

# Action for Hope

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## Summary of content

Subject	To present the Faith Plan of the Methodist Church in Britain.
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# Action for Hope

- 1 *Hope is thus a reason for bold action in the world in accordance with God's will for creation, not an excuse for inaction. – Hope in God's Future*
- 2 *Hope in God's Future* (2009)<sup>1</sup> was a seminal work by the Baptist Union, The Methodist Church in Britain (MCB) and the United Reformed Church, exploring Christian discipleship in the context of climate change. In creating MCB's Faith Plan, we turned to this resource first for direction and guidance. The above quote caught the imagination of the task group and became the inspiration for the title of our plan – *Action for Hope*.
- 3 This plan is a working document and will continue to be developed, refined and improved over the coming years. There will be an annual update to the Methodist Council, the governing body of MCB, which will be publicly available online<sup>2</sup>.

## Background

- 4 *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth... God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. – Genesis 1:1, 31*
- 5 As Christians, we believe that God created the world. We believe in the inherent goodness of creation, and we believe that God is active and present in the world – sustaining creation from moment to moment. As people made in the image of God, we believe we are called to reflect God's nature in being present and active in caring for creation.
- 6 There is a fundamental principle, of the inter-connectedness and interdependence of all creation, which undergirds our commitment to, and our alarm about, issues of climate change. Modern science, again and again, echoes and reflects this theme which has run deep in the breadth of Christian theological and spiritual tradition for two millennia: nothing which is created exists alone, or apart from, everything else. All life bears the imprint, the image even, of the God who brought it into being.
- 7 *Closing our ears to the voices of those most vulnerable to climate change would be nothing less than giving up our claim to be disciples of Christ. – Hope in God's Future*
- 8 For Methodists, there is a particular resonance, and a special energy, to these convictions. The principle of 'connexionalism' is important in reminding us of our own network of belonging and believing, and that individual Methodists and their congregations never view themselves apart from a wider body of believers, nor the wider work and purposes of God.
- 9 John Wesley's insistence on 'social holiness' was embodied in the honest and open accountability of the early Methodist societies, and in their relentless efforts to be in mission with, and for, their immediate communities and the wider world. With a moral vision that embraced urban deprivation in Britain, the transcontinental trade in enslaved people, agricultural impoverishment because of public policy, the proper treatment of animals, and the effects of global capitalism on the world's poorest peoples and nations, those early Methodists set a pattern of concern and action that still shapes our own witness and mission today.
- 10 Science, in its own voice, has increasingly pointed to the same truth of interrelationship, and the now-urgent dangers of our rejection of this basic principle and understanding. The words of Dr Martin Luther King Jr are as true in relation to the climate crisis as they were with regard to the civil rights movement: "we are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny... whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly".
- 11 *The truth is that the most systemic threat to humankind remains climate change. – António Guterres, UN Secretary-General*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/environment-and-climate-change/understand-the-issues/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-conference/methodist-council/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/press-encounter/2018-03-29/secretary-generals-press-encounter-climate-change-ga>

- 12** Scientists and world leaders are in agreement that the climate crisis is as a result of human activity<sup>4</sup> and that it represents the current greatest threat to creation, including humanity. As the situation worsens, it will be children and those yet unborn who will be most impacted by climate crisis. And it will be the poor, including those living in the global south, who will have the least resources to withstand and adapt to those impacts.
- 13** In his sermon on The Use of Money<sup>5</sup>, John Wesley wrote, “We ought to gain all we can gain but this it is certain we ought not to do; we ought not to gain money at the expense of life, nor at the expense of our health.” By this, we understand that the ways in which we manage our money or conduct our business (whether that be secular business or the activities of the Church) should not harm the prospects of others. Methodist people have always endeavoured to remain true to this calling.
- 14** MCB has spoken out on many environmental issues over the years, including animal welfare, mining and extraction, and in support of agricultural communities, and has been working on reducing its contribution to the climate crisis, and encouraging others to do the same for more than a decade.
- *Hope in God's Future* (2009) was a seminal work by the Baptist Union, MCB and the United Reformed Church. The 2011 Methodist Conference adopted sections one to four of *Hope in God's Future* as an official statement of the Conference.
  - Following this, MCB initiated the Carbon Reduction Project<sup>6</sup>, which involved a commitment to reducing the carbon footprint of MCB by 24% over five years. This involved changes to travel policy, grants guidance and quinquennial inspections, and introduced a central energy purchasing scheme. However, the focus of this work was as much on financial savings as emissions savings. In addition, the group faced difficulties in measuring (see below for more).
  - The EcoCongregation initiative was launched in 2012 and the EcoChurch programme in 2016. Currently, EcoCongregation serves churches in Scotland and EcoChurch serves churches in England and Wales. EcoChurch was awarded connexional funding in 2015/2016 and work has been undertaken since then to create EcoCircuit and EcoDistrict awards. In 2020, the children and young people of 3Generate called on every church council to include the “EcoChurch challenge” on their agenda in the coming year.
  - The Joint Advisory Committee on the Ethics of Investment and the Central Finance Board of the Methodist Church (CFB) have engaged with fossil fuel companies for many years. The CFB has played a lead role in investor collaborations such as the Transition Pathways Initiative. The CFB continues to engage with company executives over climate policy and net-zero pathways. In 2017, the Methodist Conference called for a complete divestment from oil and gas companies. Following a process of further engagement, the CFB sold the remaining energy holdings in Royal Dutch Shell and Equinor in April 2021.
- 15** In 2020, MCB created six new roles for COP26 Campaigns Workers, two of whom were based in the UK and four of whom were based in partner churches across the world. They collaborated to ensure a strong Methodist voice for climate justice was heard at COP26 and created campaigning and worship resources for use throughout global Methodism. The 2021 Methodist Conference, seeking to build on past work, and with a renewed sense of urgency, agreed an aspirational target to become a net zero Church by 2030<sup>7</sup>.

## Faith Plans

- 16** The Conference stated that “a ‘one size fits all’ plan would not be beneficial” and that a range of partnerships should instead be cultivated to help the Methodist Church meet the ambitious target of net zero carbon emissions by 2030<sup>8</sup>. One of these partnerships is with Faith Invest, who run the Faith Plans programme.

<sup>4</sup> <https://climate.nasa.gov/scientific-consensus/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.wesleysheritage.org.uk/exhibits/john-wesleys-sermons/sermon-sheet/?o=2709&t>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf10a-12-carbon-160211.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/21664/conf-2021-3-methodist-council-part-1.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/21664/conf-2021-3-methodist-council-part-1.pdf>

- 17** The Faith Plans programme is a global interfaith initiative run by FaithInvest and the World Wildlife Fund. It works to help faith groups – as the biggest organised sector of civil society in the world – to use their assets, investments and influence to drive practical action to benefit people and planet.
- 18** It involves each religious group developing a long-term action plan to determine how they will manage their assets and resources over the next seven to ten years. As well as providing moral leadership through example, the Faith Plans will focus attention on the importance of profound and urgent action to address the climate and ecological crisis and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.
- 19** The Faith Plans cover seven areas:
- Faith-consistent use of assets – including their investments, purchasing power, buildings and land
  - Education and young people – in both formal and informal settings
  - Wisdom – including theology, liturgies and prayer
  - Lifestyles – including traditions of simple living, pilgrimage
  - Media and outreach – including influence, advocacy and guides
  - Partnerships, eco-twinning and creating faith environment departments
  - Celebration – including festivals and traditions
- 20** It is advised that groups initially focus on between one and three of these areas, in order to provide impetus for change early in the process. The decision to focus on some areas does not prevent important progress being undertaken and celebrated in other areas.
- 21** It is proposed that MCB should focus on “Faith-consistent use of assets”, “Wisdom” and “Lifestyles” for the foreseeable future. These areas are proposed for the following reasons.
- Faith-consistent use of assets – a focus on this area will contribute the most toward MCB’s aim of net zero carbon emissions by 2030. It also aligns with the proposed changes to property management outlined in the Conference’s response to memorial M6 (2020).
  - Wisdom – the Conference’s response to memorial M6 (2020) references Climate Sunday, the Methodist Way of Life and Hope in God’s Future, clearly demonstrating that worship, discipleship and theological reflection are at the heart of a Methodist response to the climate crisis.
  - Lifestyles – this work will dovetail with work on discipleship and A Methodist Way of Life. It is hoped that the Walking with Micah work might also give direction to this aspect.

## Connexional plans and local plans

- 22** *The Conference wholeheartedly agrees and affirms that ‘the global climate emergency is a crisis for God’s creation and a fundamental injustice’.* – The Methodist Conference 2021<sup>9</sup>
- 23** The Conference has identified reducing carbon emissions as a connexional priority. Individual local activists have done, and continue to do, excellent work to transform the Church’s practice in this area, and we thank and honour them. But MCB has now, as a whole Church, identified this as a priority. This means every church, circuit and district must now get involved and be held accountable for their involvement.
- 24** This plan does constitute new work for MCB, which will need to be undertaken by every church, circuit and district, as well as entities which report to the Conference (see below). The task group does recognise that this may cause concern for those that feel they are already working to capacity, and has tried to be mindful of this throughout the planning process by recommending a simple and proportionate approach. However, the Conference, “the governing body of the Methodist Church under God<sup>10</sup>”, has

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/21664/conf-2021-3-methodist-council-part-1.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-conference/expectations-of-various-groups/>

directed this work, and the task group have therefore worked in accordance with that direction.

- 25** This plan is designed for MCB to work and measure progress on reducing carbon emissions at a connexional (or 'whole church') level. Alongside this, local churches, circuits and districts can (and should feel encouraged to) use more detailed, local measuring systems and resources. 360Carbon<sup>11</sup>, EcoChurch<sup>12</sup>, EcoCongregation<sup>13</sup>, the Energy Saving Trust<sup>14</sup>, the Big Clean Switch<sup>15</sup> and the resources on the MCB website<sup>16</sup> are particularly recommended.
- 26** Measuring and accountability can seem unnerving or daunting, but we should not be afraid of them: they are part of the heritage of Methodism. The classes and bands established by John Wesley enabled early Methodists to be accountable to each other about how each person was living the Christian life. This system was not designed to reproach, shame, or punish; but to encourage, free, love, forgive and heal. Today, we are familiar with the Conference setting expectations and assessing compliance in other areas of our Church life, from the specification of accommodation for presbyters to the experience and theological understanding of our leaders of worship. 'Care for Creation' is an integral part of a Methodist Way of Life<sup>17</sup>, and the whole connexion must work together and hold one another to account in Christian love for living this out.
- 27** However, the Conference resolution<sup>18</sup> that directed this work to be undertaken is unclear as to what entities are included within the definition of 'the Methodist Church'. While the aim should be that all entities that report/relate to the Methodist Conference should share the net-zero aspiration, how this is achieved will vary given the nature of the organisation.
- 28** Entities that are under the control of the Methodist Council (and are consequently included in the consolidated accounts as part of the registered charity) should be required to work towards net-zero. Consultation with each entity will take place as part of the Council's existing governance scrutiny process to determine how each entity will report progress. These entities are: the Connexional Team, London Mission Fund, North Bank Estate (Guy Chester Centre), Cliff College, Methodist International Centre (The Wesley), Southlands Methodist Trust, and All We Can
- 29** Entities that report to the Conference, but are not under the control of the Methodist Council, are invited to a regular annual meeting of Methodist bodies in the autumn. Consultation will take place as part of the gathering in 2022 to understand how they will support the net-zero aspiration.
- 30** Entities that relate to the Conference or form part of the broader Methodist family will be encouraged to adopt the net-zero aspiration, albeit the Conference will not exercise oversight in this respect. A plan for engaging with these entities can be found in appendix 1. The AFH task group will report on progress against this plan to the Council in their annual report.

## Scope of the work

- 31** In moving towards the targets set by the Conference, the connexional principle is at work in how we approach the task, and how we envision its reach and its purpose.
- 32** The 'reach' of the Methodist Church stretches beyond local congregations and circuits. Firstly, for example, to sites of historic interest and buildings of significance for our self-understanding. These places continue to provide new stimuli for remembering and interpreting who we are for today's world. As a connexional Church, we also offer support of all kinds to a range of buildings often in places historically deprived of material resource. These are also all places where the work towards net zero must be real.
- 33** Secondly, we work with a range of Partners in the World Church, by whose witness, wisdom and struggle we must be informed, challenged, convicted and inspired. Many of these Partners are seeing

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.360carbon.org/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.ecocongregationscotland.org/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://energysavingtrust.org.uk/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://bigcleanswitch.org/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/environment-and-climate-change/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/a-methodist-way-of-life/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/21664/conf-2021-3-methodist-council-part-1.pdf>

at first hand, in a way we cannot or do not, the current and devastating effects of climate change and environmental degradation. They have cultivated practical, theological responses to their context from which we must learn in ours.

- 34** Third and finally, we support and are in close relationship with institutions and places of learning, from Methodist-related universities to theological colleges to local schools: all of which, in different ways, are both urging us to intentional action and offering resources and vision for that work. Whether expressed in an academic research seminar or a primary school pupil's hopes for the future of their world, we must pay attention, remembering the vibrant, varied conviction we hold dear: of our connectedness to one another, even as we are interconnected too to all that God has made.
- 35** Taking seriously these theological and ecclesial foundations, then, we have a unique contribution to make as Methodists, both to understanding and in responding to the current crisis and the work towards net zero. It is proposed to engage in conversation with these key connexional partners and identify others, asking them to respond to a set of prompts for gathering experience, wisdom and vision, including for concrete practical actions. This might be work done alongside current consultations in areas, such as Walking with Micah and the Justice, Dignity and Solidarity strategy implementation, or drawing on the kinds of energy they are releasing for reflection and mission.
- 36** A small group will oversee this part of the work, including members of the Action for Hope (AFH) task group. They will draw up a longlist of partners with whom to engage, and offering those partners an invitation to participate in the wisdom-gathering exercise, perhaps via a standard template. The group can then assess how best the wisdom gleaned might be fed into the larger project and its goals. The AFH task group will report on the progress of this participative consultation exercise to the Council in their annual report.

## Outline of consultations undertaken

- 37** A number of consultations have been undertaken to ensure MCB's Faith Plan is well informed.
- 38** The Head of Mission has met with representatives from Chapel Aid and the Central Finance Board to discuss options for green funding.
- 39** The District Chairs of the Channel Islands, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly, Cymru, Isle of Man, Scotland, Shetland, South East, and Wales Districts have been invited to suggest someone from their district to act as a 'geographical advisor' to the Action for Hope task group. The aim is for these people (who live in the Channel Islands, the Isles of Scilly, Wales, the Isle of Man, Scotland, Shetland, Malta and Gibraltar) to 'sense-check' any resource or guidance produced by the task group, as it relates to their area.
- 40** Many districts have already begun to work towards net zero goals, an Eco District award, or other aims in caring for creation. The task group has made liaising with and learning from these districts a priority. The Chairs of eight districts whose District Mission plans included environmental concerns or aims were invited to have a one-to-one meeting with a member of the task group, so that their wisdom and experience can be incorporated into the Faith Plan.
- 41** A meeting has taken place with the Director of the Susanna Wesley Foundation (SWF) to discuss areas of overlap and mutual support. The theme of the 2022 SWF Conference is "Sustainability: sharing values, creating communities – equity, economy, environment"; a member of the task group has been invited to join a panel discussion at this event.
- 42** Several meetings have taken place with representatives from the grassroots "Methodist Zero Carbon Group" (an informal group of over 100 activists across the Connexion) to discuss how they might participate in, support and advise on the work.
- 43** A consultation with the Youth Representatives via Zoom took place in January with support from the grassroots Methodist Zero Carbon Group and Connexional Team staff. The Youth Reps were broadly supportive of the draft plan and also contributed a number of suggestions, some of which have been incorporated, including a request for guidance on low-emission rites of passage, specific aims around key connexional events, and a request for a video/blog on the origins of the Conference resolution.
- 44** A further consultation with younger children was also undertaken through the Agents of Change

programme. They were also broadly supportive of the draft plan, and were particularly keen for an exploration of the use of electric bikes by MCB staff and ministers, as well as greater emphasis on environmental themes in worship, especially around key dates such as World Earth Day and Harvest.

- 45 A meeting was undertaken with representatives from the United Reformed Church (URC) Environmental Task Group. Conversations are ongoing about ways in which MCB and the URC can support one another in this work.
- 46 A meeting was held with representatives from the Queen's Foundation. Queen's has also set an aspirational target of net-zero carbon emissions by 2030. Conversations are ongoing via the Director of Learning for Ministry to explore collaboration and mutual support in this area.
- 47 Consultations across the Abrahamic faiths
  - A meeting was held with representatives of the Chief Rabbi's Office to explore links between AFH work and the Dorot project<sup>19</sup>. The AFH task group have undertaken to stay in touch as both projects progress, and in particular to share resources on wisdom and lifestyles.
  - Meetings have been held with the interim interfaith office for the Board of Deputies for British Jews and two rabbis with an interest in this area. These conversations have been helpful in sharing good practice in the area of congregational involvement and re-framing existing work using a creation care lens. In particular, conversations have touched on consistent and holy use of food and farming and on the difficulties of buildings used only once or twice a week. There is a plan to intentionally re-connect with these individuals in 2025 or sooner.
  - It is hoped that a conversation with representatives from the Muslim Council of Britain can be undertaken in the coming months.
- 48 Further consultations and conversations to gain insight, advice and promote mutual support and working are anticipated with other faith groups across the UK in the coming months.
- 49 Conversations are anticipated between AFH task group members and representatives from TMCP and Methodist Insurance to explore ways of working together.
- 50 The AFH task group will continue this work, in particular identifying networks, eg the District Missioners, the District Property Secretaries, the Green Agents if Change, etc. to collaborate with, and will report back on these and other collaborations in their annual report to the Council.

## Aims and measuring systems

- 51 The original aim set forth by the Conference of "net zero emissions by 2030", is far-reaching and includes all of MCB's activities, from 'obvious' sources, such as gas burned in combi-boilers to heat buildings, to 'hidden' sources, such as the emissions associated with the farming, processing and transport of tea served after worship. Measuring all of these emissions would be an enormous task – far beyond the capacity of current staff and volunteers, without ceasing many of the activities that MCB is called to do.
- 52 Therefore, it is proposed that MCB measures only the three largest sources of emissions, and targets activity around reducing emissions in these areas. Measuring these sources is achievable and ensures MCB is focussing efforts on the areas where highest impact is possible.

## Asset-based aims

- 53 **Aim one: All travel directly funded by MCB to have net zero emissions by 2030. This will involve reducing travel, choosing forms of travel that have lower associated carbon emissions, and carbon offsetting travel.**
- 54 Over the course of the next 12 months, further reflection will be undertaken to discern appropriate milestones for the reduction in emissions related to travel. It is envisaged there will be one or two milestones (eg, in 2024 and 2027) reflecting both an absolute reduction in travel and a move to more

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.theus.org.uk/category/dorot>

sustainable forms of transport.

- 55 Measurement will be via an annual carbon footprint report for travel, produced by the Finance Team and submitted to the Council as part of the annual AFH report. This will include all travel funded from Connexional Funds. It will be composed of a report from the Connexional Team (including connexional volunteers), composed of two elements:
- A report from Diversity Travel – amount of carbon emissions and amount offset
  - A report from the Finance system – amount of carbon emissions and amount offset
- 56 Many of the activities in the Activity Appendix will support progress towards this aim, but of particular use will be the revised travel policies, the research into low-emissions meeting patterns, and the exploration of the provision of electric bicycles to ministers.
- 57 **Aim two: All electricity and gas directly funded by MCB to have net zero emissions by 2030. This will involve reducing electricity and gas consumption, choosing electricity from renewable sources (eg wind, solar, tidal, etc.), choosing ‘green gas’ (biomethane), and carbon-offsetting gas and electricity used.**
- 58 Over the course of the next 12 months, further reflection will be undertaken to discern appropriate milestones for the reduction in emissions related to electricity and gas. It is envisaged there will be one or two milestones (eg, in 2024 and 2027).
- 59 Measurement will be via an annual carbon footprint report for gas and electricity, produced by the Finance Team and submitted to the Council as part of the annual AFH report. This will include all gas and electricity funded from Connexional Funds.
- 60 Many of the activities in the Activity Appendix will support progress towards this aim, but of particular use will be the creation of a Property Stewards’ Handbook, and other property resources.
- 61 **Aim three: The three largest connexional events (the Methodist Conference, the Superintendents Conferences, and the Methodist Children and Youth Assembly) to have net zero carbon emissions by 2030.**
- 62 In recognition that these events have a high profile, both within and beyond MCB, it is proposed that work should be undertaken to make these events net-zero by 2030, so that they can be an example of best practice and Methodist commitment to care for creation for all to see.
- 63 It is proposed that the Connexional Team staff leading on planning these events collaborate, with the AFH task group, on creating a “low carbon event planning guide/checklist”, which can then be employed across all events. The United Reformed Church already have a similar document and report finding it of much use in simply and easily ensuring their events are as low-carbon as possible. In addition, the Conferencing team at Central Hall, Westminster have “the ability to calculate the carbon footprint for each event and then give the client a choice of ways to offset it.”<sup>20</sup> It is hoped that a meeting can be convened with the conferencing team to learn from their work. The AFH task group will report to the Council on progress in this area in 2026.
- 64 Conversations are ongoing with the Diaconal Order about including the Methodist Diaconal Convocation in this aim. The Warden and Deputy Warden are supportive of this aim, but there has not been time to fully discuss the matter prior to this report being finalised.
- 65 **Aim four: Increase the positive environmental impact of MCB’s investments.**
- 66 The Central Finance Board (CFB) are aiming to set up a Global Climate Stewardship Fund in the next 12 months. It is anticipated a proposal will come before the Methodist Council in October 2022 recommending (subject to appropriate due diligence) the Council uses some of its existing funds invested through CFB to provide the ‘seed’ funding for this new Fund. Once set up, such a fund would be more heavily marketed at Methodist entities who already hold investments with the CFB. This would include reviewing the future of the Medium and Long Term Methodist Council Funds in which all the Council’s current investments are held.

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/17599/conf-2020-39-managing-trustees-of-the-methodist-central-hall-westminster.pdf>

## Wisdom-based aims

- 67 Aim five: The Methodist Council to appoint a Resource Group to review and update Hope in God's Future.**
- 68** Hope in God's Future is a helpful, urgent and wide-ranging document, and one that it is hoped will continue to receive attention and promote action. The task group recommends that any revisions to the report should include ongoing reflection with global, ecumenical and interfaith partners, perhaps especially among the Abrahamic faiths, from whom we have much to learn and whose wisdom should be brought to bear on our conversations.
- 69** It is proposed that the names for a new Resource Group should be offered to the Council in October 2023, and the Resource Group will then report to the Conference no later than 2025.
- 70** Conversations are already under way with the responsible team members of the JPIT and the Faith and Order Committee about this work.
- 71 Aim six: To have 50% of all Methodist churches registered with EcoChurch or EcoCongregation by 2026. To have 50% of the Methodist churches registered with EcoChurch or EcoCongregation having achieved a Bronze award by 2026. To have 20% of the Methodist churches registered with EcoChurch or EcoCongregation having achieved a silver award by 2026.**
- 72** Though this aim is listed under "wisdom", it actually involves work in all areas. The EcoChurch and EcoCongregation programmes are holistic schemes that provide clear direction and guidance for churches, circuits and districts to improve their teaching and practice in caring for creation. They are excellent programmes, which MCB is proud to recommend for use across the whole connexion.
- 73** The data in this section is based on figures provided by EcoChurch, though conversations have begun with EcoCongregation, there was not time to collate data before this report was finalised.
- 74** There are 521 Methodist churches (including LEPs of which Methodism is one of the partners) registered with the EcoChurch scheme to date. This represents 13.2% of all Methodist churches in England and Wales (the EcoChurch scheme does not cover Scotland). A forecast has been undertaken, based on historic registration rates since 2016, which indicates that if MCB maintains momentum, over half of all Methodist churches in England and Wales will be registered by 2026. The task group therefore proposes that MCB should aim to maintain this momentum and aim to have 50% of all Methodist churches in England and Wales registered with EcoChurch by 2026.
- 75** 155 Methodist churches (including LEPs of which Methodism is one of the partners) have achieved bronze EcoChurch awards and 51 have achieved silver. This represents approximately 22% of those registered having achieved bronze and 10% having achieved silver.
- 76** In conversations with A Rocha and Methodists across the connexion, there has been a distinct desire to increase the rate of awards. The task group therefore proposes the ambitious target of doubling the percentage of Methodist churches at each award level, ie, to have 50% of the Methodist churches registered with EcoChurch having achieved a Bronze award by 2026 and to have 20% of the Methodist churches registered with EcoChurch having achieved a silver award by 2026.
- 77** The AFH task group will create a plan, liaising with EcoChurch and EcoCongregation, which focusses on publicity and equipping churches, to achieve this aim, and will report back to the Council annually on progress.

## Lifestyle-based aims

- 78 Aim seven: For Methodist members/adherents to reduce their carbon footprints to one ton per year, particularly via the three key areas of energy, travel and diet (the biggest contributors to personal emissions).**
- 79** The average carbon footprint in the UK in 2020 is 4.85 tons per year<sup>21</sup>. To reach a carbon footprint of

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<sup>21</sup> <https://ourworldindata.org/per-capita-co2>

less than 1 ton per year by 2030, would require a reduction in carbon footprint of 15% each year.

**80** The following measurement system is proposed for this aim:

- There are 4004 churches (also called societies) in the connexion, 3% of which (120 churches) constitutes a statistically significant sample.
- Select 120 churches from across the connexion that are representative of the range of contexts within MCB, (ie including rural/suburban/urban, poorer/more affluent, right-/left-wing politically, all of the countries/dependencies, etc)
- Once a year, ask individuals in the congregations of each of these 120 churches to calculate their personal carbon footprint, and/or complete a short survey (fewer than ten questions) relating to their energy, travel and diet.
- Track the responses from these 120 churches over the next 10 years to confirm the extent to which Methodist members/adherents are reducing their carbon footprint.

**81** The Methodist staff of the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) will produce an annual report on the carbon footprint of members and adherents for incorporation into the annual AFH report to the Council.

**82** Many of the activities in the Activity Appendix will support progress towards this aim, but of particular use will be work with the Methodist Way of Life, preaching resources, and the Learning Network/Cliff College.

**83 Aim eight: To empower and equip advocates**

**84** The AFH task group has been in ongoing conversation with the grassroots Methodist Zero Carbon Group around recruiting and equipping volunteers to work in each district as an advocate for reducing carbon emissions. These advocates would also have a role in supporting the monitoring work under aim seven, ie facilitating the surveying, gathering the responses, and sending the data to the Connexional Team for processing and reviewing. The URC has a similar role in their Synods, entitled, "Green Apostle".

**85** Further conversations are needed, in particular with District Chairs and District Policy groups and staff, to discern how best to go about recruiting and equipping these volunteers. The AFH task group will report back to the Council in their annual report on progress in this area.

## How this work continues

**86** It is proposed that the AFH task group continue to oversee this plan. The AFH task group will report annually to the Council on progress against the eight aims, and on the activities. The task group will also produce a larger 'evaluation and adjustment' report for the Council in 2026 to do a fuller review at the mid-point of the journey and create aims and targets beyond 2030, including around reducing the amount of offsetting.

**87** It is proposed that the AFH task group works in collaboration with colleagues across the Connexional Team to create a communications plan to launch and publicise the AFH plan. This will include:

- An outline of the plan (digital only) for circulation at the Conference and District Synods.
- A digital only "just tell me what to do" resource, as requested by many diverse people through the AFH consultations, this will have five key actions that a local churches can take straight away to start their journey to net zero.
- A more detailed digital only resource that offers a practical path to net zero for circulation ahead of the Conference. The target audience will be church members and officers and will focus on initial steps to take in relation to:
  - church buildings – including roof, door and window maintenance
  - energy use – including switching to renewables and installing LED lights
  - people – including theological resources, travel policies, lifestyle choices and campaigning.

- Resources and good news stories of local churches making changes, available on the MCB website.

## Activity appendix

- 88** The activities which will enable MCB to make progress towards the aims outlined above will include many local conversations and decisions all across the connexion, in churches, homes, schools and wherever Methodist people meet. Many of these activities will be critical in reducing emissions or changing culture, yet will go unrecorded, due to their local and informal nature. The AFH task group welcome and honour these activities and people.
- 89** In addition to these local informal activities, there are a number of connexion-wide and formal activities, which the task group recommends. These are outlined below.
- 90** These activities are separate to the aims and measuring systems in this report, because it is understood that these activities will contribute to progress against all of the aims. For example, revised travel policies will help reduce MCB's carbon footprint, but will also prompt individuals to think about the travel they undertake in their personal lives. New preaching resources will encourage churches to review their buildings, but also to consider their own individual calling to care for creation. And changes to spending from the World Mission Fund (WMF) will enable deeper learning from Partners around the world, whilst also reducing our impact on the environment.
- 91** Travel-related activities
- A revised travel policy for the Connexional Team has been agreed by the Senior Managers and was publicised at the February 2022 Connexional Team meeting. It is strongly worded to discourage car use. It is hoped that changes to the expenses claim system can be implemented to require staff to give a justification for car use at the point of claim. The AFH task group will report on progress on this in 2026.
  - A revised travel policy and expenses claim form for connexional volunteers are proposed to the Council for approval.
  - It is proposed that a draft church/circuit/district travel policy and associated expenses claim form be drafted by the AFH task group and offered via the Methodist website as a template for use across the connexion. The AFH task group will report on progress on this in their annual report.
  - The taxi company used by the Connexional Team in London has made a pledge to be fully electric by 2023. Already over 50% of their fleet are electric vehicles and any trips which are made by non-electric vehicles, are offset.
  - The AFH task group will research low-emission meeting patterns, ie when day meetings, residential or online meetings are the best options for conferring/reducing emissions, with a view to producing some guidance for use across the connexion. The AFH task group will collaborate with the Faith and Order Committee and the Law and Polity Committee, who are currently exploring similar themes in relation to online worship. The AFH task group will report on progress on this in their annual report.
- 92** Finance-related activities
- The AFH task group to review and if necessary update/create, in collaboration with Methodists across the connexion, guidance for church treasurers on how they can promote care for creation in their work.
  - As part of the work currently underway to review the spending from the World Mission Fund consideration will be given to the AFH plan in two ways;
    - The carbon output that occurs due to spend from the WMF.
    - The possibility of spending from the WMF to enable the sequestering of carbon or other carbon reduction work undertaken by partners.
  - The Global Relationships Committee (GRC) will consider these at its meetings in

connexional year 2022/2023 and present proposals to the Mission Committee in the year 2023/2024. In undertaking this work the GRC has already noted that MCB has a long history and has emitted much carbon in that time, creating a negative impact on the environment which is disproportionately affecting people in other countries, including in some of the poorest parts in the world. MCB cannot offset that impact only through a calculation of cost. Just as we cannot by our good works atone for our sin before God, so it could be argued that MCB cannot make amends for its negative impact on God's creation by calculating and offsetting carbon and by reducing carbon footprint. While these measures are vital, the GRC notes that in addition we must all turn to God for grace and commit ourselves to be better stewards of creation in future.

### 93 Buildings-related activities

- The new Methodist Church House will be net-zero by 2030. This work will be overseen by the Connexional Secretary.
- The Ministries Team will, in collaboration with others, review and if necessary update guidelines on manse provision, including guidance on updating heating systems, for presentation to the Ministries Committee in connexional year 2023/2024.
- The Property Support Team will review and if necessary update/create a Property Stewards Handbook, including guidance on reducing carbon emissions associated with Methodist buildings, in connexional year 2022/2023.
- The Property Support team will review and if necessary update/create and promote the following guidance, which will include carbon reduction guidance, by the end of 2022:
  - Environmental Survey
  - Quinquennial Inspections Guidance, Schedule G and Schedule E
  - Annual Property Inspections for Churches
  - Property Development Pathways
  - Annual Property Inspections for Manses and Schedule J
  - Guidance for Solar Panels, Electrical Vehicle Charging Points and other technical guidance for buildings
  - Guidance relating to historic or listed buildings
  - Guidance on sustainable building projects
  - Guidance on the use of oil, LPG, solid fuel and wood
- The Connexional Conservation Officer will continue to work interdenominationally, via the Historic Places of Worship Forums for England, Wales and Scotland, to identify further pieces of work, training and guidance on carbon reduction, and new interventions on historic places of worship.
- The Connexional Conservation Officer will continue to work with the University of York and the Heritage Alliance on creating an information hub to help identify available guidance on carbon reduction measures.
- The AFH task group will continue to explore, alongside the University of Oxford, opportunities for research, learning and collaboration between students and staff, and MCB.

### 94 Offsetting

- The AFH task group, with the oversight of the Connexional Team Senior Managers, will explore options for offsetting, with a view to selecting an offsetter that could be recommended for use across the connexion. The AFH task group will report on progress on this in 2026.

### 95 Worship-related activities

- Members of the AFH task group to meet with the Publishing Services Team to discuss if and how to amend the Methodist Prayer Handbook, in order to encourage more prayer for creation. The AFH task group will report on progress on this in their annual report.
- Members of the AFH task group to meet with colleagues across the Connexional Team to discuss how best to amend preaching resources (STF+, Politics in the Pulpit, Roots, Twelve Baskets, etc) to promote care for creation/low-carbon living in preaching. The AFH task group will report on progress on this in their annual report.
- The Ministries Team to review and if necessary update/create guidance on low-carbon rites of passage, e.g. funerals, weddings, baptisms, etc. The AFH task group will report on progress on this in their annual report.

#### **96 Learning- and Caring-related activities**

- “Action for Hope” to become an annual agenda item for the Connexional Leaders Forum, in order to share learning, hear feedback, and provide support.
- Members of the AFH task group to meet with the Communications Team to discuss how best to use social media, press releases, e-newsletters and other comms channels to promote care for creation/low-carbon living. The AFH task group will report on progress on this in their annual report.
- Members of the AFH task group to meet with the Publishing Services Team to discuss how best to amend A Word in Time to enable more learning about themes of creation. The AFH task group will report on progress on this in their annual report.
- Members of the AFH task group to meet with the Learning Network and Cliff College colleagues to discuss if and how to create learning and development opportunities that promote care for creation/low-carbon living. The AFH task group will report on progress on this in their annual report.
- Members of the AFH task group to meet with the Ministries Team, colleagues at the Queen’s Foundation and District Chairs to discuss if and how to amend Ministerial training, the content of the Superintendents Conferences and Representative Synods, the guidance for Sabbaticals and other opportunities to promote care for creation/low-carbon living. The AFH task group will report on progress on this in their annual report.
- Members of the AFH task group to meet with the Diaconal Order to discuss if and how to amend the content of the Methodist Diaconal Convocation to promote care for creation/low-carbon living. The AFH task group will report on progress on this in their annual report.
- Members of the AFH task group to meet with Children, Youth and Families colleagues to discuss if and how to amend the content of 3Generate, Agents of Change and related programmes to promote care for creation/low-carbon living. The AFH task group will report on progress on this in their annual report.

#### **97 Service-related activities**

- Members of the AFH task group to meet with JPIT to discuss if and how to create more campaigns that promote care for creation/low-carbon living. The AFH task group will report on progress on this in their annual report.

#### **98 Evangelism-related activities**

- Members of the AFH task group to meet with colleagues in the Evangelism and Growth Team to discuss if and how best to amend Methodist Way of Life Resources to promote care for creation/low-carbon living. The AFH task group will report on progress on this in their annual report.
- Members of the AFH task group to meet with the Communications Team and the Evangelism and Growth Team to discuss if and how to use Methodist “Influencers” to promote care for creation/low-carbon living. The AFH task group will report on progress on this in their annual report.

## 99 Focus activities

- In addition to the activities outlined above, which are mainly small adjustments to existing work or the creation of policy/guidance documents, it is proposed that MCB should have one AFH 'focus activity' every year.
- These activities are intended to inspire and enthuse the Methodist people – providing a fun and interesting activity to engage with each year. These focus activities should always be either undertaken by Connexional Team staff, or wholly optional for churches/circuits/districts to engage with – this will ensure they continue to be joyful celebrations and not perceived as more work.
- Below are suggestions for the next three years, though these are suggestions only at this stage and may well be subject to change:
- 2022 – plant a tree for every Methodist member (164,000) to celebrate the launch of the AFH plan. This links to the Queen's Green Canopy. Conversations have begun with the Woodland Trust to explore partnering with them in this project.
- 2023 – explore whether electric bicycles could be provided to ministers in compact circuits, as a low-carbon means of transportation. The Oxford circuit are currently exploring this, and AFH task group members have been in conversation with them.
- 2024 – explore with A Rocha, EcoCongregation and ecumenical partners the development of a Platinum Award that could be achieved after the Gold Award and which would be awarded for any church, circuit or district that reached Net Zero status.

## Appendix 1 – Plan for engaging with entities that relate to the Conference or form part of the broader Methodist family

- 1 There is a large number of entities that relate to the Conference or form part of the broader Methodist family (henceforth “sister organisation”). The following way forward is proposed.
- 2 The AFH task group draft a generic letter:
  - outlining MCB’s work towards net zero
  - saying that we’d like to share this journey with our sister organisations
  - recognising some may be further ahead or behind on this journey and hoping that we can all help and learn from each other
  - including an invitation to a Zoom gathering
  - including an invitation to send us an outline of where you are on the journey (completely optional and will be held in confidence)
- 3 The letter to be signed by the Secretary of the Conference and sent to all MCB sister organisations
- 4 Outlines from sister organisations collated by AFH task group
- 5 Zoom gathering hosted by Head of Mission
- 6 Follow-up email sent after zoom gathering to:
  - Thank people
  - Share resources/contacts
  - Invite a one-to-one follow up with a member of the AFH task group to further share ideas and support one another
- 7 One-to-ones between AFH task group members and sister organisations are open conversations tailored to the needs of those present.
- 8 Further engagement on this to be tailored to need and the relationship between MCB and the individual sister organisation.
- 9 Outputs:
  - Outlines of climate action from sister organisations
  - Zoom gathering
  - One-to-ones
- 10 Outcomes:
  - Relationships strengthened between MCB and sister organisations
  - Climate action increased/hastened by shared awareness, ideas, learning and support