**HOW BRUNSWICK UNITING DECLARED A CLIMATE CRISIS – THE PROCESS SO FAR**
 **INTRODUCTION**
Back in August 2019 Brunswick Uniting was invited by Gavin Mountjoy, a member of Westgate Baptist Church and a key person in the global “Climate Emergency” movement, to consider declaring a Climate Emergency. This document is a review of the process that followed and includes information provided by Gavin.

The process of declaring a Climate Crisis (our terminology rather than Climate Emergency – this is explained under point 5) began to take root when a group of members who were passionate about the need for climate action gathered together and began sharing ideas and reflecting on the invitation from Gavin. We all agreed that we wanted a declaration which was “more than words”. We also wanted to be guided by our faith and so reflected on UCA President Deidre Palmer’s letter to congregations concerning climate change. Gavin sent additional information to help us plan a process.

A number of people at Brunswick Uniting Church had already been involved in climate action through various environment groups in the wider community. The involvement in activism sometimes seems to make very small steps of change and is constantly opposed by conservative forces in government, business and the media. For some it can become depressing. So some felt that whilst it was still important to be involved in activism in the community, it was also important to do something within one’s own control and “close to home”.

Faith was an important motivator. There was a belief that “God so loved the Earth” and that Christians are not to exploit or escape from caring for it. Generally the faith motivation of members could be summed up by one or more of the understandings described in the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania Consultation Paper on Climate Change (May 2020):
a) A global justice theological framework
b) An eco-theological framework
c) A stewardship framework

There was also the belief that declaring a Climate Crisis was a means by which our church could live out its beliefs and “show by example” what it means to witness to our faith.

**STEPS TAKEN**
 **1. Approach our Justice and Mission Committee and then Church Council**Our congregation is governed by a Church Council and has eight different committees which do the day-to-day work. The appropriate committee with regard to climate action was the Justice and Mission (JAM) committee.
An approach was made to this committee to take up the invitation of declaring a Climate Emergency. The invitation was enthusiastically accepted and a recommendation was made to Church Council that a Climate Action Group be established for the purpose of exploring the invitation and bringing a resolution to the congregation. This recommendation was accepted by the Church Council and a Climate Action Group convenor was appointed to establish the group.

**2. Form a Working Group**After a convenor was appointed the Climate Action Group was established by inviting anyone who might be interested to attend a meeting on a Sunday morning after worship. Initially about 10 people attended and the list grew to around 20. The cross-section of participants was quite broad and included representation from the various committees reporting to Church Council.

The initial task of the group was to investigate the possibility of the congregation declaring a Climate Emergency

**3. Fostering general interest in Climate Action and the Declaration within the Congregation**At the initial meetings there was conversation about what should go into a Climate Emergency declaration. The group was conscious that the declaration should be “more than words”

Alongside this was conversation around an action to develop widespread interest in climate action. It was decided to show the movie 2040 and we were pleased that over 80 people attended.This film is quite inspirational and gives some visions of what is possible now, using technology that already exists. It is important to build hope in the area of climate change as the forces of resistance to making changes are very strong. It is important to be aware that climate change raises many issues of loss and grief which many people are unwilling to face. The film ‘2040’ has its own website link, which shows the trailer, where the film is being show, how you can host a public event or purchase it on CD or BlueRay. There is also school curriculum material and book. See <https://www.madmanfilms.com.au/2040film/>

**4. Develop a Resolution regarding the Climate Crisis Declaration**The Climate Action group met a number of times to develop a resolution for consideration by the congregation. We were conscious that faith leaders are already calling us to action. Pope Francis on 14 June 2019 declared a global ‘climate emergency’warning of the dangers of global heating and that a failure to act urgently to reduce greenhouse gases would be *“a brutal act of injustice toward the poor and future generations. … Future generations stand to inherit a greatly spoiled world. Our children and grandchildren should not have to pay the cost of our generation’s irresponsibility*,”

A number of religious leaders and ordained men and women participated in the recent Extinction Rebellion (XR) protests across the UK in 2019. The Vicar of St John’s Church of England (near Waterloo Bridge) provided support for the XR protestors by allowing them to to sleep in the crypt between shifts manning the blockade, use toilets, showers and kitchens and charge mobile phones.

In Australia on 25 June 2019, more than 150 religious leaders stated they had ‘No faith in coal’ and have called on Prime Minister Scott Morrison to acknowledge the world faces a climate emergency and block all new coal and gas projects, including Adani’s Carmichael mine. *“Despite the differences in our faith, we all regard addressing the climate emergency as our shared moral challenge. We stand together for our common home, the Earth.”*

Religious leaders involved in Australian Religious Response to Climate Change have also participated in non-violent direct action and been arrested in protests against the Adani Coal mine in Queensland.

**Our calling to be part of God’s loving restoration and healing** - As we sit on the edge of the next mass extinction of species, we know that ‘creation groans’. God calls us to be part of a loving restoration and healing of this beautiful earth.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to love and care for the poor, the homeless, for those on the margins whose existence is becoming even more marginalised because of climate change.

God calls us to join in the loving regeneration of our land and sea, of our diverse ecosystems and of our communities and cultures, and to care for the whole of God’s biosphere.

**Why Declare a Climate Emergency now?** Time is critical in terms of building on local and international momentum. If a number of Christian churches can make a declaration that will help build a momentum for other faith communities to do the same. A church community would only develop a Climate Emergency Plan if the church thought it was an emergency and it was necessary to respond in that way.

Making the Declaration is the first step. No-one expects an organisation to commit to expenditure of money or resources that they don’t have.Most organisations have taken 6 – 12 months to develop their climate crisis/emergency plan (or re-write their existing plans with the renewed focus on climate emergency). It is normal for an organisation to pass an ‘crisis/emergency’ resolution and then work out in more detail what that would mean following the resolution. By declaring a climate emergency, faith communities can help lead their respective denominations and other faith communities address the climate challenge and move forward.

Churches would also express solidarity with the many councils and national governments around the world who have ‘declared a climate emergency’. We would be showing support for all the school students who are going on strike and the Extinction Rebellion members who are asking their governments to tell the truth about the climate crisis.

**Mobilization of faith communities** When a faith community declares a Climate Emergency, it is reasonable to commit to develop a climate emergency plan – a plan on how the church will respond to the emergency and reduce carbon emissions to zero ASAP. The Action Plan would look at the Church greenhouse emissions and how the Church can reduce its emissions to zero and drawdown excess carbon emissions. The Plan would/could provide general assistance to church members on how they can reduce their own emissions.

**5. Finalising a Resolution**After much communication by email and conversation amongst members of the Climate Action Group, a resolution was finally agreed to. It included a faith based introduction, acknowledgement of the climate emergency, a commitment to develop and implement a plan to respond as resources become available, and a commitment to advocate for restoring a safe climate.

In order to ensure positive support for the Resolution at the Congregational Meeting it was sent to Church Council for input. Most of the Resolution was accepted with one major change – instead of Climate Emergency it was recommended the term **“Climate Crisis”** be used. This was because information was received that the word “emergency” creates an understanding of interference and misuse of power for many indigenous groups.

**The proposed Resolution for the Congregational Meeting was agreed as follows:**

***Declaration:****BUC recognises that we are in a state of climate crisis that requires urgent action for climate justice by all levels of government, business, the community, as well as by individuals.*

***Commitments:****Under the direction of Church Council, and in consultation with local Aboriginal people, BUC will develop a Climate Crisis Plan for the church community by May 2020, including goals and action plans for the following commitments.*

1. *BUC will continue to develop our theological understanding and our personal & collective discipleship as the people of God living in a time of climate crisis.*
2. *The plan will include specific targets for BUC to become carbon positive. We will encourage and empower households to do the same.*
3. *BUC, both collectively and as individual members, will engage with the wider church, as well as other faith communities, groups and people in our local communities, on the climate crisis.*
4. *BUC, both collectively and as individual members, will urge all levels of government, as well as business, to declare a climate crisis and commit to restoring a safe climate by immediately allocating the necessary resources across the economy, and by changing unsustainable business practices.*

*BUC will commit resources to implement the Plan, consistent with the targets and timelines that it will spell out, noting the urgency in times of crisis.*

 **6. Holding a Congregational Meeting to vote on the Resolution**The proposed Resolution was circulated to members of the congregation two weeks before the meeting. The Resolution to declare a Climate Crisis was presented to a congregational meeting in November 2019. The resolution below was unanimously adopted. An additional commitment to develop plan **a detailed Climate Action Plan** by May 2020 was also included.

**7. Develop a Detailed Climate Action Plan**
The development of a detailed action Plan has been a key aspect of the congregation’s declaration of a Climate Crisis. The Plan enables the congregation to discern the most strategic and effective use of time and resources. It is actually a living document which continually evolves.

Suggestions for the Plan were sought through a number of planned activities and were collated under the four commitments set out in the Climate Crisis Resolution. The various planned activities included:

* Each of the eight committees of Church Council was contacted and asked for their ideas for including in the Plan. The responses were far reaching – the Worship committee suggested building in climate change into the liturgy through the prayers we use. Children, Youth and Young Adults suggested incorporating climate change in the children’s program. Property suggested an inventory of all church property and a staged approach to replacing heating, cooking and lighting appliances to reduce our dependence on non-renewable energy.
* A “table café” was set up after church and participants were encouraged to share ideas for the Plan and document them as they had morning tea. Over 70 people attended.
* “Butcher’s paper” was placed in a number of locations around our hall during morning tea (after worship). People were encouraged to list down actions they thought might go into the Plan

All the material was collected and forwarded to Church Council. A task group was then established to develop the detailed Plan. Due to the Covid-19 situation, the Plan wasn’t completed by the target date of May but it was completed by July 2020. On the way a number of videos were produced and shown during worship to keep the congregation aware of progress. During on-line worship in July 2020 a video was shown which in effect “launched” the Plan.

You can see the video of the release of the Plan here <https://youtu.be/X1l3pyiTBZo>

You can see the detailed Plan here [**Climate Crisis Action Plan**](https://brunswick.unitingchurch.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/BUC-Climate-Crisis-Action-Plan-200728.pdf)
You can find out more about what we are doing for climate change action on our website [brunswick.unitingchurch.org.au](https://brunswick.unitingchurch.org.au/) just click on the **Earth Button**

 **8. Implementing the Plan**Many actions were already on the way before the release of the detailed Plan. The Plan gives additional motivation and encouragement to tackle existing and new actions.
The Plan groups various actions under the four commitments headings in the initial Resolution

1. BUC will continue to develop our theological understanding and our personal & collective discipleship as the people of God living in a time of climate crisis.
2. The plan will include specific targets for BUC to become carbon positive. We will encourage and empower households to do the same.
3. BUC, both collectively and as individual members, will engage with the wider church, as well as other faith communities, groups and people in our local communities, on the climate crisis.
4. BUC, both collectively and as individual members, will urge all levels of government, as well as business, to declare a climate crisis and commit to restoring a safe climate by immediately allocating the necessary resources across the economy, and by changing unsustainable business practices.

Each of the actions is assigned a priority (1,2 3) as well as a committee, group or individual to implement the action. There are detailed instructions on how to read the Plan in the preamble.
The Plan is owned by the congregation and whilst the **Church Council has overall responsibility** for implementing the Plan, it is anticipated that much of the work will be done by the eight committees which report to Church Council (Children, Youth & Young Adults, Communication, Discipleship & Education, Finance, Pastoral Care, Property, Justice & Mission, Worship).

The Plan is regularly promoted through the various communication channels available. A number of videos were created and shown in worship during our annual “Season of Creation” event, which is usually a four week period in September each year. There is also regular promotion in our weekly “Olive Press”, weekly notices during worship and the monthly “Olive Branch”.

Our Communication committee has developed an excellent Climate Action segment on the Brunswick Uniting Church website. Information about actions and work done so far can be found there. The original Climate Action Group continues to meet. It has been assigned a number of actions to implement and also acts as research group bringing new suggestions into the Plan.