

World Council of Churches: Commission on Climate Justice and Sustainable Development

Engaging Churches and Ecumenical Partners: Strategies for an Impactful Ecumenical Decade for Climate Justice Action

Mathew Koshy Punnackadu

[Excerpts from the presentation made by Dr. Mathew Koshy Punnackadu at the Commission Meeting on Climate Justice and Sustainable Development, WCC, held at Panama from 3 to 5 February 2025].

Introduction

The Church of South India (CSI) has been a pioneering force in ecological action. Notably, it remains the only church in India to enshrine the Integrity of Creation in its constitution, a groundbreaking step taken in 1992. This commitment has driven CSI to embrace ecology as a core mission, inspiring meaningful changes at multiple levels.

In 2014, CSI launched its Climate Justice Ministry, operating across 24 dioceses and engaging 4.5 million people in South India. Over the past decade, this ministry has implemented impactful eco-projects to address climate change. This presentation draws insights from a decade of transformative action and offers a strategic roadmap for an ecumenical approach to climate justice. Further details, including program videos, are available at www.csimkdecological.org.

A Roadmap for Ecumenical Climate Action

1. Promote Life-Affirming Theologies

● **Develop and Disseminate Resources:** Create literature emphasizing the inherent dignity of all living beings, the land, and Creation.

● **Educate Across Communities:** Provide eco-theology and life-affirming theology training for clergy, teachers, youth, and women to cultivate spiritual and ecological consciousness.

● **Rise Above Prejudice:** The Bible challenges us to transcend cultural biases and embrace equality. Figures like William Wilberforce, who fought against slavery, demonstrate how scripture—read through Christ's lens of love—can transform societies.

● **A Call to Action:** Are we reading scripture to justify

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Dr. Mathew Koshy Punnackadu presents his paper on 'Engaging Churches and Ecumenical Partners: Strategies for an Impactful Ecumenical Decade for Climate Justice Action'. Prof. Susan L. Smith, United Church of Christ, North America, on his right. Dr Ingrid Jacobsen, Bread for the World, EU, on his left.

prejudice or to transform our hearts and the world? Faith calls us to align with God's rhythm of justice and mercy.

2. Stay Updated in Eco-Theology and Climate Justice

● **Equip Clergy and Educators:** Offer training on the latest developments in eco-theology and climate justice to ensure relevant and impactful teachings.

● **Organize Regular Events:** Conduct workshops, seminars, and retreats to facilitate discussions on emerging ecological issues and explore innovative solutions.

● **Educational Collaboration:** CSI has partnered with the United Theological College, Bengaluru, to conduct a Certificate Course in Eco-Theology, equipping individuals to integrate faith with ecological responsibility.

3. Train Students as Green Ambassadors

● **Empower Young Leaders:** Integrate environmental education and leadership training into church programs to equip students as Green Ambassadors for Climate Justice.

● **Engage Educational Institutions:** Partner with schools and colleges to involve students in climate action projects, awareness campaigns, and community initiatives.

4. Collaborate to Create Model Climate-Resilient Communities

● **Interfaith Collaboration:** Partner with other faith communities to establish Climate-Resilient Communities that showcase sustainable practices, such as renewable energy use, rainwater harvesting, and community-led conservation projects.

● **Promote Best Practices:** Highlight these communities as

models to inspire faith groups, schools, and organisations to adopt similar measures.

5. Convey the Message of Climate Justice Through Artistic Expressions

To effectively engage grassroots communities, the message of eco-conservation must go beyond conventional methods. Creative art forms such as painting, dance, group songs, theatre, and storytelling are powerful tools to connect with diverse audiences. These artistic expressions can help ensure that the call for climate justice resonates widely, inspiring collective action at all levels.

6. Advocate for the Rights of All Creation

● **Lobby for Environmental Protection:** Advocate for robust legislation and enforcement to protect forests, water bodies, land, and air quality.

● **Expand the Concept of Rights: Move beyond human**

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rights to embrace the rights of all Creation—recognising the inherent value of every living and non-living being within the ecosystem.

● **The Church as a Voice for Creation:** Address ecological exploitation and destruction as moral and spiritual issues, grounding advocacy in theological principles of stewardship and interconnectedness.

● **Interfaith Collaboration:** Form alliances with other faith communities to advocate collectively for the rights of Creation, emphasizing shared responsibility in caring for the Earth.

7. Promote Carbon-Neutral Parishes

● **Commit to Action:** Aim to make 20% of parishes in each church carbon-neutral within the next two years.

● **Define Carbon Neutral Parishes:** These parishes should actively follow green protocols for mitigating and adapting to climate change, including waste management, reduced energy consumption, and sustainable practices.

● **Ongoing Initiatives:** The CSI Madhya (Central) Kerala Diocese is working towards converting 300 parishes into carbon-neutral parishes within the next two years.

8. Ensure Grassroots Impact Through Eco Audits

● **Conduct Eco Audits:** Evaluate the environmental impact of each parish.

● **Encourage Transparency:** Publish audit results on church websites to promote community-wide participation in corrective actions.

Conclusion

The Church is uniquely positioned to lead climate justice efforts, rooted in faith, compassion, and partnership with Creation. By implementing these strategies, we can inspire transformative action within our communities and beyond, making tangible progress toward a sustainable and just future.