



Darlington District Environmental Policy

- *This draft policy draws upon Conference and Council reports and some work developed in the Bristol Circuit.*

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it.

Psalm 24:1 NRSV

*God Spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature
So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle,
And yes, Earth itself, and every animal that moves on the face of the earth."
Genesis 1:26 in The Message*

Introduction

- 1 In 2011, the Methodist Church adopted the report *Hope in God's Future: Christian Discipleship in the Context of Climate Change* as a Conference statement. This joint report produced by the Methodist Church, the Baptist Union and the United Reformed Church reminded the Methodist Church in Britain that our response to the climate emergency and our care for creation is a central and integral part of our discipleship.
- 2 A *Methodist Way of Life* identifies '...care for creation and all God's gifts' as one of the ways in which we live out *Our Calling*.
- 3 In 2021, the Methodist Conference set an aspirational target for the Methodist Church in Great Britain to become a net zero Church by 2030. The Conference called on all ministers, preachers and church members to take action in response.

Aims and Aspirations

- 4 In response to the Conference decision, the Methodist Council developed a strategy entitled *Action for Hope* with a number of key aims. These aims are adapted here to have a district, circuit and local church focus:
 - To reduce all travel directly funded by the district/circuit/local church to net zero emissions by 2030.
 - All electricity and gas directly funded by the district/circuit/local church to have net zero emissions by 2030.

- To ensure that the largest district/circuit/local church events have net zero emissions by 2030.
- Increase the positive environmental impact of investments.
- To have 60% of all Methodist churches registered for a bronze Eco Church award by 2026 and a further 20% with a silver award by 2026.
- To encourage Methodist members to progressively reduce their carbon footprint.
- Empower and equip advocates.

5 In addition, the Darlington District encourages:

- All churches to recognise our responsibility as Christians for the care of God’s earth, and that this should infuse the whole of our church life.
- Making care for the environment a core part of our worship, teaching and discipleship development across all age groups with a particular focus during the Season of Creation.
- Paying particular attention to the positive potential of our buildings, land and assets on the environment:
 - using any land around our buildings in ways which benefit the environment and the community
 - identifying opportunities to increase biodiversity
- Engaging and developing partnerships with local and global organisations in seeking a fairer, more environmentally friendly world
- Encouraging lifestyles both personally and as church members which reflect these aims.

The Darlington District calls upon every church and circuit in the district to develop an environmental policy reflecting these aims and annually to report to the District Policy Committee its plans for the year in working towards the net zero aspiration.

Practical Aims for 2024-25

In 2024-25 the Darlington District aims to:

- Register as an Eco District working towards a silver award by 2026.
- Encourage circuit and local churches to register as Eco Circuits and Eco Churches with a target of 60% bronze awards by 2026 and 20% silver awards. The district will develop a database in the Autumn identifying churches and circuits and their progress.
- Review district property assets, including the district manse and district office to identify its energy impact and to progressively reduce emissions towards the net zero aspiration by 2030.
- Identify the environmental impact of large district events (e.g. the Synod) and meetings and to explore ways of reducing emissions, offsetting any remaining emissions and identifying public transport options.
- Work with circuits on energy audits and support each circuit in the development of a net zero property strategy.

- Encourage all ministers, local churches and circuits to move to the use of electricity from renewable sources as soon as is practically possible within the terms of their energy contracts and encourage a move towards green gas, reduced consumption and carbon offsetting. The district will explore the merits of connexion or district wide energy supply arrangements.
- Manage its investments ethically, where possible using investment vehicles which avoid fossil fuels, seeking to use the new fossil free Epworth Fund.
- Include within the District Grants Policy a stipulation that grants will only be made to circuits and local churches which have an environmental policy in place.
- Ensure that materials to enable theological reflection on environmental issues are included in the support given to local preachers and worship leaders both in training and in practice for implementation in time for Creationtide 2025.
- Identify a pilot circuit or possibly two to develop a model for a practical but comprehensive approach to the move towards net zero at a local level.
- Develop a network of advocates across the district to support and nurture this work.
- Seek to work with circuits, ecumenical partners, other faith groups, charitable and local government agencies to encourage environmental action both locally and globally.

This policy will be reviewed annually by the District Policy Committee.