

Why the church is taking action for a safe climate

The Hebrew Scriptures emphasise that other creatures have value apart from their usefulness to humans, [praising God, living in intimate relationship](#) with God, and being [sustained by God's Spirit](#). All Creation is *very good*.

The New Testament proclaims that all Creation came about [through and for Christ](#), who holds all Creation together as the [Word of God](#). Paul hears [Creation groaning](#), waiting to obtain the freedom of the children of God. The Children of God are the church, following [Jesus the liberator](#), the [table over turner](#), who warned constantly about [the dangers of greed and affirmed God's care even for sparrows](#). (more on the biblical witnesses and Creation care - <https://www.unitingearth.org.au/key-bible-verses/>)

So, when the Uniting Church formed in 1977, we acknowledged [God's reasserted claim over the whole Creation](#), accepting that we are called to serve God's mission of the "[coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation](#)." (Basis of Union)

We [declared our commitment](#) to challenge greed and an ever-increasing standard of living for the privileged, and to urge, "the wise use of energy, the protection of the environment and the replenishment of the earth's resources for [future generations] use and enjoyment." (Statement to the Nation 1977)

From the Uniting Church's very beginning, our First Nations leaders challenged Western stewardship, or instrumental theology, which saw the Earth as a collection of resources to be shared out amongst humans. They called the wider church to appreciate that the land is [Mother, and part of their being](#), an insight finally picked up in the [1993 Social Justice Sunday worship resource](#). [The First Nation's challenge](#) to Western theology continues. More recently, the sense of [family relationship](#) to the rest of Creation, and [reciprocity](#) is amplified in Pasifika theology. Western science, especially [evolutionary biology](#), echoes their call to see humans as part of the family of life.

The Uniting Church's many statements about environmental issues draw on these insights to varying extents, and our members identify with [a broad range of theological metaphors](#) for our relationship with the rest of Creation, including dominion, stewardship, servanthood, and family. We have never attempted to enforce one metaphor or develop a distinctive doctrine of Creation.

Two key statements which summarise the Uniting Church's understanding of our role in God's Creation are [An Economy of Life](#) and [For the Sake of the Planet and all its People](#), reproduced below:

For the Sake of the Planet and all its People

A Uniting Church in Australia Statement on Climate Change (2006)

In its first public statement in 1977, the Uniting Church in Australia expressed what would be an abiding concern with the wellbeing of the planet for the rights of future generations: *we are concerned with the basic human rights of future generations and will urge the wise use of energy, the protection of the environment and the replenishment of the earth's resources for their use and enjoyment.*

The natural environment is, however, not merely a resource for the benefit of human beings but has intrinsic value as part of God's good creation.

In 1991 the Uniting Church declared that, "Nature has a right to the protection of its eco-systems, species, and populations in their interconnectedness".

The Uniting Church's commitment to the environment arises out of the Christian belief that God, as the Creator of the universe, calls us into a special relationship with the creation – a relationship of mutuality and interdependence which seeks the reconciliation of all creation with God. We believe that God's will for the earth is renewal and reconciliation, not destruction by human beings. The foundational document of the Uniting Church in Australia, the Basis of Union, expressed this as the very heart of the Church's mission: *God in Christ has given to all people in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation. The Church's call is to serve that end.*

Since its inauguration the Uniting Church in Australia has been concerned about the continued existence of all creatures and plant life and believes that nature is not to be plundered and abused. We must acknowledge, however, that the church has been complicit in the abuse of creation. We have lived out a doctrine of the domination of nature by accepting and engaging in practices that have failed to safeguard the integrity of creation. We have supported systems and structures that exploit the natural environment in the service of human greed. We make this confession and we renew our commitment to move towards sustainable non-exploitative living, believing that God's creation—the earth itself and all the life that it supports—is precious and the earth's resources exist for the good of all now as well as future generations.

The Uniting Church regards climate change as a serious threat to the future and integrity of life on earth. The scientific evidence on global warming and its potentially disastrous impacts is now indisputable. Also beyond dispute is that the burning of fossil fuels and subsequent creation of greenhouse gas emissions and our worldwide failure to plan for a sustainable future is seriously exacerbating the problems we face. The threat posed by climate change therefore challenges the way we live in a fundamental way. If we are to meet and overcome the challenge we must think creatively about the organisation of our social and economic institutions, our relationship with each other across national and cultural boundaries and our relationship with the environment.

It is increasingly the case that some humans consume the earth's resources whilst other humans pay the price. As one of the world's major producers of greenhouse gas emissions on a per capita basis, Australia must acknowledge that it has a responsibility to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels. As long as we remain prepared to abuse the atmosphere and entire ecosystems for the sake of short-term economic gain for a few, we undermine our own future. It is important that Australia's social, economic and environmental policies begin to reflect that social justice and ecological justice are not competing interests, but have shared solutions. It makes good economic and political sense to spend money ensuring the long-term well-being of our natural world – there can be no security for humanity without a healthy ecosystem.

The Uniting Church in Australia believes that it is important for the Australian Government to set and commit to meeting serious targets for greenhouse gas emission reductions primarily through the promotion of renewable energy sources, measures to reduce energy demand and promotion of energy efficient measures. It is essential that this work be done in partnership with state and local government, business, industry and civil society.

The Church has a long history of concern with the nuclear fuel cycle⁶ and remains unconvinced about the use of nuclear power as a solution to global warming. We believe that the continued research, development and implementation of renewable energy are absolute priorities for governments and industry in order to minimise greenhouse gas production. As a matter of urgency we must reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. The impact of climate change will affect some of the world's poorest people first.

The Uniting Church is particularly concerned with the fate of some of our most vulnerable Pacific neighbours. Our partner churches in the Pacific have called on their sisters and brothers in the Church throughout the world to act in solidarity to reduce the causes of human induced climate change by ratifying the Kyoto Protocol, reducing energy use and developing clean, renewable energy sources.

Lives, livelihoods, societies, cultures and ecosystems of the Pacific Islands have already been affected by rising sea levels, diminishing agricultural space, diminishing reserves of fresh water and changing weather patterns including more frequent and unpredictable storms. The Uniting Church has called on the Australian Government to prepare to provide assistance for the peoples of the Pacific as they are forced to leave their homes and their land. Solutions must be found which ensure that the unique cultural and linguistic heritages of the various Pacific Island nations are not lost.

The situation in the Pacific is a clear signal to us that in order to secure our future, we must change how we live as nations, communities and individuals. Now is the time that governments, business, community and faith-based organisations must commit to working together to address the impacts of climate change for the sake of our planet and all its people.

Additional Worship, Bible and Theology Resources:

A constantly updated version of this document, with all links, is kept at:

<https://www.unitingearth.org.au/a-short-summary-of-ecotheology/>

For liturgies, including all-age, creative and reflective options, please visit our website:

<https://www.unitingearth.org.au/worship/>

For recommended Bible Studies:

<https://www.unitingearth.org.au/bible-studies/>

For some key Creation Care Bible Verses:

<https://www.unitingearth.org.au/key-bible-verses/>

For some devotional suggestions:

<https://www.unitingearth.org.au/devotionals/>

Stories about what churches are doing to care for creation:

<https://www.unitingearth.org.au/stories/>