



Old Saint Paul's

Scottish Episcopal Church

The earth is the Lord's, and all that is in it
Psalm 24

**Lord of life and giver of hope, we pledge ourselves
to care for your people and world,
to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation
and sustain and renew the life of the earth.**

Listening to the people of Old Saint Paul's Church: our congregational eco survey

**Helen Tyrrell and Harriet Buckley
for the Eco-Group of Old Saint Paul's Church**

This is the most pressing problem of our world today, and if we don't act now, we shall be lost

In the latter half of 2022, the Eco-Group within Old Saint Paul's Church, Edinburgh, identified a need to sound out the views of the congregation on the pressing challenges presented by climate change and related environmental issues.

This report presents the findings of the survey which we carried out. The survey was developed in Google Forms, a pilot run was carried out and the survey questionnaire was then distributed to the OSP Congregation by email, with a few members receiving their copy on paper. Encouragement to respond to the survey was given regularly at High Mass, and in the White Rose monthly newsletter.

1 Who responded to the survey?

Forty-one people, including those who took part in the pilot, responded to the survey, although one form was returned nearly blank. The biggest number (18) comprised those aged 65 or over, with the second largest group, numbering 16, being people aged 20 to 45. Nearly three-quarters of respondents said they were completing the survey as individuals and on their own behalf, with 11 people responding as a member of a small household (1 – 3 people). 39 (94%) of respondents characterised their neighbourhood as urban or suburban.

2 Responding to God's call to care for the earth

OSP members were asked to rate the importance of taking action to combat climate change and to respond to related environmental issues. Thirty-five out of the forty (88%) responding to this question rated this as very or extremely important. Asked to comment, they said:

It is the most pressing problem of our world today, and if we don't act now, we shall be lost

We are stewards of God's world and cannot evade this responsibility

Doing nothing is just not an option.... we are facing global meltdown

For future generations – time is running out for them

No healthy world, no healthy people

However, not all considered environmental action an extremely high priority:

The idea that our use of fossil fuels is causing global warming is unscientific.... until around seven years ago, with some fluctuations, atmospheric warming was indeed registered....but it is now trending down again.

3 Responding to climate change in practical ways

We asked OSP members to describe ways in which they responded to climate change and related environmental issues at different levels – at home and in church, within the community and on a wider front – nationally and internationally. 37 OSP members responded to this question, with each being asked to identify all the different ways in which they responded. Nearly everybody cited reading and learning (95% of answers) and praying and worshipping (70% of answers) as their main approaches. Engaging in family and group discussion (51% of answers) also featured, and a few mentioned teaching others (usually in schools or colleges).

Members of the congregation were then asked to describe in detail how they translated their beliefs and priorities into practical action on a number of different fronts. Again, respondents were asked to select all items that applied to them. Their reported actions in different areas were as follows:

Home energy consumption: 38 people responded, with the main actions being:

- Cutting down on energy use (87% of answers)
- Making changes to home energy appliances (42% of answers)
- Improving home insulation (24% of answers)
- Switching energy supplier (18% of answers)

People said:

- *I have long lived as economical a life as I can*
- *As good stewards, we should minimise energy use*

- *We have installed solar water heating and electric panels*
- *While I do many of the things listed, I don't necessarily do them in response to climate change*

Reducing, Re-using, Re-cycling: 39 people replied, with the main actions as follows:

- Regular re-cycling – glass, paper, packaging etc (90% of answers)
- Reducing or eliminating plastic (85% of answers)
- Donating unwanted goods to charity shops (85% of answers)
- Reducing use of paper and printing (67% of answers)
- Re-purposing items eg yogurt pots for seedlings, old clothes (46% of answers)

People also said:

- *I use fabric from second-hand clothes shops for sewing projects*
- *We harvest rainwater for watering the garden.*
- *I've tried re-upholstering old furniture rather than buying new*
- *I've been buying fewer new clothes and limiting myself to essential purchase where possible*

Consumer habits: 39 people responded to this question, with the main actions being:

- Buying local (82% of answers)
- Cutting down on buying goods overall (69% of answers)
- Buying goods from charity shops (36% of answers)
- Buying from farmers' markets (28% of answers)

People also said:

- *I try to buy only from responsible sources*
- *I grow some of my own food*
- *Shopping for hemp or bamboo clothing*
- *Following recommendations from Ethical Consumer magazine*

Transport: 38 people responded to this question, with the main actions being:

- Changing regular modes of transport to more sustainable modes eg bus, cycling, walking (68% of answers)
- Reducing air travel (47% of answers)
- Buying – or considering – an electric car (34% of answers)

People expressed additional views:

- *Eliminating ALL unnecessary travel – none of us needs ‘a few days in the sun’!*
- *We have no car and don’t travel by air*
- *I use the Enterprise Car Club*
- *I’ve never owned a car and have cycled all my life. I hire a car only when public transport is really not an option*
- *I regret not reducing air travel, but all my family live in the US and I hadn’t seen them since 2018*

Personal finance: 24 people responded to this question, with the main items being:

- Donating to environmental charities (67% of answers)
- Choosing a bank with green credentials (38% of answers)
- Participating in green financial schemes (29% of answers)

People also said:

- *Investing in companies developing technologies and services to enable energy transition*
- *There are a number of reasons for choosing any of these, however climate change is not the main reason for my choices*
- *All companies claim net-zero and green-ness, but I’m not sure we have embraced this fully*

Encouraging bio-diversity: 31 people responded to this question, with the main actions being:

- Engaging in tree planting (58% of answers)
- Creating a small area of wild garden (52% of answers)
- Improving soil (48% of answers)
- Putting up nesting boxes (26% of answers)

People also said:

- *We keep bees!*
- *I use no pesticides or herbicides, and don’t mow the grass too often*
- *Once again, this is confusing several issues: I am very concerned to improve natural habitats, and increase bio-diversity, so do all of that in the productive vegetable garden that my wife looks after*
- *I teach about bio-diversity*
- *Cultivating bee friendly flowers, not using artificial fertilisers or pesticides*
- *I live in a tenement flat, but these have a small footprint relative to the population, so, good in that way....*

4 Advocating for change

We asked OSP members to describe their views and actions in advocating and campaigning in the face of global warming and related environmental issues. We asked that people respond to this at different levels – personally and at home, within OSP and on a wider front – at community level, nationally, even internationally.

First, respondents were asked if they were aware of Old Saint Paul's engagement with climate change and related environmental issues. 40 respondents (98%) said yes, they were aware, with only one saying they were not, believing that *we are being misled by the Green movement to accept an unrealistic net-zero target....*

Additionally, 16 people mentioned ways in which they were aware of or engaged with OSP's environmental advocacy. These were largely practical actions: re-cycling communion bottles; being a member of the OSP Eco-group and posting information about this on social media channels.

They said:

- *Being part of the OSP Eco-Group, exchanging reading lists/ideas; developing a Prayer Walk for Creationtide; developing, with another and group support, this Survey*
- *Although I'm not actively involved, I read pieces in the White Rose with interest*
- *I contribute to the White Rose Eco-Corner*
- *Helping with OSP Eco Group and representing OSP at diocesan level*

OSP members were then asked for suggestions for ways in which the church could be more pro-active – 22 people responded to this, offering practical ideas. They made many different suggestions:

- *We could have much more efficient heating. Keeping the doors closed when it's particularly cold. Switching on lights only when needed. Making sure that we're using only the correct environmentally-friendly paper for service sheets, trying to keep it to a single sheet*

- *We need to think about how people get to church – would a car pooling or lift-sharing scheme be possible? It might help to get older members to church*
- *Re-cycling candle remnants*
- *I'm really excited by the prospect of an air-source heat pump in the church*
- *I'd be really interested in OSP organising a session on financial aspects of tackling climate change eg. banking and investment options, pensions*
- *More active engagement with other churches eg Canongate, and environmental groups/NGOs*
- *As a community, I think it might also be fun to explore a Library of Things, where people can borrow items which they might not use very often (tools, containers, gardening equipment), rather than buying them new from Amazon (guilty!). Could be done online*
- *Learn from each other how to repair things*
- *Have we reviewed the cleaning products we use?*
- *Create an Eco-page on the website and create a link to the current and earlier editions of the White Rose*
- *Improve the garden for birds, bees, butterflies and other pollinators*
- *Erect screens for hymns, order of the liturgy, notices – rather than printed sheets*
Hold some services outside, perhaps in partnership with other churches
- *Sign up for support for local bird and wildlife groups*

At the same time, a few people expressed some reservations:

- *I think OSP strikes quite a good balance at the moment*
- *I'm not sure if we could go beyond what is being done already. There may be more immediate and human needs that the Church is better placed to devote its energy to, with greater efficiency*
- *Probably less of a focus on preaching and prayer, more opportunities for actions that make a difference*
- *We need to separate the notion of an apocalyptic global warming from the notion of sensible unselfish stewardship*

Next, we asked respondents if they contributed to local advocacy and campaigning work. There were 39 responses to this question, with one third of respondents saying they did and two-thirds saying they did not. The 12 who gave details said:

- *I'm a choir member with a presence at demonstrations about climate change*
- *Signing petitions, putting up posters*
- *Mainly through active involvement with the Scottish Green party.*
- *I volunteer with Spokes and Sustrans [cycling organisations]*
- *I engage with my students involved with sustainability issues in the field of architectural technology research*
- *I'm a member of the Borders SWT [Scottish Wildlife Trust]*
- *I contribute to the efforts of the Royal Botanic Gardens*
- *I donate money and more recently, participate*

Additionally, respondents cited membership of local or national environmental campaigning groups such as Living Streets [UK charity supporting everyday walking], Friends of the Meadows and Moray Place Feuars [residents of properties in Moray Place, Edinburgh].

At the same time, respondents were asked if they engaged in environmental advocacy on an even wider front – nationally and internationally. 39 people responded to this question, with 31% of these saying they did, and 10 of these detailing their engagement. They mentioned signing petitions, offering support for campaigning groups via social media and contributing to online debate and fora, as well as corresponding online with individuals and groups, including Green Anglicans. They cited:

- *Giving financial support for organisations campaigning on climate change, e.g. Friends of the Earth Scotland, Greenpeace, WWF*
- *Posting on social media, donating to organisations and discussing ideas promulgated by Extinction Rebellion*
- *Being a member of Eco Congregation Scotland*

However, one person said – *but I believe my contribution would be seen as negligible in the context of this Survey*

5 Priorities for further action and advocacy

Continuing with the theme of action and advocacy for change, we asked OSP members to share ways in which they would like to be doing more – on all levels.

22 people engaged with these issues, responding first with a number of ways in which they would like to be doing more on an individual and household level. They said:

- *I'd like to reduce plastics use further*
- *I'd like to change to an electric car, but I'd need on-street charging points to be in place. I'd also like to change to a heat pump, but am waiting for grants to become available*
- *I want to reduce my use of fossil fuels*
- *Buying fewer new items; I admit I hate browsing, so tend to avoid charity shops, but there are other options which I need to explore*

There was a great range of ideas expressed for further action within Old Saint Paul's itself:

- *I'd like to contribute to the work with children on environmental themes*
- *Continue to encourage with articles in the White Rose*
Sharing information on our road to going green (air source heat pump, solar panels, etc)
- *Help OSP to really tackle plastic*
- *I'd be involved in any change as far as is practicable*
- *Happy to support initiatives – I'm afraid I don't have any great ideas myself*
- *Is there any way we could do away with the weekly service sheets? A screen to play the service or an online option?*
- *I'd love to help out in the memorial garden*
- *I'd like to see us re-discover the richness of Creational reference in our liturgy, scripture and iconography. I think there is a small chance of frequent sermons on climate change support becoming 'white noise' or being dismissed as 'woke' among certain groups in the congregation, but a gentle re-visiting of familiar, much-loved liturgical traditions might be more universal?*
- *Being an active Eco-group member is the main thing for me*

- *It would be good if OSP could be encouraged to support or work with local groups pursuing environmental action and advocacy*

Within the community there is room for action in partnership. Respondents suggested:

- *Offering support for local community initiatives*
- *Encourage people to re-think the throwaway culture - consider how we might support the local community (especially students and the less materially established) to rethink throwaway culture.*
- *Shop locally, as we have many eco-friendly shops, churches and community groups*

On a much wider front, some respondents aspired to an entirely eco-friendlier world. One person said:

- *Holding governments on targets towards net zero*
- *Learn more from the needs and wisdom of our brothers and sisters in the Anglican Communion, particularly in island communities and the global south. They are far less greedy with energy and materials than we are, but will bear the brunt of the effects of climate change*
- *[As an architect] I've taken part in competitions/construction in Ireland, China, Sweden, and as a teacher I have international students working on projects where energy issues, reuse, material recycling and innovation are explored. eg mud brick construction in SA, bamboo in China, cardboard tube disaster housing, reusing plastic bottles, wind turbine design for urban areas, natural lighting, ventilation and water storage systems in urban India.*
- *Good citizenship demands responsibility, and many of the actions promoted by the green agenda are laudable for reasons other than climate change. I come from a family deeply involved in conservation of natural habitats.... brought up reading 'Silent Spring' [by Rachel Carson], hugging trees, saving injured animals and birds*

6 Identifying barriers to change

We were interested to know what barriers to practical action and advocacy OSP members might be confronting. We also asked people to identify possible solutions to these challenges. There were 23 responses to these questions.

We noted that barriers identified seemed to fall into three groups. These were: **personal and financial constraints; practical barriers;** and **structural and political barriers.** And these barriers confronted people at different levels – at home, at church and in the community; and at national or even international levels.

Personal and Financial Constraints: these featured lack of understanding of re-cycling materials and processes; confusion about what actually is re-cyclable; lack of information; lack of time to become more involved; many people unprepared to change their habits

6 respondents elaborated on these issues:

- *Longer grass with some dandelions is often seen as a bad reflection on the owner - the idea of 'a good lawn' seems to be linked to moral character!*
- *It's very difficult to find unwrapped vegetables*
- *Being a single-person household makes energy use less cost-effective and sustainable. Also, sustainable living becomes more laborious and time-consuming*
- *My main barrier is time – I'm time-poor, and that is what makes me a) more likely to buy groceries in plastic; and b) more likely to buy clothing and other items online*

Financial constraints and shortage of money featured conspicuously:

- *The age of my property makes change difficult and expensive*
- *The costs of home-insulation are very high*
- *I need advice about affordable alternatives to a gas-combi boiler in a tenement flat*
- *Solar panels are expensive to install*
- *Ageing means that I am slowing down and identifying more difficulties*
- *Double-glazing is an issue and government grants are not readily available*
- *There's a lack of information about the impact that different banks and investments can have*
- *Many people seem unaware or unprepared to change their habits*

One response presented a more optimistic picture:

- *I can't think of any barriers – we live in an ideal location for walking and taking the bus to pretty much anything we need; five minutes to local shops, 25 minutes to work car use is minimal – to visit elderly relatives or friends on the far side of town; living in*

a solid stone building is not ideal thermally, but it is actually mitigated by sharing boundaries and is good for several hundred years....

Practical barriers, particularly within Old Saint Paul's: 14 respondents highlighted a number of practical difficulties within the church. They said:

- *There's a lack of re-cycling facilities*
- *More information is needed about what is going on – could there be more in the White Rose?*
- *There's no smart board for service information*
- *The main barriers are presented by the limits to the building and what we can do to heat and insulate it*
- *Holding more meetings online has presumably reduced our use of transport*
- *We need to be communicating more with the Vestry and each other on ways to improve our game*
- *Heat distribution in the building is tricky; it dissipates rapidly and vertically*
- *A degree of group helplessness in the face of the enormity of the challenge. Lack of resources, the inevitable constraints posed by the church building itself*
- *But, more positively – It's easy to think that we are limited by the building, but there's still lots we can do*

Structural and Political Barriers: 17 people gave their views on barriers to change within the local community. They highlighted: the '*apathy of many people*', general poverty, competing community priorities, poor cycling infrastructure, lack of re-cycling facilities and lingering Covid restriction. Also mentioned was the lack of an identifiable neighbourhood community - *this is real city-centre living*

At the same time, respondents had a number of positive suggestions to make on ways of overcoming local barriers. They included:

- *We need to connect with the local community first, find out what they are up to or have visions for, rather than spearheading lots of new ventures*
- *There's no real barrier to getting to know your local representatives and lobbying them*

It seems that the more entrenched the structural barriers that hinder environmental action and change, the more powerless individuals feel in making any kind of impact.

15 respondents elaborated on this:

- *The barriers here are on quite a different scale, ie. the persistence of climate denial/scepticism at a significant level*
- *The Westminster Government is no friend of any aspect of reducing emissions or really tackling climate change by investing resources and having the political will to change events*
- *Political realities confront us – if you ban coal-mining, for example, people will lose their jobs*
- *There is active disinformation*
- *Political will dominates, and the influence of the oil companies*
- *I suppose the biggest barrier here is the inertia of large organisations and the influence of lobbying which may not be environmentally friendly. It's easy to get climate anxiety trying to think on this scale*
- *The WEF [World Economic Forum] brand of globalism is very dangerous*
- *Most of our MPs are understandably clueless when it comes to the relationship between these big power interests and climate change*

7 How can Old Saint Paul's Church support us in taking ongoing action?

The final section of our survey focused on asking respondents to identify ways in which Old Saint Paul's church might support us in addressing and taking action on the climate change crisis and related environmental issues. There were 24 responses to this question, identifying a range of ways in which the church might help. People said:

- *Talks from experts in the field on practical ways of stepping up efforts*
- *Dedicated prayer days?*
- *Facilitating meet-ups and working together with members of the congregation*
- *Being more vociferous in encouraging us to get involved; letter-writing campaigns, etc*

- *Perhaps by mounting a campaign on one specific issue eg energy use into which we could put a lot of group energy and work towards an identified outcome (perhaps undertake this as part of our Eco-Congregation Award Scheme action at Silver Level?)*
- *Making contemplation of Creation – through liturgy and scripture – as second nature as saying the Lord’s Prayer during Mass*
- *Helping the congregation to share items and skills as a community*
- *Mobilising those more knowledgeable to teach those of us less able how to save and invest for ecological justice*
- *Keeping up with sharing information....and occasional fun awareness-raising – an OSP Pedal on Parliament next year?*
- *Being more vociferous in encouraging our involvement.....in letter-writing campaigns, for example*

But not all respondents were as confident in their responses:

- *I’m really unsure, sorry....*
- *I’m afraid I need more information on this whole topic*
- *I ‘m not sure OSP can help more*

8 Observations and Suggestions

Analysing the great wealth of material that emerged from our Survey has enabled us to identify a number of observations and to make some suggestions for further action:

Survey Design - First, we may make a brief comment on the design of our enquiry. The Survey featured some amount of overlap within the questions, with the result that the responses demonstrated a fair amount of repetition. We might consider simplifying any future enquiry. We also observed that while most of the survey questions were fairly concrete in nature, some areas focused on more abstract concepts – for example, people’s priorities for future action and global advocacy. Respondents almost invariably “translated” such questions into practical answers. Again, this might offer pointers for future questionnaire design.

Our Group of Respondents - Those who responded to our Survey were relatively small in number – 41 people in all. While this was probably a greater number than we might have

expected, it was not a large sample. The age profile was not fully representative of the OSP congregation, in that most respondents were older people, with the free time to engage with the Survey. At the same time, Old Saint Paul's is a gathered congregation and the fact that most respondents reported living either alone or in small family units in the city centre or surrounding suburbs is fairly typical of the congregation as a whole. In future efforts might be made to include wider representation from the congregation.

It came as no surprise to us that the congregation of OSP is a thinking, reading, learning congregation, with prayer and worship underpinning all these approaches, and engagement in family and group discussion also featuring prominently. This is borne out by our wish to see more liturgical focus on Creation and more expert speaker and in-house discussion groups on climate change and related environmental issues.

Relevance of Questions to Individual Experience - Our respondents seemed able to respond most positively to questions about actions within their immediate sphere of operation – our everyday world of local actions and events, our homes and gardens, our neighbourhood and Old Saint Paul's Church. On a wider front, responses became much less certain, with distance even bringing a certain feeling of helplessness. This is entirely unsurprising, as global warming and urgent environmental challenges are almost too big for most of us to grasp fully.

- Both pessimism and scepticism were apparent and at times also a slight degree of smugness – in relation to air travel and the decision to go car-free, for example
- There were many calls for moves that were already happening eg weekly worship focus on Creation, more information in the White Rose, urgent attention being given to the heating system

Identifying Ongoing Action – OPS members were almost unanimously committed to the urgency of climate change and related environmental issues and to doing something about this. They identified a great range of practical measures for themselves, their homes and Old Saint Paul's Church and generally displayed optimism at these levels.

There is much for Old Saint Paul's to take note of and to consider. In particular, we highlight the following:

- A number of measures identified and put forward by respondents as new ideas are already in place. This suggests to us that stepping up communication, especially

between the Vestry and OSP members and from the Eco-Group to the Vestry in a whole systems approach could be very helpful

- It might be useful for Old Saint Paul's to discuss the relevance of further possible practical changes within the church, even giving consideration to measures that might not have been considered already or have proved impractical or even unpalatable, such as screens for notices, the order of services and weekly sheets, as well as car-pooling, alternative forms of heating and skills and goods exchange
- OSP can benefit from giving due balance to all the ways of "being Old Saint Paul's" identified in this Survey as important in addressing climate change and related environmental issues, emphasising particularly: the balance between liturgy and preaching, the importance of teaching and learning (eg guest lectures, study days, discussion groups) and the balance between local action and wider advocacy
- Old Saint Paul's might wish to recognise the minor notes of pessimism, occasional scepticism and fatigue that surfaced in the Survey response – the last, in particular, expressed as *I think we are doing as much as we can in the circumstances*

Action and advocacy – throughout this Survey, there appeared to be an overlap, and at times even a confusion between the roles of action and advocacy. This is an important potential dichotomy facing most Christian churches today, and one which Old Saint Paul's inevitably also confronts.

While many consider the role of churches as principally the focus for the praise and exultation of God and of his Son Jesus Christ, incorporating the call to help those in need through action, there are as many who strongly believe that a major role of the church is call for change in God's name. Many people again hold that these roles hold no real conflict, but adhere instead to the idea of responding to God's call as a continuum where Christian action informs wider debate on the nature of God in the world and our role as people of God in being agents of change, moving towards the realisation of God's purpose. There are few areas more pertinent today for the realisation of this purpose than that of climate change.

Helen Tyrrell and Harriet Buckley

for Old Saint Paul's Church Eco-Group, Spring 2023

Acknowledgements

Helen and Harriet gratefully acknowledge the support and help of the clergy and members of Old Saint Paul's Church in carrying out this survey, and in preparing the report. In particular, we thank:

The Rev. John McCluckie, Rector of Old Saint Paul's Church

The Rev. Dr Jaime Wright, Curate at Old Saint Paul's Church

Elsbeth Strachan, Convenor of the Eco-Group at Old Saint Paul's Church

And members of the Eco-Group: Elspeth Strachan, Guy Johnson, Jubin Santra, Kimberley Moore-Ede, Therese Christie (until 2022), Carrie Gooch