

# A Moral Climate – 6 May 2008

## EcoChurch – a model for faith communities

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### Abstract

EcoChurch is a model for local faith communities to respond to climate change. It is about a fresh reading of the scriptures with the focus on humankind being caretakers of God's creation rather than being in dominion of the earth. It is about implementing local and practical actions arising from a belief that we are to 'safeguard the integrity of creation; to sustain and renew the life of the earth'.

The EcoChurch model includes:

- ensuring local church buildings and activities are environmentally responsible
- to assist church members to get their households in order, and
- to encourage other churches and the local community to adopt eco-friendly practices.

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**EcoChurch**  
A model for faith communities

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Earth Hour 2007 was the catalyst for us at St Mark's Anglican Church South Hurstville. We decided that the one thing that would normally be lit on that Saturday night should not be lit. It was the large cross on the external church wall backlight by two fluorescent lamps. Of course many people had candle lit dinners at home – and this year even more so.

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We launched EcoChurch at the main Eucharist, the day after Earth Hour, which happened to be Palm Sunday in 2007. All we had at that stage was a project team of four and a logo. There was a special liturgy which focussed on responsible stewardship of creation, and asking for God's blessing on the project. We saw it as important that EcoChurch, like other parish initiatives, be celebrated in the weekly rhythm of worship.

The team had decided that:

- we take a little time to plan the project
- it should start on the Sunday near World Environment Day
- and it should run at least for 12 months to the next World Environment Day 2008.

### Planning



- Take time to plan
- Gather a team
- Commence on a significant date
- Celebrate the launch

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Within our team, we were not short of ideas in this planning phase – we settled on an approach that we knew we could handle along with all the other parish, home and work commitments.

## Strategies



- Parish church
- Households
- Community



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The EcoChurch model has three strategies:

1. to get our local parish church buildings and activities in order,
2. to help get parish households in order,
3. and to somehow take it wider to other churches and/or the local South Hurstville community.

**Firstly** the church –

It seemed to us that if we were to capture the commitment of parish members, we needed a substantial symbol – something that St Mark's members could get involved in. The decision was a

water tank – very appropriate last year when Sydney's dams were quite low. After visiting a parishioner's tank installation and learning about concrete slabs, pumps, filters and first flushes, we decided on a 10,000 litre tank. The parish council endorsed the concept and we launched an appeal.

Donations came in on top of ordinary giving – and we also used along with all of the typical church fund-raising activities, to support the cause. The total cost was about \$8,000 (\$7,897) with donations of \$5,000 (\$5,093) and a government grant of \$1,000. The parish council kindly put in about \$2,000 (\$1,804).

The tank was installed during the January school holidays this year. It harvests rain water from the church hall roof and provides flushing for the toilets of the adjacent St Mark's Pre-School Kindergarten, as well as water for gardens.

The second visible initiative around the church was a recycling centre. For many years, like other churches, have had a clothing bin. We affirmed this principle of recycling, and added a series of neatly labelled cardboard boxes for a collection of additional items – generally things that the Council does not accept in the weekly kerbside pick-up.

We have a box for:

- printer cartridges for recycling.
- mobile phones for recycling.
- candle stubs from church and home.  
for reuse by a former parishioner who makes church candles.
- spectacles for reuse in developing countries.
- postage stamps for resale by the Anglican Board of Missions.
- magazines for reuse by prisoners – distributed by a sister of the church.

We still have things to do – not all of our lighting has been improved. Some fittings do not suit compact or linear fluorescents – this will take more money to change lighting fittings for purpose style lightings.

We still need to undertake a comprehensive technical audit of all buildings, but we have completed a checklist of all our activities to identify other improvements – the foam morning tea cups have gone to recyclable paper, with pressure on to go back to crockery and washing up.

## Parish church



- Water tank
- Recycling centre
- Lighting
- Audit

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The **Second main strategy** was to assist the parish households in changing the way they do things – proving information about environmental issues, and how to make improvements in their homes.

## Parish Households



- Information
- EcoGoals

My EcoGoals	
Be scrupulous about recycling in the yellow bin	
Recycle stamps, magazines, candles, printer cartridges, apostles, and/or clothing at St Mark's	
Use reusable (instead of plastic) shopping bags	
Take maximum 4 minute showers (Sydney Water egg timers)	
Change incandescent globes to efficient ones	
Take public transport, walk or cycle regularly (instead of driving)	
Carpool for regular church/community group activities	
For gardeners, choose drought resistant plants	
Buy some GreenPower from my electricity supplier	
Install a rain water tank	
Install solar water heating when next replacing water heater	
Buy a more fuel efficient car when next replacing it	
Make a donation to the church water tank	
Undertake my own ideas:	

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Just about each month we have provided extra information in the weekly newsletter and/or on the EcoChurch website. To a large extent we do not reinvent the wheel – we use brochures from Sydney Water, Energy Australia and the local Council – there are many available, and these organisations are generally very willing to provide them. One was on how to choose a water tank, others were on how to save on electricity, how to reduce water consumption, green power, recycling opportunities.

Not only did we provide information, we challenged people to make a commitment.

Worshippers were invited to sign an agreement, setting out their EcoGoals for the year. It comprised a list of initiatives ranging from straightforward and no-cost actions, to more complicated and potentially costly actions.

The aim is that the combination of accessible and straightforward information, plus the act of signing a piece of paper, helps move people towards being better stewards of God's creation.

The **third strategy is to spread the word** – we are still in our infancy in this area, but have taken some steps.

Thanks to WWF and Earth Hour, there has been some publicity in the press and radio. It has been good to let Sydney know, that churches are saying that environmental issues are important – and should be very much part of the journey of each community of faith – not just the extremely passionate.

Because of our National Synod's resolutions last year, there has also been some publicity in Anglican newspapers in Sydney and Melbourne, and on Sky News.

We have also had discussions with the local Council, and there is an offer on the table to host some of their regular EcoLiving workshops for residents at our church.

Just this week, we have also learned that we were successful in gaining a small grant from the Council for a new no-dig organic garden, a compost facility, and a second rain water tank in the Pre-School.

This project is about increasing environmental learning in the Pre-School, making connections with others. The children will be involved in tending the garden, such as building up the no-dig garden with hay, paper, compost and the like, planting, watering by carrying buckets from the tank, and harvesting the produce. The vegetables will be offered to members of a weekly seniors' club that meets at St Mark's.

## Community



- Earth Hour
- Promotion
- Local Council

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## Future

- Continuous improvement
- More frequent environmental focus
- Spread the word



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The future of EcoChurch:

Come 1 June this year (Sunday before World Environment Day), we will celebrate the achievements of EcoChurch as a project. It will stop being a special project and become part of our normal life.

One useful statement that supports this approach, was that agreed to at the 1988 Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops – the Model of Mission for the Church. Many of you may have come across it. I understand it has been adopted by many denominations and ecumenical bodies as a guide to the way the church

should be and act in our contemporary world. The model outlines five ‘marks’ for a healthy church existence:

- Mark 1:* To proclaim the good news of the Kingdom;
- Mark 2:* To teach, baptise and nurture new believers;
- Mark 3:* To respond to human need by loving service;
- Mark 4:* To seek to transform unjust structures of society;
- Mark 5:* To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation; to sustain and renew the life of the earth.

A church with a holistic mission should have activities related to each of the Five Marks, so to me *Mark 5*, concerning creation, is not an option – it must become part of the norm.

So our future in the immediate is:

- Setting up a permanent recycling centre, and continuing to improve our environmental performance.
- More frequent environmental focus in worship and teaching.
- Spreading the word.

When I scour the internet I find many reports about environmental matters on church hierarchy websites. Many Anglican Dioceses have established environmental commissions and the like, but I can’t find a lot of practical action happening.

EcoChurch is about taking action at the local level.

It is about communities of faith being better stewards of creation.

## EcoChurch



St Mark's Anglican Church  
*South Hurstville*

[www.southhurstville.anglican.asn.au](http://www.southhurstville.anglican.asn.au)

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