation.

Resource

“Fair Trade” - Baptists Together

These prayers and other resources from Baptists Together in the UK bring all who are involved in trade before God; remind us and our congregations of God's desire for justice; and help people reflect on the way that fair trade might help us to “do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God” (Micah 6: 8).

(<https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/391392/Fair-Trade.aspx>)

3.2 Reduce waste

Like households and enterprises, churches also produce waste. Landfills are overflowing and, in our oceans, already huge islands of trash continue to grow. This tells us one truth: we need to drastically cut down on our waste. We need to follow Jesus' model and contemplate his words. “When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, ‘Gather the pieces that are leftover. Let nothing be wasted’” (John 6:12).

Key practice: Become a “zero waste church”

Taking care of creation and loving our neighbour requires us to live more simply and sustainably and to reduce our waste. A “zero waste church” recognizes that creation is a gift from God and therefore seeks to be mindful of their trash and waste, and where it goes.

Examples

Waste Management Project by the Rural Development Inter-Diocesan Service (RDIS) in Rwanda

Seeing the increasing amount of untreated non-biodegradable waste, the RDIS in Rwanda is currently implementing a waste management project in church training centers, schools, guest houses, and health centers. The staff and members of these institutions receive special education about proper waste management.

The overall goal of the project is to improve the waste management process through an interactive and participatory approach as well as in a cost-effective and sustainable way. By producing the waste bins locally, the project also supports the local economy.

(<http://rdis.org.rw/waste-management>)



Composting as part of the Community United Church of Christ “Zero Waste” campaign

The Community United Church of Christ (UCC) in Raleigh, North Carolina in the USA established a composting program in 2018 as part of their commitment to become a “zero waste church.”

The impact from composting can be significant. From October 2018 through March 2020, the Community UCC composting initiative diverted 4,735 pounds from the landfill, creating 1,184 pounds of compost and avoiding 616 pounds of methane or the equivalent of 12,312 pounds of carbon dioxide.

(<https://www.ucc.org/composting-for-churches>)

Resources

20 Ways to start being a Zero Waste Church—Church of Nativity in North Carolina, USA

This article from the Church of the Nativity in Raleigh, North Carolina in the USA gathers practical tips on how to reduce waste and push forward towards a “zero waste church,” starting from putting a team together to enabling parishioners to opt-out of paper newsletters for electronic versions.

(<http://www.zerowastechurch.org/2017/09/29/20-ways-to-start-being-a-zero-waste-church>)

Composting for Churches—United Church of Christ, USA

From the UCC in the USA, this article provides a summary of the benefits of as well as the basics of composting.

(<https://www.ucc.org/composting-for-churches>)

Key practice: Ban, reduce or recycle plastics

The equivalent of one garbage truck of plastic enters our oceans every minute, destroying marine life as well as people’s livelihoods, infiltrating the human food chain, and causing illnesses. Reducing non-biodegradable waste is one aspect of sustainability. In countries without proper recycling systems, churches can function as institutions to familiarize congregations with garbage separation and recycling. Within the boundaries of your church, a garbage separation system and other initiatives to reduce the use of and recycle plastic and other wastes could be introduced.

Examples

Anglican Church in South Africa call for a ban on the use of plastic in congregational activities

In September 2019, the Provincial Synod of the Anglican Church in South Africa declared a climate emergency and called on parishes to ban the use of plastic - including items such as plastic straws, cutlery, and water bottles as well as plastic and Styrofoam cups - in their congregational activities.

(<https://anglicanchurchsa.org/church-declares-climate-emergency-and-calls-for-ban-on-plastics>)

Eco-brick Churches in the Philippines

Addressing the issue of plastic waste, parishioners from the Anglican Church in the Philippines started to build eco-brick churches.

Eco-bricks are containers, usually large empty plastic bottles, filled with a non-biodegradable material, used to substitute for traditional clay bricks or cement blocks which entail CO2 emissions during production.

Bishop Abibico said: “This environment-friendly way of processing garbage will not only help in waste management but will also recycle garbage for noble purposes like using it to build worship centers.”

(<https://www.anglicannews.org/news/2014/04/anglican-parishioners-make-eco-bricks-to-build-churches.aspx>)



Photo: Albin Hillert/WCC

Resource

10 ways to reduce single-use plastics— Anglican Church of Canada

The Anglican Church of Canada puts together a set of options for reducing single-use plastics in parishes in this resource.

(<https://bc.anglican.ca/resources/green-church/pages/10-ways-to-reduce-single-use-plastics--271>)

3.3 Reuse and recycle

Our congregations can serve as a hub for recycling and inventiveness. We can give many things a second life through reuse, up-cycling, and repair. There are no limits to creativity!

Key practice: Host repair cafés

Our economic system tends to push us to consumerism. But as more people refuse to buy new goods in favour of fixing broken items, repair cafés are gradually gaining popularity. Churches hosting such events are receiving great responses from their congregations. Basically, it is an easy principle: congregation members with diverse skills help each other out. During a repair café, members who are familiar with electronics, sewing, or carpentry, for example, teach other members how to fix a broken electric fan, torn pair of jeans, wobbly table, etc.. Everyone can bring anything they want to get fixed, learning new techniques and even broadening horizons.

Example

The Village Presbyterian Church Repair Café in Ōtautahi-Christchurch, New Zealand

A congregation in Christchurch, New Zealand organized a small repair cafe and teamed-up with the monthly community market to reach out to people. For awareness raising purposes, information boards were set up all over the church to support the “right-to-fix” movement. During the event, ten women and men offered their assistance and guidance for sewing alterations, wood working, simple electronics

gardening tips and proper use of specialist glues. In the end, the visitors and professionals were able to repair a table, food processor, jewellery, and some stuffed toys, saving them from being discarded.

(<https://nelsonweekly.co.nz/2020/07/repair-cafe-comes-to-tahunanui-church>

and

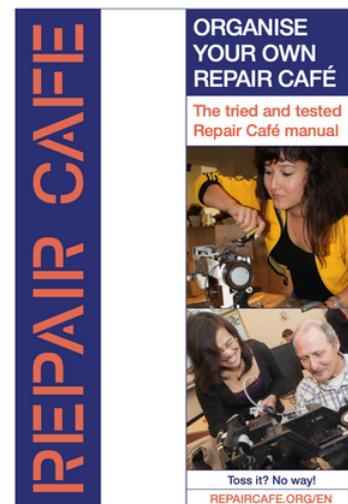
<https://www.ecochurch.org.nz/stories/repair-cafe>)

Resource

Organise your own repair café

This manual gathers all sorts of practical tips to assist in setting up structured repair cafés in your churches and communities.

(https://repaircafe.org/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/02/Repair_Cafe_manual_English_general_v_11_2019.pdf)



Key practice: Set up thrift shops and flea markets on church grounds

Churches can contribute to sustainability by setting up thrift shops and organizing flea markets on church grounds. The CO2 footprint of a second-hand product purchased at a thrift shop or flea market is near zero compared to a new, sustainably labeled product. Church flea markets are not necessarily novel nor fancy. But they are much more than markets where people go and buy things, they are also spaces for social gathering and exchange.

Example

Churches in Bengaluru, India opening their gates to flea markets

In Bengaluru, a recent trend of flea markets on church grounds has emerged. Churches across the city are encouraging their members to put up small stalls to sell anything from second-hand products to self-made accessories and food items. Particularly popular during Christmas time, the revenues go towards churches' welfare activities. Aside from helping to support charitable endeavours, the flea market events provide congregation members an opportunity to interact and pursue hobbies and interests such as craft-making.

(https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/magazine_s/panache/december-glory-bengaluru-churches-are-opening-their-doors-to-eclectic-flea-markets/articleshow/66701924.cms)

Resource

How to run a flea market as a charity fundraiser

Here are some targeted tips on how to run a flea market, starting with good planning and making sure to let people know where the money from their purchases will go.

(<https://americanmerchandise.com/fund-raiser-flea-market>)





Photo: Marcelo Schneider/WCC

4 Economies of Life: Key Practices, Examples and Resources

"You give them something to eat," Jesus said (Luke 9:13). Christians are called to be transformative disciples, re-designing the present and creating a more just and sustainable future where all people's needs are met. Even in a capitalist system, seemingly small projects and practices by churches and congregations can inspire if not make a change.

4.1 Create places for moneyless interaction and sharing

Our daily life is very much shaped by money, often causing tremendous stress, but churches and congregations can be a place of rest from these worries as well as a space to express solidarity and to share resources with our neighbours.

Key practice: Run community pantries

Churches can set up food pantries or banks to assist the economically vulnerable in their congregations and neighbourhoods.

For people in need, community pantries can bring down food shopping bills, enable access to nutritious food, whilst freeing up funds for other essentials such as clothing or visits to the doctor.

They mean that people can stay afloat in difficult times, rather than being dragged into debt, and can take care of their health and learn new skills.

Church-run pantries can also be spaces for deepening community interaction.

Example

United Church of Christ in the Philippines community pantry in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Inspired by the biblical text of Acts 4: 32-35, the United Church of Christ in the Philippines in Roxas District in Quezon City, Metro Manila opened a community pantry in their church in 2021 to respond to the economic downturn induced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The concept behind a community pantry is for people who have extra food to share the surplus and for people in need to take as much as necessary. While the pantry “does not solve the roots of the historical problem of poverty...it is an immediate response to people’s need.”

(<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/story/bayanihan-is-the-spirit-of-sharing-in-the-philippines/>).

Resource

Tips for organizing a food pantry

From putting together a committee of volunteers to oversee operations to designing a distribution method, this resource is a step-by-step guide on how churches and other like-minded groups can establish and operate a food pantry in their communities.

(https://secure.foodbankrockies.org/site/DocServer/Organizing_a_food_pantry_program.pdf;jsessionid=00000000.app30103a?docID=3321&NONCE_TOKEN=B39B9151B686383F82607D7663FC0E18)



Key practice: Open churches as shelters for the homeless, refugees, and other vulnerable people

Some churches own unused land and buildings that may be converted into facilities to shelter the homeless, refugees, and other vulnerable people who have nowhere to stay or who have been pushed away from their homes due to natural calamities, militarization, or conflicts.

With the increasing frequency and intensification of climate-related disasters, some churches feel the call to open their buildings and places of worship as shelters that provide temporary homes and safe spaces for community members who have been displaced.

Example

United Methodist Churches in Austria and Nigeria open their doors to refugees

With the influx of asylum-seekers in 2015 and beyond, the Fünfhaus Methodist church in Vienna, Austria, has continued a strong tradition of loving our neighbours and welcoming strangers. The church has offered its rooms as emergency housing to shelter busloads of refugees escaping conflict and economic difficulty in Northern Africa.

(<http://www.esumc.at/mission-outreach/broad-scale-help>)

At the height of the Boko Haram conflict in 2016, the Don Peter Dabale Memorial United Methodist Church in Abuja opened their facilities to provide refuge for thousands fleeing the war in Northern Nigeria. This despite the scarce resources of the congregation.

(<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/help-for-those-displaced-by-boko-haram>)

Resource

Basic guidelines when opening your church as shelters—United Methodist Church USA

When opening your facility, it is important to do some research on local ordinances around shelters – even temporary ones. It is also important to work with church staff and volunteers, so they understand the responsibility they have when taking in homeless or displaced people. Here the United Methodist Church sets out some helpful guidelines:

(<https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/basic-guidelines-when-opening-your-church>)

Key practice: Open children day-care centers in impoverished communities to support working parents

Low-income families need all the support they can get. Single mothers in particular face the challenge of being the sole provider while also having to find suitable and affordable childcare.

Balancing training and employment with meeting family responsibilities can be a tremendous struggle for them.

Churches can help ease the burden of time poverty by establishing daycare centers in their buildings catering to children from low-income families, enabling parents to focus on completing education or work while providing a nurturing environment for children.

Resource

Starting a church daycare

Why should a church open a day-care center? What issues must be considered when deciding whether opening a day-care center is an option for your church? This resource responds to these questions.

(<https://childrensministry.com/starting-church-daycare>)

4.2 Practice just and alternative economic models

What if all workers are paid wages that cover their needs?

What if workers can also be owners?

What if there are economic ways of bringing restoration and restitution to communities that have experienced deep injustices and violence?

What if time could serve as a currency?

Churches can help build these just and alternative visions of the economy.

Key practice: Be a living wage employer

As employers, churches have a responsibility to care for their staff, ensuring that those who work are not subject to poverty and harsh working conditions and are able to fully support themselves and their families. Sometimes this means paying more than the market price for labor.

Example

Living Wage Church

The Church Action on Poverty is campaigning for all churches in England and Wales to pay their employees a real living wage - higher than the government's minimum wage - that takes into account benefits and credits and keeps people out of poverty. All the UK's major Christian denominations have committed to support the real living wage.

(<https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/livingwage>)

Resource

The Living Wage: A Briefing for Churches

This paper provides a theological basis for the living wage, identifies some of the costs and benefits for churches, as well as explains how the living wage is calculated.

(<https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Living-Wage-churches-briefing-November-2020.pdf>)

Key practice: Support or run cooperatives

Cooperatives offer churches a transformative framework for encouraging economic activity that not only makes good use of church assets but also provides fulfilling work and sustainable income to those that need it the most. By combining charitable efforts with initiatives that seek justice for workers, church-run cooperatives can challenge systemic inequality and enrich communities rather than corporations.

Examples

The Abundant Table

A small Episcopal and Lutheran campus ministry in Camarillo, California launched The Abundant Table to change lives and food systems by creating sustainable relationships to the land and the local community. The project inaugurated a year-long residential internship program for young adults desiring to live in an intentional Christian community. The programme became a cross-class operation with college graduates learning under the tutelage of migrant farmworkers, together building The Abundant Table into an operational small-scale sustainable farm and workers' collective promoting food and worker justice. The Abundant Table compensates farmers with living wages and health benefits, provides organic fruits and vegetables to farmworker families and local public schools, sells affordable produce at the farmer's market, and donates excess harvest to food banks.

(<https://theabundanttable.org/about-us/>)

Grace in Action Collectives

Part of the Grace in Action Church, a Lutheran congregation, the Grace in Action Collectives (GIAC) is a network of worker-owned, youth- and women-run cooperatives in Detroit. GIAC believes that cooperatives "give people the power of ownership, the ability to have control over their future, and a way to invest deeply in the community where they live."

It offers services such as cooperative development trainings, bookkeeping and accounting support services, and connections to fair lenders.

(<http://www.giacollectives.org>)

Resource

Transforming Churches and Communities: Cooperative Developments in a World of Growing Inequality—Southeast Center Collaborative Inquiry Team

This video shares conversations by the Southeast Center Collaborative Inquiry Team on churches and cooperatives, providing an overview of what cooperatives are and their benefits as well as exploring the relationship between religion and economics.

(<https://youtu.be/R2R9g9jRbng>)



Key practice: Make economic reparations for historical injustices of racism and colonialism

Some churches in North America and Europe have been historically complicit in the grabbing of land, the transatlantic slave trade, and even the genocide of Indigenous Peoples and other marginalized groups particularly during (but not limited to) colonial times.

While no amount of money can ever compensate for the generational harm caused to Indigenous Peoples and people of African descent, some form of economic reparations by churches could help repair and mitigate long-standing structural and systemic inequalities.



Example

#LandBack Movement: Churches in the USA and Canada returning land to Indigenous communities as reparations

In 2015, the Rocky Mountain Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the USA transferred the deeds for two lots in Denver to the Four Winds American Indian Council, including a former church building the council had been using as a hub for Denver's Native American community. While costing the synod money, this was one of the first concrete actions of reparatory justice by churches. In 2018, the United Methodist Church's Oregon-Idaho Conference returned a camp to the Nez Perce, and in 2019, its General Board of Global Ministries returned 3 acres in Ohio to the Wyandotte Nation. The Hudson River Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church (USA) transferred the title of the former Stony Point Church in White Plains, New York to the Sweetwater Cultural Center which promotes the welfare of native peoples. The United Church of Canada has also begun to return some of its lands in Ontario to the Lenape people of the Delaware Nation.

(<https://religionnews.com/2020/11/26/churches-return-land-to-indigenous-groups-amid-repentance-for-role-in-taking-it-landback-movement/>)

Resource

Ideas for churches studying the need for reparations

This article presents some questions churches and congregations might begin to work through in studying the necessity for reparations and establishing a committee on reparations particularly in response to the legacies of slavery and racism.

(https://baptistnews.com/article/ideas-for-churches-studying-the-need-for-reparations/#.YOM_wUyxVPY)

Key practice: Set up service timebanks or exchange pools within congregations

Addressing each other's needs and exchanging services without the use of money sounds unthinkable in an era of financialization, but these possibilities exist! Timebanks can be implemented within congregations, enabling the voluntary and non-monetary exchange of services between members. When you give an hour of your time, you earn one hour of time credits which can be used to receive services from other members such as language lessons, medical and legal consultations, baby-sitting, cleaning, among others. With timebanks, members can meet some of their needs even if they are low on funds, and access services they may not usually be able to afford. In the long run, these initiatives can also change relations between high-paid professional workers and low-paid - but essential - 'blue-collar' and domestic workers, building social inclusion and cohesion.

Examples

Unity in Community Timebank

Unity in Community Timebank in Detroit, Michigan is a project initiated with a grant by the Presbyterian Committee on the Self-Development of People. SDOP enters into partnerships with groups of economically poor people who want to change their lives and their communities. This project provides a structure for the exchange of time and talents among community members, enabling the community to meet one another's needs without exchanging money.

(<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/story/unity-in-our-community-time-bank>)

St Katharinen *Tauschring*

A Lutheran congregation in Germany initiated a *tauschring* (exchange pool) to promote moneyless interactions between members (in German.)

(<https://www.kirche-lensahn.de/tauschring/>

Every participant gets a time account number, and, on mutual agreement, all kinds of services are made available. The church publishes a newsletter every month where participants can search for or offer services (in German.)

(<https://www.kirche-lensahn.de/app/download/10429027/Tauschring-Zeitung+April+2021.pdf>)

Resources

Create a New Timebank

Timebanking may not be the easiest of endeavours for a congregation, but this webpage provides a checklist of steps to follow in the journey to set up a timebank.

(<https://timebanks.org/get-started/steps>)

***Tauschring* facts at a glance and List of ideas for exchange offers—St Katharinen Church, Lensahn, Germany**

These two documents from the Lutheran congregation of Lensahn give the principles behind the *tauschring* concept and some suggestions on possible services that can be exchanged within congregations (in German.)

<https://www.kirche-lensahn.de/app/download/3752171/TauschringRegeln.pdf>

and

<https://www.kirche-lensahn.de/app/download/3752170/Tauschring%2BIdeenliste.pdf>

4.3 Practice just finance

Churches are also financial actors with financial assets such as pension funds to oversee and sometimes with financial services to offer. In a world fixated with quick profits at huge cost to people and planet, churches can empower a life-affirming economy through their investments and other financial actions.

Key practice: Divest from fossil fuels, mining, and other destructive economic activities

Churches can use divestment not only as a way to denounce unjust and unsustainable economic activities but also as a tool for promoting change. Divestment is about shedding investments in companies or even entire sectors that are unethical and contrary to our Christian values. The investment might be in a particular stock, bond, or fund that includes one or more unethical stocks. In response to the growing climate emergency, a growing number of churches are divesting from the fossil fuel industry.

Examples

Operation Noah's Bright Now campaign

Bright Now is a campaign run by Operation Noah and is part of a growing global movement calling for divestment (disinvestment) from fossil fuels. The campaign urges churches and the Christian community in the UK and beyond to: divest from companies involved in the extraction of fossil fuels; take a leading and influential role in the national debate on the ethics of investment in fossil fuels; and support the development of clean alternatives to fossil fuels through their investment policies.

Iglesias y Minería campaign to divest from the extractive sector

The *Iglesias y Minería* network brings together Catholic and Protestant churches in Latin America and beyond in a campaign to divest from mining. The campaign has a fourfold approach. First, it aims to raise awareness on communities' lived experiences with the mining industry as well as on the strategies used by mining companies to obtain legal and social licenses. Second, it aims to challenge the narrative that mining contributes to the wellbeing of communities and to 'development.'

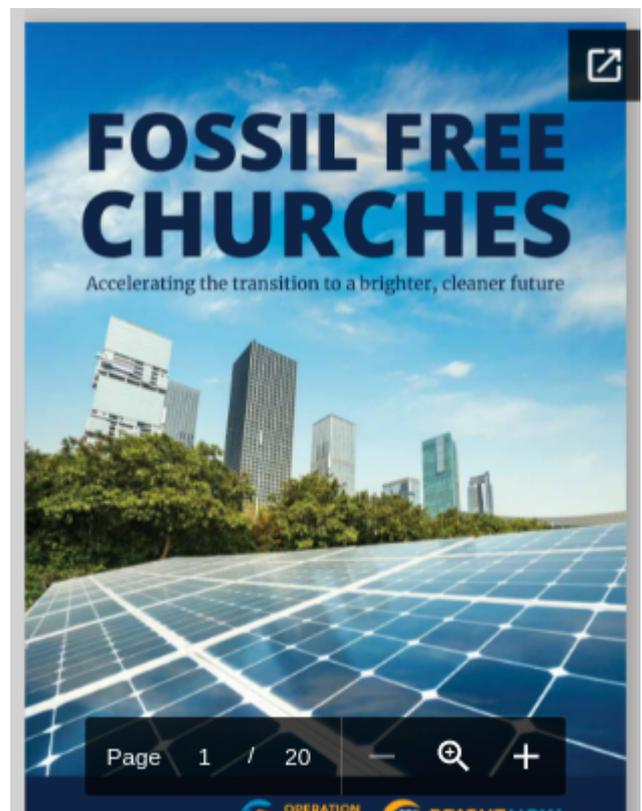
Third, it aims to build alliances with like-minded people, organizations, and movements. Recognizing that many faith-based organizations possess investments that are handled by fund managers, the fourth and key strand of the campaign is to call for churches to review their investment guidelines and packages and to divest from the mining sector according to ethical, social, and ecological criteria.

Resources

Fossil fuel free churches—accelerating the transition to a brighter, cleaner future—Operation Noah

This report produced by Operation Noah underlines the role of the churches in transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy.

<http://brightnow.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Bright-Now-Transition-Report-2018-web.pdf>



Inasmuch as the speed of transition needs to accelerate in order to keep global temperature rises in line with science and the Paris Agreement, the report shares concrete examples of how churches are shifting their investments away from fossil fuel companies.

“Divest in mining” - Iglesias y Minería

The website of the Iglesias y Minería campaign to divest from mining contains information on key mining companies that must be divested from, how to join or contribute to the campaign, as well as resources for reviewing and developing investment guidelines in line with Christian values.

(<https://divestinmining.org>)

Key practice: Invest church funds in what matters

Using beliefs and values as the driving principles of churches’ investment actions is faith-consistent investing. With clear and intentional links between core Christian teachings and the way that we invest, which are formally agreed upon and adopted by our institutions’ leadership, we can hold our churches to account in the journey towards positive economic, social and ecological change. As the odds are currently stacked in favour of big business, churches must do all that they can to support socio-economically and ecologically sustainable ventures.

Examples

Presbyterian Church USA’s Mission Responsibility Through Investment

The Presbyterian Church USA believes that church investment is “an instrument of mission and includes theological, social and economic considerations.” Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) was created in recognition of the church’s unique opportunity to advance its mission faithfully and creatively through the financial resources entrusted it.

MRTI implements the General Assembly’s policies on socially responsible investing by engaging corporations in which the church owns stock.

This is accomplished through correspondence, dialogue, voting shareholder proxies and recommending similar action to others, and occasionally filing shareholder resolutions. The General Assembly’s investment policy identifies specific concerns that MRTI is to promote: pursuit of peace; racial, social, and economic justice; environmental responsibility, and securing women’s rights. The Presbyterian Foundation implemented the Assembly call for positive investment in Israel-Palestine through a series of investments including construction loans and microfinance to create conditions for peace in the region.

(https://youtu.be/mLY_rXMBa6A)



Quakers in Britain - From Divestment to Investment

Seeking to create “an economy in which our testimonies can flourish” became a priority for Quakers in Britain in 2011.

The following year Quakers in Britain agreed that they should be “putting our money and energies into places which support our testimonies; accounting for ‘peace’, ‘joy’ and ‘respect’ alongside financial values.”

Investing in ‘the alternative’ is critical to the flourishing of a different kind of economy, one that addresses the challenge of climate change and is founded on principles of justice and peace.

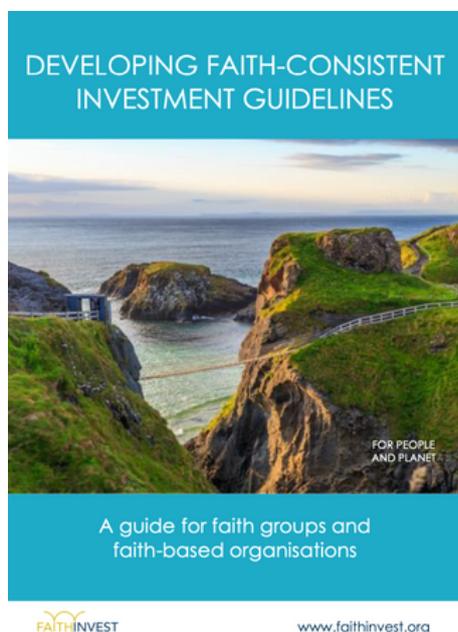
Moving capital out of the fossil fuel industry and into just and sustainable activities is an important step in the transition to a life-affirming economy. In line with this, Quakers in Britain are exploring investments in energy cooperatives.

From Values to Investment and Developing faith-consistent investment guidelines - A guide for faith groups and faith-based organizations—Faithinvest

This short [presentation](#) developed by FaithInvest provides an overview of how to move from values to faith-consistent investments. It identifies clear steps for churches and other faith-based institutions to pursue such as: agreeing on and recording sectors, themes or issues to be prioritized according to our values; reviewing the proportion, if any, of assets intentionally managed in a faith consistent manner; setting goals; and publishing plans. Watch the FaithInvest [webinar](#) on this topic.

On the other hand, this is a template for churches and FBOs to develop faith-consistent investment guidelines as an important first step for faith groups seeking to align their investments with their values.

(https://1a956828-fe29-43d1-a8f0-31f34ea86a62.filesusr.com/ugd/72b7c5_f334a89f9a7b403fac3a0fd6fae69187.pdf)

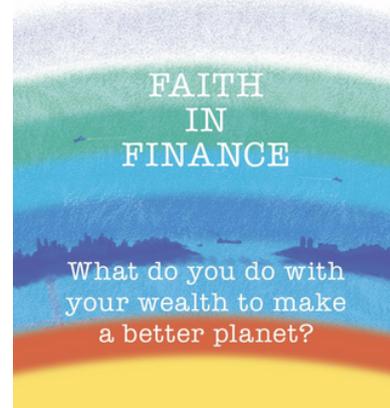


The Zug Guidelines—Alliance of Religions and Conservation

These guidelines share examples of what the faiths own (financial and other assets where that is possible to be detailed), core values, and priorities for future investment in environmental and sustainable development.

(https://1a956828-fe29-43d1-a8f0-31f34ea86a62.filesusr.com/ugd/72b7c5_8f781c73c1bc4691a18cb9b3ace4e53b.pdf)

THE ZUG GUIDELINES to faith-consistent investing



Key practice: Bank ethically and sustainably

Many big banks are heavily involved in fossil fuels and extractive industries, the arms trade, food speculation, and other ecologically and socially destructive activities.

Churches should seek to place their funds in banks that have transparent ethical policies and that think carefully about whom they lend to and where they invest. There are banks that help to shape a fairer and more sustainable society by paying their taxes, treating their employees well, and choosing to invest in renewable energies, for instance.

Churches can also challenge their banks to do more to contribute to poverty alleviation and a healthy planet.

Example

Church of Sweden engaging its bank

The Church of Sweden's financial policy clearly states that investments should only be made in companies that contribute to society.

(<https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/filer/Church%20of%20Sweden%20RI%20Instructions%20April%202017%20final.pdf>)

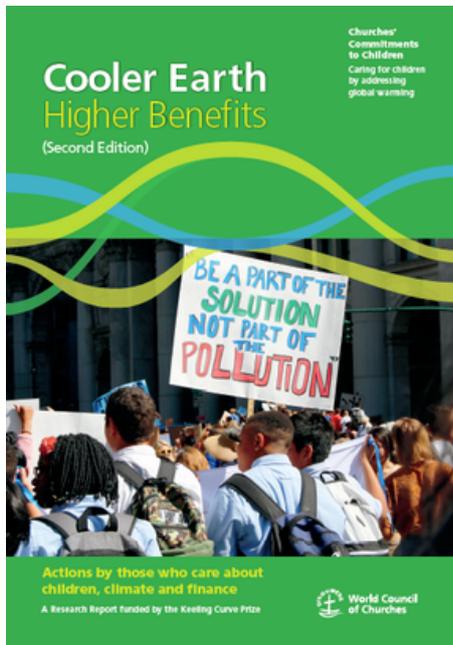
In line with this policy, the Church of Sweden has initiated a dialogue with one of their major fund managers, a bank which is also the largest Swedish financier of oil and gas. For instance, the church has asked for a credible timeline for the phasing out of all credits and loans to the fossil fuels industry. The response from the bank has been positive as well as candid: they have outlined some of the steps they are beginning to take to support ecological sustainability as well as highlighted some of the challenges they are facing.

Resources

Cooler Earth, Higher Benefits—WCC

This research published by the WCC reveals how finance is deeply intertwined with climate change and gives suggestions of how churches and other organizations around the world can respond to the climate emergency by engaging their banks and through other investment decisions which are crucial to protect children from global warming.

(<https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/publications/cooler-earth-higher-benefits-second-edition>)



A flyer summarizes what Christians and churches can do now.

(<https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/publications/cooler-earth-higher-benefits-poster>)



Questions to Ask Your Bank

As churches, we can initiate a conversation with our banks on ethical concerns. This resource gathers some suggested questions to pose, starting with whether they have an ethical policy and who owns the bank.

(<https://www.yourfaithyourfinance.org/banking/questions-to-ask-your-bank/>)

Connecting Faith and Finance—Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility (ECCR)

Prepared by the ECCR in the UK, this article asks us to imagine what a difference it would make if every Christian and church banked with an ethical bank and then highlights five ways to take action.

(<https://www.eccr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Connecting-Faith-and-Finance-article.pdf>)

Key practice: Support credit unions and establish alternative banks

Faith-based credit unions and banks can serve as an alternative to big commercial banks. Unlike the latter, credit unions are owned and controlled by their members and operate for their benefit. Directors are elected from the membership and profits are distributed among members.

The thrust is to serve the members' needs instead of maximizing financial gains. Credit unions usually have the following aims and values: encouraging members to save (not just to borrow); providing loans at fair and reasonable interest rates; educating members on how to use money wisely and how to make informed choices about their finances; and using members' savings for the benefit of members and the local community.

Because of strong ties to their communities and networks of volunteers, churches can use faith-based credit unions to reach out to poor people in ways that other financial institutions cannot.

Examples

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania's Maendeleo Bank: A Bank for the Underprivileged

Maendeleo Bank was established by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania to cater to the financially disadvantaged, and small to medium enterprises.

The Small Group Lending - one of the bank's products - is targeted at the so-called 'unbanked' who do not have access to formal banking services. SGL brings them together, offers them a free 3-week training programme on how to manage finances and operate small businesses, encourages them to mobilize themselves in small groups, and offers financing for small enterprises without collateral. Maendeleo Bank has supported thousands of Tanzanians in this manner.

(<https://marcopolis.net/maendeleo-bank-a-bank-that-serves-the-underprivileged-in-tanzania.htm>)

Ate Keleng Foundation Credit Union in Indonesia: A sharing of burdens

Guided by the idea of "providing the hooks instead of simply giving the fish", the Ate Keleng Foundation of the Karo Batak Protestant Church (GBKP) formed a credit union in January 2005 to respond to a flash flood that wiped out the livelihoods of entire communities in Bukit Lawang in Northern Sumatra, Indonesia. The credit union is an example of practicing *gotong royong* or the sharing of burdens with communities. Donations received formed the initial capital of the credit union, supporting the financing needs of the members. Profits from the loans returned to the members. The credit union enabled the communities to gradually rebuild their livelihoods and recover from the downturn. Today, almost 90% of GBKP congregations are members of the credit union as well as other communities in four surrounding villages. The Ate Keleng Foundation credit union can be seen as a model in helping the victims of natural disasters rise above adversity.

(<https://www.vemission.org/en/details/providing-hooks-instead-of-giving-fish>)

Resource

10 Ways Your Church Can Get Involved with Credit Unions—Church of Scotland

This resource from the Church of Scotland discusses how churches can support credit unions from encouraging members to join or borrow money from them to actually establishing credit unions as alternative financial institutions.

(https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/64770/Churches-and-credit-unions.pdf)



Photo: Gregg Brekke/WCC

Conclusion

“Though important, lifestyle changes are not enough. When we begin to implement changes in our spaces, our voice promoting systemic change in a broader sense will be better heard and will carry more credibility.”

The fifth and last step of the “Roadmap for Congregations, Communities and Churches for an Economy of Life and Ecological Justice” is networking or developing alliances with other congregations, communities and initiatives.

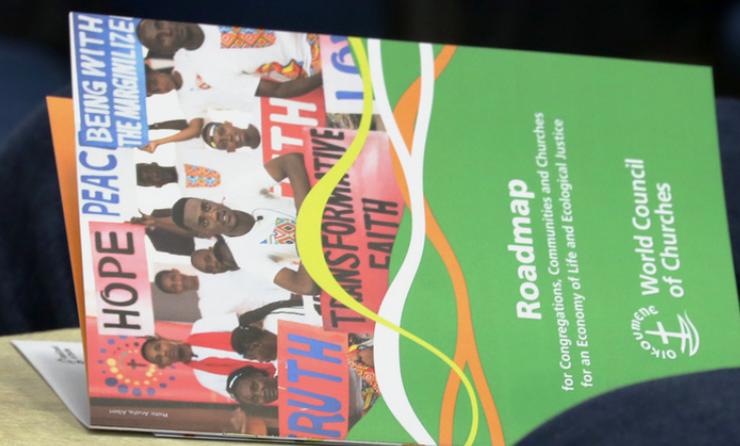
As churches and faith communities, we can exchange experiences and lessons learned and grow together. We can accompany, challenge, and spur each other on in the journey towards an Economy of Life and ecological justice.

We live in a Kairos moment. The climate emergency demands nothing less than economic transformation on a systemic scale.

We can and must join our voices in calling our governments and corporations into account, advocating for radical cuts in CO₂ emissions as well as deep-seated transformations in the global financial and economic architecture. For instance, we can push for the implementation of wealth taxes and carbon taxes as part of the ecumenical Zacchaeus Tax campaign to stem widening socioeconomic inequality as well as to raise resources for public healthcare and building climate resilience in vulnerable countries.

When we as churches “walk the talk” and strive for integrity in our own day-to-day activities, many more will listen to our urgent calls for policy and systemic change.

“We want to be change agents not only for ourselves, but as part of a growing movement on a pilgrimage for transformation.”



www.oikoumene.org

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