

Environmental Roundtable for Members - Summary

On 27 October we hosted our first Environmental Roundtable with the goal of starting the conversation on sustainable practices and green-focused projects amongst the Eurodiaconia membership. The event allowed us to share the results and challenges that different members have faced while working on green projects, and provided insight on how those projects were structured and put into practice.

The Environmental Roundtable was held prior to the United Nations COP26 Climate Summit as a way to gain momentum on climate change related topics and to begin to articulate a Eurodiaconia green network amongst our membership.

The event had contributions from the Church of Scotland and CrossReach, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland, Kirkon Diakonie (Finland), Diakonie Baden (Germany) and the Kerk in Actie (The Netherlands). There was also the chance for participants to ask questions and discuss further on specific topics.

Policy Context in Scotland and the Church of Scotland's net zero emissions target

David Bradwell, from the Church of Scotland (CoS), opened the presentation section and discussed the policy context in Scotland as well as the CoS's 2030 net zero emissions target.

In May 2021, there was a Parliamentary election in Scotland which resulted in the appointment of a new government including members of the Scottish National Party (SNP) and the Scottish Green Party. This coalition constitutes the first time a green party has been in government at a national level in the United Kingdom, and so the perspectives for environmental protection and carbon reduction in this new Scottish government administration is strong. However, it is not the first time climate change issues have been tackled from a

policy perspective in Scotland, as in 2009 the Scottish Parliament passed the Climate Change Act to set a reduction target on greenhouse gas emissions.

The CoS has been involved in campaigning for legislative innovation, which sets binding targets on governments and then influences the whole range of policy considerations on energy, transport, buildings, employment or funding. Over the next five years, any decisions made by the SNP-Green government will have a big impact on how churches and social care providers operate.

In this context the CoS has set the target of being a net zero organisation by 2030, which follows the lead set by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Church of England. Actions taken to monitor carbon footprints in local congregations have focused on buildings and transport. Amongst the proposed actions are the establishment of electric car charging points by churches, where they would use energy generated from 100% renewable sources.

The CoS have also set up grassroots initiatives such as Eco-Congregation Scotland, which is a large and growing movement of church congregations from all denominations committed to addressing environmental issues.

The Church of Scotland's role with COP26

We also had the chance to hear from Lord Wallace, who was involved in COP26 as part of the delegation of the World Council of Churches to call for actions to mitigate the effects of climate change from a faith organisations perspective. Lord Wallace highlighted the importance of using the Conference as a platform to advocate for an agreement to allow nations and communities to be supported to build their own infrastructure and increase their resilience against global warming. Moreover, Lord Wallace underlined that the multi-faith declaration goes beyond climate change and that there is the urgent need for environmental damage recognition and for the implementation of a compensation and redress scheme for those who are most vulnerable and who have affected by the current state of affairs.

CrossReach's actions towards a net zero emissions target

Eion McDunphy - Head of Finance and Resources - and Anthony Olowoyeye - Head of Estates, Procurement and Health and Safety – provided some insights

into the challenges on reaching CrossReach's net zero target and offered some practical illustrations as well.

Given that their 2030 target is in nine years' time and there is a tendency from governmental funds to be hyped up towards the end of target periods, there is real concern on the magnitude of the work that needs to be carried out in time to meet the deadline. However, CrossReach has taken actions towards reducing emissions through energy savings, replacing boilers, regulating transportation and transitioning from diesel cars to hybrid and electrical cars.

So far, the organisation has been working on two of their proposed five goal plan. One is the reduction of CO2 emissions from buildings. And the second is reducing their carbon footprint. The challenge to reach both of these sustainable green goals relies on CrossReach's buildings, which were built in the 20th century and due to the nature of their structure it is hard to include a modern approach to utilities, such as heating. Moreover, because of this situation the properties have decreased their market value and they are financially demanding.

Towards a Green Church: The Experience of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland

Magnea Sverrisdottir – from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland – explained that her organisation's green initiatives comes from their involvement in the Arctic Assemblies and the United Nations Environmental Programme.

Both events allowed the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland to be part of a high level multi-faith leaders network, which helped establish a proposed coalition of faith committed to environmental causes. The initiative has the backing of the Icelandic government and have identified social conservation and forestry in Iceland as key priorities, yet it remains unclear in what way, shape or form the coalition will have a political influence. She also added the importance of faith connected organisations and their influence to develop multi-faith solutions through green initiatives and to involve people in a local, national and international level.

Towards a Carbon-Neutral Church by 2030: The Case of Kirkon Diakonia

Rev. Ilkka Sipilainen – from Kirkon Diakonia – shared their church's environmental system which is tailored for the needs of their local and rural congregations. Kirkon Diakonia is backed by church leaders to support social justice issues at national and international level. In this context, they aim to be carbon-free church by 2030. To reach this goal, they have set multiple targets and provided counselling and support to all congregations. The first one focuses on divesting from fossil fuels, geothermal heating, oil heating, foresight electricity. Another relates to reducing emissions and mobility of the church's operations and look to compensate unavoidable emissions. They are also working on a strategy to help local communities to ecological, socially, culturally, and economically sustainable forestry as well as implementing green projects in schools. The wider target for Kirkon Diakonie focuses in making the church committed at all levels in climate work, meaning that all church bodies in one way or another are working in green targets.

Social sector's readiness for sustainability: a German perspective

Katja Vonhoff – from Diakonie Baden – shared her organisation's readiness for ecological transformation based on the challenges and steps that have already been implemented within their regional membership.

As innovation labs have been set for ecological transformation across nine European countries, many local organisations in Germany have followed the trend of setting up ecological initiatives (such as reducing paper consumption) and establishing sustainability practices as their prime objective at a national level. The government in Germany does support green initiatives, so there is great awareness of the importance of environmental activities throughout the country.

In terms of challenges, there is a lack of capacities, resources and expertise in the field of ecological sustainability within social service organisations. Although there is a lot of staff willing to contribute to the ecological transition, a structure must be established within the organisations in order to arrange, for example, sustainability management. There is also a lack of sufficient financing sources, which limits organisations' capability to implement an ecological and sustainable

transition. However, in the long run building energy friendly systems will save organisations some costs.

In the immediate future, Diakonia Baden wants to establish a working group of churches focusing on environmental topics. They would like to exchange best practices and introduce sustainability management systems in a comprehensive way alongside governmental bodies. Sustainability management systems such as the “common goods economy” helps organisations analyse different kinds of dimensions such as human dignity and environmental sustainability.

Green Churches Network

Maaïke Wigboldus – from the Kerk in Actie in The Netherlands – provided insight into the Green Churches Network in Holland, which was established 10 years ago. The network promotes and shares sustainable practices with an emphasis on social justice actions and green activities. They provide information which includes steps to implement solar panels, conscious investment or they offer guidance if a church has the necessary tools to improve sustainable practices such as heating, waste management and transportation. The network is quite active in sharing best practices through a newsletter that includes a section for green tips on how to improve sustainable practices. Each church focuses on different environmental activities, which allows churches to support each other through multiple toolkits, webinars and experiences.

Conclusion

The first Environmental Roundtable for Eurodiaconia Members constituted a fruitful, necessary and important session to kickstart the conversation on sustainable practices and projects. There were common topics among our membership. However, the challenge now is to work towards them, to deal with them, and to set up the necessary structure to establish an environmental network within the Eurodiaconia membership and work together on environmental issues.