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Net Zero by 2030

The Church of England's General Synod has set new targets for all parts of the church to work to become carbon 'net zero' by 2030.

Members voted in favour of a revised date, encouraging all parts of the Church of England to take action and ramp up efforts to reduce emissions.

A motion approved today called for urgent steps to examine requirements to reach the new target, and draw up an action plan.

An amendment introduced a more ambitious target date of 2030, a full 15 years ahead of the original proposal.

The motion follows the launch of the Church of England's first-ever Green Lent (#LiveLent) campaign for 2020, featuring 40 days of prayers and actions to encourage care for God's Creation.

The Church of England has also announced an appliance-style footprinting tool for parishes to calculate their carbon footprint.

Following the debate, the Bishop of Salisbury Nicholas Holtam, the Church of England's lead bishop for the Environment said:

"Synod has set an ambitious target for the whole Church of England to respond to the urgency of the Climate Crisis.

"To reach Synod's target of 2030 we will each need to hear this as an urgent call to action, but I am encouraged by the statement of intent this makes across the Church, and wider society about our determination to tackle Climate Change, and safeguard God's creation.

"This is a social justice issue, which affects the world's poorest soonest and most severely, and if the Church is to hold others to account, we have to get our own house in order.

"There is no serious doubt that climate change is happening, and that people are causing it, so it is very encouraging that Synod is grappling with the most urgent issues of our time."

Introducing the debate Bishop Nicholas had said:

“There is a climate emergency. It is a crisis for God’s creation, and a fundamental injustice. It has raised big questions from young people about whether we really care and about intergenerational fairness. It raises big questions about climate justice as well as about our creativity and spirituality in relation to God and the earth.”

He added:

“Incremental change is not going to be enough. This year we have some big opportunities to make a step change in thought and action, particularly because the UK is hosting the UN climate summit in Glasgow in November.”

He also praised the work of the wider church so far:

“Some of what has already been achieved is deeply impressive. The National Investing Bodies are not included in the scope of this motion but their work on investments is world class. We are widely seen to be leading the field of responsible investment.

“There are many good environmental initiatives. Living Churchyards and Caring for God’s Acre are great ways of treasuring biodiversity in churchyards that speak of the resurrection. In schools children and young people have become our teachers, but we don’t know how many are Eco Schools or how they are reducing their carbon footprint.

“Eco Church and Eco Diocese has engaged over 1168 churches across the country. Wherever this is happening churches are engaging a wider community in education, evangelism and mission. But it’s not quite 50% of dioceses and it is less than 10% of our 16,000 churches that have engaged with Eco Church.”

Bishop Nicholas also mentioned that the Church now has "a simple Energy Footprint Tool as part of the annual parish returns":

“It’s a start, and similar will be needed for our other buildings – clergy housing, schools, cathedrals, halls, diocesan offices, Church House etc. The aim is not to use our buildings less to heat them different and use them better.”

The final motion approved was as follows:

That this Synod, recognising that the global climate emergency is a crisis for God’s creation, and a fundamental injustice, and following the call of the Anglican Communion in ACC Resolutions A17.05 and A17.06;

(a) call upon all parts of the Church of England, including parishes, BMOs [Bishop Mission Orders], education institutions, dioceses, cathedrals, and the NCIs [National Church Institutions], to work to achieve year-on-year reductions in emissions and urgently examine what would be required to reach net zero emissions by 2030 in order that a plan of action can be drawn up to achieve that target;

(b) request reports on progress from the Environment Working Group and the NCI’s every 3 years beginning in 2022 and;

(c) call on each Diocesan Synod, and Cathedral Chapter, to address progress toward net zero emissions every 3 years.