

The Church of Norway's 10 year plan: Threatened life – a faith response

The Church's mission is to protect sacredness. The fragrance of sacredness protects the earth; without it the earth will be no more than a piece of raw material. If the earth and its life should be degraded to mere raw material, the earth would rise against humankind in the greatest slave revolt in history.

Martin Lönnebo, Swedish Bishop Emeritus, General Synod 2007

Let the eyes of your grandchild be your confessional mirrors.

Martin Lönnebo, Swedish Bishop Emeritus, General Synod 2007

The Lutheran Church of Norway is the state church of Norway with 3.9 million members and 1,285 parishes throughout the country. It has belonged to the Evangelical Lutheran branch of the Christian Church since the 16th century.

In 2007, its General Synod recognised the need for a profound change in the basic values, attitudes and behaviour of individuals and society in order to address the threat from climate change. It recognised that the Church has a particular responsibility in this process of change and concluded that there needs to be a new and profound reform in the Lutheran Church of Norway.

The following 10-year plan for action from 2007-2017 is a result of this. It challenges the Church's national and diocesan councils, parishes, individuals, and the government and parliament respectively.

The 2008 General Synod again discussed the issue and it was decided that the 10-year reform should be carried out as an ecumenical project, with the Christian Council of Norway and the Norwegian Church Aid as key partners. During 2009 the joint project, "Creation and Sustainability – a Decade for change in Church and Society", has raised public awareness on the need for a just and equitable climate agreement in the Copenhagen climate negotiations in December 2009, and is preparing a broad church presence at the summit.

The church also raised a public debate on the implications of a just and equitable international climate regime for Norway as a petroleum-producing country, and participated in the Christian Council of Norway's conference gathering churches to reflect on faith and creation.

The life of humankind is inserted into the life of the earth. This is the indigenous attitude to this issue. In the era of climate crisis we should perhaps realise that it is in humbly bowing towards the earth that we may really be stretching towards heaven.

Tore Johnsen, moderator of the Church of Norway
Sami Council, General Synod 2007

Ten Year Plan (2007-2017)

The year 2017 is an important year for the Church which has the Lutheran reformation as its historic starting point. It will then be 500 years since Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door in Wittenberg. Inspired then, by the faith of the Lutheran Reformation, the aim is that by 2017 all parishes will be 'green parishes' and each local joint church council will be certified as an 'environmental lighthouse'.

1. The General Synod challenges Church of Norway's national and diocesan councils to:

- immediately launch a sustainability reform to last until the Lutheran reformation anniversary in 2017, with effect on all activities of the church;
- work to clarify the ecological dimension of faith in all Church activities and in ecumenical co-operation with other churches. Individuals and parishes must be assisted in promoting an "earthbound Christian practice" where they follow Christ in the service of creation and fellow human beings. The General Synod requests that material be prepared for reflection and use in parishes; to renew the faith, as a challenge to involvement and action and to strengthen hope. This should also be a central topic in inter-faith dialogue;
- to involve and educate Church workers in this field. Parishes will need to co-operate at the deanery level, and lines of communication will have to be established for this work between parishes and the dioceses. Necessary structures will have to be established at the national and regional level. The excellent co-operation with environmental, solidarity and mission organisations must be developed further.
- to develop a special field of activity in each diocese, linked to regional specialties (eg local food in the Diocese of Nidaros, Sellafeld and oil exploration in the Diocese of Sør-Hålogaland);
- to challenge employers' and employees' organisations to see their joint responsibility in countering the continued growth of consumption and rather to demonstrate solidarity with our descendants and with people in other parts of the world. The Bishops should lead these efforts.

The earth's lifeboat has two oars, the technical one and the ethical one. What is important for the Church is to join all people of good will around the ethical oar.

Martin Lönnebo, Swedish Bishop Emeritus at the General Synod 2007.

2. The General Synod challenges parishes and local joint church councils to:

- give all parishes courage and guidance to live out the faith in a way which demonstrates that we are part of nature with a special management responsibility. In this we may receive much knowledge and inspiration from the traditions of the aboriginal peoples;
- to co-operate broadly with societies and organisations locally;

- to follow Christ in their lives and realise that charity today also implies involvement in the environment;
- to lift up the joy of a simpler life in our consumer society. The key to a necessary change of attitudes is to be found in self-denial and in the joy of a committed fellowship;
- to become "greener" parishes and work to have local joint church councils certified as "environmental lighthouses";
- to actively use tools such as Grønn Kirkebok (Green Church Book) and the Church Network for the Environment, Consumption and Justice;
- to celebrate "Creation Day" and to use the times of Advent and Lent to focus on environmental involvement.

3. The General Synod challenges us as individuals to:

- admire the greatness of God's Creation, to rejoice in his coming to the earth in Jesus Christ and to give thanks that through his Spirit he is creating and renewing life.
- to see that the good life first and foremost is found where we live. We do not need to travel all over the world to look for it.
- to make us conscious of what we can do, be concrete and live more simply in our daily life.

The General Synod challenges everyone to join the consumer network Grønn Hverdag (Green Daily Life), take the "environmental stride" and the climate test and make a personal climate promise (www.gronnhverdag.no and www.klimaloftet.no).

- to support and challenge fellow human beings to make active environmental choices in their daily life;
- to work to put environmental and climate issues on the agenda in local, regional and national elections;
- to challenge local politicians to work for a sustainable development locally.

4. The General Synod challenges the Government and the Parliament:

As a church we will support concrete and courageous efforts for the benefit of ourselves, coming generations and all life on earth. Thus, with all people of goodwill we challenge the Government and the Storting (Parliament) to form an all-party alliance to adopt a comprehensive and ambitious climate agreement. This must lead to radical cuts in Norway's carbon emissions and contribute actively to a sustainable use of the earth's resources. Among other things this agreement must imply:

- that Norway will work for a new and far more ambitious climate agreement between all states, but with differentiated commitments;
- that Norway will increase its help to poor countries to adapt to climate change. Rich countries must be challenged to pay their taxes on carbon emissions, in order for the income to be spent on climate projects in poor countries;
- that there must be a considerable increase in the research in and the use of renewable energy;

- that the extraction of petroleum will be carbon neutral as soon as possible.

As a petroleum producer and a manager of enormous incomes from this production, Norway has a particular responsibility. This responsibility must have the effect:

- that the petroleum industry does not lead to increased strain on vulnerable environments, particularly in Arctic and other northern areas;
- that foreign investments of the Government Pension Fund be moved to sectors promoting climate-friendly energy;
- that a larger part of the Government Pension Fund be reserved for climate research;
- that considerable amounts of money be spent on immediate measures, such as preventing the deforestation of tropical rainforests.

The economic philosophy of growth, dominating in national as well as in private economy, is immoral. The UN Development Programme has stated that the consumption of resources in industrialised countries must be reduced to one tenth of the present level in order to be globally sustainable. Political authorities must implement necessary measures and demand that we all contribute.

We must all renounce some of our consumption for the benefit of the fellowship.

Thus, political authorities must:

- present clear requirements to industry and formulate necessary regulations;
- adopt courageous and unpopular resolutions demanding something from us all.

Thus, there is urgent need for a national strategy and an action plan for sustainable development.