

Climate Faith Change

Three Multi-faith seminars presented by Faith Ecology Network¹

Our Transport – 19 June 2007

Anglican respondent: Bruce Cooke, an electrical engineer with 7 years experience in Government policy and practical energy management in the NSW public sector. He is a Sydney Anglican from a broad tradition and is part of the community of faith at St Mark's Church, South Hurstville. Bruce is currently heading up EcoChurch, a new project at South Hurstville, which is facilitating actions in sustainable energy, water conservation and recycling initiatives in the church buildings, and in members' households.

1. Anglican Church

You will appreciate that the Anglican Church has many voices, it is not a homogenous community of faith. Our world-wide church is very much decentralised, with each diocese having a potentially different focus on world and faith issues.

I also need to say, that in the Anglican tradition interpreting the scriptures, and actions arising out of a person's faith are also very much individually based. We sometimes talk of the Anglican Church as 'unity in diversity'. So what I say tonight is very much a personal perspective – not an authoritative statement of the Church.

2. Life and Mission of the Church

The Archbishop of Canterbury has traditionally provided leadership through forums and personal influence, inviting bishops from round the globe to discuss issues concerning the world and the church. One of these gatherings is the Lambeth Conference, which meets every 10 years. Even though outcomes of these gatherings are not binding on individual churches, they are influential in shaping local reactions.

One useful statement that was agreed to at the 1988 Lambeth Conference of Bishops is the Model of Mission for the Church. 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.

In the past our church has been concerned very much with Marks 1-3 with progress being made in Mark 4.

In more recent years, the whole world has become aware of environmental issues. We humans have a problem and a responsibility of great importance that touches upon the well-being of every creature on God's earth.

Hence the fifth Mark of mission has become prominent in the theology, mission and actions for many churches throughout the world. How may we act as the people of God so as to respect God's creation (that is, to celebrate the glory of God's world), repent of our sin towards God's creation (that is, to change our destructive and exploitative use of God's world), and work for the renewal of God's creation (that is, participate creatively in the regenerating life of God's Spirit in the world)? I wish to reiterate on one of the issues that Prof Barry Leal from the Uniting Church touched on last week.

In the Christian tradition, and thinking outside our own existence, it is the *world* (the cosmos) that God created from the beginning (Genesis 1; John 1:1-4). It is the *world* that God so loved that he sent his Son Jesus Christ to bring it to life eternal (John 3:16). It is the *world* that God seeks to bring into fulfilment in Christ's eternal kingdom (Ephesians 1:3-10). We humans have a tendency to see things mainly from our own perspective and in our own interests. Even in our faith and prayer. We tend to only focus of God as *our* (human) God, and of salvation as the healing of *our* (human) lives, and of the hope of eternity as the future of *our* (human) being and meaning.

Although that is part of our belief, sometimes we lose sight of God as God of all creation, Jesus Christ as saviour of all being, the Spirit as the giver of all life. If we are to worship this God, we will find ourselves driven to concern for all God's world, but especially for those parts that are suffering and in danger.

So therefore as an Anglican Christian, I very much see that I and my colleagues need to continue to widen our missionary vision further. We need to make real the fifth Mark of our mission, that is *to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and to sustain and renew the life of the earth.*

And in this regard my response to climate change is just not for me. It is just not just the Christian community. It is just not just for the human race. But God's *whole creation.*

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, particularly at the organisational level.

I believe if we are to be a credible group we have to get our own house in order!

3. EcoChurch – and example of local action

At St Mark's Anglican Church South Hurstville we have commenced. A new project, EcoChurch was launched on the day after Earth Hour. It started on World Environment Day 2007. It 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 – Part of a working bee in two weeks will be to level the ground for a water tank. It will harvest rain water from the church hall roof and provide flushing for the toilets of the Pre-school Kindergarten, as well as water for gardens.

We have also established a reuse/recycling centre for magazines (prisoners), candle stubs (for making of church candles), spectacles (for use in developing countries), printer cartridges for return to Planet Ark and postage stamps for raising funds for mission.

Through this year we will also undertake an audit of all our activities to identify other improvements – the foam morning tea cups will have to go.

Secondly the parish households. Two Sundays ago we asked worshippers to sign up to an agreement, setting out their EcoGoals for the year. It was important that options were available for all. So checklist starts from the simplest actions, like shopping with re-useable bags (instead of plastic), to more costly initiatives like installing a solar water heater when next replacing it.

On transport we have included:

- Take public transport, walk or cycle regularly (instead of driving)
- Carpool for regular church and community activities
- Buy a more fuel efficient car when next replacing it.

To support these choices we are providing a monthly flyer on a particular issue. Last month it was recycling, July it is Green Power – what it is and how to get it. We aim to have straightforward and accessible information which we hope will lead to action.

The **third** strategy to spread the word – how to do this is still on the drawing board.

The Anglican Church as a whole still has along way to go – I suspect lobbying Governments on public transport, cycle ways and the like, and the other ideas that Rev Dr Charles Rue (Catholic) mentioned earlier tonight, and to encourage its members to change culture on the car – are some of the transport things that could be done.

At South Hurstville, we have decided to start and do something. We've responded to the popular phrase of the 70s 'think globally, act locally'.

¹ Faith Ecology Network is an initiative of The Columban Centre for Peace Ecology and Justice (Sydney, Australia)
The three seminars were titled: *Faiths waking up to Climate Change*, *Our Transport*, and *Our Buildings*.