

Top Tips for Engaging Your Church on Climate Change

1. Don't be a lone ranger! (Getting others involved)

Whilst it is essential for a few people to be the 'champions' for climate change response, it is beneficial for those people to have others around them who care. A team of people, large or small, can make a big difference, helping to keep each other motivated.

It is important that this group get the leadership of the church on board.

Collaboration between churches and with coalitions can help too – such as inter-church forums, Creation Care and [Eco-Congregation Ireland](#). Some churches have found working with local schools to help with momentum.

Getting those around you involved can take time and you often need to lead by example. One participant told a story that when she moved into a new area, she made a point of using assorted refuse bins on a street where no-one else seemed to be doing so. Now they all do! She also made a point of being seen tending her garden in an environmentally friendly way – and now others are doing likewise. Setting an example is key.

2. Start with small realistic steps

It can be overwhelming for people to consider the scale of the challenge. Therefore, many people have found it beneficial to start with small, tangible suggestions such as switching to a green energy company or starting to use plastic-free and Fairtrade tea and coffee supplies.

You can use your Church magazine or Facebook to share top tips for the week, perhaps one or two tips a week, so people make small but significant changes.

People in your church will need to be educated first and this will lead to action.

Eco-Congregation Ireland has an environmental audit that they encourage churches to go through which can help you to identify what those steps might be. For example, removal of plastic cups, different forms of insulation, LED light bulbs etc, and this is something that all churches should go through. Going through this audit will help you identify the steps that will have the biggest impact on cutting carbon emissions and do those things first.

3. Get people involved in practical challenges which encourage a connection with nature!

Encouraging the congregation to get involved with nature and the environment directly serves to reverse some of the damage done by climate change and it also serves to help people feel connected to nature. If they feel connected, they are more likely to continue to take action.

There are lots of creative ways that churches have done so. For example, one church built a raised herb bed and engaged the children in the church to plant different sections. Another used their land to plant 1,000 trees and involved the community, and still another gave out saplings for people to take care of. Church land can be used for re-wilding by leaving parts un-mown or it can be used for planting food. Even parts of some graveyards can be left to grow without upsetting people. Churches can build bird boxes or have allotments. It's also worth thinking about Glebe land as there are some places where woodland has been planted on Glebe land.

Another resource for churches are the [pollinator plans](#) from the National Biodiversity Data Centre in Ireland.

There was a suggestion that signs would need to be put up to explain some initiatives such as re-wilding as congregations tend to want to see tidy, manicured grass. Perhaps, even agreeing that a small part of the green space could be 'mow free' would be a step forward.

4. Incorporate a connection with nature and creation care into worship

There is a need to focus on helping people to understand how essential caring for creation (and those most impacted by changing climate) is in the Bible and to our Creator God. People need time to pray and contemplate on creation care. If you love something enough you will protect it.

Including liturgy that embeds the justice narrative into the worship and thinking of the church can be a powerful tool on this journey.

It's helpful if church leaders can include this in their preaching. For example, one church leader used the book of Zechariah to show the disproportionate effect that Christians can have on the environment for good or ill.

5. Include political actions

It's vital to include lobbying politicians in your response to climate change. They can effect wider change and use influence at government level.

This can take many forms such as inviting a local politician to your creation care service, or to help plant a tree, or to officially open your new wildlife area etc.

Get the congregation involved in letter writing and petition signing. Campaign cards could be left on seats, signed and put into the offering for example. Youth groups could write letters or draw pictures of what they love about creation and send them to the Taoiseach or Prime Minister. Take a photo of your congregation holding a sign calling for action on climate change and send it to your local politician.

6. Denominational-level action

Individual churches taking action is really important but it's also vital to see action at a denominational level.

For example, denominations can look into the energy-efficiency of their manses and rectories. The Methodist church is discussing the possibility of selling old manses and buying newer more energy efficient buildings. Some Church of Ireland dioceses also looking at ways of reducing fuel use in rectories. In a recent Quaker renovation project the underfloor insulation was 'eco cell' ground up paper rather than foam. Another church installed glass on the outside of their stained glass windows to improve the insulation of the building and lower heating costs.

Denominations could set national 'baselines' for all their churches to strive to achieve, or have a consultation process that every congregation in a region must go through. The importance of engaging the denominational youth departments was also mentioned.

Many churches at a denominational level are considering how they can use their investments to support the shift from a fossil-fuel based economy to clean renewable



alternatives. Individual congregations can ask questions at larger denominational gatherings to see what progress is being made.

Lastly, could eco-theology become an integral part of ministerial training?

7. Keep it on the agenda

Some spoke of the danger of burning out due to the challenges that can come up when trying to keep creation care and responding to climate change on the agenda.

Suggestions for keeping it on the agenda were to regularly include the topic in the church newsletter or magazine.

The eco 'champions' should keep asking questions and put it on the agenda of church meetings.

One church had set up a book club to raise awareness of climate change which has been successful.

8. Show impact of climate change

It is vital to show the impact of climate change on the ground for real people, whether that be in Ireland or much further afield.

Visits to other countries can be effective at inspiring people by showing them examples of local actions for example a recent visit to Swaziland where the team travelling saw rain-water harvesting projects. The trip gave people a greater awareness of issues like single-use plastics. (Although we also recognise the conflict of long-haul flights involved in these overseas trips)

We now know we don't have to travel far to hear from people from around the world. We have all been part of events with contributions from various countries through tools like Zoom and these will continue to be really important in building links and inspiring people.

9. Celebrate progress

It can be challenging to champion this cause when others around you are not as passionate. So, it is vital to celebrate when you make progress – whether a successful lobbying event with your local MLA, the church using re-useable cups at coffee time instead of disposable or the young people being educated and inspired.

Keep marking those moments whether big or small!

10. Keep in touch

Find out more at christianaid.ie/climate and irishchurches.org/climate.



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