

The Steeple Church

# Environmental Policy

Fulfilling our calling to Care for the Earth

**The Steeple Church**

18/3/2015

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As a Christian community, we recognise the importance of being stewards of creation, and our responsibility to take care of the earth. This means we should be pro-active, taking both positive and negative actions as necessary.

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## Stewards of Creation

"Any error about creation also leads to an error about God."

Thomas Aquinas

Why should we care for the Earth?

We do not care for the earth because it is a good thing to do, though it is that. We do not care for the earth because it is the right thing to do, though it is that too. We do not care for the earth because we are legally obliged to, though we are, and this more and more. We care for the earth because we are called to do so by the Creator, Himself.

We are called not only to be the children of God, but to be the stewards of His creation. "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground' " (Genesis 1: 28). Unfortunately, this mandate has been taken to mean we can do whatever we like, to exploitation, domination rather than dominion, but it was given before the fall, and effectively humans were to rule as God's vice-regents in caring for the earth and all its inhabitants. When God made a covenant with Noah and his descendants after the flood, that covenant was also made with the animals, with every living thing: "I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you - the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you - every living creature on earth" (Genesis 9: 9-10). God commanded the Israelites to look after the land: "You must keep my decrees and my laws.... And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you" (Leviticus 18: 26, 28). The earth is not primarily for us, it is for Christ - "all things have been created through Him and for Him (Colossians 1: 16). God cares about His creation, therefore, so should we. Caring for the earth is an act of worship: it is an expression of our love for God.

Yet, instead of leading the way in caring for the earth, Christians have condoned humanity's abuse of the earth through bad theology and bad eschatology by acting as if this world does not matter, since we are

destined for another, and accordingly what is important is 'the saving of souls'. How far from the truth we have travelled. God is interested in the whole person, not disembodied spirits; and God is concerned for the whole of His creation: He has not abandoned it. On the contrary, He is redeeming it, for does not Paul tell us, "the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God" (Romans 8: 21, see also verses 18 - 25). We look forward to a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21: 1) thinking we need not bother with this one, but that is so wrong. The new heaven and new earth is not a new creation, rather it is the renewal of heaven and earth (see again Romans 8: 21, 22) and are we not to understand John in Revelation to mean by the new heavens and new earth, the destruction of the old sinful system with God's eternal reign and kingdom being fully realised? The promise is that the heavens and the earth will continue, and so Christians have a major role to play in conservation, and ecological and environmental issues. Each one of us as individuals must take up that challenge in our own places of influence, our homes, workplace, areas of recreation, our church, as well as with our political representatives. God's promise comes as He works through His people and as His people take their stewardship seriously: "The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." (Isaiah 11: 6-9).

## How then, as The Steeple congregation, are we to go about our calling to care for the Earth?

### 1. Eco-friendly products

Where possible, the church should use Eco-friendly products.

- **Cleaning materials:** Eco-friendly cleaning materials should be available for the cleaners, and members of the congregation to use.
- **Toiletries:** Likewise, any toiletries for use in the building should be from an Eco-friendly source.
- **The office:** Where presentation is not important, recycled copy paper, etc. should be used; for other purposes paper sourced from sustainable forests. Where possible, other office materials should be sourced from recycling companies.
- **The kitchen and coffee bar:** Whenever possible, local produce should be used. This is both good for the local economy and cuts our 'carbon footprint'. However, many products need to be imported, e.g. tea and coffee, but as a Christian community we should ensure that where possible, the imported products we use are either Fairtrade (economically friendly) or support the rain forests (ecologically friendly). While these products may be more expensive, cheaper products may be purchased at the expense of people living on the margins of poverty, at the expense of communities, and at the expense of the planet.
- **Church groups:** As above, materials used for activities in the various groups should be from sustainable sources, recycled, Fairtrade, Traidcraft, etc.

## **2. Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Rejoice!**

As a church our concern for the environment is not a secondary consideration (see introduction above) and should not be limited to the mundane task of recycling and then considering we are 'doing our bit'. It needs to be much more than that (see part 3 below). It is an 'all of life activity', pro-active, a deliberate lifestyle in which we encourage one another to care for all creation, a fundamental doctrine that underpins all else, and which makes sense of God's redeeming work. That said, we need to look at the practicalities of our stewardship of the earth, how we work out the greening of our building, our homes, our lives.

### **2a. Reduce**

**Worship Services:** We need to consider what we use in our worship services. Over the course of the year items are handed out to the whole congregation which are simply left in the seats after the service is over, then to be collected and binned. Though this was not the intention, what was of significance to the person leading in using the handout as a tangible link to what is being said, obviously does not seem to have that same meaning for many in the congregation. Not only is it a waste of financial resources, it becomes a waste of time and effort in producing the handout, not to mention the environmental impact unnecessary overproduction brings.

**Communion:** Disposable glasses are used for communion. These should be collected, rinsed and put in the plastic recycling bag, not in the general waste.

Functions: Disposable plates, cups and cutlery at our own functions should be used only when absolutely necessary, and where possible, use discouraged by those who rent our halls. We have a dishwasher and so regular crockery, cutlery and glasses are to be used, which will both cut costs and be more environmentally friendly.

Energy consumption: Reduce our electricity and gas consumption where possible.

- Light bulbs may be energy saving, but we still need to switch lights off when leaving a room.

- Gas/Electricity use is monitored on a regular basis by a member of the Building Management Committee. Nonetheless, all users of the building should be responsible in the use of these and 'switch off' when not needed.

- Technology is an area where it is possible to overlook the 'switching off' by leaving things on 'standby'. It may vary from one piece of equipment to another, but standby consumes a large percentage of the electricity needed to operate a piece of technology.

Water is not currently monitored, but we should avoid being wasteful with it as it still costs money to process to make it suitable for our use.

Paper: We should actively seek to reduce the amount of paper we use to avoid unnecessary waste. This is already done with notice sheets and magazines. Consideration should be given to the production of leaflets, both the necessity for, and if necessary, quantity.

Unwanted mail: Despite the growing awareness of the need to reduce our use of the Earth's resources, there is still tremendous waste through the production of advertising materials, which are then delivered, unsolicited, to our door, and most likely put straight in the bin. This can be stopped and as a church we should be doing our part to discourage such waste. See 'stop the drop':  
<http://www.zerowastescotland.org.uk/stopthedrop>

## **2b. Reuse**

Plastic bags: Every year, Scotland uses approximately 1 billion plastic bags! This is the equivalent of 200 bags for each person in Scotland! Reusing the same shopping bag rather than purchasing new bags every time we go shopping reduces the amount of bags we need to dispose of.

Crockery, cutlery, cups/glasses: (see 2a above)

## **2c(i). Recycle**

Recycling, the easy thing to do:

The service provided by Dundee City Council enables us to recycle:

In the blue bin - paper and cardboard, which includes food and drink cartons, e.g Tetra Pak (must be rinsed first), unwanted mail, envelopes, magazines, old Yellow Pages, flattened cardboard boxes, greetings cards, newspapers, wrapping paper, telephone directories, office and printer paper, catalogues and brochures. Confidential waste must be shredded before being disposed of.

In the grey bin: all general waste that cannot be recycled in one of the other bins.

A practical point: With no one being on site, and since bins need to be out in the street by 7.30am on the day of collection, a paid member of staff or a volunteer should be identified to ensure this happens.

Green bins - For businesses (which includes city centre churches), DCC only collect glass. Other items that are collected and recycled from domestic premises in the 'green bin' are not collected from businesses. The church does not have a green bin, and so volunteers should be identified to recycle glass along with plastic items, etc. This would have to be done either through the volunteer's own domestic collection or by taking the items to a suitable recycling point. We should act responsibly and not put these items in the general waste for convenience, ensuring the recycling whenever possible of aerosols, glass bottles and jars, plastic food trays, yoghurt pots, plastic bottles and lids, margarine and butter tubs, clean foil and takeaway containers, aluminium, steel and tin food and drink containers, and, of course, disposable communion glasses. Plastic collection bags are in place in the church kitchen and coffee bar area for separating plastics, glass and paper from general waste. A notice reminding people what can be recycled, to separate into appropriate bags, and rinsing/washing where necessary, should be in place at these collection points. Note, the Council's REQUIREMENT is to WASH AND SQUASH all cans and plastic bottles and RINSE OUT glass bottles and jars, separating lids from jars and all bottles (glass or plastic). The volunteer(s) should empty these

bags on a weekly basis either through home recycling bins or by taking them to a recycling point.

Brown bins are not provided for businesses or city centre churches. So, rather than put clippings from the church flowers into general waste, these should be taken home by the flower arranger or an identified volunteer and composted or put in their brown bin for council collection.

Food Waste: The Council are presently doing a "food waste trial" which should be rolled out to the whole city sometime soon. Both our food waste and that of Parish Nursing will then have to be separated from general waste. See also the 'Love Food Hate Waste' campaign: <http://scotland.lovefoodhatewaste.com/>

## **2c(ii). Safe Disposal of non-recyclable materials**

Hazardous Materials: The disposal of any hazardous materials (see also Health and Safety) will have to be done by taking such items to one of the cleansing department depots. Under no circumstances should hazardous materials be put into general waste, or in any other way disposed of other than by health and safety guidelines.

Energy Saving Light Bulbs that have burnt out should be taken to one of the cleansing department depots for safe disposal since they contain mercury, and should not be put in glass recycling or general waste.

Batteries: If we have batteries to be disposed of, these can be put into a collection box in Boots, supermarkets, or taken to one of the cleansing department depots. They should not be put in the general waste.

## **2d. Rejoice!**

"Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad, let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; they will sing before the Lord."  
(Psalm 96:11-13)

"You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands" (Isaiah 55: 12)

Heaven above is softer blue,  
Earth around is sweeter green;  
Something lives in every hue  
Christless eyes have never seen:  
Birds with gladder songs o'erflow,  
Flow'rs with deeper beauties shine,  
Since I know, as now I know,  
I am His, and He is mine.

"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for You created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being" (Revelation 4: 11)

"He (Christ) is before all things, and in Him all things hold together"  
(Colossians 1: 17)

"Christ is all, and is in all" (Colossians 3: 11)

### 3. Being Pro-actively Green Beyond Re-Cycling

How then, as The Steeple Church, are we to go beyond simply re-cycling? We would like to see the following become part of our congregational life. Progress in these areas can be monitored when the policy is reviewed.

We start by asking ourselves the **questions**, 'How does my lifestyle impact the planet?' 'How does congregational life impact the Earth?' Do we hold our consumerism in check, by asking whether we need to buy an item, whether we could do without it, and by avoiding waste where possible? Do we have positive or negative answers to these questions?

#### **Proposals:**

- An **annual audit** to be carried out by using the environmental tool kit for churches produced by Eco-Congregation Scotland, and available to download free online.
- We have a **Sunday every year, focusing on God's good creation** and our responsibility as stewards. This could be further enhanced by a **series of workshops**. We could extend this beyond our congregation by having Christian environmentalists give **an annual lecture**. The SiC group (Science in Congregations) could help here.
- **We work with other environmental organisations**. Though there is a much greater awareness, education on the matter is still very important, as some, if not many, may not accept it as a personal issue, but rather see it as a matter for 'authorities' to deal with. Working alongside other organisations will help with the education, especially as they produce the 'glossy leaflets' which help towards this end.
- On the practical front, we look at **our use of the building, how 'green' we are** as a congregation, and how we can begin to improve on that, always with the implication that this should not

stop at the door of the church, but flow over into our individual lives and spheres of influence. This 'greening' of our building also extends to the manse.

- The church's policy on the use of our building, recycling, etc., be **extended to lets**. Those who hire a room and have use of our facilities should follow the same principles and practices as the church members in the use of our building.
- **Beyond the walls**, and into the church environs over which we have no direct control, to actively encourage Dundee City Council and the Overgate management to enhance the area through floral displays, which will not only be attractive and life enhancing, but if the right kinds of plants are chosen, be good for, and encourage wildlife in the city centre, especially pollinating insects and birds, both of which are ultimately good for people too in a variety of ways.
- Over and above any practical measures, **praying for the earth**. For example, when we consider the ravages of war, we think of this in human terms - loss of home, loss of income, loss of life; but what about the ecological impact? What about the loss of habitats, the potential loss of species limited to a certain locality, the destruction of the earth as though it is of no consequence? What of the damage done to the inter-connectedness of the bio-sphere? God cares, and so should we.

**Care for the Earth is justice for all of creation.**

## **Appendix - Suggested reading:**

The Care of Creation: Focusing Concern and Action - R J Berry, editor (IVP)

God doesn't do waste - Dave Bookless (IVP)

Planetwise: Dare to Care for God's World - Dave Bookless (IVP)

Jesus and the Earth - James Jones (SPCK)

Tending to Eden: Environmental Stewardship for God's People - Scott C Sabin & Brian McLaren (Judson Press)

Green Church: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Rejoice! - Rebekah Simon-Peter (Abingdon Press)

Seven Simple Steps to Green Your Church: Starting on the Path to a Cleaner Environment - Rebekah Simon-Peter (Abingdon Press)

Salvation Means Creation Healed: The Ecology of Sin and Grace: Overcoming the Divorce Between Earth and Heaven - Howard A. Snyder and Joel Scandrett (Cascade Books)

Christianity, Climate Change and Sustainable Living - Nick Spencer (SPCK)

**Effective from:** 18/03/2015

**Review date:** / /2016

**Reviewed:**