

The foundation of the Uniting Church's concern for the natural environment and the challenge of global warming

The Uniting Church's commitment to the well-being of the environment arises out of its belief that God is the Creator of the world in which we live and move and have our being. This 'groaning' creation is God's 'good' creation. (Fifteenth Assembly, 2018) ¹

The Uniting Church's commitment to the environment and concerns over global warming and resulting harmful climate change, arise from two foundational Christian beliefs. The first is that God is the Creator of this world and all its life. In the beginning God pronounced this creation as "good", which bestows upon it and all life an inherent worth. And while this world now "groans in travail" (Romans 8:22), often because of the abuse and exploitation of the natural world by human beings, it is still beautiful and valuable in itself. The second foundational belief relates to, as described in the Basis of Union, "... that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation". And it goes on to say, "The Church's call is to serve that end..."²

The Uniting Church believes that the world has intrinsic value that goes beyond its usefulness to human beings.^{3,4} The world and all its life are beloved by God and so worthy of the deepest respect and care. More than that, the Uniting Church understands that God's will for the world is not that it be ruined and destroyed by the folly of human beings, but that it be transformed as part of the reconciliation and renewal of all things, which is God's ultimate purpose for the creation. Therefore, every act to safeguard the integrity of the world and its life in this present time has merit and no such action can be dismissed as meaningless or ultimately futile (1 Cor 15:58). The whole world will share in the liberation and transformation God intends for God's human creatures (Romans 8:21).

In this time, after creation and before the final reconciliation and renewal of all things, our Church believes God calls us into a special relationship with the rest of creation. Our understanding of this relationship is developing.⁵ It includes our God-given responsibility to care for and protect the earth and its creatures. But it goes beyond that to recognise our fundamental mutuality and interdependence with all of life and the earth itself⁵ – all of life is in some way our neighbour whom we are to love as we love ourselves. We are to love God, our human neighbours and God's non-human creation as well.

Concern for all God's creation and our earthly home is a result of our faith and theology, but it is informed by science. As the Basis of Union states, ² "...the Uniting Church enters into the inheritance of literary, historical and scientific enquiryand gives thanks for the knowledge of God's ways with humanity which are open to an informed faith". The overwhelming scientific consensus is that global warming, if not adequately addressed, poses very significant threats to human beings and other life on the planet.⁶ An urgent response is required by these circumstances. Such action is consistent with Christian hope, by which we are called to be active participants in God's mission and purpose. As the theologian Jurgen Moltmann has written, "A theology of hope is a theology of combatants and not of onlookers".⁷ It is these convictions that cause us to make the following appeals to our political leaders for our nation's response to the challenge of global warming.

Our response to global warming: What the Uniting Church is calling for!

Our concerns

The Uniting Church takes seriously our human responsibility to care for the whole of creation now, and for future generations. As God's creation we value the natural world for its own sake, not only for its material benefit to humans.³

Our church accepts the clear evidence, based on the best scientific knowledge, that global warming poses a serious and growing threat to the world and all its life, which requires a decisive and urgent response.⁶

While global warming poses an enormous challenge, it also provides our nation (and all nations) with an historic opportunity to transition to a more sustainable and equitable future based on renewable energy.⁸

Our Federal government has a dual responsibility both to keep our nation and its inhabitants safe, and, as far as is possible, ensure its prosperity and the opportunity for all its citizens to flourish. We also have responsibilities to ensure climate justice for our global neighbours, particularly our near Pacific neighbours.^{9, 10}

What we are urging our Federal government to do

The Uniting Church, Synod of NSW and the ACT calls on the Australian government to take the same far-sighted, science informed approach to tackling climate as was taken for COVID 19, and lead an urgent, orderly and planned transition away from fossil fuels to an economy and society based on renewable energy.⁹⁻¹¹ We have already experienced some of the negative affects of global warming and do not have the luxury of time to delay.

This will require:

1. Decisive action to reduce Australis greenhouse gas emissions, including:
 - Setting national emissions reductions targets of at least 65% of 2005 levels by 2030 ¹²
 - The immediate cessation of new coal or gas mines or other means of extraction ^{10,11,13}

- The immediate cessation of new coal or gas-fired power plants ^{3,11,13}
2. A purposeful and well supported transition to an economy and society based on renewable energy, including: ^{6,9-11,13}
- Rapidly scaling up the necessary policies, investment and infrastructure to transition to a carbon neutral economy and ultimately one based on 100% renewable energy
 - Supporting and investing in a renewables-based post COVID recovery that creates new employment opportunities in renewable energy and associated industry, manufacturing and other areas
 - Active support for industries and communities currently dependent on fossil fuels to transition into new jobs and other sustainable sources of income
 - Equitable access to reliable, affordable renewable energy for all Australians

References

- ¹ Uniting Church in Australia. For the Whole Creation. Proposal 66 presented at the Fifteenth Assembly, 2018.
- ² Uniting Church in Australia. Basis of Union (1992 edition) in Constitution and Regulations Uniting Church Assembly, 2018, p 22
- ³ Uniting Church in Australia. Our Vision for a Just Australia. UCA, 2020
- ⁴ Uniting Church in Australia. The Rights of nature and the Rights of Future Generations. Resolution 91.14.18 at the Sixth Assembly, 1991
- ⁵ Uniting Church in Australia. For a World Reconciled: Justice Statements from the Uniting Church in Australia 1977-2015, C Coghill & E Poulos (Eds) For the Sake of the Planet, UCA Assembly, 2016
- ⁶ Climate Council. Aim High, Go Fast: Why emissions need to plummet this decade. Climate Council 2021
- ⁷ Jurgen Moltmann, cited in John Polkinghorne, The God of Hope and the end of the World. Yale University Press, 2003
- ⁸ Ross Garnaut. Super-power: Australia's low carbon opportunity. La Trobe University Press, 2019
- ⁹ Uniting Church in Australia. #Build Back Better: A Just Recovery Post-COVID-19. UCA Assembly, 2020
- ¹⁰ Uniting Church in Australia. National Climate Action Plan. UCA Assembly, 2020
- ¹¹ Australian Religious Response to Climate Change, Global Year of Action, What we're calling for. Available at: <https://www.arrcc.org.au/global>
- ¹² Synod Climate Action Strategy: Proposal to Synod (NSW.ACT) 2019. Appendix 2: The scientific rationale for more decisive action. 2019. (The figure of 65% emissions reduction was proposed as "a morally responsible, scientifically credible, national emission target.")
- ¹³ Synod Climate Action Strategy: Proposal to Synod (NSW.ACT) 2019. Attachment 1: What the proposed climate action strategy will include. 2019