

## **The United Reformed Church achieves 100% Eco Synods on World Earth Day**

On Friday, 22 April, it is World Earth Day, and The United Reformed Church (URC) is celebrating the significant milestone that all 12 of their Synods in England and Wales are now signed up to become an 'Eco Synod'. This is part of the wider commitment made by the URC in 2019 to act urgently to reduce carbon emissions across the whole of church life.

Eco Synod is part of the Eco Church scheme, developed by the charity A Rocha UK. The Eco Synod scheme was developed in partnership with the URC to help and encourage Synods as they support local churches to engage in creation care through Eco Church, as well as to look at Synod-level activities and policies.

World Earth Day is celebrated around the world, and this year the theme is 'Invest in Our Planet', encouraging people to take part in activities to care for the planet. Eco Church is a learning community of churches open to all denominations with resources and awards for progress. At a practical level, Eco Church encourages churches to reduce energy use, protect open space and valuable natural habitats.

The URC West Midlands Synod in 2021 was the first to achieve a Bronze Eco Synod Award. The award encourages Synod-level change and complements the local church-level engagement with Eco Church.

*Simeon Mitchell, URC Secretary for Church and Society said: "It's brilliant that all Synods are now engaging with the Eco Synod programme as a structure to take forward their environmental commitments. The leadership in this area shown by Synods is vital and encouraging as we seek as a denomination to respond to the urgency of the climate crisis by renewing our Environmental Policy and setting a more ambitious target for reaching net-zero carbon emissions across the whole of church life. We are grateful for the support provided by A Rocha UK through the Eco Church programme and the dedicated work of Synod Green Apostles in championing this crucial agenda for people and the planet."*

A quarter of all URC churches (300 churches) are now registered with the Eco Church programme, and 134 Eco Church awards have been achieved. There are currently three Gold Awards winners St John's Marsh Green, Tavistock URC and Emmanuel

Church in Bungay. Some inspiring recent examples include Cores End URC in Buckinghamshire, which achieved its bronze award in March 2022 and has exciting plans to turn its newly acquired field into a wildlife area. Beulah URC, who earned their silver award in August 2021, has been working actively with their MP, participated in The Climate Coalition's 'Show The Love' campaign, and grew vegetables on their church land with their junior church.

Helen Stephens, Church Relations Manager at A Rocha UK, said: *“At the start of 2022, we all know the scale of the challenges we face to avert catastrophic climate change and the loss of nature - and what’s needed to avert this. The steps being taken by the URC Eco Synods reflect a united commitment to encourage action locally and regionally. As each Synod progresses through the Eco Synod scheme, more churches will become Eco Churches, a growing church community that cares for creation across all aspects of life, and Synods will be taking action towards net-zero carbon emissions in their own activities. We commend all of the Synods for making this commitment and look forward to many more award applications as they continue to take action.”*

There has also been inspirational leadership from the URC Youth, which A Rocha UK recently acknowledged in a letter of endorsement when they met for their 2022 annual Youth Assembly.

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**For images, case studies, and to arrange interviews, please contact:**

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**Notes to editors:**

Available for an interview - Helen Stephens, EcoChurch Manager, A Rocha UK; Simeon Mitchell, URC

- The United Reformed Church (URC) has 13 Synods: the national Synods of Scotland and Wales plus eleven regional Synods across England. Each provides oversight of about 100 local churches and is led by a Synod Moderator.

<https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/denominational-awards/eco-synod/>

- [A Rocha UK](#) is a Christian charity undertaking practical nature conservation and education with local communities and equipping others to care for the environment. Their main mission is to equip UK Christians and churches to care for the environment.
- A Rocha UK is part of a worldwide family of A Rocha organisations. It works collaboratively with others who share the passion for the planet and our desire for its flourishing.
- Eco Church is a free online award scheme and is an A Rocha UK project. It is an award scheme in England and Wales for churches. At a practical level, the Eco Church scheme encourages churches to reduce energy use, protect open space and valuable natural habitats, reduce

churches' contributions to global warming, keep churches safe and healthy, lessen pressure on the local water supply and reduce run-off into local waterways.

- Launched in 2016, 25 churches have achieved a Gold level Eco Church award, including Quaker, Methodist, Baptist, United Reformed and Anglican churches. Churches can do so by registering and completing a [simple survey](#)
- Each year, on April 22 since 1970, more than a billion people celebrate World Earth Day to protect the planet from things like pollution and deforestation. By taking part in activities like picking up litter and planting trees, we're making our world a happier, healthier place to live.