

GREEN EVENT PLANNING

For regional and national gatherings
in the Presbyterian Church of
Aotearoa New Zealand



Written By
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Reduction Group*



Presbyterian Church
of Aotearoa New Zealand

INTRO

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 greenhouse gas emissions.

One area that we can reduce emissions is **the way we run our regional and national events**, including conferences, General Assemblies, and Presbytery gatherings.

Through conscious planning, these events can be “green events”.

A “Green event” can be characterised as any event that attempts to reduce emissions, waste, and promote environmental sustainability through action-oriented measures. There are ways to adjust our actions to make our gatherings more sustainable, from planning and promotion, to implementation and clean-up. Greenhouse gas emissions from events come from four main categories: travel, plastic waste, food production and energy use.

This document is intended to help you make conscious eco-friendly decisions when planning your next event. We hope you find it helpful.

The PCANZ Emissions Reductions Workgroup
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STEP ONE

IN PERSON OR ONLINE?

One of the easiest ways to reduce the environmental impact of an event is to have it online. Discuss whether an event needs to be in-person.

Some considerations might include:

- The primary purpose of the event (e.g. relationship-building, business meeting, resourcing)
- How often the event is (e.g. twice a year, quarterly, annually)
- What will be gained by being in-person?
- What is the cost of being in-person (e.g. economic cost, opportunity/time cost, environmental cost)?
- What is the cost of being online?

In discussing these things, you might decide that an event or meeting should always be in-person, always be online, or a mix of both.

Reports claim that travel accounts for between 70% and 90% of an event's total carbon emissions. The average event attendee has an impact of about 180 kg of CO₂ a day.

Travel doesn't just mean flights. It accounts for the travel to and from the event e.g. ubers, buses, trains, etc. Especially when hosting a multi-day event, you must take into account the impact of travel to and from your venue every day.

Since we know that transport and travel is the largest source of emissions at events, it is worth exploring models for future gatherings which could limit travel.

Transitioning to virtual events is the most tangible and effective way to reduce carbon emissions when organising any event or large gathering. A recent energy report shows that transitioning events to a virtual platform will reduce related carbon emissions by 99%.

With online events, in-person collegiality is easily lost. One possibility is to create local hubs and host a hybrid online-in-person gathering.



STEP TWO

ECO-FRIENDLY PLANNING

TRAVEL

- Consider providing a carpool option to event attendees
- Venue is easily accessible to public or active transportation
- Promote the use of carpooling, active and public transportation, whether it's internally organised or left up to attendees, make it clear that it is an option!

WASTE

- Recycling and compost options for waste disposal at venue
- Use crockery to avoid single-use
- Consider materials being used and/or purchased for the event; try to limit waste and promote reuse and/or recycling
- Avoid passing out printed materials or other unnecessary waste. Ensure documents are available online. When printed material is necessary, use recycled paper.
- Encourage event attendees to bring their own reusable water bottles and coffee mugs. If the venue does not have crockery ask event attendees to bring mug/reusable dishware.

FOOD

- Try and find local caterers who can offer plant-based meal options.
- Try to provide local produce and/or Fair Trade products and/or try to ensure a vegan/vegetarian option, or consider going completely meat-free.
- Request pitchers of water and juice rather than bottles or cans and request that condiments be provided in bulk dispensers rather than individual packets (ketchup, salt, pepper, sugar, butter, milk, cream).
- If food is being composted, make sure you remind event attendees of compost bins before and during the event.

ENERGY

- Heating sources at the venue (avoid buildings using fossil fuel heaters)
- Natural lighting at venue to reduce electricity
- Turn off all lights and unplug electronic equipment when it's not in use

STEP THREE

COMMUNICATE AND PROMOTE

Communication is important if commissioners are to understand and get on board with initiatives. In the pre-gathering communications, advertise the gathering as “green” and continue to communicate during the event.



STEP FOUR

DEBRIEFING THE EVENT

After the event is finished, make sure you evaluate what worked well and what didn't work well. Consider what you could do better in future and make a note of it (especially if you won't be the one organising it next time). The goal should be carbon neutrality (events that don't result in any net increase of carbon in the atmosphere).

MOVING TOWARDS CARBON-NEUTRAL EVENTS

1. **Identify Emissions.** The first step in creating a carbon neutral event is to identify all of the greenhouse gas emissions associated with the event. Major emission sources include travel, energy consumed, paper and resource use and waste generation. By identifying any sources of emissions, they can be measured and mitigated.
2. **Reduce Emissions.** Emissions can be reduced through a variety of measures, such as those listed above. It is also important to ensure the venue is able to provide required data for monitoring and evaluating energy and water use throughout the event.
3. **Engage Participants.** Engage participants to raise awareness of climate change issues and actions that can be taken to reduce emissions by stating it in material leading up to the event.



4. **Measure Emissions.** Online calculators will assist in determining the amount of emissions produced at an event. A few recommended resources include:
[360 Carbon Calculator](#) (by A Rocha)
[Toitū Envirocare](#)
[My Climate](#) (designed for events)
<https://zerowasteevents.org.nz/>

If measuring emissions is not able to be done by the planning committee, the New Zealand-owned business [Ekos](#) can help with measuring and offsetting.

5. **Offset Emissions.** There are several ways to implement an offset for the emissions produced. The most ethical way to do this is via tree planting. One way to do this would be to work with local churches to identify either land owned by the PCANZ or local restoration projects where trees could be planted. Another way would be to pay a New Zealand business to plant trees on behalf of the PCANZ such as [Trees That Count](#) or [Ekos](#).



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THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Often we think of our regional and national Church gatherings in practical ways: we gather to conduct business, to share stories, to celebrate and commiserate together, to discern the guidance of the Spirit, and to be resourced and equipped for ministry. Certainly, these are important reasons to gather.

Typically, though, before we get to work doing all these things, we first gather to share Holy Communion together. The meal is a reminder that, in gathering as the people of God in this place and at this time, we are a sign of God's reconciling and renewing work in the world.

In the Old Testament, the gathering together of the united people of God signified the ushering in of God's new reign of peace. Not only would "swords be beaten into ploughshares" (Isaiah 2) representing peace between people, but the land would also be restored and flourish "yielding its increase" (Psalm 85). It is a wonderful vision of a world made new – a world in which all human and non-human life can flourish together with God.

In the New Testament, wherever Jesus gathered people around him, signs of new creation were made manifest. These signs included miraculous healings of humans, but they also included the transformation of the created world (e.g. the feeding of the five thousand or the Wedding at Cana). These signs of abundance were a foretaste of God's new creation in which the earth itself will thrive and there will be enough for all.

When the Church gathers for "business", it's important not to lose sight of this bigger picture. Before we knuckle down adopting budgets, introducing legislation, and presenting reports, we are first and foremost a gathered sign of God's new creation.

Certainly, we should reflect this hope in the way we conduct business with one another (i.e. by beating our proverbial "swords" into instruments of peace). However, it's easy to forget that **we can also conduct business in a way that helps the earth to flourish as well.**

Seen in this way, working practically towards Carbon Neutral Events is an embodiment of the hope we express in Communion. It is a means by which we live as a sign of God's new community in the midst of a restored and healed creation.





Restoration of School Creek, Flagstaff Community Church, Dunedin

SOURCES

- Event Guide to carbon neutral and green events by The University of New Brunswick found at: https://www.unb.ca/initiatives/_assets/documents/sustainability-/green-event-guide.pdf
- Trend towards virtual and hybrid conferences may be an effective climate change mitigation strategy. Yanqiu Tao, Debbie Steckel, Jiří Jaromír Klemesš & Fengqi You. Found at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-021-27251-2>
- How To Overcome The Environmental Impact of the Events Industry; <https://www.beaconlive.com/blog/how-to-overcome-the-environmental-impact-of-the-events-industry#air-travel>

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



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