



Guidance for encouraging fossil fuel divestment in the Church of England

Operation Noah is encouraging Anglican supporters of the Bright Now campaign to work with others in their Parish or Diocese to help raise the issue of divestment from fossil fuels in the Church of England. These notes provide additional guidance and other resources are available on the website www.brightnow.org.uk/resources.

Operation Noah is calling on the Churches and the Christian community in the UK to:

- Divest from companies involved in the extraction of fossil fuels
- Take a leading and influential role in the national debate on the ethics of investment in fossil fuels
- Support the development of clean alternatives to fossil fuels through their investment policies.



Mobilising support

Bright Now is part of a global movement calling for institutions to withdraw their investments from fossil fuels. Raising this issue through official church channels helps to push forward the public debate on the ethics of investment in fossil fuels. It draws the attention of those with responsibility for church investment policy to the growing support for divestment among church members. This challenges the national church bodies to re-examine how they can address climate change through their investment decisions.

The key reasons why we are asking the Church of England to divest from fossil fuels now are:

1. **Church policy** – the Church of England has already made commitments to address climate change
2. **Church finance** – investment in fossil fuels is seen as increasingly financially risky
3. **Our faith** – care for God's creation is central to the Christian faith. How we use our money as a way to witness to our faith is also important in our response to climate change.
4. **The science** – the urgency of the need to drastically reduce our dependence on fossil fuels in order to avoid catastrophic climate change is becoming ever more apparent.

Quakers in Britain have already made the decision to divest from fossil fuels backed by overwhelming support from Quakers at their annual meeting. Other religious institutions in the USA, Australia and New Zealand have also made commitments to divest, adding their voices to the growing fossil free movement.

The Church of England's response to climate change and investment

In the report *Sharing God's Planet* (2005)¹ the Church of England recognised our human impact on the environment and that concern for God's creation is fundamental to the Christian faith. It outlined recommendations for a practical Christian response to climate change.

¹ *Sharing God's Planet: a Christian vision for a sustainable future* (2005), Church of England Mission and Public Affairs Council <http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1258771/gs1558.pdf>

- Significant steps have already been taken through the *Shrinking the Footprint* campaign that aims to reduce the carbon footprint of the Church's buildings and operations. The campaign has adopted a carbon reduction target of 80% by 2050 (and interim 42% by 2020) in line with the UK Government's overall targets.²
- The report *Church and Earth*,³ the Church of England's seven-year plan on climate change and the environment, suggests that the Church should work towards divestment from fossil fuel extraction companies and towards a carbon neutral portfolio by 2020. As yet no commitment to divest has been made, although the Church of England Ethical Investment Advisory Group (EIAG) is currently engaged in a major review of its ethical investment policies.
- At present the Church of England's UK Equity Fund, Global Equity Fund and Investment Fund holds approximately £60 million of investments in major fossil fuel companies.⁴
- In February 2014, following a Motion from Southwark Diocese urging the Church to respond more fully to climate change, the General Synod voted to call on the national investing bodies to ensure that investment policy (including the option of divestment) is aligned with the theological, moral and social priorities of the Church. It also voted to establish a working group on the Environment to monitor this and other environmental issues. The EIAG is due to publish the review of ethical investment with regard to climate change in 2015.⁵
- At present the Church Investors Group stated position is to engage with companies that operate within carbon intensive sectors to report their carbon emissions and adopt emissions reduction schemes through the Carbon Disclosure Project.⁶

Why divestment is an urgent issue for Churches

The Bright Now campaign makes it clear that Churches need to respond more quickly and decisively on this issue to avoid catastrophic climate change. Operation Noah believes that a policy of influencing fossil fuel corporations through investor engagement is no longer appropriate given that they give no indication that they intend to switch away from their core business, of identifying, extracting, processing and burning fossil fuels.

Fossil fuel companies continue to invest billions of dollars every year to develop new fossil fuel reserves, while ignoring both scientific evidence and international commitments to limit global warming to below 2⁰ Celsius. Worldwide, known fossil fuel reserves already far exceed the total amount of carbon that can be safely burned without triggering climate catastrophe.



Divestment by Churches from fossil fuels would send a powerful message to governments, investors and the companies themselves that profiting from the destruction of the atmosphere and oceans is ethically, morally and financially unacceptable.⁷ Through the upholding of Christian values the Churches have traditionally had a role in leading the way on ethical investment choices,

² Church of England, Shrinking the Footprint www.churchofengland.org/about-us/our-buildings/shrinking-the-footprint.aspx

³ Church and Earth 2009-2016 (2009), Church of England www.arcworld.org/downloads/christian-CofE-7YP.pdf

⁴ Church Commissioners Annual Report, 2012

⁵ www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/general-synod/agendas-and-papers.aspx (Feb 2014, Environmental Issues)

⁶ Church Investors Group Position Statement on Climate Change www.churchinvestorsgroup.org.uk/

⁷ www.brightnow.org.uk/news/churches-need-end-engagement-divest-fossil-fuels/

for example, avoiding investments in arms, tobacco and alcohol. We call on policy makers in our churches to respond more deeply to one of the gravest threats to humanity.

How to raise your concern with the Church of England

The General Synod debates matters of national and international importance and considers and approves policies affecting the whole of the Church of England. However, investment policy is decided by three independent investment bodies: the Church Commissioners, the Central Board of Finance and the Pensions Board. The General Synod cannot decide on investment policy directly but it can make strong recommendations.

General Synod is made up of the House of Bishops, the House of Clergy and the House of Laity. It meets three times a year in February, July and November where any motions that are brought forward from Diocesan Synods can be debated. To put forward a motion an individual or Parish Church Council first needs to bring their suggestion to their Deanery Synod that meets four times a year. Your Parish Church Council will have representatives on your Deanery Synod. The Deanery Synod must pass the motion through a vote and then it is put forward to the Diocesan Synod. The Diocesan Synod will then vote on whether to put forward the motion to General Synod.

If it is successful the General Synod will then decide on the priority and timescale for when the motion is to be debated. This could be at the next meeting or sometime in the future. A General Synod member of the relevant Diocese will present the motion, which will be followed by time for debate and for bringing any amendments to the motion. General Synod then votes on the motion, and if it is passed, the relevant bodies of the church will begin to enact it.

Organisations both within and outside the Church of England can also make a request to hold a fringe meeting on a particular issue outside of the main Synod sitting or to have a display stand at the Synod meeting. This helps to build awareness and constructive dialogue about the issue being debated for members of the General Synod.

For further information about General Synod and relevant contact details please see the website www.churchofengland.org. You can also get involved by standing for Deanery Synod at your Parish AGM elections in spring 2014, or for General Synod in the summer of 2015.

Building local support

It is recommended that you build support for the campaign amongst church members, clergy and the bishop for your diocese. It will be helpful to set up a small action group with others in the area. Your Diocese Environmental Officer will also be able to provide advice on environmental issues and local contacts. See the additional resource guide *Building support for disinvestment* for ideas on raising awareness and encouraging action, plus other resources available on the website.

For further information about the moral, theological, scientific and financial rationale underpinning the campaign you can distribute the report *Bright Now: towards fossil free Churches* (available to download or hard copies can be requested).

If you are planning to put forward a motion please let us know. We may be able to put you in touch with others in your area that want to take action and can provide further advice or support.

Bright Now:
towards fossil free
Churches



Guidance on wording

The motion needs to be worded to ask the General Synod to take a specific action and must be backed up by facts relevant to the current situation. Here is some suggested wording:

This DIOCESAN SYNOD draws attention to:

1. The overwhelming scientific evidence of the damage being done to the planet through the burning of fossil fuels, that is already being experienced around the world, often affecting poorer communities most severely.
2. The huge reserves held by gas, oil and coal extraction companies that far exceed what can be safely burned in order to hold global warming below the internationally agreed level of 2 degrees Celsius.
3. The large proportion of the Church of England's funds that remain invested in major fossil fuel companies.
4. The urgent moral, scientific and financial imperative to withdraw investments from companies involved in extracting new reserves of gas, oil and coal as outlined in *Bright Now: towards fossil free Churches* (2013) plus other sources.

And recommends the GENERAL SYNOD to:

- a) Acknowledging the current review of ethical investment polity, to call on the national investment bodies to make an explicit commitment to divest from companies involved in the extraction of oil, coal and gas, as soon as possible.
- b) Request the national investment bodies to actively explore options for alternative investment in clean, renewable energy and other low-carbon technologies.



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