

## Baptist Union of Great Britain

### MISSION EXECUTIVE

#### A Vision for the Environment

#### INTRODUCTION

In March 1998, the Council of the Baptist Union of Great Britain accepted the report *Five Core Values for a Gospel People*. This report affirmed, among other principles, that we are called to be:

- a prophetic community confronting injustice and challenging human concepts of power, wealth, status and security;
- an inclusive community identifying with those who are rejected, deprived and powerless;
- a sacrificial community seeking to reflect the generous, life-giving nature of God;
- a missionary community demonstrating God's healing and forgiving love;
- a worshipping community exploring and expressing what it means to live together as the people of God, obeying his Word and following Christ in the whole of daily life.

In seeking to establish the nature of these core values in our churches and community, we set down a pattern of action at various levels. These included:

in the local church

- developing practical programmes to experiment in simpler, greener, fairer living;
- becoming generous givers within and beyond the church;

in the denomination

- informing and challenging churches to a firm commitment to using fairly traded goods and ethical investments and to pursuing just lifestyles;
- taking a lead in collecting models of good practice, and informing churches and society of those policies which most clearly make for justice;
- experimenting with patterns of worship and prayer, which will enable churches and individuals consistently to lift up to God the strife, suffering, injustices and despair of humanity;

in society and the world

- pressing for an increased share of world resources to be devoted to international development and conservation;
- speaking out against policies and practices that widen the gap between rich and poor;
- being alive to the signs of God at work through people and agencies outside the church, and be prepared to align ourselves with them in supportive prayer and action;
- recognising that to pray '*Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth...*' involves commitment to political and social action, to service and evangelism, bringing good news to the poor and needy, and to the strong and powerful.

We have also stood alongside our ecumenical brothers and sisters in Christ in affirming the *Five Marks of Mission*<sup>1</sup>, the first and last of which are:

- to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom;
- to safeguard the integrity of creation; to sustain and renew the life of the earth.

It is clear from all that we have affirmed together that care for creation, a just sharing of the world's resources, and a concern for the environment are fundamental gospel commitments. We acknowledge the work and effort already undertaken by some of our member churches in developing environmental concern as part of their own mission initiatives, but believe that a far greater number of our churches should be encouraged to give expression to their Christian faith in this way. Council is therefore invited to reflect upon and to affirm the following policy statement in order that it may guide thinking and practice within our churches, Colleges and Associations.

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<sup>1</sup> Identified first by the 1988 Lambeth Conference as five marks of a missionary church, and subsequently affirmed by both individual denominations and key ecumenical bodies.

## **VISION STATEMENT**

### **Our Stewardship of Creation**

#### *Our faith*

We believe that God

- created and continues to create the whole universe
- sustains and nurtures creation
- through Christ, wills to redeem the whole of creation from its bondage to decay
- entrusts creation to our care, allowing us to have dominion over it
- calls us to be partners in God's ongoing creative, renewing and redeeming activity
- commands us to act justly and in righteousness not only towards our fellow human beings, but to all creation
- requires us to care for creation so that future generations, whom God also loves, can enjoy it and benefit from it.

#### *Our mission*

We affirm that Christian mission includes caring for God's earth and of all creation. It includes sharing in putting right the relationships within God's creation that have gone wrong, and growing towards justice and good stewardship envisaged in the Biblical vision of the world as it is meant to be.

#### *Our care of creation*

We believe that human activity has contributed to the degradation of the earth in its land, seas and atmosphere, and that this is not the will of God. We believe that this degradation limits the attainment of the fullness of life that God wills for all creation, and is a sin for which we should seek forgiveness. It also imposes most heavily upon the peoples of the developing countries of the world and is part of the intrinsic injustice to which we bear witness.

#### *Our calling*

In fulfilling our commitment to our Core Values, we challenge and encourage our Baptist people to care for the earth by following sustainable practice and by taking into account global and local environmental considerations for present and future generations

- in the conservation and use of resources in the church and at home
- in living in a more sustainable lifestyle
- in active involvement in community initiatives aimed at sustaining and renewing the environment
- in concerns for action on global environmental issues.

#### *Our commitment*

To this end we should have regard to

- the challenge of meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs
- the potential for harnessing the skills, expertise and enthusiasm of the members of our congregations
- the opportunities for co-operation in joint initiatives with other congregations, including ecumenical joint action
- the actions in one place that may have an effect in other places
- the valuable contribution of small steps by individuals as well as major initiatives.

### **Our Environmental Objectives**

In order to work out our faith and fulfil our responsibility for the stewardship of God's creation, we commit ourselves to the following actions.

#### *Awareness and Commitment*

- to promote awareness amongst Baptists of these principles and objectives and of the values underlying them

- to ensure that all staff members of the BUGB, its Associations and Colleges are familiar with this environmental commitment and its objectives, and encourage them to work towards its implementation
- to encourage Baptist communities in their activities to comply with all relevant environmental recommendations for good practice

#### *Energy and Water*

- to ensure energy is used efficiently and wherever possible reduce its use
- to encourage the increased use of renewable energy
- to use water efficiently and with care
- to avoid pollutants entering the drainage system

#### *Waste*

- to reduce the production of material waste including unnecessary packaging
- to encourage re-use, repair and recycling of materials including organic waste
- to dispose of waste in a safe and responsible way

#### *Materials and Resources*

- to buy products which are made in accordance with the principle of using material in a sustainable way and to use locally-made goods as far as this is possible and practicable
- to buy products from sources that adhere to principles of fair trade with those within poorer countries
- to take into account the lifetime costs of materials when repairing, altering or rebuilding premises
- to maximise the proportion of paper used from sustainable sources and recycled materials
- to offer electronic communication as an alternative to paper for those who are suitably equipped

#### *Natural and Built Environment*

- to take appropriate opportunities to conserve and enhance the natural and built environment
- to engage with local planning developments where these affect the environment
- to encourage the renewal and enhancement of the urban environment
- to be sensitive to the impact of church activities on the local environment

#### *Travel*

- to make every effort to reduce air pollution and energy consumption resulting from the use of the car by avoidance of unnecessary travel and the use of energy-efficient vehicles
- to explore undertaking the work of the denomination and local church in ways which reduce the need for travel particularly by car and encourage the use of public transport
- to share car transport wherever possible

We affirm that the earth belongs to God and hold to a vision of a world that reflects the glory of God. So together we will celebrate all that is done and achieved in fulfilling our human responsibility for the care and stewardship of creation.

## **CONCLUSION**

We recognise and commend the Churches' Environmental Programme *Eco-Congregation*, which has been established by the partnership of the Environmental Issues Network of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and ENCAMS<sup>2</sup>, the environmental awareness charity part-funded by a grant from the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. This programme supplies material and assistance in raising the awareness of congregations to our stewardship of creation, for enhancing worship and Bible study, for working with children, young people and adults, and for taking action of a practical nature in our church life and within our community. We encourage its use amongst Baptists as a way of living out our environmental policy.

#### Acknowledgement

We are grateful for permission to use part of the Methodist Church's Environmental Policy statement as a basis of some of our own declaration, and for the advice of the Churches' Environmental Project Co-ordinator of *Eco-Congregation*.

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<sup>2</sup> Formerly *Going for Green* together with the *Tidy Britain Group*