



Uniting Church in Australia Assembly

US Environmentalist sings praises of Synod divestment

The Synod's recent decision to divest from corporations engaged in the extraction of fossil fuels has won high praise from one of the world's foremost campaigners for addressing the effects of climate change.

Bill McKibben, the founder of 350.org, took time out of his busy schedule of public lectures and media appearances in Sydney last month to meet Moderator Rev. Dr Brian Brown in person and congratulate him on the Synod's stance.

"It's a great honour to be here and to be able to personally say thanks to the first denomination in the world to manage to divest from fossil fuels," Mr McKibben told the Moderator.

Mr McKibben, raised as a Methodist in the United States and for many years a Sunday school teacher, was visiting Australia as part of his 'Do the Math' tour. He said religious communities in the US are more engaged than ever in the campaign to combat the effects of climate change.

"There was no religious environmental movement in the States 25 years ago," said Mr McKibben. "Now we've started to do mass civil disobedience."

"We like to say we put 'collars upfront' - clerics in the first rank - and it's really great to see that starting to happen. There is some real work starting to happen in evangelical communities. Not with the old guard, but I think by now the head of every important evangelical seminary has signed a good letter about climate change.

"Young people seem to have finally grown sick of being told that their only political activity will be to fight gay marriage. Now that battle is pretty much lost in the States, they are thinking, OK now there's other things we can do like fight climate change.

"It was interesting as the conservative churches seemed scared of it because they perceived it as 'a way station on the road to paganism'. We're getting past that now. The liberal churches were scared, because they said their real job was hunger and poverty and that this campaign was 'a luxury we can't afford'.

"People have understood now that this is where hunger and poverty is going to come from in the next century. The link is so direct between what we're doing polluting in the rich world and the effect globally."

The proposal to divest was originally brought forward to the Synod by the Uniting Earthweb Group, the environmental action group of the NSW and ACT Synod. Rev. Dr Brown and Mr McKibben discussed the need for more people of faith to step up and take action.

“Hundreds of members of the Uniting Church came together to make this historic decision,” said Rev. Dr Brown.

“I am proud that the Uniting Church in Australia is the first denomination in the world to divest in fossil fuels.”

“We are sending a strong message to our Christian brothers and sisters here at home and around the world to think about the future of the earth we live on.”

“We are hoping that the actions of the NSW and ACT Synod will flow on within the Uniting Church to other Synods and the Assembly.”

Director of the UnitingJustice, Rev. Elenie Poulos, who was also present at the meeting, congratulated the NSW and ACT Synod on the divestment.

“The NSW and ACT Synod have taken a major step forward in demonstrating our care for the environment in a very practical way.”

“As a national church with partners in countries which are already suffering the devastating effects of climate change, we must continue to demonstrate our commitment to a better future in words and deeds.”

“The natural environment is a part of God’s good creation and it is our responsibility as Christians to do all we can to protect it.”

Mr McKibben described the overall religious response to climate change as “a remarkable act of witness.”

He said his group 350.org was committed to faith-based environmental activism and that he was exploring the possibility of bringing Uniting Church activists to the United States to campaign with 350.org.



Uniting Church in Australia members meet with Bill McKibben

(From left to right) Dr Miriam Pepper, Rev. Dr Brian Brown, Bill McKibben, Justin Whelan, Rev. Elenie Poulos, Fiona Johnson

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