Greening the Church

Australian churches tell their inspirational stories

Compiled by the Five Leaf Eco-Awards Church Project and the Justice and International Mission Unit, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, Uniting Church in Australia
Church greening is a young and exciting movement. In the United Kingdom, and particularly in the United States, it is rapidly taking off as hundreds of churches and church leaders become engaged in environmental improvement projects and environmental certification schemes. Here in Australia, the movement is smaller, but already there are some really exciting stories coming from churches around the country. This booklet introduces you to some of those stories; but there are many more.

The churches whose stories are included in this booklet come from a range of different places, circumstances, beliefs about ‘the environment’ and motivations for acting; but they share one underlying motivation – a love of God. This love prompts them to care for God’s creation, the poor, their children and each other, and challenges them to be good stewards of the earth.

This love has been expressed in many ways, but there are many different ways to reduce our impact on the Earth, and each church will be unique. The churches in this booklet have shared their stories in the hope that other churches like yours will be inspired by what they have done. This is not a ‘how-to’ handbook, but a collection of stories to assure you that if you care for Creation, you are not alone, and other churches have acted. These stories prove that while it may not be easy, acting for God’s creation as a church is not impossible. With determination and commitment, real progress can be made.

Where to find more stories:
Uniting Earthweb
http://www.unitingearthweb.org.au
The Sierra Club – Faith in Action report
http://www.sierraclub.org/ej/partnerships/faith/default.aspx

With thanks to everyone who contributed to the stories in this booklet.

Jessica Morthorpe
Founder and Director, Five Leaf Eco-Awards Project

© September 2010
Compiled by Jessica Morthorpe
Five Leaf Eco-Awards Church Project
with assistance from Cath James and Dr. Steve Douglas
Cover Photo: Castlemaine Uniting Church, used with permission.

The Justice and International Mission Unit
Synod of Victoria and Tasmania
Uniting Church in Australia
130 Lt Collins St
Melbourne 3000
p: (03) 9251 5271
f: (03) 9251 5241
e: jim@victas.uca.org.au

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the position of the Justice and International Mission Unit.
CONTENTS

Port Melbourne Uniting Church, Melbourne, VIC 4
Charlestown Anglican Parish, Newcastle, NSW 5
Maroubra Junction Uniting Church, Sydney, NSW 6
Templestowe Uniting Church, Melbourne, VIC 7
Springvale Uniting Church, Melbourne, VIC 8
Castlemaine Uniting Church, Castlemaine, VIC 9
St Luke’s Uniting Church, Highton, VIC 10
Caloundra Uniting Church, Caloundra, QLD 11
O’connor Uniting Church, Canberra, ACT 12
Ecofaith Community, Bellingen, QLD & Mid North Coast Presbytery NSW 13
Clarence Uniting Church, Hobart, TAS 14
Holy Trinity Church, Tilba Tilba, NSW 15
Bentleigh Uniting Church, Melbourne, VIC 16
Rosefield Uniting Church, Highgate, SA 17
Wembley Downs Church Of Christ, WA 18
Nightcliff Uniting Church, Darwin, NT 19
Brunswick Uniting Church, Melbourne, VIC 20
Crossroads Uniting Church, Werribee, VIC 21
Belconnen Baptist Church, ACT 22
Star Street Uniting Church, Perth, WA 23
Fitzroy Uniting Church, Melbourne VIC 24
Willunga Uniting Church, Adelaide, SA 25
Warrandyte Uniting Church, Melbourne, VIC 26
Parish of SS Peter and Paul, Catholic Parish Kiama, NSW 27
St Mark’s Anglican Church South Hurstville, NSW 28
St George’s Uniting Church, Eden, NSW 29
St Ignatius College Riverview, a Jesuit community, Sydney, NSW 30
Diocese of Grafton, NSW 31
In July 2007 the congregation at Port Melbourne Uniting Church began an Eco-Project, “Inner Urban Sustainability and Stewardship”, now called the Simply Living Project.

Port Melbourne Uniting Church has a long history of caring for the community through South-Port-Parks Parish Mission, now South Port Uniting Church and South Port UnitingCare. We felt that the Eco Project was an extension of this care for community. The project was inspired by individual members of the congregation who had been thinking for some time about how a Christian community should respond in a time of ecological change, how to live more sustainably and how to share the resources of the world more equitably.

A generous donation provided seed funding for this project. A project worker is employed for five hours a week and a task group of congregation members oversee the project.

The Project was officially launched in August 2007 by the Mayor of the City of Port Phillip and the Environmental Project Officer at the Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania.

We inflated black balloons to symbolise our CO₂ emissions and a hard rubbish sculpture was created. On the 18th of January 2009, Port Melbourne Uniting Church became the first institution in Australia to qualify for the Five Leaf Eco-Awards’ Basic Certificate, receiving the award from Five Leaf Founder and Church Project Coordinator, Jessica Morthorpe.

In order to earn the Basic Certificate, the church installed window film for insulation; set up a community garden; installed bike racks so people can ride to church; created a worm farm to be shared with the kindergarten next door; switched to energy efficient lights; and turned off a rarely used fridge. We also included eco-friendly tips in our weekly news sheet and created a ‘Green Book’ to record and encourage actions by our congregation to reduce their impact.

We have conducted services with ecological themes and hosted several forums and film / discussion nights with themes such as “Think Local, Act Local”. Each year we support a UnitingWorld project which helps us link living sustainably in inner urban Australia with the needs of others in the world.

Our Simply Living Community Garden in the church grounds has been a particular success with members of the congregation and community involved its care. It is a valuable outreach tool that helps connect us with our neighbourhood and develop networks with other local groups. A grant from the City of Port Phillip provided the funds to build the garden in 2008. There is no fence and everyone is welcome to enjoy the garden and its produce. The community compost bays have become a regular meeting place for neighbours and a 20,000 litre underground tank collects water from the church roof. The garden is complemented by a community kitchen program held in the church hall; another part of our commitment to sharing resources and being an inclusive community.

Contact: Janet Hoare: janet.hoare@southportuniting.org.au
As Christians, we consider that we are stewards of God’s world and it is our duty to care for Earth, including other species, other human beings, and future generations, all of whom deserve to share in God’s creation. Our primary objective is based on the fifth mark of the Worldwide Anglican Communion mission: “to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and renew the life of the earth”.

Our work has involved a variety of initiatives both within and outside our parish and diocese. One of our projects involved the restoration of the Winding Creek Gully and implementation of a rainwater harvesting program. This project had funding from the Australian Government’s Community Water Grants and involved the installation of three 3,300Lt bladder-style tanks under St Alban’s hall to harvest rainwater to supply the toilets, wash basins and gardens. It is estimated that up to 130,000 litres of water per year will be saved.

As well as saving water, the project involved rehabilitation of the Winding Creek Gully adjacent to St Alban’s church to remove lantana and improve the water quality and erosion in the creek. In addition to restoring the ecological value of the gully, a significant outcome from this project was being able to mulch and recycle the lantana that was removed. A variety of native plants were used to stabilise the bank and create an attractive area for use by the community as a quiet haven. The project has also involved reshaping the eroded creek bed to prevent ongoing erosion.

As part of the Gully restoration project, a Waterwatch program was established by our Godly Play group to monitor the quality of the runoff water from the surrounding commercial and residential properties in the area. Results are posted regularly on www.waterwatch.nsw.gov.au. One of the unexpected outcomes from the water monitoring was the identification of very high phosphate levels in the water in the St Alban’s gully area on some occasions and a campaign was developed to inform local residents and businesses in the area to reduce the contamination. Valuable partnerships have been developed with the Hunter Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority, Charlestown Square Shopping management and the Lake Macquarie City Council, who have assisted us with training and support in producing brochures and other material for distribution within the community. The Godly Play group also marked the stormwater drains in the area with a stencil stating that “The Lake Starts Here”.

Parish Council has undertaken an environmental audit based on the “Becoming an Eco Congregation” model to reduce our environmental footprint. This included a survey of water and energy use within households of the parish. With the assistance of a grant from the NSW Government Energy Savers stream we are also in the process of testing, demonstrating and installing low energy, long lasting LED lights in the church and hall as well as a solar hot water system for the hall kitchen (resulting in a potential energy saving of 8,000 kWh per year.)

An environmental play, “On the Sixth Day” written by one of our parish members was performed by the Godly Play group (to a packed house) and sought to encourage us all to reduce our impact on the environment. The group created and sold fridge magnets that featured artwork that was prepared as part of the play. The funds (in addition to donations and a grant from Lake Macquarie City Council) were used to buy an 80 Watt photovoltaic (PV) solar panel to power three 11 Watt compact fluorescent security lights through the night. The lights will save 100 kWh of electricity throughout the year and approximately 100kg of carbon dioxide.

Contact Geoff Rigby: rigby@mail.com
Project Green Church was a grass roots environmental project of Maroubra Junction Uniting Church that ran from 2006 to 2009. As Christians, we are committed to social and ecological justice and believe we have a moral imperative to act if we want to leave our children an inhabitable planet. The project, which stemmed from these convictions, was designed to make the church more environmentally sustainable and help inspire others to follow our example.

Our activities covered three main areas - buildings and property, possession and skill sharing, and mission and outreach. In addition to our website, we also created an 18 minute documentary about our story.

In July 2006, we installed a 5000 litre water tank that services the toilets for our preschool and our garden hose. We received subsidies totalling $2550 from Randwick City Council and Sydney Water. This simple step saves our church hundreds of litres per day. We have affectionately named our water tank Delilah and have beautified her with the image of the “Woman at the Well” painted by Sydney’s local hip hop graffiti artist Mistery. We chose this not only for its water symbology but also for its strong social justice message.

We also try to share possessions to reduce our use of material resources. In early 2007 we became members of GoGet carshare, allowing church members to join the scheme through the church account. This allowed members to forgo a personal car, but still allowed them access to one for the odd occasion where public transport, cycling or walking will not suffice. Church members receive cheaper access to the service through our system as they only have to pay the usage charges. There are currently 18 church members participating in the scheme.

We installed two solar hot water systems on the roofs of our student accommodation. These systems provide 100% of the hot water needs during summer and up to 80% during winter. These energy savings mean that within 7 years the units will have paid for themselves. The supplier Solarhart also gave us a 20% discount.

In 2007-2008 we ran a GreenPower Challenge and found approximately 40% of our congregational members had switched over to GreenPower.

We also established a vegetable garden at our student accommodation, a recycling scheme in our church buildings, and purchased a cordless electric mower known as the “ecomower” which we share with our community. We use the mower to do the lawns for those who can’t manage it themselves. Randwick council thought it was such a good idea they bought us a second one. Victa Lawn Mowers helped by providing us with the mowers at wholesale prices.

We installed two Nubian Oasis grey water treatment systems on our student accommodation. The water is collected from the showers, hand basins and washing machines, and is treated and recycled for use in the washing machines, toilets and outdoors. This project was funded by the Australian Government Community Water Grants program.

We also ran community events, including two open days where we invited the community to share in our hospitality and to learn about our environmental activities. We also organised two Clean Up Australia Day clean ups/festivals together with other local churches.

While Project Green Church is has formally finished, our ecological commitment has not. We continue to have regular preaching on ecological issues and a monthly “green testimony” during the announcements where a member of the congregation shares something that they have been doing to protect the environment in their own life. We are also a part of the local climate change advocacy group, the South East Climate Action Coalition.

- Contact info@mjuniting.org.au or http://www.mjuniting.org.au/
Since April 2006, a group of grandparents and seniors from churches in the Manningham municipality have met regularly to share concerns about climate change and its impact upon future generations. We are now an Incorporated body known as A GRAND STAND for the environment. We recognize that human beings are standing at an extraordinary moment in world history. Today’s grandparent/senior generation is the first to hand on to our children a planet worse off than we have enjoyed. We urgently need to re-think our values and the way we live. We recognize the deep and rising concern about the loss of biodiversity on the planet and the urgent need to protect and restore natural habitat. We recognize too the profound detrimental effect that global warming has and will continue to have on vulnerable communities in poor countries.

With a view to addressing these issues, the group has sponsored public fora in the Templestowe Uniting Church to raise awareness and give opportunity for the voicing of grief, anger, fear and despair as well as striking a note of hope and empowerment. In each of the forums, use has been made of art, poetry, music and ritual, whilst drawing upon the knowledge of and taking inspiration from high quality speakers. We recognize that it is a spiritual/ cultural problem, not a lack of climate science that holds us back in courageously addressing the challenges of climate change.

In our fora, we have expressed the challenge of social problems and over-arching consumerism in spiritual/ cultural terms when exploring the roots of human involvement in this catastrophic crisis. It is our belief that the problem of harmful human impact on the earth results from an inadequate view of human identity as rulers of Earth, rather than dependent creatures of a Creator spirit.

Intrinsic to our GRAND STAND philosophy is the importance and place of Indigenous Spirituality. We believe that the gift of Aboriginal relationship with the land is essential in raising our awareness and sensitivity to the suffering of Earth and its peoples. It too, enhances our understanding of the ‘sacred’ in exploring human identity and our sense of belonging/disconnection to Earth. Thus an Aboriginal speaker/didgeridoo player has been invited to every forum, and offered a special quality and insight to our presentation. An average of around 100 people have been present each time.

The titles of the forums have included:
- The Earth will survive. Will the human race?
- Saying Sorry to the Earth;
- Turning the Titanic; and
- Economic meltdown – threat or promise?

Poetry, music, art, drama, story-telling and ritual woven through the forums have inspired positive response, created awareness and affirmed the spiritual nature of the crisis we face.

“Table Talk,” a catalyst for the simplicity of conversation in homes and cafes has evolved from A GRAND STAND for the Environment. In these slowly emerging intimate groups, heart-felt stories of hopes and fears for our earth community are given an opportunity to be heard. In offering a ‘safe’ place of attentive listening and mutual vulnerability, we seek to generate new hope, creativity and encouragement for those around the table. A simple ritual of sharing a home-grown gift or piece of handcraft completes a precious gift of intimacy in a two hour ‘communion’ of a simple morning tea.

As GRAND STAND continues to explore future consciousness-raising events, we will network widely with local communities. Our aim will be to faithfully journey together to embrace a true understanding of our human identity and dependence upon Earth as a sacred and abundant source of life, and to enhance our collective relationship with Earth as a gift of sustaining grace.

Contact Gail Pritchard: gailpritchard@westnet.com.au
At Springvale Uniting Church we view our rainwater tank as a symbol of hope and new life in our community. The project was instigated by Khuna, a Cambodian woman in our congregation. The tank is for watering the church’s flourishing and well-used gardens and it provides water to flush the church’s new toilets. It is a response to the water crisis, and a sign of our care for the Earth. The symbol of water represents new life in this diverse community.

While we raised funds to purchase the 10,000 litre tank, a Festival of Living Water was proposed. The festival would combine celebrations for the 120 year anniversary of the church’s presence in Springvale, and would include the blessing of the tank.

People shared stories of their experiences of water. One remembered carrying water from a single tap in the beachside camping ground through the six week summer holiday break. A Sri Lankan woman remembered carrying water over a kilometre each day before and after school. The Tongan minister told of her weekly journey as a child when she would do the household laundry and then carry back sufficient drinking water for a week. These everyday stories of valuing water were told alongside the story of Jesus’ offer of living water as a symbol of leading people to new life.

As part of our preparations for the festival, the Sudanese members of the congregation were invited and agreed to lead a procession into the gardens with dance and drums. In the weeks leading up to the event, children made a banner and colourful cellophane sculptures of vegetables, flowers, and insects to carry in the procession, and then plant in the newly formed veggie patch. A memorial garden was designed and built in preparation for the festival.

On the day of the festival, church and Council dignitaries joined old and new friends of the congregation in a service of worship. All were welcomed by a young Chinese woman playing accordion. Everyone wore their traditional clothes for the festival, bringing colour and joy to the day. They joined in a multilingual Litany of Living Waters before joyfully processing out to the gardens.

At each of five stations, prayers were offered as young plants were planted and watered from the newly installed rainwater tank. A Tongan choir sang a blessing. Finally, the people gathered to share a feast and enjoy the story of the congregation’s history presented in displays.

Christina Rowntree, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania’s Artfull Faith co-ordinator, worked intensively with the Springvale congregation to plan and present the Festival of Living Water.

Contact Mary Gardiner: SpringvaleUCA@gmail.com
The Castlemaine Uniting Church is a regional church in a medium sized Victorian town. The town has a strong environmental focus and the local Mount Alexander Sustainability Group advocates on ‘green’ issues in many creative ways.

Our church has taken an active stand in attempting to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, firstly by undertaking an environmental audit of our buildings and reducing our power consumption, but also by installing solar panels on the roof of the parish hall. We did this with the assistance of a Solar in Schools Federal Government grant and partnered with the Mt Alexander Sustainability Group who agreed to do the education requirement of the grant.

We have also installed a small water tank and a low water use meditation garden that uses indigenous plants. As part of the establishment of the garden, we held services in which the gardening was part of our worship. We sang songs, played music and planted local plants as part of our worship of God.

One of the other creative ways we have worked to care for Creation is to have regular church services with a focus on the issue of care for God’s world. In conjunction with the local Sustainability Group and the Anglican church we held a Harvest festival weekend. This was to celebrate and give thanks for the bounty of food we are able to grow and produce. Special services were held in both churches and a Harvest lunch of soup and bread donated from the local bakery was held afterwards.

Local artists were involved in providing singing and dancing to celebrate God’s Creation and to educate people of all ages about the Christian imperative to be responsible stewards of God’s world.

Contact: Margaret Leveke levecke@gcom.net.au
ENERGY, WATER & TRANSPORT AUDIT

St Luke’s Uniting Church, Highton, VIC

In 2007, we engaged Joel Meadows as a consultant to conduct an energy, water and transport audit of the St Luke’s Church property (excluding the preschool). A comprehensive report was submitted in February 2008. The report was made available to all interested members of the congregation. A spreadsheet summary of the audit was prepared as a quick reference and as a control sheet that would show the state of affairs prior to our making any changes.

Before the audit was prepared, the electric floor heating in the Worship Centre was identified as being inadequate and as a large consumer of electricity. Three gas space heaters were installed. These resulted in improved heating of the Worship Centre, and a significant reduction in our electricity usage.

The audit also identified that our radiant wall heaters were major electricity consumers. The units in the hall were replaced with two gas space heaters, the units in the old Chapel were removed, and the units in the meeting room & kitchen were replaced with split system reverse cycle air conditioners (heat pumps).

As part of our education and reform process, emphasis has been placed on turning off appliances immediately after use. Additionally, when a new photocopier was purchased in 2007, it was chosen in part because it automatically goes into standby mode if not used for a preset time.

Other actions included replacing incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs, removing one of two fluorescent tubes from security lights, and disconnecting a redundant hot water service in the toilet room.

At the start of each calendar year, a CO2 reduction target is set for the next 12 months. In 2008, we achieved a 22% reduction and we were aiming for a 10% reduction in 2009.

During 2009, our Pastoral Connections Team ran four public forums on ecological themes. Up to 50 people have attended each session.

St Luke’s Environmental Group meet regularly to discuss ecological issues, engage with a guest speaker, write letters to politicians, and plan activities in the local community such as tree planting. We are investigating the possible use of solar panels, rainwater tanks and other measures to further reduce our electricity and water consumption.

Contact Ian Pooley: igp@people.net.au
We have erected a new cross on the roof of the Caloundra Uniting Church! It will supply power to the church for all of its lighting and energy needs for its programs and for the many cultural and social groups who use the property.

The 24 solar panels will generate all of our electricity needs and will earn the Church approx. $2,000.00 per year through the sale of our surplus electricity onto the grid. As we are empowered in our life and mission by the cross, we will be helping to reduce our greenhouse gases by 65%.

This visually striking cross we hope will be a reminder to the whole community of the importance of “going green” to save the planet. During our preparation for the installation of our solar panel cross, 14 of our members installed solar power at their own homes, and others are considering doing the same. Their stories are exciting as we hear of their results.

This project came about as a result of a seminar we conducted with Reverend Dr Clive Ayre, who presented us a challenge on the theme, “The Church in the Eco Crisis”. This led us to draw-up an Eco-Vision statement that reads:

The Caloundra Uniting Church, in recognising the natural environment as God’s Creation, believes that:

*Christians are called to safeguard the integrity of Creation and to exercise their mission in such a way that the life of the earth is sustained and renewed.*

*Alongside other valid expressions of Christian mission, the proclamation of the Kingdom of God includes working for justice, peace, and a proper stewardship of the earth.*

*The well-being of people is inter-woven with the well-being of the planet itself.*

This initiative was followed by one of our members, Geoff Hacquoil, doing an energy audit of the church building. This revealed changes we needed to make to equipment and behaviour.

We were aware that PV solar power was ‘the way to go’ in reducing our greenhouse gas emissions, but the solar power companies costed what we would need at $40,000. It seemed to be out of our reach. We decided to apply for a rebate from the Federal Government and a grant from the State Government Gaming Community Benefit Fund (GCBF).

Our first application from the GCBF was rejected; however we applied again and were successful. We dedicated the cross with an ecology themed service.

We see the sun as a gift from God, as is all Creation. It is our task to use the power of the sun to help create a cleaner environment as we take a small step towards the vital issues of climate change in our beautiful Sunshine Coast.

Contact David Lowry: davidwendy9@yahoo.com.au
In slightly more than two years, a unique relationship developed between O’Connor Uniting Church in the ACT and the Canberra Organic Growers’ Society (COGS).

In hindsight, it is quite understandable that the two overgrown unused church tennis courts sparked the idea of their potential use as a community garden. The church approached COGS in late 2005. An agreement prepared by COGS was agreed to by the church council. The new O’Connor garden group conforming to COGS rules was formed and started taking in new memberships and transfers.

We successfully applied for a local government establishment grant, and soon changes were noticed as watering pipes and garden beds were laid out and installed. Very soon vegetables and flowers changed the appearance of the area completely.

Once the project was established, the church accepted an invitation from the gardeners to host a morning tea to express their appreciation. This was held after a Sunday service in the open under umbrellas. COGS arranged an eight-piece folk music band, the garden was open for inspection, and the gardeners were on hand to give gardening tips and advice!

The then Chairman of Church Council, Peter Crimmins (who is also a COGS member and gardener), introduced some of the key COGS members, including those who had successfully applied for a new $20,000 Federal community water grant on behalf of the church. Two massive rainwater tanks installed during 2009 are now full. This rainwater is to be shared between COGS and the church. Currently it is applied to the garden, and later will be used in the church hall toilets.

Speaking after the morning tea Pastor Jan Thomas said:

“When I first heard about the recycled use of the former tennis courts, it sounded such a great idea. Imagine, an unsightly and forgotten area being transformed into a fertile productive garden shared by so many! There is great symbolism there!”

“The morning tea was a wonderful way for the two communities to meet and celebrate this successful and ‘growing’ venture.”

As well as the water-harvesting program, O’Connor has developed a sustainable native plant garden and hosted a greening seminar where the pilot of the Five Leaf Eco-Awards was launched.

An array of 16 solar panels, in the shape of a cross has recently been installed. It’s a 2.72kW system, estimated to produce about 3,500 kWh of energy annually, saving 4.24 tonnes of CO2 emissions per year. Our annual electricity bill is expected to be reduced by around 37%.

Contact Noel Haberecht: jotela@velocitynet.com.au
Ecofaith community
The temple we frequent is high. A turquoise vaulted dome, the sky—which clothes the world in majesty. This adaptation from Omar Khayyam is largely true of the Bellingen ecofaith community, except that the vaulted dome is often grey, and even leaking—there were seven floods in Bellingen in our first year of worship!

We meet for worship and contemplation out amongst the rest of life, exposed to the elements, to remind us that God is the God of all of life, not constrained to temples made of human hands.

Ecology and evolution confront us with a story in which humans are not the centre or purpose of the story of God and life. We are, however, invited to be a part of that story.

Participating on Sundays hopefully encourages and inspires individuals to continue being part of the reconciliation and renewal of all creation during the week. As a group we collaborate with LandCare to “serve and protect” the part of creation where we gather.

By meeting outdoors, and in an existing shelter when it rains, and with many people commuting by bike or foot, the ecological footprint of our gatherings is miniscule compared to building a new facility. Our chairs, blankets, and tradewinds tea and coffee are wheeled to the park in perhaps the dodgiest handcart ever made: a testament to the imperfection of evolution.

We started meeting in February 2009, and gatherings are open to all people of good will, who want to deepen the connection between Earth (the ecos) and faith, including the implications of Jesus’ claim that God is right here, on Earth, amongst and within us, and that we should do something about it. See: http://ecofaith.org/mnc/community

Uniting eco-faith, MidNorthCoast
Creating the Bellingen ecofaith community is only one aspect of ecoministry on the Mid North Coast. Rev Dr Jason John was called to this role in 2008, with financial assistance from the Uniting Church’s Mission Resourcing Fund.

The ministry is currently focussed in and around Bellingen, and also involved collaboration with others of good will in the community to help bring about the reconciliation and renewal of all creation. Some examples of collaboration include being involved in the local food network, the transition towns initiative, and the campaign to save the Camerons Corner wetland from proposed roadworks.

Although the ministry is mostly focussed at and beyond the edge of the existing church, some energy also goes into helping existing congregations revitalise their awareness of the links between the ecos and their faith. These links are attested in the biblical witnesses, beginning with the two creation stories in Genesis, and reappearing countless times. Now we also have new stories about creation, being discovered in the evolutionary and ecological sciences which can undergird our faith. More can be found at http://ecofaith.org/mnc

Even before the ministry started, some congregations were already making eco-faith links, leading them to switch to green power, and start community food gardens for example. The presbytery property and finance committee is including environmental considerations in its future reviews of church property.

Contact: Jason John jason@ecofaith.org

WORSHIP IN THE TEMPLE OF THE SKY & ECO-MINISTRY

Ecofaith Community, Bellingen, QLD & Mid North Coast Presbytery NSW
At the heart of the ecological crisis is a breach in relationship. How human beings understand themselves in relation to the rest of Creation shapes how we treat Earth. Worship can play a pivotal role in a renewal of our understanding of Earth and our response to the ecological crisis.

In worship we celebrate that all Creation is embraced within the love of Christ through whom all things came into being. And we respond to the call to share in the healing ministry of Christ in whom all things are reconciled (Colossians 1:15-20).

Eco-faith@ Clarence Uniting Church in Hobart was held on the third Sunday of each month. During 2008, the worship focused around the four seasons and the four elements of earth, water, air and fire. We recognized the goodness of Creation and what it meant to be creatures of Earth. We lamented the pain caused to our planet, and we committed to changing our lifestyles to be more ecologically responsible, and sharing in the ministry of caring for Earth.

Earth Pilgrimage is another worship activity focused on transforming our encounter with Earth. A different way of describing it would be a prayer bushwalk. Through the walk we seek to journey not just through a place but into a significant encounter with that place. Time during the pilgrimage is spent in quiet attentiveness and prayerful reflection. Through this encounter we come to again understand something of ourselves as Earth creatures, and of God present in and through all creation.

These acts of worship form part of how Clarence Uniting Church shares in the ministry of caring for Earth.

Contact Rev. Paul Chalson
paul.chalson@bigpond.com
Open Sanctuary @tilba is a ‘new expression of church’ with a particular emphasis on care for Creation. As a Christ-centred community, the sanctuary also offers a contemplative and inclusive way of prayer and gathering from our base at Holy Trinity Church, Tilba Tilba on the NSW far south coast.

We believe that the experience of personal intimacy with God’s creation may become the necessary metanoia to energize the individual and communities to act for justice and healing for others and the earth. We offer a space for listening; sharing; and becoming a living model of a community caring for Creation and for disadvantaged people. We also offer a Sabbath space of rest, contemplation and recreation.

In 2005 Rev. Linda Chapman went to see the then Bishop of Canberra/Goulburn Diocese George Browning. As a committed advocate for Creation care, George was immediately supportive and suggested the little church, Holy Trinity, at Tilba Tilba as a starting point. By the early 2000’s the congregation had dwindled to a handful of people attending the monthly Holy Communion service. The weatherboard church, built in 1896, was beginning to deteriorate quite badly. The building is surrounded by about 2 acres of land belonging to the Diocese which was bordered by the original grazing property in a spectacular setting. Having settled on exploring the possibility of Open Sanctuary in this place, we signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Parish of Cobargo to begin a fresh expression of church distinct from the parish system.

One of the first things we did at Open Sanctuary was to fence the little bit of land we have available to us in order to keep grazing cattle out so that we could begin to plant trees and shrubs. We were aided in this by a Landcare grant. We continue to gradually plant this area, and we include the planting of a tree or shrub in many of the wedding ceremonies conducted at OS. Another priority was to restore the building itself, which we have since done with the help of a Local Heritage Fund grant and the generosity of the community and donors.

In December 2006, Open Sanctuary held a gathering in connection with the Montreal Climate Change conference as part of our commitment to grass roots action. The Sanctuary community felt it was important to honour the many religious voices calling for the moral and ethical imperatives of climate change as part of the conference in Montreal. We were blessed to have poets, musicians and writers amongst us to offer their particular gifts giving expression to a love and desire to care for God’s Earth.

Since 2006 Open Sanctuary has hosted various speakers and events supporting conservation and action for climate change both within the church and non-church community. From presentations by the Faith and Climate Change Project Officer (The Climate Institute), to talks by people such as Dr Mark Deisendorf, to ringing the Church Bells for Copenhagen we continue to witness to the need to care for creation.

Many of our congregation are active in various grassroots eco and social justice issues, and Open Sanctuary has become a place of nurture for people engaged in this work. Our liturgy and prayer are also Creation–focused, and we enjoy the gift of the potent beauty of the natural landscape as part of our ‘church’. A spirit of ecumenism and dialogue has grown together with genuine friendships and a clear sense of God’s presence amongst us and in that place from which we say, truly, all are welcome. Above all, our invitation is to come and rest awhile to allow the stillness and silence of the place to restore our being. The friendship at the heart of Open Sanctuary includes our relationship not only with each other but with with the whole Earth community in which God dwells. In 2010 we are excited about the installation of our new rainwater tank and 1.5kw photovoltaic solar panels for the church roof.

Contact: Rev. Linda Chapman opensanctuary.tilba@gmail.com
Bentleigh Uniting Church, Melbourne, VIC

Bentleigh Uniting Church has a worshipping congregation of approximately 100 people as well as at least 10 community groups who use its facilities throughout the week. The Minister, Rev. Ji Zhang, and our congregation were keen to develop the mission of the church around ecological sustainability. A significant donation was made by one of our congregation members in order to fund the installation of photovoltaic (solar) panels on the roof of the church. The church council also agreed to apply for funding for the solar array through the (Federal) Department of Heritage, Water and the Arts, and the Victorian Department of Primary Industries. As part of this, an education program has been established and the congregation has looked at ways of reducing our energy usage.

An informal energy audit was carried out by analysing our electricity usage accounts for four quarters (22/9/2006 – 26/9/2007). They were then analysed to elicit the most cost-effective ways to reduce emissions whilst not increasing our expenditure on energy.

The audit found that our biggest energy use was the electric heaters in the hall, our two boiling water units (urns), and general lighting.

The first step to reduce our electricity use and associated greenhouse gas emissions was to turn off one of the boiling water units, which also resulted in an immediate saving of around $800 per year.

The electric heaters were primarily being used by other community groups to heat the hall, which has a very high roof (a large space to heat) and no insulation. We were unable to change the electric heating to gas (which would have reduced our greenhouse gas emissions by approximately 3/4) as we don’t have gas connected to the property. We explored solar-thermal forms of heating and cooling, but at this stage they were too expensive. So we switched our emphasis onto the need to educate the congregation and the other hall-users about the need to conserve energy in their use of this building.

Space-heating and mains hot water heating will be addressed in the forthcoming year during the second round of our ongoing energy-management program.

The foyer and halls of the church have many fluorescent lights that will be replaced with T5 fluorescent tubes (these are small, highly efficient tubes) that will reduce our total energy consumption by a small amount.

Overall, we are expecting to reduce our energy use in the first year by 40%, which will save us $1800 per annum, increasing as energy prices rise.

Contact David Evans at akehrst@one-name.org
Greening our church is now a way of life at Rosefield Uniting Church, thanks to some passionate and creative members of our congregation, and a responsive community. In 2006, the Rosefield Environment Group was formed, bringing together our responsibility as Christians to preserve God’s creation and members of the community who were concerned about the ecological crisis. Since then, the group has implemented many ecologically-friendly initiatives.

Practical steps included:
- Switching to 100% post-consumer recycled copy paper in the office;
- Re-using copy paper that has only been printed on one side;
- Reducing the number of Orders of Worship produced each week;
- Emailing the Weekly Notices to our community and only producing hard copies for those without email;
- Making Weekly Notices and Orders of Worship available online;
- Placing a Planet Ark cartridge recycling bin in our office (it is available to all users of our building);
- Acting as a collection point for hard plastic lids requiring different recycling methods;
- Acting as a collection point for cork recycling;
- Recycling through kerbside collection;
- Disposing of food scraps through local Council green waste collection;
- Turning off lights in vacant rooms;
- Switching off computer screens when not in use; and only using air-conditioning when necessary.

Awareness-raising includes:
- Presenting an annual Worship service with a strong ecological focus (the most recent addressed the impact of climate change on people);
- Holding information displays after worship;
- Running our ‘Green Spot’ programme from July – December 2007 (this involved a different monthly focus that informed and encouraged our community to make more sustainable choices in their daily living).

Topics covered were:
- using ‘green bags’ rather than plastic bags when shopping;
- insulating homes against heat loss in winter and heat gain in summer;
- Switching from incandescent to compact fluorescent lights;
- recycling wherever possible;
- reducing transport emissions; and conserving water both inside and outside the home.

Our weekly notices have an ‘Environment’ section that provides ongoing information and helpful tips to our community, and promotes upcoming environmentally-focussed events.

One of our most significant and measurable savings occurred when we reduced the amount of paper used in the church office at the beginning of 2007. As a result of various paper-saving measures in the office over the following 12 months, the total number of sheets of clean A4 paper used was 20,000 less (40 reams) than during the previous year. As producing a ream of paper produces 5.4kg of carbon dioxide and uses 167 litres of water, it could be argued that Rosefield reduced its ecological damage by indirectly emitting 216kg less CO2 and indirectly using 6680 litres less water, just by using less ‘new’ paper. Despite the slightly higher cost of purchasing 100% post-consumer recycled copy paper, we still saved $1179.20 because we used much less paper. Our paper-saving efforts continue, and we are aware that diligence is required to ensure our staff and community members don’t slip back into lazy paper use habits.

Another of our successful initiatives was joining the ‘Cartridges 4 Planet Ark - Close the Loop’ cartridge recycling scheme in 2006. The scheme is available to all users of the building and since that time, over 60kg of cartridges and waste bottles have been diverted from landfill and have been recycled.

Contact Meredith Spangler:
meredith@rosefield.org.au
In November 2007, Wembley Downs Church of Christ responded to a call to become part of an experimental para-church movement, which we called Peace Church. The mission of this new venture was to explore issues of peace and conflict, and to promote non-violent resolutions to conflict within our local and broader community.

During our first year, we explored a number of issues, and we came to understand that we could not be completely at peace with each other without also being at peace with our environment. In order to understand who we are as the image of God, we had to balance our human-human, human-Divine sense of being within a Divine-environment and human-environment context. Several sessions focussing on the environment followed which ultimately resulted in a challenge to the church to consider caring for the environment as an intrinsic act of worship. This was not worship of Nature, but rather recognition of Divine presence within Nature, and that in order to move towards a spiritual wholeness, one had to include Nature, i.e. the environment, within our spiritual focus.

As a first practical step, this concept was presented to the Wembley Downs Church of Christ itself at a board level. The Board committed to including environmental concerns in its decision-making, and it set up a committee to formulate a policy. The committee met regularly, and in February 2009, it presented a policy to the church members for acceptance. The policy was accepted and formally adopted at a special worship service. It is now part of the definition of who we are as followers of Jesus of Nazareth at Wembley Downs Church of Christ. The policy presented broad issues, but also attempted to highlight practical steps that the church could take to reduce its ecological impact, as well as guidelines for individuals in their own home. One of the pleasing things to come out of this was recognition that the church members were already doing many practical things to reduce their ecological impacts.

As part of the special worship service, an expo was held to demonstrate the practical steps that people could take to reduce their ‘ecological footprint’. We now have signs around the church prompting people to turn off lights, and the environment is consciously considered when purchasing cleaning products for use in the kitchen and around the church.

The Board plans to replace an inefficient refrigerator, and repairs were undertaken on the church manse to improve its energy efficiency. As they wore out, incandescent light bulbs were replaced with compact fluorescents, and many church members now have worm farms to aid in composting. The church is now a repository for used printing cartridges and expired compact fluorescent lights, which are taken to a recycling centre. Where practical, the church’s role as repository for these materials is promoted around the community through our Open House group. Our church notices newsletter regularly promotes environmental issues and events, encouraging people to take part, and perhaps gently reminding them of the commitment the church has made to the environment.

Wembley Downs Church of Christ is made up of a largely older generation of people. We have discovered that we can make a significant difference to the health of the planet without necessarily having a severe impact on our daily lives. Including the environment in our spiritual focus has made caring for and about the environment as natural as caring for and about each other.

Contact: Dennis Ryle: djryle@aapt.net.au
PERMACULTURE IN ACTION

Nightcliff Uniting Church, Darwin, NT

Nightcliff Uniting Church congregation has a long history of involvement in social justice issues. While our congregation grapples with the issues facing many congregations, namely increasing expenditure and decreasing funds, we seem to be on a journey that helps us to keep living the questions.

An Op-Shop has been a part of our congregational life for over three decades. It provides inexpensive clean clothing and has recently started sending excess clothes to a remote indigenous community to on-sell and raise their own congregational funds. We now understand our Op-Shop to be an integral part of the “3R”s of recycling, and are aware that many of our clients purchase used clothing to reduce their carbon footprint and to make an environmentalist statement.

We have recently begun sharing our space with the traditional owners of our Darwin area, the Larrakia Nation. They use the space for administrative purposes and for oversight of their social justice programme.

Frilly’s is our Fair Trade (donation) coffee shop that runs in conjunction with the Op-Shop; it is named for the collective of Frill Neck Lizards that join us in our garden during the wet season.

Our most recent inclusion is the Mulch Pit Community Food Garden based on the three Permaculture principles: care for Earth; care for people; enough for all. In practical terms, that means the garden is organic (no chemicals) and tries to be in tune with the local environment, the neighbourhood, and with all humility, the universe.

With our new ministers we have undergone a period of discernment which resulted in us identifying five practices or purposeful actions that sustain us, guide us, and remind us of who we are.

1. HOSPITALITY Earth – Yellow
2. DISCERNMENT Fire – Red
3. SUSTAINABILITY Wood – Green
4. CONNECTIVITY Metal – White
5. SPACIOUSNESS Water – Blue

The Community Garden is being established on an eroded, underutilized car park on the western side of our building. The raised bed borders have been fashioned out of disused objects that were headed for the dump and that echo the elements (i.e. wood and metal so far). The mulch is provided free of charge by a local tree lopper, saving himself the cost of dumping, and saving us delivery costs.

The garden beds are a mandala design that is often used in permaculture. The word ‘mandala’ represents wholeness, and can be seen as a model for the organisational structure of life itself- a cosmic diagram that reminds us of our relation to the infinite, the world that extends both beyond and within our bodies and minds.

Through our budding community garden, our ecological connections and actions have blossomed. We held a Copenhagen Vigil each evening during the COP 10 process, encouraging people to grieve and hope through silence and liturgy. The premiere of the documentary, “No Impact Man”, was hosted by our congregation in conjunction with Climate Action Darwin. We held a “love the earth” Valentines Day afternoon tea in conjunction with Top End Transition (a group within the global Transition Towns movement).

This coming dry season we’ll be hosting some of our local “Grow Your Own” workshops teaching people the art of growing veggies in the tropics. We’ll be offering a service for people in nearby units & flats to empty their Bokashi bins of kitchen scraps into our composting system, thereby providing the garden with nutrients and preventing all that organic matter entering landfill.

We aspire to be an Alternative Resource Community providing an ARC (or ARK) for Darwin. We partner with local environmental and justice groups offering a space that is unique and sustaining to all who gather, a place to draw breathe, reflect, cry, laugh, reconnect to God, self and others, and continue renewed on the journey!

Contact Gai Nowland: gaitime9@bigpond.com
Every third Saturday in the month, the ‘Olive Way’ room of Brunswick Uniting Church is a buzz of activity. It is ‘Pickup’ day for the Food Co-op.

The Brunswick Food Co-op began at South West Uniting Church in 2000 with about a dozen members and eighteen products. The Co-op wanted to help protect creation by reducing the use of packaging, and by using organic products if possible. Two grants of $500 were obtained; one from the UCA Earth Team, and the other from Hutchison Close (an outreach program of St. David’s, Brunswick). Scales and some containers were purchased, suppliers were sought, and the Co-op tentatively began to see if there was sufficient interest within the congregation. At this early stage, orders were taken and paid for one week prior to delivery, and exact amounts of products were bought to meet the orders.

The members paid $12.00 per year for membership and were charged on a cost–plus 10% basis to cover inevitable food wastage and miscellaneous expenses. Within fourteen months, the Co-op had grown enough to enable it to purchase in bulk prior to the day of delivery, and to hold enough stock to cover purchases.

Our products include: organic flours, sugars, rices, cereals, nuts, dried fruits, pasta from a local manufacturer, Australian grown organic coffee, and a large range of locally produced environmentally-friendly cleaning products. Where possible, we buy Australian produced goods to cut down on the ‘food miles’ (i.e. the amount of fossil-fuelled transport needed to get the product from its place of production and/or processing to the point of ultimate sale and consumption).

The Co-op operates on a volunteer basis, with members being rostered on each pickup day. This is a wonderful way to shop. Members bring their containers and request the amount of each product that they wish to buy. Volunteers weigh the container before it is filled; another volunteer fills the container; it is then weighed again; and the member takes their order form to the computer where the amount owed is calculated and paid. This is all great fun (most people love ‘playing shop!’).

Before and after this happens, members are invited to share coffee and morning tea that is provided by the rostered members.

The Co-op Committee meets monthly to evaluate all procedures and ensure that the pickup day runs smoothly and efficiently.

Four years ago, South West Brunswick merged with Brunswick Uniting Church and moved to the Sydney Road site. The Co-op has moved and now has a designated room, making setup and cleaning much easier. Membership has grown to over sixty, including both church members and members of the wider community. We now stock sixty products. If a financial surplus accumulates, donations are made to the Indigenous Hospitality House, the Asylum Seeker Centre, the TEAR fund and other projects.

The Co-op hopes to encourage and assist other groups to become established.

See: www.brunswick.unitingchurch.org.au

Contact: Glenice Cook on 0414319649.
The Crossroads Uniting Church in Werribee encourages everyone to be informed and involved in a range of social justice issues and recognises the close relationship between social justice and care for the environment.

On the 13th of December 2009, we participated in the World Council of Churches Bell Ringing for Climate Change. This was a coordinated worldwide campaign that coincided with the COP10 climate change conference in Copenhagen. Having obtained permission from our Property Committee, the Werribee police, the CFA, and the Sudanese congregation whose worship needed to be shortened, Crossroads’ bells bravely joined the chorus, ringing out 350 times (representing the 350 parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere that is considered the upper limit to avoid dangerous climate change). We also held placards on the street corner outside the church outlining our concerns. A bonus arising from this exercise was the enthusiastic involvement of the Sudanese congregation, especially the children.

A group of us also took part in Walk Against Warming. It was great to be part of this huge event and to make our own stand. We look forward to next year and the opportunity to be more organized and to make our own banner.

Our social justice task group and congregants have also sent letters and signed petitions on various social justice issues. We sent a letter from the justice task group to Senator Penny Wong (former Minister for Climate Change) about Australia’s greenhouse gas emissions, and also sent a petition from the congregation to the Federal Government on this issue. In the spirit of the Micah Challenge, congregants sent letters to the then Prime Minister asking him to meet the Millennium Development Goals.

Crossroads has a twice monthly contemporary Worship Service at 5pm called ‘Crossroads @5’. To celebrate Clean Up Australia Day, our Minister, Rev. David Withers, led a short reflection on Creation and caring for the environment. We then went to nearby Soldiers Reserve to collect rubbish. Although the group was only small, 6 garbage bags of rubbish were collected. We then reconvened to close worship.

We have installed a rainwater tank and investigated the feasibility of installing a solar hot water system at the manse. However, for financial reasons, we elected to delay installation of the solar hot water system until the current unit needs replacing. Unfortunately, there were no rebates available for churches installing this technology.

We encourage our individual members and families to be responsible stewards of Creation in their own homes. Some have been inspired to install rainwater tanks and grid-connected solar power (photovoltaic panels), etc. We also held a discussion evening where we screened the documentary, ‘Who Killed the Electric Car?’ to encourage thought about ecological issues by members.

We have been accepted as a Fair Trade faith community as we use Fair Trade tea and coffee in our kitchen, and also sell Fair Trade tea, coffee and other products every Sunday after church.

Sometimes the enormity of ecological issues seems too great for us to have a significant positive impact, and at times it can be challenging to get others on board to share our vision. However, we do have a strong sense of God’s call to be responsible stewards for Creation. It is encouraging to get some ecological ‘runs on the board’ and to know that we are not alone - that there are other churches facing the same challenges. It is also encouraging to have the opportunity to be part of the wider environmental justice movement in events such as the Walk Against Warming.

Contact: Rob Bradley robjan5@tpg.com.au
JOURNEY TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

Belconnen Baptist Church, ACT

Early after its formation in the 1970’s Belconnen Baptist Church (BBC) commenced a building project and by 1975 had erected a modest building of approx 285 sq metres for worship services and Sunday School. It was “all electric” with scant attention paid to insulation or energy conservation. Later in the mid 1980’s an extension was constructed and a further 486 sq metres was added providing for a 300 seat auditorium and offices, again “all electric”. Little attention was also given to water efficiency and the grounds were landscaped with wide expanses of lawns, trees and shrubs and with underground mains connected sprinklers.

During the late 1990’s and the 2000’s the church’s leadership became increasingly aware of our profligate use of water in the grounds and of electricity in water heating and space heating within the building. Progressively action has been taken to reduce this by the introduction of a series of changes as funds have permitted.

The changes that have been made to date include:

- Removal of the “as fitted” electric heaters from the offices of the new building and replacement with a more efficient reverse cycle ducted air conditioning unit with consequent reduction in use of electric power.
- Removal of electric heaters from the original building and replacement with a more efficient ducted gas heating unit with consequent reduction in use of fossil fuel and reduced carbon emissions.
- Removal of the “as fitted” ceiling and lights from the main auditorium of the new building and replacement with a new ceiling with better insulation qualities and new high efficiency fluorescent lighting providing a consequential reduction in use of electricity.
- Removal of inappropriate shrubs and replacement with more suitable drought resistant varieties, reduction in the area of lawn and shrubbery and heavy mulching of gardens to reduce evaporation and lower water consumption.
- Installation of a 170,000 litre underground tank for harvesting of rainwater from the roof and the fitting of pumps and pipes to use this water for gardens and lawn and all purposes with the building (both old and new extension) except where drinking or washing of utensils is involved. This project cost over $50,000 and was partly funded by a Federal Water Grant.

Recently the installation of a large scale evaporative cooling system for the auditorium has been undertaken. A very deliberate decision was taken to not choose a Reverse Cycle air-conditioner system because of the heavy use of electric power that this would involve compared to the evaporative system. In addition we do not use mains water for the evaporative system but our own water harvesting system from the 170,000 litre underground rain water tank. We therefore use little extra power and no mains water.

The church leadership (Board) is now far more aware of the issues involving climate change than it has ever been in the past and realises much more needs to be done.

To illustrate this, BBC has recently accepted membership into a community organisation called SEE Change which is committed to reducing the impact on our environment and we are now taking further steps to do just that in the buildings which we own or use. We would ideally like to be able to be self sufficient in the generation of power from solar energy for our main building and auditorium but cannot afford that at this time. We are currently looking into putting solar panels on one of our smaller buildings through the SEE Change Interfaith Bulk Buy which is helping churches and their members around Canberra to get solar panels on their roof.

The ACT Government has recently offered a grant of nearly $25,000 to install solar panels and this will commence in a few weeks - a further step in our journey to sustainability.

Contact: Dean Wisheart deanwishart@bigpond.com
Following the Uniting Church Assembly’s adoption of the statement, *For the Sake of the Planet and all its People* in 2006, the Victoria Park & Districts Uniting Church, known simply as Star Street by locals, formed a Sustainability Working Group to explore how it could become a ‘greener’ church.

The congregation, located in one of the inner-urban suburbs of Perth, has a diverse membership including many people who already have a personal commitment to living a sustainable lifestyle. The fact that the church shares a building with the Carlisle Food Centre, which offers low-cost food for people on a low income, offered some challenges to the thinking of the Sustainability group since a lot of the food sold through the Centre was, and continues to be, heavily packaged. However, while the food sold through the Centre doesn’t look very environmentally-friendly, a lot of it comprises donated material that would otherwise be going to landfill, so it’s effectively a community waste reduction program, as well as a community building project!

After making some small changes such as switching to energy saving lights, the Sustainability Working Group has focused on raising awareness of the concept of sustainability within the congregation. During Advent in 2008, we ran a ‘green Christmas’ project, with members of the congregation sharing ideas for celebrating in a way that doesn’t place undue pressure on the environment.

The Uniting Church in WA is part of a collective that runs “Sustainable September”, including having sustainability-themed Bible studies and worship resources. Over four weeks in September 2009, members of the congregation explored the idea of sustainability in relation to the themes of ‘the elements’, ‘plants’, ‘animals’ and ‘humans’. Again, this was a chance to share ideas within the congregation, and to let people know who was doing what. This not only raises ecological awareness and generates action, but builds and strengthens community. We created posters with ideas and tips from different people in the congregations who do things at home to reduce their carbon footprint such as keeping their own chooks, recycling their grey water, or having a ‘water–wise’ native garden.

The group led worship one week during Sustainable September, and asked congregants to help create a ‘green tree’ at the front of the church by writing on a paper ‘leaf’ one way they would commit to ecologically responsible action, and by sticking the ‘leaves’ around the cross at the front of the church. Each person took away a native seedling to plant at home as a reminder of their commitment. The tree stayed up throughout the ‘green’ church season before Advent, reminding us of God’s calling to us to care for Creation.

To the excitement of the congregation, in December 2009, 27 solar panels were installed on the roof of the church building. The solar panels will provide approximately 50% of the energy of the whole building (both church and food centre) and came about as an initiative of the Food Centre with the support of the congregation and the local council. The installation of the panels was celebrated by the Food Centre volunteers (who are also members of the local congregation) with two events: a breakfast launch sponsored by the Town of Victoria Park and a screening of the film, *The Age of Stupid*, to help raise discussion about ecological issues in their local community.

The church runs a small op-shop stall, and offers free morning tea to customers each Wednesday morning. The church also works alongside organisations in both East Timor and Zimbabwe who are committed to ensuring a sustainable future.

What we have come to realise is that sustainability is also about creating long-term nurturing communities locally and internationally. It’s all part of the same thing!

Contact Alison Atkinson-Phillips
alison.atkinson-phillips@wa.uca.org.au
Fitzroy Uniting Church’s Move To CERES Environment Park, Melbourne, VIC

The congregation of Fitzroy Uniting Church moved permanently to CERES* Environment Park on September 20, 2009. The congregation had to vacate the Fitzroy site due to an inability to maintain the deteriorating buildings. The Fitzroy congregation, with a long social justice, human rights and peace emphasis, has strives to embody and strongly promote a feminist, gay and lesbian affirming, liberationist and widely inclusive theology and practice for at least twenty years. With the increasing awareness of the ecological dangers to our planet and the need to respect animals and the whole Creation, the congregation has embraced and sought to understand eco-feminist theology. We seek to uphold a model of mutual ministry, respect and friendship.

The Fitzroy congregation became a CERES site member and held irregular Sunday services at CERES from early 2003, sometimes as often as monthly, before the permanent relocation. We also rented an office in another building at CERES. A dedicated, small planning group from the congregation met regularly with the CERES Management Team in finalising the redesign of the Education Centre and other aspects of our growing relationship. The final move came once the main refurbishment of the Educational Centre was completed and transformed into a modern, environmentally sustainable, multi-purpose and multi-user building.

Some of the features of our new building are:

- Reuse of the timber from the church’s attractive timber pews and doors. (This was made into bookshelves, tables and cabinets.)
- Passive solar energy efficiency design
- Tank water
- Tank-to-toilet connection
- Recyclable carpet made from non-toxic, natural materials.
- Recycled kitchen
- Double glazed windows
- Skylights for natural lighting
- Natural ventilation
- Energy efficient lights

We wanted to renovate an old building instead of starting from scratch to reduce the environmental impact.

The community was excited to pursue an arrangement of partnership in community buildings beyond the church structures. This happened to be outside of the then guidelines regarding the use of proceeds from the sale of our church property, so the community entered into a tenancy arrangement that was within the guidelines while still allowing the community to develop links with groups beyond the church. It is a model based not on ownership of property, but rather on restructuring to continue our focus on people and faith, and of "ministry with” rather than “ministry to” people of the community at CERES and visitors to the site.

A vision for the congregation’s ministry at CERES presently encompasses these areas: a dynamic, inclusive, worshipping community; openness to Sophia (the wisdom of God); partnership with CERES, its members groups and others; the future of the planet globally and locally; the peaceable kin-dom; a prophetic ministry of justice; feminist and eco-feminist theology; hospitality; wider church, ecumenical, and interfaith relationships and interpretation and education, offering a Christian perspective to the spirituality that informs CERES, and also seminars and educational resources.

The congregation is presently accessing its agreed allocation of expected sales proceeds for set-up costs and funding a part-time paid minister, with the size of these annual grants reducing over ten years. So the congregation faces the challenge of sustaining its ministry through: continuing voluntary effort, including in organising worship, which has been a long-term feature of the congregation; increasing our financial giving; and building other funding sources and collaborative and imaginative initiatives with other groups and individuals from within CERES, the wider church and more broadly.

Contact Rev Dr Robyn Schaefer (03) 93872822 (mobile: 0407 113 376 or robyn@ceres.org.au)

*CERES stands for the Centre for Education and Research in Environmental Strategies (pronounced "series"). See: www.ceres.org.au
One of Willunga UCA’s Lenten observances for the 2010 lent period was an evening exploring “Our Relationship to the Environment: What do the scriptures actually say?”

International speaker on Ecology and Spirituality, Rev. Dr. Vicky Balabanski, started the evening with the two accounts of creation in Genesis, explaining that a literal understanding of certain words has allowed “man” to exploit Creation for his benefit. However, on deeper inspection, a more ecologically integrated picture comes into view. Some of the questions she posed were:

What is the pinnacle of Creation - humanity, or is it the Sabbath, when God rests and declares everything ‘very good’? What is meant by humans having ‘dominion’ (radah, a word indicating strong control) in the first account in Genesis? In the second, the adam (human person) was put in the garden of Eden to ‘till’ it (abad). This term means literally to ‘serve’. How are we to exercise this ‘dominion’, being made in God’s image as we are?

Dr. Vicky encouraged comments from the floor and these included observations that we humans are only part of Creation; that God’s purpose for Creation was not primarily to benefit us and that the word radah could perhaps be taken to mean for us to ‘control’ in order to encourage things to flourish, rather than to subdue them.

‘Endings’ were discussed as well as ‘beginnings’, with Dr. Vicky explaining that Premillenialists read the book of Revelation as a prediction of things to happen before the Second Coming. This interpretation has impacted directly on culture and politics, particularly in the USA, with the associated belief in an imminent arrival of a new heaven and a new earth justifying ecologically destructive policies, such as legislation permitting mining and logging of national parks.

But is this world dispensable so that we don’t have to worry about it? Revelation says “I am making all things new” not “all new things”. Is this a replacement cosmos or a renewed one?

In her introduction, Dr Vicky quoted Professor Lynn White Jr., writing in the journal Science in 1967. He said, “What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them.

Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny – that is, by religion. To Western eyes this is very evident in say, India or Ceylon. It is equally true of ourselves…”

As we left to re-enter the world around us, Dr Vicky told us, “The challenge to us as Christians is whether we can start to take seriously the fact that we are connected with the rest of creation, which God also loves (John 3: 16 God so loved the world/kosmos, that he gave his only Son...)” So Willunga UCA’s particular part of God’s renewal continues.

Contact Lois Gepp at loisg@txc.net.au
As part of our vision of ‘Peace with God, Peace with the Earth and Peace with Each Other’ Warrandyte Uniting Church created a gift to the community – a Peace Wall and Garden

This area is open to all visitors; a place for people to come and reflect on Peace whenever they like. People can often be seen wandering by the wall and around the pathways in the garden and children delight in finding their tile in the design. Visitors often write a prayer or message for Peace which is then planted in the garden.

The wall was created with the help of over 1,000 community members. The participants came from many different faiths, many different community groups and were people aged between 2 and 92! Each participant made or painted a tile which represented Peace to them. School children concentrated on Peace with the Earth and made animals, fish, plants, insects & stars. The tiles were then placed as mosaics into a design created by professional artists in our congregation, Walter Magilton and Denise Keele-Bedford. Mary-Lou & Chris Pittard who are ceramic artists guided the process and ran workshops. Mandy Nicholson, a Wurundjeri artist, shared the stories and symbols of the Wurundjeri people and gave permission for these symbols to be used in our Peace area.

We had over 20 workshops with the community where participants talked of Peace and what it meant to them. Much of this centred around the peace gained from natural surroundings. People’s concerns centred on protecting that environment – the river in Warrandyte, stars at night, bush and gardens, water in all its forms. All this input can now be found in the detail of the Peace wall.

The next stage of our gift to the community was to create a garden setting which would also provide seating. Again we had the assistance of a professional in our congregation, landscaper Bev Hanson who created a design which used natural materials, meandering paths and indigenous plants. Again, many participants of all ages joined in the creation of the Peace garden.

We used only local indigenous plants, returning the area to its natural state and preserving the native grasses which were already there.

Water run-off from the church roof is used in two ways. The first is a flat carved stone “font” which fills when it rains and spills onto the garden. We also purchased recycled olive drums to store run off from the gutters which serve as a watering system for the plants.

The creation of our Peace wall and garden developed a strong and vibrant link to the community. We found we all cared deeply about Peace in all its forms. The participants appreciated the opportunity to share in creating this peace filled space.

Our vision continues….. Our discussions on Peace have inspired us to pursue other opportunities to create Peace with our Earth.

More information on Warrandyte Uniting Church’s Peace vision can be found at www.riverflow.com.au

Contact: Leeanne Keam at keam@mail.com
THE LIGHTHOUSE PROJECT

Parish of SS Peter and Paul, Catholic Parish Kiama, NSW

The Lighthouse Project started in 2007 with an idea of conducting a carbon audit along the lines of the then Catholic Earthcare program. After extensive consultation with all groups in the Parish in 2008 and 2009, the Social Justice Ecology and Peace Group (SJEP) decided to broaden the initiative to a year-long program of events to raise awareness of the ecology and faith connection and encourage action towards environmental sustainability, reflecting the Church’s teaching on the need for Environmental Conversion.

Parishioners attended a reflective and planning workshop assisted by the ‘The Sound of Many Waters’ Program in Bristol and Catholic Earthcare’s audit program “On Holy Ground”. An interim report was produced and a core group appointed to progress the initiative. The result was the “Lighthouse Project” – a year-long calendar of events to celebrate through action, prayer, fun, and reflection our need to care for our environment.

The project was launched, with the full support of our priests, on the Feast of St Francis of Assisi, on 4 October 2009, with a blessing of the animals.

During the service the congregation gave thanks for the world in which we live, and looked to St Francis of Assisi for an example of love and respect for the environment as we face the challenges of our times.

The project will conclude with a musical celebration in October 2010. The group also obtained broad sponsorship for the project from the ACF, NCC, WWF, Wollongong Diocese, Kiama Council and Healthy Cities Illawarra.

The aims underpinning the project are:
• action – the Carbon Systems Australia Audit;
• changing attitudes by liturgical emphasis throughout the year;
• inclusion of the school’s programs;
• environmental awareness - walks – picking up the themes of creation, that are uniquely possible in this area – geological, geographical, flora and fauna;
• involvement in local community events through film nights;
• allocation of time to sustainable examples in living and food.

In November, we used a screening of the film “The End of Suburbia” followed by a slow food dinner to expose how our unsustainable lifestyles are underpinned by cheap oil.

In November and April, creation walks were conducted along Love’s Bay Rock Escarpment where fossils and geology allowed participants to learn about the pre-historic Permian Period.

“Dawn Chorus”, our Easter Sunday service on Kiama’s Surf Beach was a great success, using music, prayerful reflection and stillness to renew our relationships with the Risen Lord; with creation as a backdrop to the hope of Easter Dawn.

This was an ecumenical event, and about 40 people attended.

Other activities include a carbon audit, participation in the World Council of Churches Bell Ringing for Creation, regular prayers on ecological themes and photo exhibitions with local schools on the environment.

Finally, a Bush Mass and Family Picnic is planned, before the year wraps up with ‘A journey in Song on the life of St Francis of Assisi’, an inspiring presentation by singer and song-writer Peter Kearney.

Contacts: Ann Long ph (02) 4234 0865
Marie Milne ph (02) 4232 1535
Ben van der Wijngaart ph (02) 4232 2319
ECOCHURCH

St Mark’s Anglican Church South Hurstville, NSW

EcoChurch is an environmental project for the parish and community that demonstrates our commitment to the stewardship of God’s creation. It provides connections with our local community, educates parishioners and community about climate change and other environmental issues, and facilitates action to reduce harmful environmental impact.

A growing number of Christians now understand that concern and responsibility for the environment flow directly from our faith. This proposal is primarily about taking action – doing things to reduce both town water use and greenhouse gas emissions.

EcoChurch employs three strategies:
• improvements in church buildings and a new environmental focus in our parish life
• education and improvements in parish households
• taking the experience to the broader church and the local community.

EcoChurch was launched and dedicated on Palm Sunday 2007, the day after ‘Earth Hour’ – an initiative to show the world that we care enough about global warming to take action and turn our lights off for one hour. EcoChurch is now part of the norm of our church community.

Initiatives over recent years:
• Speakers provided to various forums, such as: Faith Ecology Network series of seminars ‘Climate Faith Change’ held at Auburn in June 2007; A Moral Climate Conference 6 May 2008.
• EcoGoals agreement and monthly education flyers distributed to members.
• Water harvesting through a 10,000 litre water tank installed for St Mark’s Pre-School Kindergarten toilet flushing.
• An organic garden and a second smaller tank used for Kindergarten gardens and education purposes.
• Recycling centre established for printing cartridges, spectacles (through OPSM), magazines (for prisoners), postage stamps (for mission fundraising), candle wax (for worship candles), in addition to the long standing community clothing bin. It has been expanded to include the collection of computers and associated equipment, which will be recycled by Psychiatric Rehabilitation Australia. PRA provides employment opportunities for people living with mental illness and psychiatric disability.
• St Mark’s was represented from 2007 in the Walk Against Warming coordinated by the Nature Conservation Council of NSW
• EcoLiving Workshop on ‘water tanks’ for the local community in conjunction with Kogarah City Council.
• Church incandescent lamps changed for energy efficient lamps.
• ‘Signed-up’ for all Earth Hours.

St Mark’s observes the Season of Creation each year in September: including Creation Sunday, Social Justice Sunday, International Day of Peace, and Blessing of Animals on St Francis Day.

Contact: Bruce Cooke cookeb@optusnet.com.au
We started our Garden of Eden community project in May 2006. Our mission is to: *work with the community to create an eco-conscious and wonder-filled garden, and a lively community art and cultural centre to connect with Creator, Earth and all humanity.*

We wanted to re-establish a dynamic relationship with our community using a project which could encompass everyone, regardless of age, background, religion, etc. We especially wanted to be inclusive of those who feel marginalised. As Eden does not have a community centre where people can come together, we also wanted to address this need. The church is sitting on an acre of land which was largely unused and it was agreed that a community garden was going to be the perfect expression of our desires.

We started with enormous faith – and no garden tools or money to buy them. On the first day it rained and only one person turned up, Roger. As it happened he was an artist and designed our sign. And everything happened from there....

We have formed many partnerships within our community. We work with Mission Australia, Workways and the Work for the Dole recipients where we are the only local work provider. We have worked together with all three local schools. Flags were painted depicting our local community, and nature murals adorn the walls of our hall. Bega TAFE students have planted some of our garden beds. We have provided workshops on cob oven building, fruit tree pruning and grafting and growing succulents. Our talks with guest speakers on climate change, permaculture and water conservation have been well attended. We are part of the transition towns movement and once a month have a local produce market selling our organic vegetables and jams made from local produce.

We have installed a 24,000 litre water tank with drip watering system and solar hot water panels for which we received grants. We have also built a mud brick studio/toolshed through a combined grant application with other Eden Service Clubs as part of a Heritage Trail.

Today we have many flourishing garden beds and a diverse orchard with a variety of fruit and nut trees. We have created a native garden and a fernery with water feature. A native/bush tucker garden is being designed and built with local indigenous people. We hold World Movie nights once a month showing movies with an environmental/social justice theme, followed by supper and lots of chatting.

Our hall is considered to be a safe and welcoming place and is now used by many people and groups who would not normally attend church.

Most importantly we have provided a local place for local people to share community and build relationships of respect for each other and the Earth.

Contact: Ruth Haggar: tread softly@exemail.com.au
The Jesuit Community of St Ignatius College Riverview has as a major part of its preferred futures, the vision to:
1. foster our community to appreciate the gift of creation and their responsibility for its future,
2. develop in our community the knowledge, skills values and commitment to move towards sustaining God’s creation, and
3. inspire leadership within our community to move our society towards sustainability.

College leaders have set up an Environment Committee comprising inspired members from across our community including students, staff and parents to guide the vision forward. One of the first steps undertaken was to formulate a Sustainable Environment Management Plan to guide the Committee’s strategies and actions.

More recently a dedicated part time Environment Officer has been appointed to drive the plans. Five focus/theme areas have been established for action:

- **Curriculum - Teaching and Learning**
  The College is developing inspiring lesson plans for its curriculum across Yrs 5 to 12 to foster and educate our students to be future leaders in the environment and its sustainability. A smart metering program, Eco Driver” is used to provide real live, relevant data to be used in some of these curriculum lessons.

- **Co-curriculum – Participation and Learning**
  The College has established co-curriculum groups across our 3 campuses who participate in “Streamwatch” and ‘Murder under the Microscope” programs. A student leadership team comprising Vice-captains from each of our 12 pastoral care houses runs a calendar of events to raise awareness of environment & sustainability. Earth Hour events, mobile muster, national walk to school day and Keep Australia Beautiful are just some of the events in the College Environment Calendar.

  A Water Management Plan was developed to reduce consumption and has resulted in the introduction of water saving devices such as timed showers, waterless urinals, dual flush toilets, water flow restriction devices, efficient watering systems including rainwater tanks.
  Energy initiatives include the installation of an 11.4kW solar power system generating approx. 16.5MW of electricity per year.
  Waste initiatives include co-mingle and paper recycling, a “low waste” Wednesday initiative and green waste recycling. The students have produced podcast around the red bin system.

- **Management of school Environs**
  New buildings are designed to save energy utilizing sun and shading, insulation, cross ventilation and passive air conditioning. Gardens are moving towards native plants and climate friendly design with water efficient drip fed irrigation. A program of land care removing noxious weeds and renewing local habitat has been followed in recent years. We are currently working on a Riverview (Bush) Walk open to all in the local community.

- **Community involvement and partnerships**
  Working closely with Local Council an e-recycling day for local residences was recently hosted at the College. Our annual Earth Hour breakfast held March 16th 2010 in our hall had over 170 participants from twenty two schools across Sydney. While our Old Boys Union donated the smart metering system hardware and software - EcoDriver.

Contact Susan Martin
smmartin@riverview.nsw.edu.au
In what is believed to be a world first, the Anglican Diocese of Grafton has had a spider named after it - *Habronestes diocesegrafton*.

Diocesan Bishop Keith Slater said that the Diocese was proud to have the spider named after it as there “are deep theological and conservation statements being made by acceptance of the honour.”

“Clearly God made the entire universe, all creatures great and small, not just the iconic rare pandas and tigers, yet we hear little of the tiny ecological building blocks,” Bishop Keith said.

“To be a living interrelated whole the world needs to be concerned about the future of the obscure and little known spiders, mites and ticks as well as the big eyed and attractive vertebrate fauna.

“Christ taught that God knows every sparrow in the air and the very hairs on our head, we mirror Christ when we seek to know and protect our fellow creatures.

“Neither the church nor the conservation movement has been good at promoting the plight of the small invertebrates, we hope our spider can assist in changing that and helping humanity reflect on the needs of the small creatures, if so we will be happy.”

The significance of the spider to the Diocese is that it was found in NW NSW and while the Australian Spider Fauna is the richest in the world and spiders dominate in all terrestrial ecosystems, few people know about them. Dr Robert Raven curator of Arachnids of the Queensland museum believes about 80% of the 110 currently recognized spider families live in Australia and about 3,300 species have been described so far, but more than 6,000 Australian species await description.

Recent work by researcher Dr. Barbara Baehr of the Queensland Museum described about 400 Australian Species out of three families. It is from this work that the Grafton Diocesan Spider has been described and named.

The family is the Ant Spider family – *Zodariidae*. The genus is the Yellow Spotted Ground Spiders – *Habronestes* (first described in 1872 by a German Arachnologist called Ludwig Koch). “Habros” is Greek and means pretty and nescio - “nestes” is Latin and means not known. So the genus name means a “pretty unknown spider”. *Habronestes* is one of the most diverse Ant Spider genera in Australia. Twenty eight species are already described but about 80 species are still without names.

They are small to medium sized spiders (2 – 12mm) and most species can be easily recognized by their bright yellow or orange spots on the dark brown background on their back and the special kind of palps in males. Their legs look like the spiders are wearing white, black and orange-banded socks. Zodariids feed predominantly on ants. This relatively big species belongs to the *Habronestes macedonensis* species - group. It is a day active hunter. The only male is known from Northern New South Wales. The spiders live together with ants, mimicking their behaviour. Specimens of this species can easily be separated from the other Australian members of the genus by:
- Their extraordinary big anterior median eyes, which enable them to focus on their prey;
- Their specific colour pattern on the back;
- Their armed back legs with lots of stout spines;
- Their extremely compact unique male palps.”

Contact Rosie Catt rcatt@nor.com.au
THE FIVE LEAF ECO AWARDS –
ECUMENICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE PROGRAM FOR CHURCHES

The Five Leaf Eco-Awards are a pilot ecumenical environmental change program for churches and religious bodies. The scheme provides assistance, inspiration and recognition for environmental achievements. The program is supported by the Justice and International Mission Unit of the Uniting Church in Australia Synod of Victoria and Tasmania.

Designed specifically for churches, The Five Leaf Eco-Awards Church Project encourages faith communities to care for creation and play an effective role in social change towards sustainability.

The Five Leaf Eco-Awards program encourages a holistic approach to creation care.

The five target areas of the program include:
- Eco-Church Buildings
- Eco-Worship
- Eco-Congregations
- Eco- Outreach
- and Community Environmental Leadership

The first award in the program, the Basic Certificate, is awarded for the achievement of small actions in each of the five target areas. Advanced awards are then available for additional achievements in each of the areas.

At the time of printing, eight of the churches featured in this booklet have already achieved recognition through one or more of the Five Leaf Eco Awards.

The featured award winning churches are:
- Port Melbourne Uniting Church – Basic Certificate
- Charlestown Anglican Parish – Basic Certificate, Eco-Worship Award and Advanced Eco-Outreach Award
- Maroubra Junction Uniting Church – Basic Certificate
- Templestowe Uniting Church – Eco-Worship Award
- Fitzroy Uniting Church at CERES – Basic Certificate, Eco-Worship Award, Advanced Eco-Building Award
- St Mark’s Anglican Church South Hurstville – Basic Certificate, Eco-Worship Award
- St George’s Uniting Church Eden – Basic Certificate, Eco-Worship Award, Advanced Eco-Congregation Award, Advanced Eco-Outreach Award
- St Ignatius College Riverview – Basic Certificate (School/Church Communities Category)

For more information about the Five Leaf Eco-Awards and how to apply please visit http://wr.victas.uca.org.au/green-church/environmental-awards-for-churches/

The Five Leaf Eco-Awards also publish a monthly church greening newsletter called ‘Salt and Light’.

Contact: Jessica Morthorpe
fiveleafecoawards@gmail.com