

Supporting church communities to become environmentally sustainable

A Rocha Aotearoa

Churches and the groups who meet in them are key parts of a community, with regular rhythms through weekly services, events, seasonal celebrations and other gatherings. A Rocha Aotearoa's Eco Church project helps Christian leaders and communities understand and reduce their impact on the climate.

How a church manages things like waste, energy, transport and buying supplies has an influence on the environment and on the people, neighbourhoods and households connected with the church.

Eco Church is an A Rocha Aotearoa initiative helping church communities realise their potential as climate action leaders. The project focuses on fostering sustainable community, restoring ecosystems and preparing the next generation of environmental kaitiaki.

Funded by the Climate and Sustainability Fund in March 2022 and August 2023, the Eco Church project supports churches to understand their carbon footprint and develop climate action plans. Their carbon calculator tool was launched in March 2023 and has since been used by Wellington's growing number of Eco Churches to better understand and measure their impact.

Mo Morgan, Eco Church coordinator for the lower North Island, says every church has its own priorities and needs.



"When a church becomes an Eco Church, they don't have to do a set list of things. They just need to say yes ... We need to make choices which actually make churches more sustainable, and how each church does that is going to be different." *-Mo Morgan, A Rocha Aotearoa*

Eco Church Aotearoa is part of A Rocha's global network of Eco Church projects. Over the funding periods, 580 people joined online and in-person capability-building sessions. There are 26 Eco Churches in Wellington, with a growing list of churches taking an interest in the initiative, demonstrating measurable change and momentum. 31% of people in the Wellington region identified as Christian in the 2023 Census.

Each Eco Church in the region is on its own sustainability journey, which might involve measuring and monitoring emissions, maintaining community gardens and compost, hosting bike-fixing workshops or strengthening connections with nature by having church gatherings outdoors. Mo Morgan

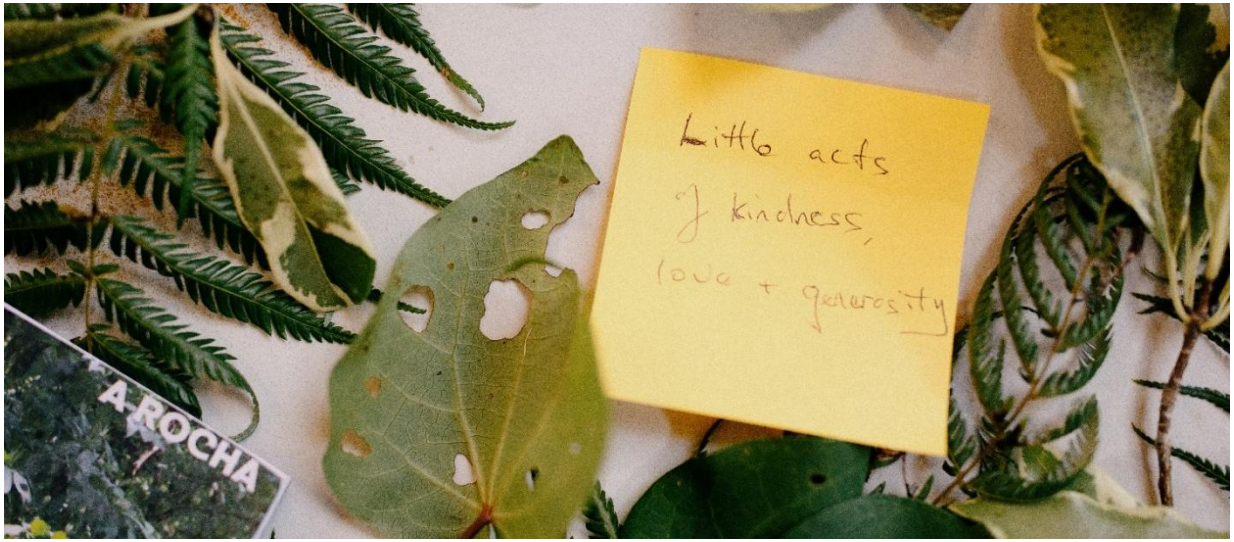
says some church communities also plant trees and care for local streams.

Shared values, strong relationships and connected communities are an important part of church for most people. Research shows these concepts also play a key role in promoting the lifestyle changes and long-term focus needed to address climate change. While education is part of the support A Rocha provides to Eco Church participants, the programme also helps people connect over shared interests and spend time together on activity that benefits their neighbourhoods and the environment at large. Mo Morgan says magic happens when people get outside, roll their sleeves up and work on something together.

As part of emissions reduction and conservation work, the Eco Church kaupapa encourages church communities to partner with mana whenua, and support iwi and hapū leadership to protect natural resources. Local partnerships aim to build connections through shared goals and grow a more hopeful and fair future for all.

> "When an Eco Church is being active, they are participating in local conservation projects, making choices with their resources which are sustainable, like recycling or taking care of their waste well. They are seeking to manage their energy output, maybe having conversations about solar panels." *-Mo Morgan, A Rocha Aotearoa*

The Eco Church movement is engaging large communities in climate action and encouraging people to do better together at church, home, school and beyond. But Mo Morgan says the motive for this work doesn't come from fear of what is happening to the planet, or stories on the news. She says it's about a love for the world and everything in it.



> "Caring for the environment has always been part of the picture of what it means to be Christian. It's just that it's pressing right now ... Our motive is that this is just what it means to be human."
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> *-Mo Morgan, A Rocha Aotearoa*

Engaging with Eco Churches who are taking practical steps - such as reducing energy use, promoting sustainable travel, and reducing waste - contributes to stronger, healthier, and more resilient communities.

To learn more visit **ecochurch.org.nz**