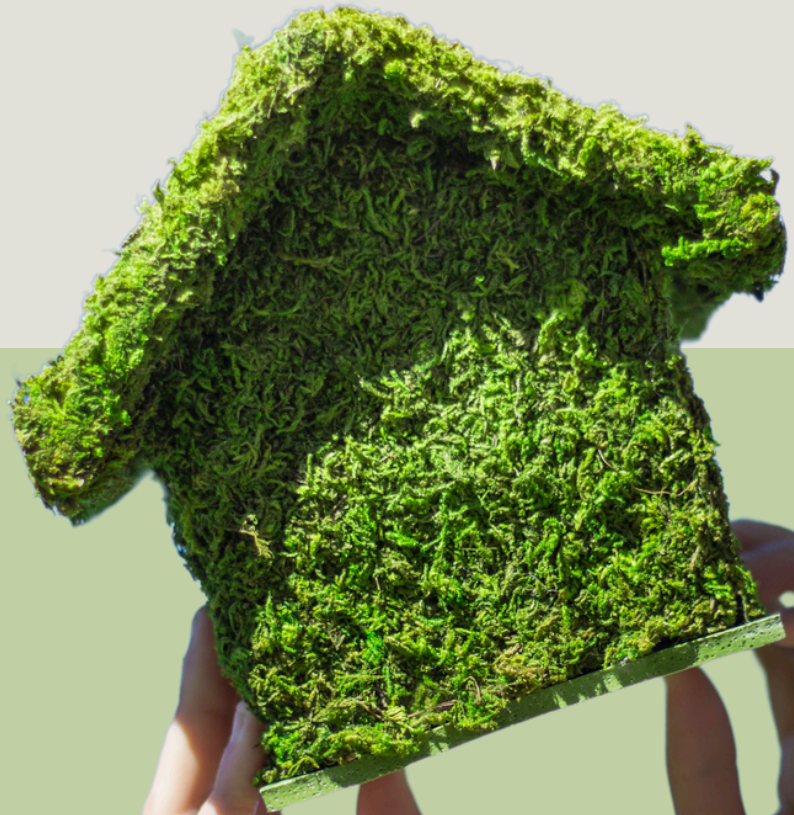
BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

Thinking about mission, property, and caring for creation



Written By
PCANZ Emissions Reduction Group

Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

INTRODUCTION

As part of its mission to make Jesus Christ known, the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand is committed to caring for creation. We are captivated by the vision of a new heaven and earth coming into being through the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead.

It is often overlooked that, before anything else, God created human beings to be **caretakers of creation** (Gen 1:26). As we live into this calling, we can think of the church as a priesthood in God's Temple-Garden. In this way, our caring for the earth anticipates a flourishing creation as God always intended.

The problem is that our current ways of being and doing Church can inadvertently cause harm to creation. Today, the climate crisis is the defining crisis of our time. **It has never been more urgent to take seriously our calling to care for the earth.**

But we can change. **By integrating eco-conscious processes** into our regular rhythms, we can significantly reduce our negative impact on the earth. To that end, in 2021, the Special Assembly agreed to form an Emissions Reductions Task Group to promote initiatives that help the various parts of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions.

One area that we can reduce emissions is by making our buildings more eco-friendly. When embarking on a building project (new build and/or renovation), we can make conscious decisions that reduce our overall environmental impact.

This is part of making our buildings missionally "fit-for-purpose", a requirement in the Property Handbook composed by the Church Property Trustees[1]. More than that, though, it is an opportunity to imagine how our buildings can be Temple-Gardens that witness to God's renewing work in all creation.

What might it mean to build churches: that take seriously the call to care for creation? that assist in forming Christians as carers of creation? that provide an oasis of solace and hope to communities (both human and non-human) facing the challenges of climate change? These questions, far from being a barrier and a hindrance in planning for a building project, should open new ideas and conversations that better enable the Church to live out its mission.

This short document is for any group, congregation, or organisation in the PCANZ looking to embark on a building project. It contains two sections:

1. a series of practical considerations to better integrate creation care into your project

2. a theological foundation for considering the purpose and scope of your building project

We hope you find it helpful!

The PCANZ Emissions Reductions Workgroup
Pentecost 2024

TreeChurch and Gardens, Waikato

ABOUT US

The PCANZ Emissions Reductions Group was formed by the Council of Assembly to promote initiatives to help all parts of the Presbyterian Church to reduce emissions. To contact the Group, please contact the Assembly Executive Secretary: aes@presbyterian.org.nz

TreeChurch and Gardens, Waikato

BUILDING DESIGN: SITE, HABITAT

How does the building design optimise the potential for the site as a place that is functional and flexible, but also accessible, beautiful, and nourishes human and non-human flourishing? What does the building design say about our identity in Christ, and how we value creation and beauty? What does the building say about our understanding of bi-cultural and inter-cultural realities and aspirations?

- **Siting & Orientation of the Building:** Does the building design use the space available optimally? How large does the building footprint need to be? Does the building design do justice to the site's history: Acknowledgement of mana whenua? Of previous faithful Christians? Of other creatures who reside there?

- **Functionality:** Is the design amenable to multi-functional uses?

- **Beauty:** Is the design aesthetic? Does the building enhance the beauty of the surrounding landscape? How is the beauty of creation made present to those within the building? e.g. windows with views, natural light. Does the design consider acoustics? e.g. communal worship, places of silence.

- **Future-proofing**: Does the design ensure a building with a long life-span that, in the future, if necessary, could be modified?

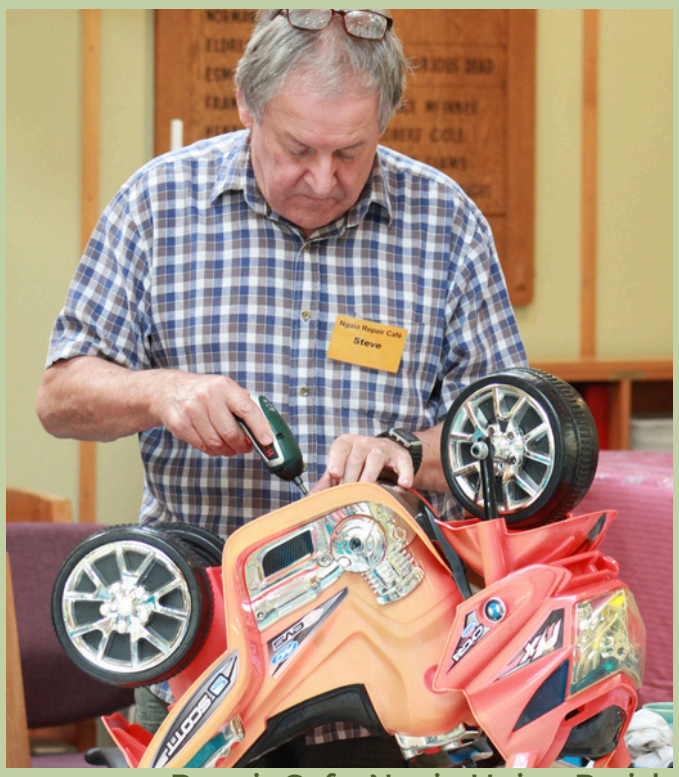
MATERIALS

While buildings in Aotearoa New Zealand must meet the building code, not all building materials are equal. All building products have a life-cycle. Their production (and even their transportation to site) requires natural resources, involves the use of energy and water, and produces pollution and waste. All products have within them embedded emissions (embodied carbon/embedded energy).

- Can the project **re-use** and incorporate **recycled** materials – without compromising energy efficiency; aesthetics; functionality, future-proofing?
- Give preference to **low-carbon/ low embedded** energy products.
- What is the origin of the building materials? Give preference to materials that are **natural and sustainably-produced**.
- What is the **life-span** and **durability** of the product? Spending more initially often means a longer-lasting, lower-maintenance product and thus reduced resource-use in the future. Are building materials recyclable should the building need to be modified in the future?
- Many building materials release volatile organic compounds (VOCs). These contribute to pollution and can, over time, be toxic. Give preference to **low-VOC** materials. e.g. paints, flooring.
- How are you going to minimise **waste** in the building process? e.g. Surplus/"waste" building materials? Packaging? In the case of renovated buildings, the reuse/recycling of materials? In the building tender, contractors need to be asked how they will minimise waste, and how they will recycle the different types of waste produced in the building process. A waste management plan should be required from contractors.

ENERGY

Buildings can be very energy-hungry, needing to be heated, and as future summers get hotter, potentially cooled. The objective here is optimised energy-efficiency.



Repair Cafe, Ngaio Union Parish

- **Temperature Control:** How will you heat and cool the building? Give preference to low-emissions, renewable energy. e.g. passive heating (utilising the sun); solar-energy; use of shading to minimise heat in summer.
- **Insulation:** Optimise energy-efficiency by installing maximum insulation – going beyond the minimum R-value required.
- **Lighting:** Utilise LED lighting, light-timers.
- **Energy generation:** What is the potential to generate and store energy on site? e.g. solar panels and batteries, miniature wind turbines?
- **Efficiency:** Ensure appliances within the building optimise energy-efficiency. e.g. fridges, freezers, hand-air-dryers.

WATER

Water is a precious resource. Think about how the project design can conserve and protect water on site.

- **Harvesting** rain-water that can be used within the building or on external gardens.
- The potential to **reuse** greywater on-site for gardens.
- Ensure water-using appliances within the building are as **water-efficient** as possible. e.g. low-use toilets; showers.

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

BUILDINGS OF WORSHIP IN THE BIBLE

Buildings for worship feature throughout the Biblical narrative. The Tent of Meeting, built following God's instructions (Ex 25-30), was the venue where the sojourning Israelites could encounter and worship the God who had liberated them. Later, the Temple in Jerusalem becomes the site where Jews and God-fearing Gentiles from all nations came to worship God.

In the New Testament building and Temple imagery continues, employed to describe the newly birthed Church (1 Cor 3:1-23; 6:19; Eph. 2:11-22; 1 Peter 2:4-10). That New Testament writers describe followers of Christ as 'God's Temple', 'a royal priesthood' has, at times within Church history, led to an over-emphasis upon the truism that "the Church is people" and been accompanied with a downplaying of the significance of buildings.

However, such a binary – that sets people and buildings in opposition – is unhelpful. The Church is indeed composed of people who, as 'living stones', are being built together. Nevertheless, **buildings have always been, and will continue to be, integral to the life of worship and discipleship of Christians**.

BUILDINGS OF WORSHIP TODAY

In our contemporary context, discussion around church buildings often revolves around the theme of 'mission', and whether a proposed building project (new build and/or renovation) is fit for the purpose of a congregation's mission statement.

It is vital to consider the missional context and the activities being undertaken in a church building now, and potentially in the future, to ensure good building design and construction: Is the population in the area growing and therefore is congregation-size likely to grow? Is space required for a growing children's ministry; youth ministry etc.?

These practical considerations mean that we tend to think of our buildings primarily in functional and instrumentalist terms. In other words, the mission of the Church is something we do and our buildings exist to enable us to do it. They are means to an end. While this is true to an extent, we risk over-emphasising these functional considerations to the detriment of other considerations.

BUILDINGS AND MISSIONAL IDENTITY

Mission is not merely the activities/events/ministries that churches "do" but more broadly, **mission is something the Church "is"**. That is, the very existence of the Church – as a people 'called out', 'set apart', incorporated into a new way of being human together – is a miraculous work of God. The mission of the Church is to live into this identity of being the people of God. An understanding of mission as connected to identity and to our way of being helps ensure Church buildings don't come to be viewed simply in instrumentalist or functionalist terms.

To expand further on this, church buildings exist not merely as sites for "doing missional activities" but rather, are, in their own right, formative and communicative. **Buildings, like all human-artefacts, shape the identity of their user.** That is, we construct architectural structures and then, over time, as we dwell within them, they form us. Through our interaction and engagement within these places and spaces – with each other, with creation, and with the Creator God – our relationships with the other participants – people, creatures, God – are deepened. Our lives become woven together.

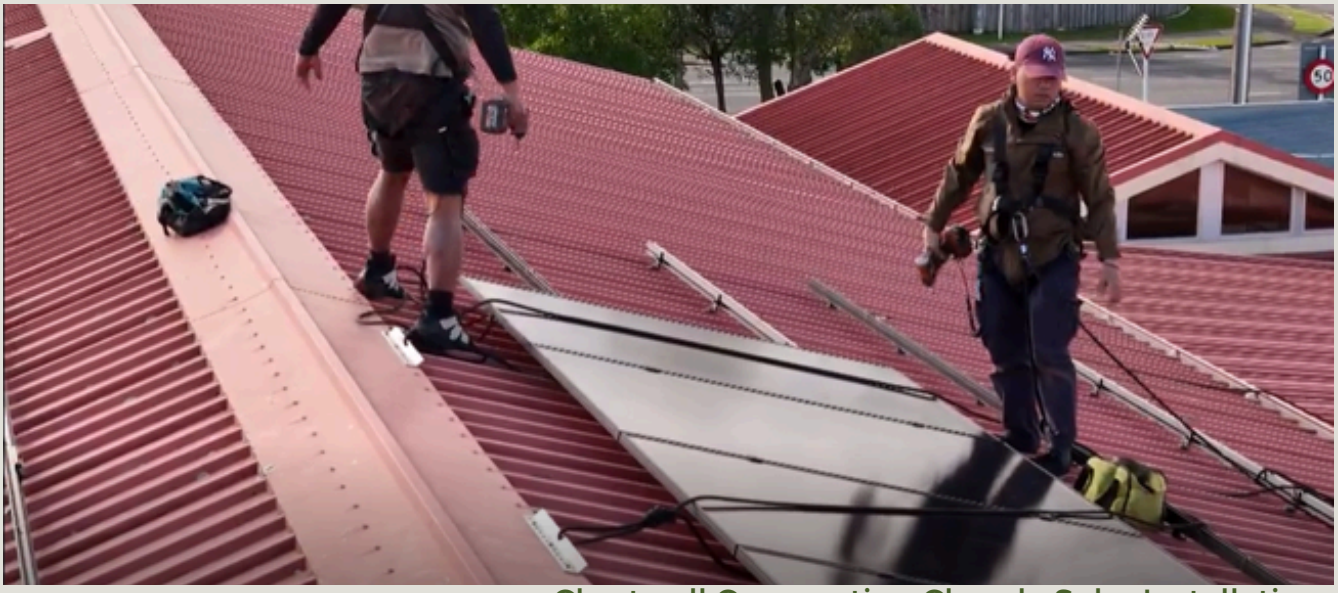
Church buildings are also communicative. They tell a story of this weaving: of the history of the land, of the community of faith who worship in this place (historical and present-day), and can also offer powerful testimony to God's steadfast ongoing faithfulness to creation and the Church. Thus, at their best, church buildings should be understood not as static, inert structures but rather as Spirit-filled spaces, forming and nourishing the collective lives of the congregation, providing a place of welcome for strangers, and communicating to the world the Church's faith in God's reconciling love for all creation.[2]

The realities of climate change, specifically increased risk of extreme weather events (rainfall, extreme heat and drought), must be taken into account in the design of buildings fit for purpose for the present and for an uncertain future.

A BIBLICAL VISION FOR OUR BUILDINGS: THE TEMPLE-GARDEN

Integral to a Biblical anthropology is the belief that humanity is made in the image of God and therefore has a particular vocation. The entire cosmos, brought into existence by a loving Creator God, serves as the LORD's temple (Psalm 24) – with all its inhabitants (human and non-human) summoned to give glory to their Creator. Genesis 2 views humanity as placed within this Garden-Temple to 'till (avad) and keep (shamar) it' (v15). These words, 'till' and 'keep', are commonly used in the Old Testament to describe the role of the priests working within the Temple and safeguarding it (Numbers 3:7-8; 8:26; 18:5-6). Elsewhere, the term avad is often translated 'cultivate'. We tend to employ this English word primarily when referring to agriculture but the word is also the root from which we get the word 'culture'.

Thus, the Bible offers a vision in which the human activity of safeguarding creation and human creativity and culture[3] – including architecture – are inextricably connected. **Care of creation and the ingenuity and beauty of human cultures come together and find their definitive expression in the worship of the Creator God.** In our contemporary world facing significant ecological challenges this imagery of ourselves as Gardening-Priests and of churches as Garden-Temples is particularly apposite. How might this imagery inspire us as we construct buildings that testify to God's story of reconciling love for humanity and all of creation?



Chartwell Cooperating Church, Solar Installation

REFERENCES

[1] "For any proposal, the congregation is asked to explain how the proposal fits into the congregation's mission plan and to demonstrate how it will contribute to God's mission and the growth of the Church. The congregation will also be asked to provide evidence of its financial sustainability."

[2] In this sense, Church buildings are akin to wharenui on a marae. They are not simply buildings for specific activities but storied structures that shape their users/inhabitants and communicate their story to the world.

[3] In Exodus 31 the artisans Bezalel & Oholiab are filled by the Spirit of God to create and construct beautiful objects to be used for worship in the Tent of Meeting. Human creativity and culture offered back in worship.

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of Aotearoa New Zealand