

Uniting Church in Australia – Queensland Synod

GREEN CHURCH NEWS



Green Church Advocate: Rev Dr Clive W Ayre

Associate: Rev Judith Dalton

Issue No 1

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Welcome to this first issue of “Green Church News”! It is my hope that we can produce such a newsletter on a more or less regular basis as an important means of keeping in touch, and sharing information and stories to help us all achieve a greater effectiveness in what Norman Habel now calls Earth Mission. I hope also that you will feel free to contribute to this process.

Introduction

As many of you will know, the Green Church office is maintained on a voluntary basis. I have been appointed as Green Church Advocate against the background of my PhD work on “An Approach to Ecological Mission in and through the Christian Community in Australia: Beyond apathy to committed action.” (<http://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:163691>). I can provide further information on that for anyone who is interested.

In addition to my Church role, I am Adjunct Senior Lecturer at the University of the Sunshine Coast and Editor of a Group associated with the projected World Symposium on “Christian Faith and the Earth” set for South Africa in August 2012.

Rev Judith Dalton’s recent arrival from Eden on the Far South Coast of New South Wales has been a real blessing, since she brings a passion for God’s creation and a desire to work on the greening of mission through the Uniting Church. Judith has an Honours degree in biology and an MA in Theological Studies. Her ministry included “Wander and Wonder Walks” and the Garden of Eden Community Project.

- <http://www.unitingearthweb.org.au/explore/wander-and-wonder-eden>
- <http://www.unitingearthweb.org.au/explore/st-georges-eden-uniting-church-garden-of-eden-community-project>

Website

It is our hope in the near future to establish a Green Church link on the Synod website, which in turn will have links to various resources and groups that should prove useful. For now, web links are included in the newsletter.

World Environment Day, 5 June

The theme of World Environment Day this year was “Many species, One planet, One future”. A resource pack has been assembled through the Assembly office, and is now available for download from the UnitingJustice website. The resource includes congregation activities, worship resources and sermon starters, information on biodiversity, a theological reflection, and so on. Although the Day is now past, the information is still relevant.

- <http://www.unitingjustice.org.au/resources/world-environment-day.html>

Interfaith Activity

A Green Church agenda certainly includes an interfaith aspect. At a World Environment Day event at the University of the Sunshine Coast recently I was able to participate in an interfaith panel on a spiritual response to environmental care. This was a rewarding experience, and demonstrated that in this area at least there is a large degree of commonality.

The Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC), set up in 2008, is a multifaith network committed to taking action on climate change. At their recent World Environment Day Eco Awards Dinner and Presentations, Caloundra Uniting Church was announced as the winner (jointly with the Canberra-Goulburn Anglican Diocese) of the ARRCC Climate Change Award. This is a significant award for “excellence in taking action and encouraging others”, and stems from the unique 4.2kw solar cross on the roof.

At the same dinner, The Garden of Eden Community Project was also recognised with Eco Awards for the congregation, worship and outreach.

- http://www.arrcc.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=376:eco-award-winners&catid=38:extra-pages#top

Green Church Stories

A “Greening the Church” booklet, with inspirational stories from 28 churches around Australia, has been produced by the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania. It is also on the web.

- http://wr.victas.uca.org.au/assets/1674/church_greening_stories_final_for_web.pdf

Queensland Green Church Stories

- Caloundra Church, with its 4.2kw solar cross on the roof, also held a successful Fair Trade and Green Market in May.
- Blue Care has also won deserved recognition for its greening endeavours; they were one of three finalists recently in the Premier’s

ClimateSmart Awards. They have set an excellent example of leadership in this area.

- Mackay is currently exploring solar options, as also is Bundaberg.
- Some Earth Mission possibilities are being explored at Blackall Range and Palmwoods.

I know that other individuals and congregations are either currently taking action or considering action, and that is encouraging.

Tell YOUR Story PLEASE

Only you can tell your Green Church story, and I hope you will do that as a way of sharing ideas and good news, and thereby encouraging others. We would love to include your story and a few photos on our projected website.

Judith's Story of the Garden of Eden Community Project, Eden, NSW

From little things, big things grow we sang (in faith, and hesitant anticipation) at the launch of the Garden of Eden Community Project in May 2006. With a small congregation, and zero budget we opened our land "to work with the community to create an eco-conscious and wonder-filled garden and a lively art and cultural centre... to connect with Creator, Earth and all Humanity."

But we were stunned at how things developed! It has been thrilling to see the many blessings we have received and to recognise God's Spirit at work among us. Our prayers have been answered far more abundantly than we could ever have asked or imagined (often even before being consciously verbalised)!

So many people, from St George's Uniting Church and the Eden community, offered their gifts of time and materials, interests and skills for designing and developing the Garden. Gifts of administration, planning and grant applications; gardening, cooking and hospitality; rocks and wood, soil, compost, horse manure and mulch, pots and tools, plants and seeds; murals, pottery and sculptures; workshops on making mosaic tiles, building a cob oven, and mud brick shed, installing rain water tanks and irrigation, permaculture, pruning and grafting.

Mondays have become regular work days for unemployed from Mission Australia and volunteers, with about 15 people regularly sharing a community lunch (including vegetarian dishes). Some of our aboriginal participants are now developing an indigenous bush tucker garden, with a campfire garden in the middle of two boomerang gardens. There are regular gatherings for musicians and photographers and social justice movie nights.

Our monthly local produce markets feature fruit and veges, home-made jams, pickles and craft, music, coffee and other delights.

Our Poet's Breakfast and Open Garden have become a notable part of the annual Eden Whale Festival, and have included exhibitions of High School artists and our photographic club.

From little things, big things grow!

Ring out the Lord's glory!

Advocate's Diary

- July 8th – 10th Presentation of paper to an international climate conference at the University of Qld.
- July 17th Mary Burnett Presbytery.
- July 23rd – 24th Central Qld Presbytery – Mackay and Sarina.
- October 1st – 3rd Possible paper to a conference in Sydney.
- October 10th Seminar at Palmwoods.
- Dec. – Jan NCYC electives.

2011 and 2012

I mentioned earlier the projected World Symposium on "Christian Faith and the Earth" set for August 2012; this was originally designed to bring scholars together from around the world to assess the current state of the debate in Christian terms, and that would be really significant. There are some recent signs that this ambitious project may need to be scaled back, which would be disappointing. My own involvement has been the task of preparing a major paper on "The Nature, Mission and Governance of the Church" as it relates to creation care. Feedback is welcome, so let me know if you would like a copy.

The AAMS (Australian Association for Mission Studies) has agreed to include a significant Earth Mission stream at its next conference set for September 2011 in Sydney. My hope is that through this process I may gain valuable feedback in preparation for 2012, and in addition that it may lead to a more coordinated Christian response in Australia. I would urge you to consider registering for this event at the appropriate time. We will keep you posted!

Trinity College Library

Don't forget that Trinity College Library has a range of resources relating to Ecotheology and mission, and would be only too happy to assist you.

Brochure

Have you seen our Green Church brochure yet? We had it available at the recent Synod meeting, introducing the Green Church idea.

Can we help?

Please let either Judith or me know if we can help you, through offering advice, resources and encouragement, addressing a group or congregation, conducting an eco seminar, or in some other way.

Please pass this on to anyone who may be interested, and ask them to send us their contact details if they would like to be added to our mailing list. It would be great to have a Green Church contact for each congregation!

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