



In 2022, the 16th Assembly resolved “A call to action for climate justice: listening to First Peoples wisdom.” The resolution established a steering group that amongst other things, is tasked with sharing stories, expertise and learnings on effective strategies and resources to reduce emissions, prioritising the wisdom of First Peoples.

Towards Net Zero: Sharing what our church is already achieving on our journey to net zero.



Uniting climate action and social justice: Uniting Communities (SA)

As the first certified carbon-neutral organisation in South Australia, Uniting Communities is making bold steps towards their goal of becoming Net Zero by 2035.

Lee Sauerwald – Uniting Communities' Executive Director of Corporate Services – says there's a natural connection between taking action on climate change and social justice.

"UC's work is about enriching lives and uniting communities across South Australia. Our commitment to achieving Net Zero strengthens this work by supporting the people who are most at risk from the effects of climate change," he says.

"By focusing on environmental sustainability, we're supporting improved social wellbeing and financial outcomes for both our organisation and, most importantly, the people we exist to serve." In practical terms, Uniting Communities is making meaningful steps through a range of sustainable strategies, including:

- Championing eco-friendly infrastructure through innovations like U City – SA's first certified whole carbon-neutral building with a 6-star Green Star Rating.
- Advocating for improvements in energy efficient housing standards, especially for low income earners and renters.
- Investing in renewable energy and efficiency improvements, like installing onsite solar and switching to 100% renewable electricity by 2025.
- Making the transition to sustainable transportation for fleet vehicles and encouraging the use of eco-friendly transport for employees.
- Investing in carbon offsets to counteract emissions and implementing environmental purchasing and waste management practices to reduce landfill.

But being proactive on climate change means more than leading by example. Lee says that boldly advocating for sustainable business practices encourages other organisations to make the move towards Net Zero as well.

"Talking about our Net Zero journey is a simple but powerful way of supporting others to take this leap. The more of us who are committed to leading a zero-carbon future, the better for everyone."

To this end, Lee has recently shared Uniting Communities' environmental success story with community and business leaders across the Asia-Pacific region, presenting at a major sustainability conference in Hong Kong.

Speaking with global leaders was a valuable opportunity to help influence perceptions about sustainability principles and how they can be embedded across organisations of every kind.

“It’s so encouraging to see people and communities from other countries also making a difference,” Lee says.

“Collective action is the most effective way to address the damaging impacts of climate change. Charities and social service agencies like Uniting Communities have a vital part to play – not only in advocating for climate change action, but in taking responsibility for our own actions and behaviours.”

“Our sector is a significant contributor to the Australian economy, and it’s up to all of us – big, small, private or NGO – to take action now.”

For organisations and community groups ready to embark on their own journey towards Net Zero, Lee recommends a few key steps:

- Take the time to network with other organisations on their carbon reduction journey.
- Engage environmental sustainability experts to help establish and guide a carbon reduction pathway and any offset, measurement, reporting, and auditing requirements.
- And, most importantly, ensure you secure widespread support across your organisation’s leadership and stakeholders at every level.

“The key to our success has been establishing a committee to proactively lead the initiative and drive our core commitments,” Lee says.

“Crucially, having the endorsement of the Board has helped ensure that, when we want to take bold actions – like building the state’s first whole carbon-neutral building – we’re encouraged to make this step.”

Uniting Communities is proud to lead the way in taking meaningful action on climate change, and standing up for those who share their vision of a fairer, greener future for all



Pursuing flourishing for creation through action and advocacy: QLD Synod

What inspired the Synod to take climate action?

So many people across the Synod are working in their own spaces to care for Creation, whether it's starting a veggie patch with children at a Uniting Early Learning Centre, preaching about climate action in worship, collecting recyclables at church or rolling out a large-scale solar project across Blue Care residential aged care facilities. This was made very clear in the Plenty strategic planning consultation and engagement throughout the Queensland Synod, where environmental sustainability emerged as a key commitment.

This led to the development of the "A Flourishing Creation: Queensland Synod Action and Advocacy Plan to 2030". This is the first time we have documented our commitments in this way, but it's worth acknowledging the incredible volume of prior work of all kinds that has led us to this point.

Can you briefly tell us about the QLD Synod and it's "Flourishing Creation Action and Advocacy" plan?

A Flourishing Creation: Queensland Synod Action and Advocacy to 2030 was adopted at the 36th Synod in Session in 2022. It is a bold and ambitious north star for us to be guided by. Through this plan we renew our commitment to care for all Creation, to walk together with First Nation Peoples in order that we listen, learn, build friendship, and give of love for all that God has made.

The Plan recognises that each part of the Synod will engage with the commitments in different ways, with different interests and priorities, and offers optional pathways and opportunities for action.

How has faith influenced this commitment?

The church continues to be called to participate in God's mission, by standing up for what is fair, just, and right for the sake of the whole of Creation. We are facing an urgent ecological challenge and there is clear scientific evidence of climate change and its environmental, social and economic implications. We lament our direct and indirect contribution to this. Too often we have forgotten that we are part of creation, dust of the earth (Genesis 2:7), and to dust all return (Ecclesiastes 3:20). In our acts of stewardship, in the image of the servanthood of Jesus and the communion of the Trinity, we are called to live in sustainable ways, caring for and living in community with the natural environment for present and future generations.

What are your hopes and vision for the future?

Our vision is to contribute to a future in which we all work more closely with the regenerative cycles of creation and create a greener, fairer, healthier future for all. We are determined to improve our capacity to monitor and measure our impacts on the environment so that we can create real change. We need to remember that each action, however small, can make a difference.

What tips or encouragement would you share with other communities who want to start this journey?

- **Read A Flourishing Creation Action and Advocacy Plan** – it holds so many different ways to get involved and ideas on where to start.
- **We're all in this together** – Reach out to others who have already begun the journey. Everyone has different strengths and areas for growth, and people are so willing to share their advice, resources and ideas. We are all better together in this.
- **Then, start!** Pick one small thing and start there, you never know where it might lead. Share what you are doing and measure the impacts, keep changing and improving as you go.



Good news from Good Sammy (WA)

Good Sammy is a proud Uniting Church agency in Western Australia. Since being founded in 1958, Good Sammy's purpose is to create employment opportunities for Western Australians with disability and believes that creating inclusive workplaces is the foundation for an inclusive society. At Good Sammy, people with disability are empowered to make their own choices so they can identify their goals, feel connected to their community, and be supported as they work towards independence and employment aspirations.

Good Sammy is best known for their 27 op shops, located from Albany to Geraldton. More than 50% of the workforce is made up of people with disability, and the organisation is active in providing other employment opportunities.

Through their recycling initiatives, almost 7 million kilos of used goods are recycled each year, and they are an authorised collection organisation for the Containers for Change program. Overall, this has a huge impact on reducing waste and caring for the environment.

Not only does recycling goods prevent materials going to landfill, but it also reduces the number of new goods which need to be manufactured. This means the need for energy, water, raw materials, and transport is reduced, and therefore greenhouse gas emissions are reduced. Good Sammy is also responding to the Western Australian Synod's request for agencies to work towards Net Zero by 2040. They have employed a part time Carbon and Energy Advisor and established their 2021/22 and 2022/23 carbon footprint.

A Net Zero Action Plan has now been developed based on tackling the highest carbon emitting sources.

As Good Sammy expands, they are actively pursuing strategies to reduce emissions. This includes recruiting supporters to assist in installing solar panels, and they plan to test electric vehicles in their truck fleet, building upon their existing use of e-bikes.

There is also some major work happening to enable the reuse operations to be recognised as official carbon credit units because of the materials and energy saved. If this work bears fruit, more funds will be available to help the organisation's disability employment mission.

Good Sammy is a great believer in the "Circular Economy", and as governments reinforce the requirement to reduce emissions, it will be in a great position to respond to increased demand for recycled goods, both locally and globally.



Striving for sustainability: Aitken College

Aitken College is an open entry, co-educational, independent school in Greenvale, Victoria in association with the Uniting Church. At Aitken College, education is about providing opportunities and experiences for young people. The College motto 'In Mind and Spirit' reflects the nurturing of educational and spiritual growth. The unique site on which the College is located is welcoming and provides opportunities for students to learn about sustainability and care for their environment. Principal, Josie Crisara says that 'hands-on learning to demonstrate it is possible to make a difference, needs to be experienced by young people in order to give hope.'

The College prides itself in providing students with a set of values to become responsible members of our global world. College Chaplain Rev Deacon Gavin Blakemore believes that the school's philosophy and values which flow out of the association with the Uniting Church, are central to the focus on caring for creation. Gavin adds that 'the school's location on land that was open farmland only twenty-five years ago provides a wonderful opportunity for discovering natural world and learning to live in harmony with the environment.'

Dwayne Ganci is the Sustainability and Agriculture Coordinator for the College. He mentioned that the College has had a sustainability vision for many years and students are taught to care for the environment. Dwayne adds, 'The kids really act positively to this aspect of school curriculum. We have Sustainability Leaders in each of the classrooms who are supported by elected primary and secondary Sustainability Captains.' Several projects have arisen including a recent biodiversity project with Major Roads Victoria to ensure that vegetation from the local area is restored following the current extensive roadworks adjacent to the school.

The College is also working with Melbourne Water to regenerate the biodiversity of the local waterway called Brodies Creek and help establish it as a wildlife corridor. This has now become a regular service program for all Year 9 students. Another project which is part of their Precious Plastics initiative, involves collecting plastic bottle tops and using this material to make ballpoint pens, combs and pots.

Students explore the concept of recycling plastic waste, learn the environmental impact of plastic pollution, and investigate the process of plastic recycling. The collection of bottle tops is sourced from the school community.

Aitken College is also a recipient of the "5-Star ResourceSmart Schools certification" and is one of only three schools in Victoria to receive this certification. This program is managed by Sustainability Victoria, a Statutory Authority established by the Victorian Government, and organisations must renew their certification on a regular basis. The program evaluates biodiversity, waste, water usage and energy usage. Aitken College has been a ResourceSmart School since 2007.

Within the rapidly expanding suburbs in Melbourne's North, Aitken College sits as small oasis with market gardens and a mini farm key elements on its 18-hectare site. It is a sign of hope that we can empower the emerging generations to care for our Earth.



Advocacy and action: Uniting NSW/ACT

Uniting NSW.ACT is the social services and advocacy arm of the Uniting Church NSW/ACT Synod. In 2021, it set itself a target to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2040. As one of the largest not-for-profit organisations in Australia, this is no small commitment. So far, the organisation has cut its emissions by 25.1% between 2010 and 2023. It has installed over 16,00 solar panels across its properties, and is in the process of expanding its fleet of 4 electric vehicles and 28 electric charging stations.

Uniting NSW.ACT is also using its public voice to advocate for greater political action on climate change. Jon O'Brien from the advocacy team explains this work.

Can you briefly tell us about Uniting NSW.ACT's climate advocacy and collaboration with Church leaders, particularly from the Pacific Islands?

The Uniting Church has been concerned about care for the environment since its inception and the threats posed by climate change have been intensifying in recent years. In its 2019 meeting the NSW/ACT Synod voted (almost unanimously), to initiate a Climate Action Strategy. The resolution made three commitments: to advocate to all levels of government for reduced emissions; to take responsibility to reduce emissions across all parts of the church, and; to stand with young people in their advocacy on climate change (the School Strike 4 Climate movement was just beginning then).

Uniting, as the churches community services and advocacy arm, took a lead in advancing the strategy but with strong involvement from church leaders and members through five task groups. That aim to engage the wider church has remained while the core elements of the Strategy have evolved. In 2021 we held a planning conference to shape the next phase of the Strategy, which yielded important developments. These were to be bolder in our climate advocacy and to highlight the voices and perspectives of younger people, the rural community, First Nations peoples, and the Uniting Church Pasifika community. We put all these aims into practice in some way but the role of Pasifika leaders in climate advocacy has been a real strength. This reflects a longstanding Uniting Church concern for climate justice and knowledge that our Pacific neighbours are bearing the earliest and severest impacts of climate change.

In 2022 the Synod held a Pasifika led Uniting Church Climate election forum before the Federal election that year. Only Chris Bowen, then shadow Minister for Climate, of all the invited MPs attended. It was a lively, colourful, and passionate evening and Chris Bowen committed to meeting again with Uniting Church Pasifika leaders the following year. A second forum followed in October 2023 with Mr Bowen, now the federal Minister for Climate Change and Energy. The newly installed Moderator, Rev Mata Havea Hiliau, has continued speaking out on climate issues on behalf of the whole Synod and the Pasifika community. We are now planning our second climate strategy conference for May this year.

Can you tell us about how these two projects intersect?

They have to intersect don't they. We need both parts! Our advocacy would lack authenticity and credibility if we were not working to reduce our own emissions. And by itself, without advocacy for societal change, our emissions reduction lacks effectiveness- it simply won't be enough on its own

How has faith influenced this work?

As we said before the Uniting Church has a longstanding concern for the environment and behind that sits the conviction, expressed I think in a previous Assembly meeting, that “this groaning creation is God’s good creation.” While there are a range of views within the Uniting Church (we sometimes get emails saying our advocacy on climate is misguided) there is a conviction that our welfare is inextricably caught up with the welfare of all life. Another Assembly Resolution “for the Sake of the Planet and all its People” expressed it further- “The Uniting Church’s commitment to the environment arises out of the Christian belief that God, as the Creator of the universe, calls us into a special relationship with the creation – a relationship of mutuality and interdependence which seeks the reconciliation of all creation with God. We believe that God’s will for the earth is renewal and reconciliation, not destruction by human beings.”

What are your hopes and vision for the future?

I hope that we can continue to express care for the earth as a dimension of our mission. That will always include a prophetic aspect. So one hope is simply to be faithful to that mission. But we also believe that our future is reconciliation and renewal not destruction, so that means reducing warming to make a safer climate future possible. We want our advocacy to be successful as well!

What tips or encouragement would you share with other communities around the Uniting Church who want to start this journey? One thing we’ve learned is that there are already so many Uniting Church members and congregation taking action in sustainability, creation care and climate action. So, affirming that but also bringing people together for collective advocacy and supporting them in that, is important.



Learning to sustainably care for Country: Queenscliff Uniting Church

Queenscliff Uniting Church is located by the sea, just a short distance from Geelong in Victoria. The congregation has a contemporary and contemplative worship focus and seeks to connect with the local community. It has become known for its annual Sacred Edge Festival, held in May each year, which aims to build inclusivity, acceptance and mutual understanding and a respect for creation and diverse people and cultures.

Richard Allen, a member at Queenscliff Uniting, explained that around four years ago the congregation accepted an invitation from the Local Council to help build a Climate Emergency Response Plan. Along with other community groups, the congregation helped form a core group which worked on the plan. A great deal of interaction and community synergy grew out of this work.

A key motivation for the Queenscliff Congregation has been its understanding of the biblical instruction to care for God's creation. Understanding other faith perspectives on creation has also been important. Richard says, "learning how Indigenous peoples have cared for country has been very important and the congregation has now developed connections with the local Wadawurrung people of the Kulin Nation."

In the first year of the implementation of the Climate Emergency Response Plan (CERP) the congregation made three main commitments – install a solar battery, cease the use of gas, and educate the community on the CERP and the actions they can take.

These are now well advanced and being in a central location in the town, the local community can see that renewable energy is certainly a priority for the congregation. There is a buzz in the town and the work of the congregation is now a talking point. Worship at Queenscliff also encourages conversations about caring for the Earth through the sharing of contemporary readings, songs, and artworks. The congregation has still more work to become fully renewable and is seeking funds from a wide variety of sources. In the meantime, energy to meet their renewable "shortfall" is sourced from a reputable "Green Power" supplier.

Richard encourages other congregations to start the journey. He believes that doing an energy audit is a good place to start and there are organisations around to help. "There are opportunities around to obtain funding or subsidies and organisations are prepared to work with you once you start talking and looking around."

Richard also stresses that there are also great savings to be made in the congregation's budget by adopting renewable energy. "Acting on global warming is a win-win for the people, the Planet and all those who will come after us!"



Indigenous wisdom: Rev Tim Matton-Johnson

Listen to the wisdom of First Nations leader and Panninher man Rev Tim Matton-Johnson in a Zoom conversation with Assembly Policy and Advocacy Officer Raul Sugunananthan.



