



## Guidance for encouraging fossil fuel disinvestment in the Methodist Church

Operation Noah is encouraging Methodist supporters of the Bright Now campaign to work with others in their locality or region to help raise the issue of disinvestment from fossil fuels in the Methodist Church. These notes provide additional guidance as a supplement to the campaign report *Bright Now: towards fossil free Churches* and other resources available on the website [www.brightnow.org.uk/resources](http://www.brightnow.org.uk/resources).

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

- Disinvest 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 disinvestment 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 Methodist Church to disinvest from fossil fuels now are:

1. **Church policy** – the Methodist Church has 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 disinvest from fossil fuels backed by overwhelming support from Quakers at their annual meeting. Other churches in Australia, New Zealand and the USA have also made commitments to disinvest, adding their voice to the growing fossil free movement.

## The Methodist Church’s policy on climate change and investments

In 2010 the Methodist Church recognised how pivotal tackling climate change was to the future of God’s planet. It encouraged local churches to become more active in addressing our carbon-intensive lifestyles and challenged all levels of the Church to take climate change seriously.

- The Methodist Church has committed to reduce carbon emissions ‘proportionate to the overall reductions necessary by 2050 of at least 80%’ with ‘urgent and immediate interim steps’, and it also accepts that ‘church policy in many areas, including the investment of church funds, will need to be reviewed’.<sup>1</sup>
- The Methodist Central Finance Board (CFB) has committed to assess the long-term environmental impact of its investments and aims to achieve a low and declining carbon footprint over its investment portfolios.<sup>2</sup> However, as yet this does not include a commitment to disinvest from fossil fuel companies.
- At present the Methodist Church’s UK Equity Fund holds approximately £58 million of investments in major fossil fuel companies. This equates to 6% of the £1 billion invested by the CFB.<sup>3</sup>
- The Joint Advisory Committee on the Ethics of Investment (JACEI) and CFB have stated that constructive engagement with companies is desirable in order to improve their environmental performance, with the option of disinvestment considered as a last resort. The CFB is also a member of the Institutional Investors Group on Climate Change, which set up the Carbon Disclosure Project that urges companies to disclose their carbon emissions and work to reduce them.

## Why disinvestment 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 as they give no indication of intending 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 less than 2<sup>0</sup> Celsius. Worldwide, known fossil fuel reserves already far exceed the total amount of carbon that can be safely burned without triggering climate catastrophe.



Disinvestment by Churches from fossil fuels would send a powerful message to governments, other investors and the companies themselves that profiting from the ever more rapid destruction of the atmosphere and oceans is ethically, morally and financially unacceptable.<sup>4</sup> Through the upholding of Christian values the Churches have traditionally had a role in leading the way on ethical investment choices, 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 take your concerns to the Methodist Conference

The Methodist Conference, which meets annually for a week in June or July, is the key forum to influence, challenge and uphold national policy and practices for the Methodist Church. Each

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<sup>1</sup> Hope in God’s Future: Christian discipleship in the context of climate change (2010). Methodist Church, Baptist Union, United Reformed Church <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/higf-studyguide-100909.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Climate Change: the challenge for ethical investment (2010). Methodist Church <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/pi-JACEI-report-2010-250310.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> CFB Funds Performance Report, 2012

<sup>4</sup> <http://brightnow.org.uk/news/churches-need-end-engagement-disinvest-fossil-fuels/>

District sends a number of representatives. To raise an issue of concern at the Conference any member of the church can submit a 'memorial' to their local Circuit or District Synod. These are short notes from a Circuit or District meeting that outline a concern, and point the Church and its resources towards a course of action. The memorial can only go forward to the Conference if the majority have voted in favour at the Circuit or District meeting, so it cannot be accepted from an individual or single church. If you are unsure what to do you can contact your circuit superintendent or the secretary of the District Synod (contact details are available on [www.methodist.org.uk](http://www.methodist.org.uk)).

The Conference has to reply to every memorial it receives and a committee will draft a reply, which is proposed at the Conference. The recommended reply will be published in advance on the website [www.methodistconference.org.uk](http://www.methodistconference.org.uk). If you are unhappy with the recommended reply, you can ask your representative to the Conference to bring an amendment, a 'Notice of Motion', to the Conference. The Conference will then vote on whether to accept or amend the reply. The agreed reply is then sent to the Circuit or District that sent the memorial.

Memorials from a local Circuit need to be submitted to the Conference by 31st March to be included at the Conference, and from a District Synod by 14th May, so you would need to find out when a local meeting has been scheduled prior to these dates. You need to submit your suggestion to the Circuit Superintendent or the Synod Secretary at least seven days prior to the meeting.



### Building support

It is recommended that you begin building support amongst ministers and church members prior to submitting your suggestion for a memorial. It will be helpful to get a small action group together with others in the area. Ask to meet with church leaders or the Chair of the Methodist District to discuss the issues. You could also give a presentation about climate change and the Bright Now campaign in your church or at a Circuit or District meeting. For further ideas on raising awareness and encouraging action see the resource guide on the website, *Building Support for*

*Disinvestment*, plus other resources including a PowerPoint presentation, films, newsletter article, Bible study, science briefing, national petition, etc.

**Bright Now:**  
towards fossil free  
Churches



**BRIGHT NOW**  
towards fossil free Churches

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; hard copies can be requested).

If you are planning to bring forward a memorial, please let us know. We may be able to put you in touch with other Methodists in your area who want to take action and can provide you with further advice or support. Please contact us at:

email: [campaigns@operationnoah.org](mailto:campaigns@operationnoah.org) or phone: 07804 059426.

## Guidance on wording

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

### **THIS CIRCUIT / DISTRICT SYNOD draws the Conference's attention to:**

1. The Methodist commitment to take seriously our Christian responsibility to care for the planet and address climate change (outlined in *Hope in God's Future*, 2009).
2. 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 nations most severely.
3. 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.
4. The large proportion of the Methodist Church's UK Equity Fund that remains invested in major fossil fuel companies.
5. 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 asks the Methodist Conference to:**

- a) Ensure that the stated commitment outlined in *Hope in God's Future* to take urgent and immediate steps to reduce carbon emissions includes an immediate review of policy on investment of church funds.
- b) Request the Central Finance Board to review its ethical investment policy on climate change to make an explicit commitment to disinvest from companies involved in the extraction of oil, coal and gas, as soon as possible.
- c) Request the Central Finance Board to actively explore options for alternative investment in clean, renewable energy and other low-carbon technologies.



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