

REPORT ON THE ACTIVITY OF THE ECO-CONGREGATION COMMITTEE

1. The aim of the eco-congregation program

RCH is committed to responsibility for the created world, and for this reason, similarly to the environmentally conscious program of the Church of Scotland, developed a voluntary program for environmental consciousness and protection of the created world, aimed at Hungarian congregations and church institutions, helping those who are willing to act. While numerous ideas and local initiatives have been launched and realized in our church in this area, this present co-operation aims at strengthening these and starting new ones.

Our Scottish brothers' experience of several years, along with their national network is a great help for us in realizing this task the best possible way.

Upon launching the program, the following objectives were set:

- connecting people involved in this field with the congregations, providing them with a forum
- creating a webpage specifically for this purpose
- publishing ideas and examples
- forming a well-prepared body, fit for professional co-ordination (Eco-Congregation Council)
- founding an „eco-congregation prize” to motivate congregations, institutions and Christian communities, who could apply in a competition published by the Eco-Congregation Council

2. Creation and operation of the program

European Christian Environmental Network

One of the most significant programs of the European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN) is to spread the *environmentally conscious way of thinking and approach to leadership*, as well as its naturalization in the service of the greatest possible number of church organizations.

Within the framework of the Eco-Management team bilateral partnerships have been forming, with the aim that a church organization with more detailed, better-developed environmental program should help another church organization in forming their own eco-program. Participants include Sweden, Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic, Romania and the United Kingdom.

Agreement on co-operation with the Church of Scotland – October 2010

As part of the ECEN program, in co-operation with the Church of Scotland, the RCH applied for support. The framework of the shared initiative is ensured by the agreement of co-operation between the „Church and Society” Committee of the Church of Scotland and the RCH, signed in October 2010, aimed at launching an eco-congregation program in the service of RCH, similar to the Scottish model. Eco-Congregation (www.ecocongregation.org) is a flourishing ecumenical movement throughout the United Kingdom, helping church congregations to live out their environmental responsibility along with their Christian faith, encouraging environmentally conscious Christian action in the life of Christian communities and believers, and effectively supporting congregations in their actions as sustainable Christian communities.

Eco-Congregation field-trip, Scotland – 4-6 March, 2011.

A three-member delegation of RCH (Eszter Karsay, Tamás Kodácsy and László Pál Szalay) visited an exemplary functioning model of environmentally conscious attitude. In the ever more urgent issues of climate change justice could not be done merely by theological theories, but the achievements of natural, engineer, social and human sciences and artistic approaches should also be included in the proposals for solution. During the discussions practical ideas emerged, such as central distribution of recycled paper for office and school purposes in the four church districts, moreover, developing different systems of criteria for urban and country congregations,

who could register on the webpage of the initiative to become members of the network and thus get hold of the tools and supplements.

Establishment of the Eco-Congregation Council – 4 January, 2012. november 12.

Established within the framework of ECEN and supervised by the Ecumenical Committee of the Synod, the Presidency of RCH established the Eco-Congregation Council to co-ordinate this independent program. The voluntary body, comprising committed and experienced pastors and expert church members, is called to provide the initiative with a thorough professional background, supervise the programs, and suggest propositions for the Synod. Upon the first meeting, held on 4 January, 2012, the members of the Eco-Congregation Council committed themselves to the strengthening of ecological sensitiveness of the church and its congregations.

Members of the Council as an advisory body:

Dr Barbara Botos environment protection expert,
Géza Gyimóthy Jr, environmental engineer,
Ágnes Fekete pastor,
Eszter Karsay pastor,
Dr Tamás Kodácsy pastor,
Mrs Zita Bihari Konkoly, climatologist,
Mária Szabó economist,
László Pál Szalay pastor,
Boglárka Szűcs biology and geography teacher,
Dr László Végh physicist, and
Dr András Viktor teacher of environmental studies.

The roles of the body include harmonizing the initiatives launched so far, such as the ecumenical Festival of Creation and Church Farmers' Market, along with finding and creating ways of co-operation with ecological teams of other churches (e.g. 'Ararat Protection of Creation Team' – Lutheran Church; 'Hymn to the Sun' Protection of Creation Association – Catholic Church).

The Eco-Congregation does not simply join the growing number of green non-governmental movements, but seeks to popularize the idea of protecting creation. The specific theological direction and practical advice indispensable for the movement is provided by the Council, whose first significant task was to prepare a professional conference held in Budapest in April.

The Eco-Congregation webpage

The new eco-congregation webpage (www.okogyulekezet.hu) was presented at this meeting. Its objective is, firstly, to collect church and secular documents, news and other useful information available in the topic of protecting creation, and secondly, to assist congregations in form of e-learning to form an environmentally conscious approach to life. After registration, courses could be downloaded from the webpage. These follow the three-fold division of the Scottish program:

1. Growing in faith and understanding
2. Making the house of God an environmentally friendly place
3. Changing life, changing community

Eco-Congregation Conference – 28 April, 2012

In the course of the conference, organized by the Eco-Congregation Council, the importance of ecumenical collaboration was emphasized: Lutheran and Catholic experts and guests were also present.

„In what condition will the Earth be found when Jesus Christ returns?” – the question was raised by Tamás Kodácsy pastor, head of the eco-congregation program, in his devotional at the beginning of the conference, followed by Lutheran theologian Eszter Kodácsy-Simon, representative of the Ararat Workteam, presenting the basic principles of protecting creation. Zita Bihari climatologist, head of the Climate Department at the National Meteorological Service, elder at the Svábhegy Reformed Congregation gave an informative presentation on climate change. Beside showing the natural and artificial reasons behind climate change, modelling of climate-forecast and script of modelling processes were explained in a clear way, intelligible even for non-professionals.

In his talk, Adrian Shaw, a Climate Change Office expert of the Church of Scotland presented how eco-congregations operate in Scotland, and the lobby-activities the church takes in politics to oppose global climate change. Alison Boyes gave an account of the everyday life and practical solutions of a prominently active Scottish eco-congregation, and at the closing of the plenary session the Hungarian Eco-Congregation title and award was announced.

Employment of an eco-congregation co-ordinator – 24 May, 2012

Géza Gyimóthy Jr was assigned by RCH Synod Presidency to carry out the activities relating to the co-ordination of the *Eco-Congregation Program*. The contract of assignment is for a definite time, between 24 May, 2012 and 31 December, 2012. The co-ordinator is employed part-time, his tasks involve co-ordinating the undertakings of RCH in the fields of ecology and creation protection. He assists the work of the Eco-Congregation Council, and co-operates with the head of the Council. He moderates, looks after and updates the homepage of the Eco-Congregation. He takes part in organizing eco-congregation programs. He provides the church organizations, communities and congregations with professional advice and information. In creation protection and ecological issues – with authorization from and continuous discussion with those concerned at Synod Office – keeps contact with the partner churches, administrative organizations and NGOs. Within the Church Farmers’ Market program, he keeps contact with the Hungarian Advertising Association.

3. Eco-Congregation Prize

Awarding ceremony during Creation Week – 30 September, 2012

On 30 September, 2012, in the course of the opening service of Creation Week, the first Eco-Congregation title and prize (as announced during the first eco-congregation conference in April 2012) was awarded. Such congregations, church communities and institutions could apply for the title, who take active steps in protecting the created world through their approach and voluntary operation, and in their church services – on voluntary bases – keep to the following basic rules.

The decision on the Eco-congregation prize was made by the RCH Eco-Congregation Council.

To win the Eco-congregation prize, the congregation has to undertake that they will maintain the main objectives of the title, and develop their own program for environmental protection, thus setting a good example in preserving creation.

Five congregations applied for the eco-congregation title and prize, three of them sent the required application along with a plan for creation protection. All of the applicants undertook to realize their outlined plan for creation protection and maintain it for at least three years in the spiritual and practical aspects of the everyday lives of their congregations.

The congregations of Szólád and Torbágy were awarded the eco-congregation title, whereas further three, the congregations of Telkibánya, Hajdúnánás and Budapest-Buda were awarded the eco-congregation prize.

Promoting the eco-congregation program at church events

Transdanubian Reformed Church District (REND) – 29 June – 1 July, 2012

The Eco-congregation Program was represented at its own stall during the festival, held in Székesfehérvár, organized for the 5th time this year. The primary aim of the appearance was to promote the prize, announced at the 28 April, 2012 Eco-congregation Conference. The hosts of the stall were Géza Gyimóthy Jr, environmental engineer and László Pál Szalay, pastor, members of the Eco-Congregation Council. During the festival publications were presented in Hungarian and other languages, offering both theoretical and practical help in starting an environmentally conscious congregational approach.

„Szélrózsa” Lutheran Youth Festival – 18-22 July, 2012, Fonyódliget, Lake Balaton

During the festival the eco-congregation program was represented and promoted at an eco-tent, where Tamás Kodácsy and Mária Szabó, members of the Eco-Congregation talked not only to the Lutheran youth about the Christian responsibility and mission of protecting creation.

4. Financing the program

Within the framework of ECEN, co-operating with the Church of Scotland, the eco-congregation program could so far rely on resources from international competitions. We are continuing to collaborate and count on further competitions and support of the Church of Westphalia.

PLAN for 2013 – DRAFT

Nov-Dec 2012 – display and finalization of e-learning moduls for eco-congregations in Hungarian, integration of the website on the RCH homepage (www.reformatus.hu)

Based on the Scottish experience, contacting NGOs and professional environmental organizations
During Advent, weekly recommendations (e.g. cutting down pine trees, recycling, etc)

JANUARY 2013 – Meeting of the Eco-Congregation Council (assessment of 2012, memberships, goal-setting, tasks)

FEBRUARY-MARCH 2013 – Field-trip to Scotland, details of the announcement of competition to be defined, invitation of Normann Hutchenson (8-10 secondary school students, interested in the topic, accompanied by 2 teachers, for a 2-3-week visit at a Scottish eco-congregation)

APRIL 2013 – Eco-Congregation Conference, announcement of the Eco-Congregation title and prize

MAY 2013 – Eco-congregation field-trip to Scotland – announcement of the winners of competition, based on the competition published in early 2013

JUNE-JULY 2013 – „Starpoint” Reformed Youth Festival, Mezőtúr
Eco-tent, promoting eco-congregation program

SEPTEMBER 2013 – Creation Week, Eco-Congregation Awarding ceremony

MOTION FOR RESOLUTION

1. The Synod accepts the report of the Eco-Congregation Council
2. The Synod accepts and supports the work schedule of the Eco-Congregation Council