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# ation

and Plough Sundays are being used, as well as Harvest, Creation-time and Environment Sunday, to highlight issues from which those in towns seem far removed. Even some of those who live in the countryside may commute to towns to work and have little understanding of what is actually going on on the local farms, and may shop at the supermarket out of convenience. Eco-congregation provides the impetus to engage people with some fundamental aspects of our daily life: Who does grow our food? How is it grown? What are the difficulties faced by small farmers selling to supermarkets? How should we react to so much imported food? What are conditions like both for those who grow it, and the soil?

Many CEL members are already actively engaged with looking at these issues as individuals, but may feel on the edge (seen as the lunatic fringe?) in their church. Eco-congregation has the backing of all the major denominations through the Environmental Issues Network of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, and so does have some weight behind it. It helps those who feel that they are alone to have something to back them up!

So how is it going? 41 churches at the time of writing have achieved the award (others are in the process of being assessed), with many more registering for the project (which means that they have had agreement from their church decision-making body to work on the issues). That isn't many considering the thousands of churches in the country! But there is significant movement in the church hierarchies. In the trade justice movement there is a unique coming-together of development agencies and environmental agencies. There is far more in the media about environmental issues and this is a good time to bring environmental issues to the table in the churches. However we do it, whether we need the structure of a project like Eco-congregation or not, we still have to press on – it is part of our discipleship calling. If Eco-congregation can be helpful in enabling us to fulfil this calling, then great! Please use it!

All resources are downloadable from the website: [www.ecocongregation.org](http://www.ecocongregation.org) (under 'Free resources').

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Aquinas can be re-shaped to emphasise at their heart, justice for the earth, and prudence and restraint with regard to her resources<sup>6</sup>.

But what above all must be reclaimed is our awe and wonder at God's giftedness through creation. Until this can flow through us into spontaneous praise, and shared communal worship, our lifestyles will not be transformed. Until some recent attempts the sacramental tradition of our churches had become impoverished through the lack of this dimension of cosmic praise – the understanding of sacrament as rooting us in the realities of water (drought and flood), bread (famine and feast), wine/blood (the tragedy of addictions and the horror of the shedding of innocent blood today). Where else is a more appropriate place for lament for what has been lost – forest, extinct species and clean air – thankfulness for what is still left, and ethical commitment to simpler

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lifestyles? Where else is the starting place for the re-education of our desires and the recovery of hope? Liturgy is the place of transformation, and the survival of nature needs no less. For nature and ourselves to survive *we have to want less and desire different things*<sup>7</sup>. But, as Bill McKibben tells us, in his hopeful stories of successful reclamation projects in the east coast of the USA, in the reconversion to nature this process has already begun:

We have our woods back to help in reshaping our desires<sup>8</sup>.

Perhaps the most visionary and potentially transforming message that Christian Green Theology offers is that the process of restraining and reshaping our desires, in a consumerist culture, so that flourishing is enabled for the humblest creatures on earth, is actually about *the recovery of joy*. Joy at Creation's birth, together with the great vision of the Feast of Life (Isaiah 25) and the redeemed city, where the leaves of the tree of life are for the healing of nations (Revelation 22), are foundational images that create a great hope that the necessary restraint and transformation of lifestyles are in the service of a joy that all may share.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996); Celia Deane Drummond, *The Ethics of Nature* (Oxford: Blackwell 2004)

<sup>7</sup> See M. Grey, *Sacred Longings* op cit.

<sup>8</sup> Bill McKibben, *Hope, Human and Wild* (St Paul Minnesota: Hungry Mind Press 1995), p.210.

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