Northern Synod

TASK TEAM ECOLOGY

Report

1. Assignment

The task team's assignment was to guide congregations to give meaningful and sustainable ecological input in their congregations and communities

2. Members of the task team

Willem Boshoff (moved to Orania in 2025), Peet Crous (coordinator until the end of 2025), Willem Ferguson, Paul Grobler (ex officio), Paullet Grobler, Louis Lemmer, Tjaart Meyer, Fay van Eeden (since 2026), Willie van Heerden (coordinator since 2026).

3. Execution of the assignment

3.1 Introductory

The task team's discussions and other work **focused on** the following:

- Setting up and making available a **theological framework** as an attempt to clarify the 'why' of ecological ministry and to inspire and inform the practice of ecology ministries.
- Making available practical tips on how a congregation's ecology ministry can gain momentum regarding raising awareness, enrichment, advocacy, practical steps and projects.
- To investigate possibilities for **effective communication** between congregations, between the task team and congregations, and between the task teams or green teams of various regional synods, about matters related to ecology ministry.
-

3.2 Eco-theological framework

The task team set up a provisional framework in 2024 and presented it at a session of the SSC for discussion.

Since then, then General Synod's Moderamen also set up a Task Team for Ecology, of which two of the members of the Northern Synod's Task Team are

current members. One of the assignments of that task team is also to set up a theological framework for use by congregations of the DR Church. Members of the Northern Synod played a significant role in the preparation of that theological framework. For that purpose, the conceptual eco-theological framework already prepared by the Northern Synod was used, but it simultaneously presented an opportunity for enriching and developing the Northern Synod's proposed eco-theological framework.

Members of the Northern Synod's task team submitted the enriched document for further discussion on, and feedback, from final year theological students of UP, their ecclesiastical representative, and also some ministers and interested members. This feedback has been incorporated into the version presented as Appendix A of this report.

3.3 Practical tips and actions

Practical tips took the form of making available written communications, gathering information about existing initiatives in congregations, contributions at meetings of the presbytery, et cetera.

Written communications that contain practical tips include the following:

- A document set up by the task team about the introduction of a **Season of Creation** (usually from the 1st of September to 4th of October every year). A presentation on this was made at a meeting of the Northern Synod's SSC, and an updated version of the document is attached as Annexure B to this report.
- An information paper on electricity and water was prepared by Willem Ferguson. This is obtainable from Lynnwood congregation. '
- Daily readings with an ecological focus, by Peet Crous, appeared in the *Verskil ['Difference']* newsletter;
- A number of contributions of eco-theological import by Willie van Heefden, also in the *Verskil* newsletter.
- Sermon outlines prepared for the *Verskil* newsletter by Willem Boshoff.

Practical tips were given and collected in the following ways:

- Peet Crous advised congregations on an ongoing basis, or collected tips on recycling (paper, paper-related materials, batteries, etc.), grey water, caring for flower beds, using electricity wisely, the planting of indigenous trees (for instance at baptisms, and at memorial services for the deceased), vegetable gardens on church grounds, poison-free gardening, composting, etc.

Information was also gathered on **existing initiatives and actions in congregations and rings**. Examples of these are:

- Thanks to the initiative of Fay van Eeden, one of our task team members, the 2024 documentary film *Plastic People: The Hidden Crisis of Microplastics* was shown in several congregations. The film investigates people's dependence on plastic and how microscopic pieces of plastic have infiltrated human blood, organs, and brain tissue.
- Tjaart Meyer reported on ecological work in the Presbytery of Pietersburg / Polokwane, where among other things a Green Pentecost was held.
- Ministers of that presbytery meet regularly for book discussions, after which speakers are invited to make presentations related to the books' themes. One of the books under discussion was [the Afrikaans title is translated here] *Counter-Intuitive. To See this World as God's Creation. A Dangerous and Astounding Confession*. by the eco-theologian Ernst Conradie.
- Rev. Morné Jacobs of the Wierda Park congregation, who is part of the congregation's digital ministry, prepared a series of four ecological sermons, with the theme: 'Meet God in Creation.'
- At Monument Park congregation a WhatsApp-group twice a week broadcasts messages related to a green lifestyle.
- Members of Monument Park congregation and Lynnwood Congregation took part in a Saturday project for removing invasive plants from the Rietfontein Nature Reserve.

- Congregations make their buildings available for meetings by environmental organisations like *Friends of the Moreleta Spruit.* This promotes mutual contact and interest.
- A few of the task team members made presentations on ecology-related themes at presbytery meetings. At Southeast Pretoria congregation such a discussion focused on meaningful recycling.

3.4 Contribution of a member of the task team to an award-winning publication

Fay van Eeden contributed to, and was one of the editors of, the book *Care for Africa. Witnesses of Earthkeeping and Ecological Justice* (2025, published by the Fund for Christian Literature Fund). The book was awarded the Andrew Murray-Desmond Tutu-prize for a theological work in an official South African language excepting Afrikaans.

3.5 Communication between the office of the synod, the task team, and congregations

The task team was impressed by how **valuable the *Verskil* newsletter** is regarding effective communication with congregations.

The thought arose that **a recognisable rubric for ecology-related contributions** can be created and that the Task Team for Ecology, or a green team of the Northern Synod, can take responsibility for (a) regular **contributions,** for instance, once a month, and also (b) **building an archive** of contributions, tips, news, invitations, etc. to which a link in the *Verskil* newsletter can provide access. Contributions in the newsletters and WhatsApp groups of other regional synods can also find a home here and become accessible.

4 Recommendations

4.1 The Northern Synod's Task Team for Ecology **continues with its work in the coming term**.

4.2 The Northern Synod's Task Team for Ecology **focuses in the coming term on helping congregations with the practical implementation of ecology ministries,** emphasising

- the optimal utilisation of opportunities to communicate,
- experiential opportunities,
- the development of, and making available, materials that can benefit ecology ministries and congregations.

4.3 The Northern Synod's Task Team for Ecology recommends **that the document on the theological framework for ecology ministries (Annexure A) be made available to the General Synod's Task Team for Ecology,** which at present is also preparing a theological framework for ecology ministries. That document shall be presented for approval at the meeting of the General Synod in 2027. The aim of this recommendation is to rule out overlap as well as to support the General Synod's Task Team for Ecology in its work. At present two members of the Northern Synod's Task Team for Ecology Tans are also members of the General Synod's Task Team for Ecology.