Commitments to protect people and the living planet

The destruction of the natural environment, including the impact of climate change, together comprise the biggest challenge to all life on earth, threatening the survival of communities and putting the diversity and wonder of nature at risk. And it is at this time, when the world’s scientists have issued a ‘Code Red’ to humanity over climate change, when one million animal and plant species are threatened with extinction and wild spaces are being destroyed at unprecedented rates, that the major religions of the world are taking a lead. They are developing action programmes with their faithful to address these issues for generations to come, through the creation of Faith Plans – the biggest and most ambitious environmental initiative ever launched by the world’s faiths.

‘Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last 200 years. Yet we are called to be instruments of God our Father...’

Laudato Si’, Pope Francis
Introduction to Faith Plans for People and Planet

The Faith Plans programme is the most ambitious faith-driven initiative on the environment, mobilising the vast potential of religious organisations – the biggest organised sector of civil society – to make a significant contribution to the urgent crises facing people and planet. The Faith Plans are commitments by the world’s major faiths to develop measurable, real world, practical action on climate change, biodiversity and sustainable development. They involve each faith looking at how it manages its assets and resources over the next seven to ten years – from its land, investments and purchasing power to its schools, hospitals and youth organisations, and from its influence and advocacy to its teachings and wisdom.

Groups from all major faith traditions are involved in the Faith Plans programme. As well as providing moral leadership through example, the Faith Plans focus attention on the importance of profound and urgent action to address the climate and ecological crises and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Unprecedented coalition of partners

The Faith Plans programme does not exist in isolation but is part of a collaborative effort by many faith-based organisations taking action for people and planet. An unprecedented coalition of partners has come together to support the Faith Plans initiative, including some of the world’s leading faith networks as well as UN and environmental groups.

A dedicated website – [www.faithplans.org](http://www.faithplans.org) – has been set up to inspire faith communities to take part, showcase what they are doing and share the collective efforts of this growing movement of faiths taking far-reaching action on climate change, the environment and sustainable development.

What led to the Faith Plans?

Today’s Faith Plans initiative builds on the success of the original 2009 Faith Commitments programme, which resulted in more than 60 plans that have profoundly shaped the faiths’ response to the environment. It was inaugurated by the UN and the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) and resulted in the launch of 31 Plans at Windsor Castle in the presence of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and HRH The Duke of Edinburgh (founder of ARC).

This was followed by another 32 plans in 2012, of which 28 were from faiths in sub-Saharan Africa. See below for more details of the 2009 Faith Commitments.
Why now?
The Faith Plans programme is a response to both the ecological crisis and the UN's call for action on the SDGs. They demonstrate the readiness of world religions to “hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor”, a phrase made famous by Pope Francis, and in so doing launch a fresh wave of real world action for people and planet.

Who is involved?
The Faith Plans programme is organised by FaithInvest and WWF’s Beliefs and Values Programme (both of which grew out of ARC). As mentioned above, supporting the programme is a unprecedented coalition of around 30 partners bringing together the world's leading faith-based networks as well as UN bodies and environmental groups. This is the first time such a coalition has been formed.

Our faith-based partners include Religions for Peace, the Laudato Si’ Action Platform, Hazon, Operation Noah, GreenFaith, World Evangelical Alliance, Interfaith Power & Light, Bhumi Global, and many more. Our secular partners include UN Environment, Interfaith Rainforest Initiative, UNDP, Stop Ecocide, the Conservation Foundation, EAT and more. They bring unique insights, abilities and resources to bear on key issues for the faith groups developing Faith Plans.

Faith Plans participants
As in 2009, the faith groups involved in Faith Plans cover all major traditions within Baha’i, Buddhist, Christian, Daoist, Hindu, Islamic, Jewish, Shinto and Sikh faiths as well as with key interfaith organisations.

Many of the Faith Plans will come through our partner networks. For example, the leading US Jewish environmental group Hazon is working with 200 of its members; the Khoryug Network is working with 70 Buddhist monasteries in Asia.

In some cases faith communities will sign up to develop a Faith Plan. In other cases their environmental action will be inspired and shaped by a programme run by one of our partner networks, such as the Laudato Si’ Action Platform’s seven-step programme to bring the Pope’s ground-breaking encyclical, Laudato Si’, to life.

Together we are all building this movement of faith communities taking action for people and planet.

Seven key areas

The Faith Plans cover Seven Key Areas in which the world’s major faiths can have a huge impact on environmental action through their assets, resources and traditions.

1. Faith-consistent use of assets... including buildings, land and investments
2. Education and young people (in both formal and informal situations)
3. Wisdom, including theology, liturgies and prayer
4. Lifestyles, including traditions of simple living, pilgrimage
5. Media and advocacy, including influence, advocacy and guides
6. Partnerships, eco-twinning, and creating environment departments
7. Celebration, including festivals and traditions
Launch of the Faith Plans programme
Following months of preparation and consultation with faith groups and partners, the Faith Plans programme officially launched on October 4, 2021, a month before the UN COP26 climate negotiations in November 2021. Working with our coalition of partners, our social media campaign about the launch – including our Faith Plans animation – was seen 8.5 million times, and an interview about the launch was broadcast globally by BBC World TV to more than 454 million households in 200 countries worldwide.

Faith Plans in a global context
Statement by the Pope and faith leaders
The launch of Faith Plans was deliberately timed to coincide with the call by Pope Francis and 40 religions leaders on October 4, 2021, for urgent action to save the planet from an ‘unprecedented ecological crisis’.

As well as urging the international community to ‘raise its ambition’ for COP26, the faith leaders committed themselves to taking ‘far-reaching environmental action within our own institutions and communities’. They promised to educate their members and actively participate in the public debate on environmental issues, but they also pledged to go further by:

- making ‘bold plans’ to achieve full sustainability in our buildings, land, vehicles and other properties
- striving to ‘align our financial investments with environmentally and socially responsible standards’
- evaluating ‘all the goods we purchase and the services we hire’ with the same ethical lens

COP26 Climate Conference
The Faith Plans programme was shared widely at meetings held in Glasgow during the UN COP26 climate conference in November 2021, serving as a clear indication to governments, other agencies and the wider world that the faiths are committed to address the climate crisis and to further the environmental and sustainable development agenda.

‘Given the size of their assets and influence, faiths alone, through their actions, could make the crucial difference to the world’s efforts to halt irreversible climate change and reverse environmental destruction’

Martin Palmer, FaithInvest
2009: The first Faith Plans programme

In 2008, following concerns that the 2009 Copenhagen climate negotiations would not achieve its goals, UNDP and the ARC joined forces to create the first Faith Plans programme. In 2009, 31 Long-term Faith Commitments were launched at Windsor Castle in the UK with another 32 developed by 2012, including 28 from sub-Saharan Africa.

As is the case today, the 2009 programme focused on Seven Key Areas of action – assets and investments; education; wisdom; simple living; media and advocacy; partnerships; and celebration – where faith groups made measurable commitments to generational change.

The plans were delivered in a three-step process:

1. **Each group began with research and planning**
   These activities were supported with a small amount of seed funding and, in some cases, a large amount of advice and support. ARC hosted events with faiths and experts to catalyse the research and planning phase.

2. **Each group created its formal Plan**
   Faith groups found that the formal process of discussing their tradition’s strengths within the seven key areas, and committing to generational change on paper, enabled them to develop a vision of the future – a vision that supported implementation of the plans.

3. **Each faith group published its Plan publically**
   These can be viewed on the Faith Plans website.

**Achievements**

The first Long-term Plans programme delivered many notable achievements, including:

- The creation of *investment priorities* for the faiths, resulting in the faiths becoming the leading group involved in the fossil fuel disinvestment movement and now the largest values-driven group investing in impact and ESG projects worldwide.

- A new focus on *sustainable agriculture* across sub-Saharan Africa and South-East Asia, based on working with (Christian) Farming God’s Way practitioners and the development of a Muslim approach to sustainable agriculture – Islamic Farming.

- The planting of *millions of trees* globally to tackle deforestation.

From top: As a result of the first Plans, faiths installed solar panels on churches; trained their farmers in sustainable agriculture; planted millions of trees; and introduced environmental education into their schools.
Photos from top: Michael Coghlan, ARC, ARC, Steven Gray.
• A massive increase in the demand for sustainable energy from the faiths for their buildings.

• The Long-term Plans also created new organisations:
  • The Sikh environmental organisation, EcoSikh, now working with tens of thousands of Sikh temples
  • The Bhumi Project, the largest Hindu environment and development agency
  • The Daoist Ecological Temple Association, linking tens of thousands of Daoist temples across China.

• The planning team that created the Jesuit Long-Term Plan, launched in 2009, included an Argentinian bishop called Jorge Mario Bergoglio – who became Pope Francis in 2013. Subsequently, in 2015, the Pope published his ground-breaking document, Laudato Si’, the most discussed faith document on faith and the environment yet published and of considerable significance to the wider environmental and sustainable development worlds.

Today’s Faith Plans programme

The driving principles of the Faith Plans are the core beliefs and values of each faith group. Each offers its own distinctive contribution to efforts to address climate change, the environment and sustainable development.

As a result, the Plans will have immediate and long-lasting consequences for faith institutions as well as impacting personal behaviour among the 84% global population who claim allegiance to a faith.

An abundance mentality

At the launch of the EcoSikh Plan in New Delhi in July 2009, UN Assistant Secretary-General Olav Kjørven said the history of climate change negotiations over the past 20 years had been characterised by ‘everyone wanting to do as little as possible, while pushing for others to do as much as possible’.

This comes from a scarcity mentality, he said, ‘to make sure someone else pays the bill’.

However, there was a very different mentality on view in meetings by faiths on their environment commitments. ‘We see people are saying: “This is what we can offer: this is what we are going to do.” They don’t say: “We’ll only do this if another faith or the government does this.”

‘They simply say: “This is what we can give and this is what we can do”. This comes from an abundance mentality.’
The Seven Key Areas

The Seven Key Areas framework offers a starting point for faith communities to consider as they develop their Faith Plan. We also ask participating groups to consider how gender, race and human dignity considerations will be applied in each area. The framework is not mandatory: each faith community will decide which of the seven areas are appropriate to its own priorities and reality. Visit www.faithplans.org for more details of the Seven Key Areas, along with resources, case studies and recordings of webinars on various topics.

1. Faith-consistent use of assets
   a. Construction and buildings
   b. Land and forests
   c. Water
   d. Wildlife/habitat protection
   e. Healthcare, including medical facilities
   f. Financial investments
   g. Purchasing and consumption, eg, food, suppliers, recycling, waste

2. Education and young people
   a. School curricula
   b. Informal education
   c. Vocational training & entrepreneurship
   d. School buildings and grounds
   e. Conservations and recycling policy
   f. Youth organisations and camps
   g. Nature trails
   h. School eco-twinning
   i. Environmental monitoring

3. Wisdom
   a. Theological education and training
   b. Crisis and adaptation
   c. Liturgies, quotations and orders of prayer
   d. Sacred places
   e. Theology of nature, land, forests, water
   f. Stories and practices
   g. Prayer

4. Lifestyles
   a. Green audits
   b. Traditions of simple living
   c. Families, population and choices
   d. Pilgrimage and tourism
   e. Nature protection
   f. Purchasing power

5. Media and advocacy
   a. Subject matter
   b. Influence
   c. Advocacy
   d. Guides and handbooks
   e. Materials

6. Partnerships, eco-twinning and new environmental departments
   a. Dedicated staff and funding
   b. Lay people
   c. Eco-twinning
   d. Other partnerships

7. Celebration
   a. Traditional festivals
   b. New festivals
   c. New traditions
   d. New beautiful places and developments
Developing your Faith Plan

The Faith Plans website includes resources to help you get started at www.faithplans.org/creating-your-plan. We suggest you may also find the process outlined below helpful.

1. Research and planning
   What matters to your faith? What action is most needed in your context? What difference do you want to achieve? What activities are already underway? What are the wider operations (schools, hospitals etc) within your faith? Do you have access to knowledge and partnerships to support you to deliver the changes you want? We can help you make those connections if you need them.

   How you will know your activities are on track to make the changes that matter to your faith? We suggest you carry out a baseline assessment so that you know where you are starting from (resources to help you are on the website). Consider how you will communicate your progress, as this is a valuable way to maintain the focus and motivation of the leadership, laity and the wider world. Communicating your progress is also a key success factor for embedding lasting change.

   Working faithfully often involves taking steps into the unknown. It can feel difficult to see how these activities can be measured, but great comfort and encouragement can be found in learning how your efforts are having the desired impact – and that you are not alone.

2. Writing your Faith Plan
   Each faith community starts from its own unique position and needs to create a Plan that accords with its theology, context and capacity. The Faith Plans website provides:
   • A more detailed framework for the Seven Key Areas
   • Case studies and inspiring stories
   • Links to partners with technical expertise; for example, in forestry or faith-consistent investing

   Explore how you can find a meaningful and workable method to monitor your progress. It is important to measure your impact but make sure you focus on the changes you want to see rather than burdensome processes that eclipse the activities you plan.

3. Publication and dissemination of the Plans
   When you’ve finished your Plan, you can upload it to the website to serve as an inspiration to others. We will also help groups to disseminate their Plans through key publications, platforms and events.

Four insights from the first Faith Plans

Take stock of the past, and celebrate the successes and learnings from the first commitments.

Gain a clear understanding of the present, summarising the current context for each area of action.

Imagine and plan the future – with real world, measurable impacts and initiatives.

Share the narratives – within faith traditions, within the laity and to the wider world.

Further information

If you have any queries, we would be delighted to answer them. Feel free to contact:

Catherine Devitt
Faith Plans Programme Manager, FaithInvest
catherine.devitt@faithinvest.org

Matilda Palmer
Faith Plans Programme Officer, FaithInvest
matilda.palmer@faithinvest.org